Theoretical perspectives in social psychology assignment

Psychology

Theoretical Perspectives and Theories in Social Psychology Man is the only animal for whom his existence is a problem he must solve. -Erich From Of existence and the ensuing behavioral patterns that so accompany it, the field Of social psychology holds to its credit a variety Of affiliated disciplines that collectively contribute to its attempt at scientifically understanding the nature and causes of individual behavior in relation to other individuals, groups and social environments, or?? in the words of Gordon Lopper??" the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings. (1985) A altitude of topics are encompassed within this discipline, including work on aggression and hostility (Sheriff, 1954) obedience (Malaria, 1961), conformity (Cash, 1951), identification and mob-behavior (Zanzibar, 1999), as well as several others, each conforming to the universal hypothesis that human behavior is subject to much change given the single variable of the presence (or lack thereof) of others (Lenin, Lippie and White, 1 939; Triplet, 1897).

Our beliefs of ourselves are, in part, influenced by the way we believe we are perceived by others (Twice and Wallace, 2003) and here illustrates the faint regularity of the argument, for the way others perceive us has a great deal to do with our own perception of ourselves. Social psychology thus also brings IR the angle of the influences social phenomena have on our interactions with others, highlighting thus some of the key concepts that play a causative role in both action and self-perception.

Social behavior is viewed as goal-oriented, or driven largely by motivations of either intrinsic or extrinsic value to us, and said goals are inherently influenced by the social and cultural influences of our environment.

Interactions with this environment determine the outcomes of the behavior elicited from us?? this explains therefore why the way in which we conduct ourselves in different situations (e. G. An academic setting, such as a classroom, as opposed to an informal setting, with ones friends) is largely relative.

These social interactions all contribute to creating what is termed as ones self-concept, or self-perception: the various self-images that collectively contribute to form ones sense of identity. Reflecting the appraisal we receive of our presence (or absence) reflects the human tendency of attributing external opinions of us to an internal value of our self-worth; another method f going about this involves ' social comparison', in which we base our self-worth in comparison to that of a particular reference group.

The expectations and beliefs we hold about the world (that arise from our interactions with the environment) soon begin to consolidate into a phenomenon known as ' expectation confirmation', in which we focus attention solely upon information that provides validation for the pre-existing beliefs and expectations we hold of our social environment.

This form of attribution often extends to us assuming that the behaviors of others correspond to their intentions and personalities (a phenomenon known as he ' fundamental attribution error'), highlighting thus that our socially- constructed perceptions of ourselves with relation to the world are often subject to much cognitive distortion. The field of social psychology thus makes great use of theoretical frameworks used to investigate and interpret social phenomena, based on empirical findings.

A ' theory' itself refers to a coherent and logically conceptualized statement expressed as a quantifiable property, and which aims to organize, explain and reliably predict data based on the criteria of scientific skepticism, accuracy, objectivity, and open-mindedness. Much like other scientific fields as well, social psychology follows a standard procedure for the building up of a theory. Based on existing evidence, the theory?? consisting of the basic statements that stipulate how the concepts it seeks to prove regarding said evidence are related?? is thus proposed, for e. . A theory which seeks to explain the causal attribution factors which lead us to form a judgment regarding the reasons for another's behavior, based on either dispositional or situational factors (known as the fundamental attribution error) and how we tend to perceive he lines blurring between disposition, behavior and the situation with regards to others, while affording an undue amount of attention to these regarding ourselves. These statements all hold predictive value, and collectively form the hypothesis upon which the theory is based.

Theory testing is carried out through different research methods?? systematic observation, experimentation, correlation studies, survey methods etc. There are several criteria of a good theory. For one, the relative ease of application of a theory is directly related to its understandability, based on he abilities of he using it, as well as the degree to which the tentative statement regarding the relationship between the variables, or hypothesis conforms to the case at hand.

