**Question 1**

During the last several decades social psychologists, have debated about the development of the field. Much of this debate has focused on the theoretical integration (or lack thereof) which characterizes the discipline (e.g. Kruglanski’s critique of the field). Discuss the nature of this debate and assess its relevance for the discipline.

The field of Social Psychology has faced many progressive changes throughout the years. Beginning in 1908, one of the primary definitions for Social Psychology was, *dealing with uniformities due to social causes* (Reis, 2008). The debate of what constitutes great theory in the field has been a heavily debated topic dating back to even before the 1930’s. A major problem with the developing theory within the social psychology realm is the tug between hard data driven theories and abstract informative theories (Krugalanski, 2001). This debate is otherwise known as the top down vs bottom up theoretical approach. A top-down approach suggests a practical approach to building theories through content knowledge and build down to build data. The bottom-up approach utilizes a data-driven technique to develop a theory. Krugalanski (2001) explains the problems with creating high level theories by noting a top-down approach tends to be difficult to verify. Therefore, suggesting that a need for a secure and strong database is necessary in the field before making large sweeping theories that have an impact. Therefore, the need for change within the field needed to happen with this realization.

By the 1970’s the aversion of developing data driven theories have led to extreme criticisms. Because of a lack of testable theory, a crisis arose within the field, allowing critics to suggest the social psychology field should not be considered a science at all. Due to these allegations and critiques, there were a series of changes that took place over the years. Starting off, there was a large shift in the types of articles published. According to Krugalanski (2001), the percent of Social & Personality articles published in *Psychology Review* increased dramatically in the years between 1965 and 1998. This shows an everlasting impact on the field because of criticisms. The field had gone from lack of theory to gaining a head in the field. This lack of theory has, ironically, helped to create a stronger standing over time as the number of theories started to come out of the literature.

The relevance of this debate has helped shape how the field theorizes today. The nature of what constitutes a good theory was up to large debate throughout the years. Which has helped fuel the everlasting critique of the field. Gawronski & Bodenhausen (2015) generated several good classifications for a good theory in research. These theory evaluations (although written much after the field) may be used to help understand the nature of the debate. These evaluations of theory help to generate workable and feasible expectations of the discipline. For example, the generality criterion for theory states that if the field generates a theory that works well in many situations and explains a large amount of phenomenon’s, then this is a theory that generates a large amount of relevance to the field (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2015). Because of these differences in theory evaluation though, many social psychology phenomena’s may be explained through multiple facets.

The ongoing debate between what constitutes good theory helped to develop and shape the discipline. Now, the social psychology field has testable theories that help to explain social processes among human beings. These top-down and bottom-up theories are used to help develop intervention programs designed to improve health outcomes and well-being. The relevance of these debates was to help develop standards for the Social Psychology discipline and ensure that there are standards to be held to. In summary, the ongoing debate, beginning in the 1930’s helped to escalate the field and become a more reliable source in understanding human behavior.

**Question 2**

Compare and contrast the following general theoretical approaches: field theory, rational actor theory, and dual process theories. What are the central propositions or key concepts of each theory? What does each theory say are the primary influences on, or determinants of, behavior? At what level of explanation do they operate? According to each theory, how do the actions of other people influence an individual's behavior? What, in your opinion, are each theory's major strengths and weaknesses?

Field theory was initially proposed by Kurt Lewin (1951). This theory is defined by an individual’s “life space”. This life space is a person-centered approach where the individual is surrounded that an individual is responsible for or that helps define that individual, it is their *needs*. Examples of things surrounding the life space in Field theory include the workspace, or an individual’s children. All these responsibilities and identities are constructive and dynamic around the individual themselves. As one part of the life space changes, everything else around it changes as well, thus making the process complex extremely malleable. For example, as an individual finds the desire to focus more on their diet, the consequence is that they will have to put more time and energy away from another need, such as school. According to Lewin, this theory describes behavior by these precise changes in the life space. According to field theory, these changes in the life space contribute to an individual’s behavior and how they react to the world. All other individuals are part of the life space, therefore every action changes the life space. The actions of other individuals influence an individual’s behavior because, by definition, they are part of the life space, and as they meld and move with an individual’s life space then they are causing that ego in the life space to produce a behavior. In my opinion, this theory is complex. A strength is that it accounts for every single aspect of an individual’s life and the behaviors they produce. However, because this is a social world, and stimuli are constantly bombarding us as human beings, I have trouble believing that it is very testable in an observational or experimental design. I also find this theory as a great challenge to the behaviorist approach, as it considers the person, which often is lacking within the behavioral perspective of theories.

