



SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY : UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEINGS BETTER

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Abstract

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher observed “Man is a social animal.”... A very famous saying we all have heard and read. This was said because the very nature of human beings makes them so. Human beings cannot be distinguished from their situations. We humans are “first of all beings in a situation.” So, for understanding the human behavior in a better way social psychology actually studies the influences of situations on human behavior with special attention on how human beings view and affect each other. This paper is an attempt to emphasize the role of social psychology in understanding human behavior in a better way.

Keywords: Human Beings, Behavior, Social Psychology

Introduction

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another. So with this we can actually know about the very basic nature of human beings. Social psychology actually lies at the boundary of psychology and sociology. When sociology actually emphasizes on study of people in groups and societies social psychology focuses more on individuals and uses more experimentation. So the scope of social psychology lies in that it attempts to understand the relationship between minds, groups and behavior in many ways. Social psychologists typically explain human behavior as a result of interaction of mental states and immediate social situations. In even the simplest social interactions, the interplay between participants is rapid and a great deal of information is exchanged. The essence of interaction is that all participants modify what they do and say according to what others are doing and saying. While such mutual interdependence provides much of the joy and vitality in our interactions with others it also makes it difficult to arrive at a clear analysis of the determinants of the social behavior.

Discussion

Sociality, being in a social environment, in a society is a natural instinct and basic nature of all human beings. Scope of social psychology includes

- To see how the thoughts, feelings and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others.
- To understand the influence that individual perceptions and behavior have upon the behavior of groups.
- To understand groups themselves as behavioral entities and the relationships and influences that one group has upon the other.

There are three theoretical approaches which dominate the current social psychology and it includes the role theory, reinforcement theory and cognitive theory.

ROLE THEORY

Role theory explains the social behaviour through an analysis of roles, role obligations, role expectations and role conflicts. A role is a socially defined pattern of behaviour that accompanies a particular position within a social context. Role obligation is a moral requirement, which attaches to an institutional role, whose content is fixed by the function of role and whose normative forces flows from the role. The relevant institutional role can be political, familial or occupational. Role expectations are assumptions about an individual behaviour based on their role. For example professors expect their students to attend classes regularly and obtain good grades and at the same time students have role expectations from their professors, expecting them to be on time in class, to be dynamic ,expert on their subject etc. Role conflict occurs when two or more sets of pressure occur at the same time, such that compliance with one set makes it difficult to comply with the other set. Role conflict are of two types : interrole conflict and intrarole conflict. Interrole conflict occurs when a person holds several positions that have incompatible demands. Intrarole conflicts occur when a single role has expectations that are incompatible. Each of us plays multiple roles. For example the role of a mother, wife ,teacher, daughter all cannot be satisfied at the same time and interrole conflict may produce. A student might experience intrarole conflict if he has to choose between studying for a theory exam and typing a project.

REINFORCEMENT THEORY

The central focus of this theory is an analysis of the relation between stimuli and responses. If a response leads to a favorable outcome for the person a state of reinforcement then exists. If our actions are followed by rewards, the probability that actions to be occurred in future increase. In contrast, actions that are not rewarded tend to be discarded, and actions that are punished may be actively avoided. This theory relies more on the cognitive aspects and also involves the social learning theory and social exchange theory. Social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura has become the most influential theory of learning and development. His theory includes observational learning in which people can learn new information and behaviours by watching other people. In his famous Bobo doll studies children observed an adult acting violently with a Bobo doll and when they were allowed to play with that doll in the room later on they began to imitate the aggressive actions they had previously observed. Bandura also explained intrinsic reinforcement. He stated that it is not only the external rewards and environmental reinforcement that works but internal rewards such as pride ,satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment also work as internal reinforcement. There are various steps involved in learning. First of all is attention ,in order to learn one must pay attention .Anything that detracts the attention has a negative effect on learning. After attention the information has to be stored ,a process called as retention. Once attention is paid and the information is retained then comes the time to actually perform the behaviour which was observed, a process called as reproduction. Finally for the observational learning to be successful there has to be a certain level of motivation to actually imitate the behaviour that was modelled.

Social exchange theory was presented by George Homans who assumed that people are basically hedonistic ,they seek to maximize pleasures and minimize pain. People while interacting with each other exchange many a things to achieve pleasures. Such exchanges can vary both in quantity and in type. One can exchange material and non-material goods ,approval and prestige. Those who give to others create a pressure in others to reciprocate, in order to create an equitable exchange relationship. Berschief and Lopes also use social exchange theory to explain interaction between people .According to them people maintain those relationships in which reward exceeds costs and they avoid relationships when costs are greater than rewards.

COGNITIVE THEORY

This theory finds its roots in early work by both Gestalt and phenomenological theorists. Gestalt theorists made the basic assumption that whole is greater than the parts. Phenomenological theorists understand behaviour of a person by knowing how that person perceives the world. Cognition is defined as the

knowledge acquired through experience. For a cognitive theorist a stimulus involves a complex pattern of organization rather than a simple external object .This involves concepts such as knowing, meaning and understanding. Thus the focus is primarily in internal processes that must be inferred rather than directly observed. Unlike the phenomenologists, cognitive theorists do not limit their concern to those cognitions of which the person is consciously aware.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we can see that human behaviour is actually influenced by social situations. No matter how does a person behaves his behaviour never solely depends on himself but on so many other factors, society and social situations playing the most important role. Therefore if the human behaviour is to be studied social psychology actually plays a very important role in explaining human behaviour that why and how a person behaves in a particular way in a given situation .Social psychology involves the study of influence of individuals on each other and the influence of groups on individuals and vice versa. There are many theories to explain human behaviour :

-Role theory

-Reinforcement theory :Social learning theory and social exchange theory

-Cognitive theory

Social psychology explains human behaviour with respect to various day to day situations involving various theories and supporting these theories with research which mainly involves the correlational and experimentation,hence it provides a scientific basis to the human behaviour.

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