This involves, therefore, the extent to which it can be separately and reliably measured by different researchers, using different setting and a different

representative sample of participants?? something known as ' testability. ' Testability refers, therefore, also to the degree to which the theory at hand succeeds at evincing evidence when applied to real-life events, following a methodologically sound procedure.

Each indicator of the theory must be conducive to presenting its key concepts in an observable, quantifiable manner. Another criterion of a good theory involves its information value. Upon ascertaining its applicability to a variety of situations, questions can often arise regarding its reliability, or whether it accurately describes the nature of the events and their natural progression, in a meaningful and significant manner that does not merely conceptualize, but also seeks to proximate to real-life experiences.

The third criterion for judging a theory is its potential predictability, or whether the variables it pits in relation to each other are causal or functional statements, or whether the occurrence of a particular variable will reliably predict the occurrence of another. Following this is a theory explanatory power, or the explanation it affords with regard to why the changes that occur among particular situations do so over a given period of time.

The hypothesis is evaluated in terms of its order of data, basic concepts, the relationships it seeks to establish and the assumptions it makes, thus providing the foundations upon which the predictions formerly made can chive the scientific and empirical validation they so need to certify the theory as legitimate. Other criteria involve the relative parsimony of the theory, or how succinctly does a theory portray its propositions and communicate its intentions in as simplistic a manner as possible.

Said propositions are often looked upon to contribute to future research in areas other than the original conditions in which the theory arose, a property termed as ' heuristic potential,' or the propositions of a theory suggesting hypotheses in different areas of research. For e. G. The theory of the fundamental attribution error worked especially on by Edward E. Jones and Victor Harris (1967) initially hypothesized that we tend to associate freely-chosen behaviors to internal, dispositional factors and chance-related behaviors to situational factors.

The phenomenon known as the ' fundamental attribution error confounded this hypothesis, given that this bias towards corresponding events giving great weight to personality-based factors, while undervaluing circumstantial explanations for said behavior. This is most apparent upon evaluating the behavior of another, where spoliation factors are given far more importance, while upon evaluating ourselves, we always take into account the situational factors that give rise to our actions in the first place.

Argued to be ' the conceptual bedrock for the field of social psychology' by Lee Ross, the classic demonstrative study by Jones and Harris (1967) in which writers described to have either freely chosen, or decided on a coin toss, whether they would base their position for or against Cuban dictator, Fidel Castro, were naturally rated as having a more positive attitude towards him, without taking into consideration the additional, constrictive factors that most certainly accompany a situation like this.

Several hypotheses arise to explain this phenomenon: based on cultural factors that vastly support such a notion, people have an innate tendency to

believe that the results of their actions are usually what they deserve, based on several factors (Learner, 1 977), though most particularly dispositional ones. Attributing success to positive characteristics within us greatly induce a feeling of high self-esteem and boost our idea of a positive self-concept, as well as our notion of holding a modicum of control over our lives.

We are thus titivated to perceive the world as a just one, given that this reduces perceived threats to the aforementioned self-concept, and affords us a sense of psychological security. This extends, however, to people often attributing negative dispositional factors to, say, victims of rape and sexual abuse?? explaining perhaps therefore why women are often blamed, disparaged, and even vindicated upon a general affirmation of their ' victim' status, justifying thus a belief in their supposed insusceptibility to the situation, judge another's behavior based on our lack of awareness of the situational forces working upon them.

Social and cultural factors too play a major role in the prevalence of said error?? a study by Massed et al. (2004) revealed that person's belonging to individualistic cultures are far more likely to make the fundamental attribution error, given their belief in individuals as independent agents responsible for their own behavior based on a self that ends at one's own stipulated boundaries, rather than extending to include others as well, as seen in more interdependent, collectivist cultures.

American participants were more likely to attribute the differing movements of an individual fish winning ahead oaf group pf fish as based on internal, rather than external factors, as opposed to Chinese participants. Also,

Japanese participants were far more likely to pay attention to contextual factors (e. G. Rocks and plants) rather than focal objects (e. G. The fish.) The disparity in responses suggests that collectivist Asian cultures tend to attribute behavior to a situation, while individualistic Western cultures tend to attribute behavior to disposition.