Next, the Rational Actor Theory. This theory is described in detail by Trafimow (2015), in which he describes that an individual always act in a way that is rational to them. An important aspect of Rational Actor Theory is not that the choice is “rational” though. The point is that the individual is acting in accordance to their own rationality and this serves as an extremely important point within the theory. Therefore, these rationalized thoughts are the causes of behaviors. An interesting tie to the rational actor theory is the Theory of Planned Behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, people set out to pursue goals, and make conscious choices while understanding the outcomes of the behavior (Ajzen, 2012). Therefore, this theory is working at a much more individualized and cognitive level than the previously discussed Field Theory. People are completely in control of their behaviors and think rationally about the behaviors they are performing. According to this theory, people are much less affected by the actions of others. According to this theory, individual’s behaviors are created by the fact that they are looking to pursue something for themselves or obtain a goal. One of the major strengths of this theory is that it sets the individual as the main individual again. Within rational actor theory, the individual is in control of everything. However, again, it is a bit tough to test because to understand the cognitive process has problems. Another weakness is that it denies a large amount of influences surrounding the individual. To think that individuals are strictly motivated by that process is a bold statement.

Lastly, the dual process theories. These were described by Wyer (2012) as understanding behavior outcomes as a set of stages. These theories went through many changes as the field progressed. However, the main idea is that stimuli process through cognitive processes (some deliberative, some automatic) and the behavior is elicited through this process. Of all the theories, this appears to have the most behavioristic of approaches, however, it does not deny the cognitive processes associated with a cognitive perspective. Within this theory, the individual has a set of schemas that are developed, and this influences the sensory input. Therefore, based on these already set schemas, the integration of the processes lead to a behavior enacting. Often, this is an unconscious effort by the individual. However, in terms of a situational context, the behavior may elicit differently depending on the situation. Therefore cognitive processes are likely to come into play at this point because of this situational context understanding. In general, the primary influences of behavior from this perspective are the situational context and schemas that are formed in an individual. According to this theory, other individuals do have somewhat of an ability to influence the actions of the ego. In part by changing the schemas that are unconsciously embedded in an individual. This is because of the evaluation process associated with the theory, in which individuals perform steps to determine their likeability towards an individual and thus, the resulting behavior ensues. Additionally, the idea of persuasion is applicable within this theory as well. The other individuals must make an effort to change the ego’s conscious perceptions in order to get to the unconscious perspective. In my opinion, the strengths of this theory are that it takes a striking balance between the other two theories and allows the influence of others on the individual while still allowing the individual to have a cognitive thought process. Additionally, it applies the power of persuasion into the idea of changing an individual’s behaviors. A weakness of the theory is that it seems to put the individual as a constant evaluator. The process of the constant evaluation may not be the main aspect of everything, and it still infers that individuals have a large goal driven process. This may not precisely always be the case.

**Question 3**

The literature on attribution processes identifies a number of "biases" in the processes by which we perceive other persons. (a) How do these biases influence the impressions we form of others as we interact with them? In particular, to what extent and in what ways do these biases influence our perceptions of the identities and goals of those with whom we interact? (b) What are some possible explanations for the existence of these biases? Be sure to discuss the ways in which motivational and cognitive factors possibly affect attributions.

Biases may form in relation to past experiences that influence how it is that an individual may judge the present. This is most supported by the Feelings-as-information Theory (Schwarz, 2012). The feelings-as-information theory describes how current feelings, moods, and emotions effect an individual processes and response to stimuli. If an individual has woken up and is feeling stressed, then that individual is likely to view other situations and events as more stressful. This works in the positive as well. Furthermore, these judgements have been shown to be stronger for individuals in happy moods than sad moods. However, the effect from these sways an individual’s judgements regardless. These biases can influence perceptions of the people around us.

Another way in which these biases occur are through heuristic decision making. Kahneman & Klein (2009) report that heuristics are a likely candidate to induce biases. Heuristics are built off the fact that individuals have intuitions that bias the impressions of individuals. For example, seeing an individual in a white lab coat may cause an individual to make a snap judgement and perceive that individual as smart and credible. However, that is not necessarily the case. Additionally, past experiences can cause heuristic processes as well. Based on these heuristic processes that cause individuals to invoke biases, these can cause individuals to act in different ways towards others based on their heuristic interpretations. Individuals are more likely to agree and believe an individual of higher status. Relating back to the dual process theory, this may give insight as to why these heuristic biases are happening as well. As an individual produces a schema surrounding groups of people, then the heuristic process may begin. Thus, effecting an individual’s behavior and simultaneously contributing to a biased perspective.

