

## Introduction

Origins credited to William McDougal (1908) (UK) - published book "Introduction to Social Psychology".

[Other claims: Ross (1908) (US) - "Social Psychology"; James (1890) - "Principles of Psychology" - in the philosophical tradition.]

Scientific approaches displace philosophical ones in early 20<sup>th</sup> century - providing certainties on which progress can be built. Early scientific psychologists attempted to establish psychological principles using the same methods and approaches as for physical principles.

Society cannot be easily, if at all, operationalised in the laboratory; but it was argued individual behaviours could be - early experiments were in memory and perception.

Contemporary scientific social psychology originates with Moede (1920) (Germany) - "Experimental group psychology" pamphlet - suggested using groups of people in lab experiments to see effect on thinking and feeling. Influenced Allport (US) - experiments to investigate if group membership affected judgements - the start of the US experimental social psychology tradition. His concept of 'social facilitation' is still a key research area in experimental social psychology.

Work in the US following on from Allport's 1924 book "Social Psychology" meant by mid-1970's social psychology was largely a North American discipline (Jones, 1985).

European pre-cursors of social psychology:

Le Bon (1908) (France) - crowd psychology - philosophical roots.

Wundt (1860s) (Germany) - "Völkerpsychologie" - lab experiments only appropriate for simple functions - e.g. perception; his psychology attempted to address 'mental products created by a community'. Identified

## SPM Chapter 1 - Social Psychology: Past and Present

a differentiator between individual and social psychology.

Social psychology as a discipline emerged from both scientific and philosophical roots over 100 years ago.

However, its history demonstrates it is not easy to define what it is and how long ago it started due to because of differences in the geographical roots and research traditions it developed from.

### Two social psychologies

Current UK 'mainstream' social psychology is experimental, influenced by the NA tradition.

Hewstone and Manstead (1995) definition: 'scientific study of the reciprocal influence of the individual and their social context'. Argue SP will remain an empirical, primarily experimental discipline, but the 'experimental' part is now under challenge.

One of the arguments made in DD307 is that and effective SP can transcend the 'either-or' of individual or social explanations of psychological phenomena - referred to as 'individual-social dualism'.

Individual-social dualism has split social psychology - e.g. in NA there are two traditions - PSP (psychological social psychology) and SSP (sociological social psychology).

**PSP** - focus is on psychological processes and investigates how social environments impacts individuals. Largely experimental in outlook. Dominant.

**SSP** - focus on the reciprocal nature of society and individual; tries to explain social interaction. Largely naturalistic observation and surveys - e.g. symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

That there is very little cross-citation of work between the traditions reinforces the individual-social dualism.

Mainstream UK social psychology sits somewhere between the mainstream NA and European traditions. Has started to distance itself from the NA individualist and experimental paradigms due to European influences and sociological work on interaction, language and identity.

**Tajfel** - social group research influenced by European social identity theory - 'SP can and must include ... a direct concern with the relation between human psychological functioning and the large scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it'.

However, much research in this tradition is experimental and focussed on individuals - making it more difficult to reconcile it with the range of ways individuals are socially situated.

In the UK, a similar parallel between mainstream SP and a tradition known as 'critical' SP to the NA PSP/SSP split has emerged. CSP uses (mostly) qualitative research in everyday social settings. Attempts to deal with complexity of people's experiences and meanings against a background of their changing world.

### Social psychology: roots and routes

#### *PSP - Measurement without experiment*

WWI - emergence of psychometrics - the idea that as with physical characteristics, people's psychological characteristics can be measured and compared against those of the wider population. As with ESP, the individual is extracted from their social context.

Unlike ESP, it had an applied emphasis from the start - e.g. with the formation of the Psychological Corporation in the US in 1922 with the aim of fitting the right kind of person to the right kind of employment.

Social psychometrics - the measurement of reported attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviours followed. Commonly practiced - probably due to its applied emphasis.

e.g. Health psychology - receives considerable government and commercial funding due to its apparent usefulness in discovering attitudes to drinking, smoking etc.

e.g. **Bogardus (1933)** - 'social distance scale' - an attitude scale - based on questions on racial and ethnic groups (coincides with mass immigration to US from Europe).