In this way, this theory is one example of how a methodologically sound conceptualized statement can reliably describe, predict, explain and measure particular phenomenon, based on a relative ease of application, information value, predictability, explanatory value, parsimony and heuristic potential. Judgments arise from implicit, non-conscious processes and are a universal phenomenon; attribution is an empirically-validated occurrence that conforms to the hypothesis propounded by Jones and Harris and thus deems this theory legitimate.

As aforementioned, theories are tested by the variety of research methods employed within the scientific fields. These are of two kinds?? quantitative research methods, which seek to empirically validate its findings with tactical computations through an operational definition of its variables, hypothesis, and the measurable response to the introduction of a variable, and qualitative research methods, which seek to describe its findings in terms of the underlying factors according to which they occur.

Quantitative research methods include the experimental method and correlation studies, while qualitative research methods include ethnographic studies, participant observation, the survey method etc. ?? often including a triangulation of methods within it (as is seen in the case study.) Correlation

studies form a preceding element to the experimental method, given its lack of cause/effect relationships, while compensating for this by generating the hypotheses upon which experimental studies can be based.

It can, however, be bettered in terms of explanation in terms of the introduction of a mediating variable?? but can be confounded by the supposed possibility of a third variable accounting for a greater part of the relationships it seeks to establish. This can be augmented by the experimental method.

However, despite its obvious gains regarding the stringent level of control guarding variables afforded by the experimental method, as well as its establishment of cause/effect relationships, experiments are subject to a vast variety of methodological limitations that often confound the veracity of its results, jeopardize their internal and external validity and consequentially, limit their applicability for further generalization.

Depicted as the traditional scientific approach to research, quantitative methods employ a systematic and methodological process that places considerable value on rationality, objectivity, prediction and control; experiments afford the framework for the establishment of relationships between variables in terms of cause and effect.

The researcher is an active agent within the experiment, using deductive reasoning to prove (or even falsify) hypotheses through a manipulation of the independent variable and observing the outcome on a dependent variable, while attempting to hold extraneous variables constant. A similarity

between the various subject groups is ensured by matching cases respecting an infinite number of characteristics, and randomly allocating members to either an experimental or control group, relying solely on observable facts and techniques of inferential statistics to provide precise numerical results.

The factor of control within an experiment relates to the application of a rigorous standardized procedure aimed at reducing bias and misjudged conclusions?? these include random sampling, manipulation of the independent variable, single or double blinding procedures, and the use of stringent statistical tests to verify the data etc.

This high degree of control affords a level of confidence in the researcher's ability to state that the results are solely due to the experimental conditions, drawing thus firm conclusions room the findings, but conversely, increasing the artificiality of the situation and increasing the likelihood that such conditions are not representative of real-life situations.

Limitations also involve problems gaining a representative sample, and failure at randomization allocation to either group, which might limit generalization of findings, as well as the high degree of experimental realism limiting external validity, while augmenting internal validity. Subjects may also consciously behave in socially desirable ways upon acknowledging that they are being attached (a phenomenon known as the Hawthorne effect) and may thus confound the reliability of results, taking into account the demand characteristics and choosing either to completely conform to the hypothesis, or further confound it.

This can, however, be countered upon through the operation of a cover story. Experiments also operate largely on the principle of reductionism, which tends to downplay upon the effects factors aside from the independent variables might have had upon the subjects, and quite possibly might have laid down the potential of differing dependent variables. Experimental research also brings into attention a number of ethical considerations, especially when a double-blind procedure is used, given the element of deception involved.

Experimenters themselves might be subliminally operating through their own biases and prejudices and must take care to maintain an objective manner of analysis while studying their results, given that the minor cues they might unconsciously be giving out (such as facial expressions, tactile cues etc.) might encourage the subject to play the role of the ' good subject' and further fabricate socially-desirable responses, specially in ego-involving areas, during the post-experimental review.