Additionally, these attributions can impose differing reactions from individuals depending on the situation. According to the Attributional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior proposed by Bernard Weiner (2012), events may lead to differing behavioral reactions. However, the emotional reaction is likely to be different depending on how responsible the individual that faced the reaction was. For instance, an individual that was responsible for the failure of an achievement is more likely to feel anger which leads to a potential retaliation effect. Conversely, an individual facing the same dilemma with no responsibility for the situation has a stronger ability to feel sympathy for them selves and are less likely to seek retaliation for that event. Therefore, based on this Weiner’s (2012) attributional theory, that individual has a negative life event in the past that has led to their demise are more likely to have more interpersonal conflicts with others that are around. These explanations help to understand why these biases may occur.

**Question 4**

Do you believe in free will? Why or why not?

On a personal level, I like to believe in free will is possible. However, in terms of understanding the theory and recognizing that all instances are interrelated, it becomes hard to recognize free will as a truth. Thinking of theories that help to explain and synthesize social psychology, it becomes clear that the idea of free will are precisely true. Even from the rational actor perspective, free will is the most likely to exist because even in the lightest sense, an individual is at least motivated to rationally work towards their own fate. The unfortunate reality is that, even with accordance to this theory, it is situationally dependent. As Cooper & Whitey (2009) point out in their readings, the situation has a very strong influence on the behaviors an individual performs. Furthermore, individuals are likely to conform to their settings to be part of a group or community. Thus, leading to a lack of free will.

Thinking of Gestalt from the Social Psychology class lectures (Lecture 1, Harman), he inferred that people perceive things that are most functional to them. Thinking of this concept, it at first seems as though this thought would give an individual a sense of free will. However, the idea that individuals think distinctly as a function defining themselves denies the ability to freely practice altruism. Thus, inferring all peoples actions are a functional service serving only themselves infers that free will is impossible because the purpose of living is to provide for yourself. Furthermore, coming from a behaviorist perspective to social psychology and trying to understand free will, the Dual Processes Theories support that a partial part of an individual’s stimuli processing is done so unconsciously, and stimulated precisely just a response.

In conclusion, it seems relatively hard to infer that free will exists at all. Field Theory infers that the individual is a product of the influences around an individual and that as the life space changes, a behavior is elicited. Although the individual is controlling parts of the life space in field theory (for example, shrinking school for work within the life space), there are influences and factors out of an individuals control. Thus, the ability to have free will is diminished by the changes in the life space. Therefore, as much as I would like to believe free will is possible, it appears the theories and evidence suggest otherwise. No, free will does not exist.

**Question 5**

What does it mean to be a social being?

A social being is interacting with a similar kind. However, they do not have to necessarily be similar. Defining what a social being is a complex task, but social psychology principles can help to further define the answer. Festinger (1954) helps to explain this when he attempts to explain the social comparison process. Within his paper, he explains how individuals think and act when put together through a series of hypothesis that are (somewhat) supported through data and theory. To start, Festinger (1954) states, “There exists in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities.” When I read this quote, I think of what happens when a human being is surrounded by other comparison human beings. There seems to be a comparison with individuals when they are together. Festinger (1954) describes this as a tie and a sense of appraisal between individuals.

The idea of comparison and is a large part of defining what it means to be a social being. Marsh et al. (2008) explain the “Big-Fish-Little-Fish-Pond Effect” which further explores the comparison effect as a tool for describing what is means to be a social being. Using data from a large international study, Marsh et al. (2008) help to further explain how a frame of reference to other individuals influence an individuals social meaning by influencing how an individual’s frame of individual agency (sense of self). By indicating that the sense of self is influenced by our perceptions of those around us helps to further support that being a social being means seeking the appraisal and seeking to compare to others. The evidence supports that humans, being social beings, consistently seeks some sort of validation, belonging, or acceptance in something. Furthermore, being a social being is associated with the perceptions of oneself.

Understanding what it means to be a social being is complex. However, there is evidence to support what it means. In my opinion, the meaning of a social being is to have a sense of appraisal between those of similarity. Additionally, it’s understanding that, like the life space from Field Theory, as a social being, you are impacted by the others that surround you. Social beings look towards others in the same group to help identify who they are. The sense of self is colluded with others. Therefore, being a social being means understanding who oneself is by comparing themselves with those around them.

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