**Katz and Braly (1933)** used laboratory based research (on Princeton undergraduates) to look at beliefs about racial and national groups.

Basis of SP research into stereotyping and the use of (white, male, middle-class) undergraduates as being representative of the population as a whole.

**Allport** - goal was to explain social behaviour in terms of individual behaviour, as he argued that it is within individuals that behaviour and consciousness exists, fundamental to how we interact with others. This is a principle which underpins PSP.

*PSP - Social intervention or science*

WWII encouraged an interest in social psychology in the way WWI had encouraged an interest in psychometrics. Jewish (and other groups) persecution during WWII sparked interest in topics including inter-group conflict, racial hatred, national identity, authoritarianism and leadership. US government also interested in how to maintain morale.

**Lewin** - advocated psychology needed to be relevant to social reform - e.g. work in WWII on changing food habits. Also investigated effect of group participation in decision making and psychological warfare.

Main contribution was to the study of leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire - **Lewin et al., 1939**) - impacted on management and also parenting research.

Death of **Lewin** in 1947 left few arguing for combining theory/research with social action; by mid 1960s **Hendrick (1977)** noted experimentation was the dominant methodology; other methods disparaged. Very few papers published in NA psychological used non-students as research participants between 1980 and 1985 (**Sears**): 17% non-students vs 75% students in the three main journals of SP.

Impact of this could have been to bias research that claimed to be generalisable/universal across a whole population - many social and ethnic groups would have been excluded from such research.

*PSP - The crisis in social psychology*

**Ring (1967)** - questioned values of ESP; these attacks continued throughout 1970s. Argued there were three kinds of SP:

- Humanistic, action-oriented (e.g. **Lewin's**) which lost out after WWII.
- Scientific SP, lab based, uninterested in social relevance.
- 'Fun and games' SP, clever experiments, counter-intuitive findings, questionable relevance to anything.

The so-called 'crisis in SP' was a result of this intellectual disarray, identified by **Ring**.

Two issues then dominated - (i) criticism of experimental methods using deception to produce reductive and irrelevant findings (e.g. **McGuire; Silverman**) and (ii) criticism of the individualism in SP (**Sampson**).

Crisis faded, but resulted in new critiques of psychology suggesting it had a dehumanising vision and

Ignored real-world settings.

*Sociological social psychology*

**Mead** - regarded as the most prominent early SSP theorist - especially in the realm of symbolic interactionist theory (Mead, 1934). Studied the importance of symbols - especially language - as a way of understanding individuals and how they interact.

**Mead** argued as the social system is established before an individual is born, they are already immersed in language when they experience the world and act in it. Language is also used to internalise the role of the other. The self is therefore made up of:

- (i) The 'I' - the subject of language, and
- (ii) The 'Me' - the object of other people's meanings and (through internalisation) your own.

Methods in SSP have changed over time. Self-report and naturalistic settings dominate. **Garfunkel (1967)** - asked his students to act as lodgers rather than family members when they returned home - resulting in an example of 'normative disruption' - i.e. breaches of unwritten rules of social behaviour. Such experiments are a key strategy in ethnomethodology - the study of lay methods in everyday life to make sense of what is happening.

e.g. **Becker** - marijuana can only be used by an individual for pleasure iff they go through a learning process to understand an object (marijuana) can be used in such a way. Contrasts this finding with static individualistic theories that would not enable this to happen. Argues individual experiences are derived from social meanings, shaped largely by language.

**Goffman (1959)** - interactions form the self. We cannot help but give out an impression of ourselves to others, the basis of all interactions. His work on interaction analysis has informed current discourse and conversation analysis techniques.

### *European social psychology*

**Rijsman and Stroebe (1989)** argue that the NA crisis of the mid 1970s allowed European ideas - e.g. intergroup conflict (**Tajfel**), minority influence (**Moscovici**) to be taken up in the US. But even though the ideas were new, research methods remained traditional.