Ones interpretation too might be subject to these same biases; experimenters might selectively interpret data in a way consistent with the hypothesis given that responses are often ambiguous, and subjective in nature. On the other side of the spectrum, qualitative research methods aim to describe textually and question the nature and underlying causes of behavior and why it occurs in a way that answers questions and relies on subjective matter, rather than the objective, operationally-defined mores of initiative research.

It seek to rely on findings that extend beyond the immediate boundaries of the study based on the full spectrum of subjective responses that so typify the magnitude and multifaceted nature of the human being?? I. E. Ones beliefs, values, emotions, thoughts etc. Unlike quantitative methods, they take into account a vast variety of factors indirectly responsible for the generation of several responses?? some of these would include gender roles, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, mental state, medical history, occupational affiliation etc.

Qualitative data helps, therefore, o broaden the magnitude of quantitative research and to better understand the complex reality of social interaction. At the same time, however, qualitative research techniques limit the sample, representatives and generalization of results, providing thus findings relevant only to a particular and thus non-representative sample of individuals characterized by particular traits, and by extension, only on the particular cases studied. They also consider their results in a thematic form, and therefore not subject to be reported in a manner likely to be generalized to large populations.

Conclusions are therefore highly specific to the case at hand, and any other propositions and predictions are largely speculative. At the same time, however, quantitative research methods are often used so as to afford it empirical validation and more solid foundations for its hypotheses?? especially given that it is difficult to operationally define the thousands of variables present within the kind of studies qualitative research methods are Often employed to investigate.

The ethnographic study holds links to the coloratura angle which forms a major perspective of social psychology, given both their emphases on neutralizing experiences and drawing conclusions from the social and cultural norms, mores and expectations that motivate individuals to behave as they do, in a methodologically sound manner. This involves a triangulation of qualitative research methods, such as large-scale surveys, questionnaires, interviews, participant observation etc. With the researchers attempting to describe the nature of the individuals within the contexts of their behaviors. Indeed, an ethnographic study might even make use of a quantitative research method?? I. E. The field experiment. Participant observation involves gaining familiarity with the target population at hand, and learning of their beliefs, values, expectations, behaviors, norms etc. That collectively form their social and cultural identity, and gain highly specific information regarding the same. This usually extends over a long period of time, and may thus be time-consuming.

A key principle involves finding ones' self a role within the group, and not merely operating as a spectator?? though the requisite amount of distance must still be maintained so as to systematically and objectively observe the characteristic behaviors f a group without the inconvenience of an insider's tendency to perceive it in an overly desirable manner. At the same time, overt participation within a group might generate a negative response, and the researcher must be careful to tread the balance between differentiation and integration.

Certain groups (the Aborigines, in particular) are averse to interviews and direct observation and participation, and might object. Also, despite the detailed information garnered, given the length of time spent among a group, discrepancies might arise regarding the researcher's own biases coming to play. In a similar light, the survey method is a quicker, less time-consuming and efficient way of gaining vast amounts of information from a large group of people in a short period of time.

It involves largely the questionnaire method, a form of self-report designed in a question/answer format. An off-used forum for the efficient garnering of responses might be the Internet?? relying, however, thus on what could possibly be a non-representative sample biased towards a particular opinion, and hindering the likelihood of gaining a universal, holistic response. Similar to the occurrence within quantitative search methods, respondents might adjust their answers to fit a socially desirable light, and thus confound the veracity of the findings.

In the same way, however, should issues of sampling arise, researchers employing qualitative methods have devised three methods Of sampling so to deal with possible problems of non-representatives. Purposive sampling involves particular groups chosen on the basis of particular characteristics (with the size being determined by the extent to which new data contributing little to the variety of responses garnered?? known as ' theoretical saturation'.

