

Sociocultural level of analysis Syllabus

Introduction

At the third level of analysis, the biological and cognitive systems that make up the individual are embedded in an even larger system of interrelationships with other individuals. At its beginning, psychology largely confined itself to the study of the individual acting alone. As the discipline matured, a few psychologists recognized that human behaviour could be fully understood only if the social context in which behavior occurred was also taken into account. This recognition led to many investigations of social influence, that is, how the presence and behaviour of one or a few people affect the behaviour and attitudes of another individual. It also provided a broader context for exploring topics such as aggression and helping behavior that had largely been regarded as individual personality traits.

Although there has long been an exchange between the sciences of psychology and anthropology, the study of culture has largely been the province of anthropology. Recently, as many societies have become more multicultural, the need to understand the effect of culture on a person's behaviour has risen to a new prominence. Social psychologists saw the need not only to achieve an understanding of the role of culture in human behaviour, but also to devise means for alleviating problems that arise from misunderstandings when individuals from different cultures come into contact with each other.

In what appeared to be a contrary movement, as social psychologists turned their attention to exploring the power of culture, other investigators were focusing attention on the biological bases of human social behaviour: the role played by genes. These investigators explained important social behaviours as special adaptations to becoming social organisms acquired throughout the course of human evolution. As social psychologists continue to integrate the biological and cultural contributions to social behaviour, there is a general consensus in the discipline of psychology that a synthesis of the biological, cognitive and sociocultural levels of analysis holds out the greatest promise of bringing us closer to the goal of more fully understanding the nature of the complex interacting systems that make up the human being.

Learning outcomes

General learning outcomes

- Outline principles that define the sociocultural level of analysis (*for example, the social and cultural environment influences individual behaviour; we want connectedness with, and a sense of belonging to, others; we construct our conceptions of the individual and social self*).
- Explain how principles that define the sociocultural level of analysis may be demonstrated in research (that is, theories and/or studies).
- Discuss how and why particular research methods are used at the sociocultural level of analysis (*for example, participant/naturalistic observation, interviews, case studies*).
- Discuss ethical considerations related to research studies at the sociocultural level of analysis.

Sociocultural cognition

- Describe the role of situational and dispositional factors in explaining behaviour.
- Discuss two errors in attributions (*for example, fundamental attribution error, illusory correlation, self-serving bias*).
- Evaluate social identity theory, making reference to relevant studies.
- Explain the formation of stereotypes and their effect on behaviour.

Social norms

- Explain social learning theory, making reference to two relevant studies.
- Discuss the use of compliance techniques (*for example, lowballing, foot-in-the-door, reciprocity*).
- Evaluate research on conformity to group norms.
- Discuss factors influencing conformity (*for example, culture, groupthink, risky shift, minority influence*).

Cultural norms

- Define the terms "culture" and "cultural norms".
- Examine the role of two cultural dimensions on behaviour (*for example, individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, Confucian dynamism, masculinity/femininity*).
- Using one or more examples, explain "emic" and "etic" concepts.