They cite **Harre** (British philosopher) and **Gergen** (US social constructionist) who rejected the 'natural science approach' as a starting point and became (though different in other ways) exponents of a new epistemology.

Truth != revelation of the world as it is to observers and theory the best description of this truth by privileged writers. Instead theory and truth are forms of discourse, reflecting embeddedness in social practice of those who speak and engage with others.

Theories should not be judged on their accuracy, but on their social intelligibility and power.

Social behaviour is the discursive activity that constructs meaning.

Research practices cannot therefore be confined to (just) experimentation. British SP has picked up on this and has moved in some areas from experimental to field methods.

e.g. **Potter and Wetherell (1987)** 'Discourse and SP: beyond attitudes and behaviour'. Draws on European discourse analysis (**Foucault**) and American SSP tradition.

Criticises the way the concept of attitude dominated SP, which located attitudes in the minds of individuals. Instead, they argue they are located in the social world, as discourses.

This approach challenges the assumption that language is just about sending messages from one person to

another - instead, language is used to construct version(s) of the world containing objects, subjects and social relations. Unlike attitudes, these are not fixed - and change depending on the context.

Concept of 'interpretative repertoires' - a lexicon of terms/metaphors drawn on to describe and evaluate actions and events - helps to enable discourse to be used empirically.

### *Feminist social psychology*

Roots in criticisms of **Kohlberg's** (1958) research into moral reasoning which argued few women could attain the highest stage of moral development. **Gilligan** (1982) was able to question these results by suggesting that it was incorrect to regard moral reasoning based on situated relationships as inferior to abstract principles more often used by men.

Feminist SP challenged traditional psychologies by:

- (i) Criticising its epistemology (assumptions about what knowledge is)
- (ii) Criticising its method of enquiry (how empirical evidence is collected)
- (iii) Criticises its subject matter (what is studied)

**(Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001)**

Feminist SP has explicitly political roots. **Wilkinson** argues that there are two key aspects.

(i) Women should be listened to by SP researchers - major studies (e.g. **Kohlberg, Erikson** studies omit women and extrapolate results from men). To do this, a change of methods would be required to be more open to meanings and experiences of women without constraints - had an impact on the movement towards qualitative methods.

(ii) Feminism => social change required, but as feminist SP has entered the mainstream, it has lost sight of this as a primary goal. 'Psychology of women'

does not do this, according to **Wilkinson**.

e.g. **Ussher** - argues mainstream psychology pathologised femininity, from reproductive characteristics onto psychological characteristics and reinforces the belief that women are inferior.

Feminist SP has had a contributory impact on changes in wider SP - for example in bringing to attention issues of:

- (i) Power relations and ethical practices
- (ii) The principle of listening to individual's meanings and experiences
- (iii) Subject matters of SP are now more likely to be based in real world concerns
- (iv) The (largely male) idea of the autonomous individual has been influentially contested.

### *Critical social psychology*

As with other social science disciplines, associated with arguments that previous world views were no longer valid - e.g. postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism.

Criticism of psychology (modernist perspective of science and rationality) argue that the focus on 'the individual' has assumed and fed the idea we are unitary autonomous agents, rational and driven by conscious intention.

**Foucault** (poststructuralism) - argues individuals are not fixed or a given entity, but the product of social regulations and norms at a specific point in time.

**Rose** argues that although feelings, desires and aspirations seem to be personal, leading to us assuming our 'real' private self is internal to us, this is a misleading view of the world. Instead, the 'psy' disciplines have been key to the regulation of

subjectivities, seen in work, schools, homes.

Critical social psychology argues individuals are:

- Situated - in a social and historical context
- Relational - others influence the self
- Dynamic and conflictual - there are changing tensions inside our plural personalities
- Embodied - we express social meaning through our physical presence
- Discursive - we have to be positioned by socially available meanings and practices

To signal this critique, the term subjectivity is used. It is used to refer to individuality and self-awareness and is not the opposite of objectivity.

