

Social psychology

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



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Social psychology is the understanding of individual behavior in social environments. Per McLeod (2007) “ the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior in social situations. ” Social psychology studies how human behavior is influenced by other individuals and within the social environment in which the behavior takes place (McLeod, 2007). This paper will provide the definition of social psychology. There will be an analysis of the four key characteristics of social psychology. Included will be an explanation of the concept of situationism and the role that it plays in social psychology. Lastly, will be the five core social motives and the explanation of how each core social motive affects the field of social psychology (University of Phoenix, 2010). The Four Key Characteristics There are four key characteristics within the field of social psychology Per Fiske (2010) consists of most things in an individual’s life. S. Fiske (2012, p32) states that social psychology “ is broad in scope, constitutes a culturally mandated source of knowledge, follows scientific methods, and reflects an ongoing search for wisdom, ” which was the result of experiments conducted by Philip Brickman. Broad Scope of Social Psychology Social psychology covers a broad amount of material and human concerns like conformity, deviance, altruism, and aggression, love and hate, self and groups of people, attitudes, and actions (Fiske, 2010, p32). Social psychology involves things in an individual’s life from emotions to trials in a public court room. Social psychology uses information obtained from economists, political scientists, researchers, health, legal scholars, education

and other psychologists from other areas of psychology; this is why social psychology is such a broad field (Fiske, 2010). Nonverbal behavior is a way to communicate with other people through body language and is taught to another person by mimicking the other individual's body language. It is through nonverbal behavior that married couples begin to look alike after years of marriage as they begin to imitate the other spouse's expressions, facial habits, and muscle groups. Another way to imitate another individual through nonverbal communication is by smiling or doing something that makes another person feel good; if individuals' smile, the person being smiled at feels better as a smile reflects feeling good (Fiske, 2010).

Culturally Mandated Source of Knowledge The most important part of social psychology is thought to be cultural mandate which is the translation of our own understanding of behavior from a source of older language to a new one. Old language is thought to be from " religion, customs, laws, and etiquette (Fiske, 2010, p33). As individuals we need to have our explanation of behavior spoken in language we can understand which makes the language of science. Social psychology is an accepted type of greater understanding much like the traditional ways of religion and fortune-telling did in past times. Social psychology provides the way of understanding and appreciating other cultures and its exercises. In some cultures, knowledge is accepted because it is culturally mandated while in other cultures, knowledge is only accepted by someone that has expertise in the area in question; such as psychology (Fiske, 2010).

Scientific Methods Scientific methods are a vital part of social psychology in three ways: 1) Develop systematic theories and investigate the validity of the theory in order to advance scientific

understanding in the areas of predicting why, logic, a way of avoiding excess and assist in more investigation (Fiske, 2010). 2) Social psychology depends on scientific methods such as techniques, procedures, analyses, and standards in order to make reliable knowledge. The methods that are used are to help show people a precise, public, and accurate measurement of data (Fiske, 2010). 3) Social psychologists use appropriate research methods through experimental, observation, and surveys. Social psychologists follow meticulous criteria prior to making any judgments about how individuals influence another individual. The knowledge gained through research is used to make predictions of our social world and the ways that people respond (Fiske, 2010). Search for Wisdom Social psychologists study social problems to aid in making a safe place for people to live. The use of real-world issues are a crucial part of studies. Most people enter into social psychology so they are able to help other people. The belief is that social psychologists who understand how an individual can influence other individuals then possibly negative influences can be improved upon. Social psychologists seek wisdom, as knowledge isn't enough. Wisdom is necessitates combining moral and intellectual issues, plus wisdom also combines indirect and direct experiences. Wisdom uses knowledge regarding how people live in the real world and combines that knowledge with moral, intellectual, and concerns about society to make sense of the experiences that individuals have lived in the social situations (Fiske, 2010). Social psychologists look at the reasons individual's act in specific ways when alone, among groups and between groups of people that are different. Social psychologists have a culturally mandated knowledge that is scientific rather than traditional or common