Quota sampling, a derivative of purposive sampling, allocates a particular number of subjects to particular samples while designing the study, on the

basis of the assumption that such subjects might have certain insights into the topic at hand. Snowball sampling refers to a type of purposive sampling in which the participants inform the researcher of a next possible subject to refer to, regarding finding greater information about their topic of interest, thus expanding their social networks to garner insights.

While issues of confidentiality might arise, ' hidden populations' might e easily recruited through this method, gaining thus an accessibility not afforded by the other sampling methods. In this way, the two methods of research employed in social psychology differ in their ways of obtaining similar results. In terms of the general framework, quantitative research methods seek to confirm hypotheses about phenomena, use highly controllable and rigid equipment so as to operationally define, categorize, and elicit responses, and use structured methods such as systematic observation, experiments, correlation studies etc.

On the other hand, qualitative research methods explore phenomena sing markedly more flexible styles to elicit responses in a manner best conducive to cater to a subjective, open-ended manner of analysis, using less structured methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation etc. , and valuing textual, rather than numerical, responses. At the same time, in terms of analytical objectives, quantitative research methods seek to quantify variation, establish and predict cause/effect relationships, and describe generalize findings.

Qualitative research methods describe variation, relationships, individual experiences and group norms which might to necessarily generalize to a

larger population, and more often than not, generates rich, voluminous amounts of information that contribute greatly to an understanding of human nature in different contexts. Several of these research methods find themselves put to ample use in the different major perspectives that social psychology employs. These include the coloratura, evolutionary, learning and cognitive perspective.

The coloratura perspective, which emphasizes the importance of social mores and culture, in which individuals are thought to learn behavior through what is termed as ' problem-solving' interactions with other individuals?? particularly in childhood?? thus learning the values and expectations of their social environment, is a multifaceted discipline, greatly influenced by anthropology due to the work of Lurid, Elongate and Viscosity. It implies that the development of a schematic perception of beliefs, values, identity, personality, ideals, skills, attitudes etc. S all a social construct, and that to truly understand the individual means taking into account the contextual background of their origins in the first place. The coloratura perspective also emphasizes upon the idea of cultural relativism, in which ACH culture is meant to be viewed as different from each other, rather than a hierarchical notion of racial, genetic and/or cultural superiority, as well as the notion of individuality persisting within each cultural, ethnic, and social group, thus discouraging sweeping generalizations.

This might explain why a salesman eagerly describing a new product in a highly desirable light might be viewed positively among members Of the American culture, while the Japanese?? more accustomed to a modest

downplaying of the product's value, even apologies for the deficiencies of the inventor?? might think otherwise. Ulna sought to establish hypothetical links between socially organized modes of interaction and cognition, and thus creating an anthropologically-based cultural emphasis on the underlying motives of behavior.

Juxtaposing Central Asian populations not yet having to modify their behavioral patterns under the onset of Russian industrialization with the modernized masses, his findings were largely inconclusive, despite the hint of correlation found between age and literacy on behavior. Leonine, focusing more on psychological issues of research, spoke of the active participation of the individual in response to mentalist concepts, relating the individual to the social environment.

It was Viscosity, however, who was to integrate these two theories, and introducing an educational angle to what was then to develop as the coloratura perspective. He propounded that the individual was an intimate, essential part of his social environment, augmenting ones cognitive and psychosocial development through ones repeated interactions with it. Social mores are therefore internalized, colonization helps the individual learn of the cultural norms that his environment demands of him, and higher mental unction's are thus said to be a product of said social environment.

Internal, mentalist concepts are the us perceived as the consequences of repeated interactions with external, environmental influences?? thinking is described to be ' quasi-social', or a manner of socially interacting even on an interpersonal level. Another one of Visigoths theories was termed the zone of

proximal development, establishing the link therefore between social and developmental psychology, and highlighting the essentialist Of learning experiences for children, as well as the ideal notion of a supportive adult residence to recognize the potentiality of development levels.