'Post' tendencies argue that the idea that an individual is an agent (modernist approach) with free will, able to exercise intentions, make and act on decisions is called into question if we accept the critique that we are formed in social structures and positioned by discourses and social practices. If such a view is correct, then our capacity for exercising agency is vanishingly small.

But, if power relations and discourses are so influential, where does their agency reside? Such questions illustrate the agency-structure dualism - which continues to cause problems in SP.

The 'post' critiques also question what SP should be trying to achieve - e.g. can knowledge really be important for its own sake and disinterested. They argue it is impossible for researchers to stand outside their social/historical/cultural/power context. This is particularly important in the field of SP, as its effects can be powerful in realms of political policy. It can be argued that (for example) prejudice cannot be understood or studied from a standpoint of scientific impartiality.

#### Four interrogative themes

##### (i) Power relations

**Foucault** - power is a property present in all relations, all practices and all knowledges. It is a two-way dynamic, not something the powerful do to the powerless. Power is positive.

Traditional psychology and science does not address the concept of power - and so could therefore be used unaccountably or unknowingly - e.g. **Milgram (1965)** and the use of deception to study authority. The acknowledgement of power has led to higher ethical standards across psychology.

Can potentially also be seen in the relationship between mental health patients and psychiatrists - where objectification and stigmatisation can occur. Similar critiques of psychoanalysis are possible.

##### (ii) Situated knowledges

**Haraway (1991)** - the idea that knowledge is situation-specific, so we should be wary of over-generalising from experiments conducted on (say) solely US undergraduates. Danger is that the use of statistical samples may give an unwarranted legitimacy to universal claims about results into conformity, helping behaviour, cognitive biases etc. Studying people is not the same as studying inanimate objects (e.g. in physics).

Demand characteristics - occur because it is difficult or impossible for researchers not to set some kind of expectation to the participants about what a correct response might be and so effect outcomes of experiments, interviews and other investigative techniques. Can happen in interview situations - e.g. knowledge (or otherwise) of a researcher's sexual identity in the context of interviews with LGBT participants; as part of briefing and gaining informed consent

Methods therefore influence what knowledge is produced. Acknowledging the importance of situated knowledges means that social psychology must be set within specific historical and cultural settings which are changing constantly - very different to studying the properties of inanimate physical objects, for example.

Knowledge of what 'SP says' also impacts everyday life itself too - e.g. the 2006 TV replication of **Milgram's** authority experiments. Knowledge of the original research has permeated society and therefore in turn may well have impacted the responses of participants in the replica - even if some participants had not been directly aware of the original experiment.

##### (iii) Individual-society dualism

Seen in, for example, the difference between PSP and SSP as to whether individual or society is privileged in how SP phenomena are explained.

Other examples - **Wundt's** distinction between (individual) consciousness and community life and reductions of explanations of psychological phenomena to either purely biological or social causes.

Seen in the intelligence debate - **Eysenck** and others - argued a significant genetic component was present in explaining difference in intelligence. Sociologists often argued that the influence of a child's environment was so important as to negate any effects from biology on intelligence. High stakes argument - as it has a direct impact on political policy - e.g. do you select at 11 (which is rational if the biological argument is correct) or do you attempt to fix the environment through schemes such as SureStart?

However, a simple dualism is inadequate to describe how genetics and environment might interact, and neither are psychological concepts, unlike anxiety, for example - rooted in the specific setting in which people perform and affects our capacity to think.

(iv) Agency or structure in explaining action

The agency - structure debate mirrors the individual - society debate. If individuals are relatively independent of social influence then they can be agents of their own destinies; if not, and social structures are dominant, then our choices and desires become irrelevant.

Social theory has often emphasised the power of social structures in governing action. Critiques of social determinism have replaced the static nature of such influences with more dynamic processes - making it easier to focus on change.

Can also be seen in social psychology / sociology - e.g. static social structures like marriage or psychological structures such as gender differences could instead be viewed as relationships of choice in a continual flux.

Agency and choice exercised within specific and complex constraints - SP therefore needs to understand the dynamic between desires and actions which are relatively free vs those constrained by circumstance - rather than falling on one side or other of the agency-structure dualism.