sense knowledge. Social psychology looks for wisdom regarding human conditions (Fiske, 2010). The Five Core Social Motives There are five social core motives that surround social psychology consists of belonging, understanding, controlling, self-enhancing, and trusting. These five core motives are what are thought of as what motivates human behavior. Individuals adapt to other individuals through “ social groups, networks, and relationships (Fiske, 2004, p1). “ People need to have social belongings with other people in order to survive. Individuals continue to exist and prosper by belonging to other groups of people. The main motive of belonging is to achieve approval and circumvent denial (Fiske, 2004). Belonging Belonging is a constant in an individual’s life; individuals are attracted to other individuals and form relationships that are different only slightly from their own culture. Individuals are attracted to similar things such as education and wealth. Individual have to associate with their own group belonging out of similarity. Individuals may have more trust and control than with other individuals from a different group, especially if their goals are different than individuals of the same group. Similarity also validates a shared connection if the associates of that group have similar likenesses of it and share the group’s original model. Familiarity and similarity aids in forming friendships within the group of a culture, for example (Fiske, 2004). Understanding For anyone to belong to a specific group, the individuals have to have a “ socially shared understanding” which is the core of the social motive (Fiske, 2004, p2). If one person within a group of people doesn’t share the same beliefs, they will not fit in as individuals are motivated to have the same understanding of things within their own culture or environment. Shared

information contexts lets individuals get along in any type of relationship and provides them with the judgment of their denial or approval which aids belonging within the group (Fiske, 2004). Control Individuals are very motivated in knowing when something will take place and what the outcome will be. Control is knowing and controlling feelings and effects their environment. When people attribute things to a group, they believe they have control within that group. The feeling of control helps to encourage one's health and life within a group so individuals attempt to rebuild any lost control; however, not all cultures and people agree on this motive.

Individuals see another individual's intent as good or bad which is affected by their own culture. Differences of cultural control have an importance on social accord and individuals give up control to other people of the in-group to preserve and generate calmness within the group (Fiske, 2004). Self-enhancement Another core social motive is keeping oneself in special status or feelings of being superior or having sympathy for oneself within the group. These feelings can be good or bad depending on the culture of which they belong and employ mechanisms of self-protection, improvement of self, and maintaining one's self. People from the United States are more self-involved than those of another culture such as Japanese who tend to be reserved and more involved about the group (Fiske, 2004). Trust Trust is a normal feeling in relationships whether it is in interpersonal or intergroup levels of people and the feeling of knowing who can be trusted within a culture and differs in importance with each culture. Being able to trust some individuals within a culture is another core social motive. Individuals are most times trusting when it comes to other people and it is a baseline in relationships.

Individuals from the United States place more trust in others so not to make a bad outcome for themselves. Japanese cultures are more narrow-minded when it comes to trusting others and based on the knowledge of the other individual's intent (Fiske, 2004). There are five types of comparative data used when comparing individuals from Japan and the United States: 1) Social stereotypes that reveal rejection between groups 2) Rejection amid friends that are thought to be normal 3) Scenario studies of possible rejection 4) Studies of probable communications and possible rejections 5) Studies of real communications and true rejection (Fiske, 2004). There were similarities within each culture and differences as well that motivated people to either want more or less trust. Americans are looser when it comes to belonging and understanding as Americans are more apt to speak their minds directly and wanting others to believe it as truth. American's see that being in a relationship as their choice and under their own control, having more self-confidence, and self-enhancement, and trust more positively unless it is proven to be different than thought (Fiske, 2004). The Japanese culture has different motives and expectations. Social harmony, relational motives, and don't care to voice different things in different situations; these are highly prioritized within the Japanese culture. The Japanese culture does not always believe the feedback is always true, even if it is their spouse. Japanese see this as protecting the other members "face", showing respect, and providing solidarity when they flatter someone (Fisk, 2004, p10). Situationism

Situationism is a theory in social psychology that describes human personality as a function of responding to situations in life. Theorists believe that people react to situations they find themselves in such as being with

friends who break the law; people will follow the person rather than trying to go against what is being done. People will play “ follow-the-leader" rather than being the leader and trying to change the other individual’s behavior to do something other than what they originally planned. People have the need to belong to groups and be accepted so to fit in, they will go against their conscious and do what others are doing. Situationism fits into the field of social psychology as people want to feel like they belong, are held to the same standard as others within the group, are trusted, and as a way of self-enhancement (Merriam-Webster, n. d.).

Conclusion This paper has provided the definition of situationism and how it relates to the field of social psychology. Included are the five core social motives and the explanation of how each motive affects social psychology and how they relate in the cultures of Americans and the Japanese. An analysis of the four major characteristics of social psychology has been provided along with the definition of social psychology.

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