

UNIT 4 RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOLOGY WITH PSYCHOLOGY*

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this Unit, you should be able to:

- Define sociology and psychology;
- Explain the major concerns of sociology and psychology;
- Describe the relationship between sociology and psychology;
- Explain how the concepts of sociology and psychology when applied together gave birth to a new discipline called sociological social psychology to understand the impact of society on individual relationships;
- To trace the historical development of Social psychology; and
- To understand the concepts and methods of sociology used in social psychology.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Among all the living beings, human beings have the ability to think and interact with the environment make sense of it. Human is a social animal and lives in a group. As the human society has developed, systematic attempts have been made by scholars to understand and document social and cultural activities of human in different contexts across time and space. This quest to understand the human nature and relationships gave birth to academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and history which form the core of social sciences. Amongst these, the discipline of sociology is mainly concerned with the study of human society and relationships within it. Along with sociology, psychology also focuses on the study of human beings. The question arises is there any inter-relation between sociology and psychology, whether the theoretical premises of these disciplines could be integrated to develop a better understanding of the socio-psychological phenomena. By studying this unit we will be able to understand the nature of sociology and psychology and also the subject matter of socialpsychology.

4.2 DEFINITION OF SOCIOLOGY

The term sociology was coined by Auguste Comte, who is called the father of Sociology. Sociology is concerned with the study of human relationships and the society. It is believed that relationships develop when individuals come in close contact with other and interaction takes place between them. This leads to the formation of social groups and complex relationships among these groups develop as result of constant interaction. Hence, it can be said that social self and individual self are two parts of the same coin. Given this, scholars have attempted to define and explain the subject matter of sociology.

One of the founding fathers of sociology, Auguste Comte divided the subject matter of sociology into the study of *social static* and *social dynamic*. The static was concerned with the study of how the parts of the societies inter-relate, the dynamic was to focus on whole societies as the unit of analysis and to show how they developed and changed through time (Inkeles, 1964). According to Emile Durkheim sociology is the study of social facts. Sociology can be defined as the scientific study of human life, social relations, social groups and every aspect of the society as a whole. The scope of sociology is very wide, ranging from the analysis of the everyday interaction between individuals on the street to the investigation and comparison of societies across the globe.

4.2.1 Psychology

The term psychology is derived from two Greek words; *Psyche* means “soul or breath” and *Logos* means “knowledge or study” (study or investigation of something). Psychology developed as an independent academic discipline in 1879, when a German Professor named Wilhelm Wundt established the first laboratory for psychology at the University of Leipzig in Germany.

Initially, psychology was defined as ‘science of consciousness’. . In the simple words, we can define psychology as the systematic study of human behaviour and experience. According to Baron (1990), psychology is the science of behaviour and cognitive processes. Psychology emphasizes on the process that

occurs inside the individual's mind such as perception, cognition, emotion, and consequence of these process on the social environment.

4.3 SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY: THE POSSIBLE INTERLINK

Sociology and psychology together form the core of the social sciences. Right from their inception as separate academic disciplines, sociology and psychology have studied different aspects of human life. Most of the other species, work on instincts in the physical environment for their survival. While the survival of humans depends upon the learned behaviour patterns. An instinct involves a genetically programmed directive which informs behaviour in a particular way. It also involves specific instruction to perform a particular action (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). For instance, birds have instincts to build nests and members of particular species are programmed to build a nest in a particular style and pattern. Unlike this, the human mind is influenced by the social culture, customs, norms, and values. It through socialization that humans learn specific behaviour patterns to suit them best in the physical environment. Humans process the information provided by the social context to make sense of their living conditions. Sociology's basic unit of analysis is the social system such as family, social groups, cultures etc.

The main subject matter of psychology is to study human mind to analyses attitude, behavior emotions, perceptions and values which lead to the formation of individual personality living in the social environment. While sociology deals with the study of the social environment, social collectives which include family, communities and other social institutions psychology deals with the individual. For instance, while studying group dynamism, sociologist and psychologist initially share common interests in various types of groups, and their structures which are affected by the degree of cooperation, cohesion, conflict, information flow, the power of decision making and status hierarchies. This initial similarity of interest, takes on different focus, both the disciplines use different theoretical positions to explain the group phenomena.

4.4 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The quest to study human behaviour on scientific principles started with the emergence and establishment of natural sciences during the nineteenth century. Comte thought that society could be studied using the scientific methods of natural sciences. Comte argued careful observation of the entities that are known directly to experience could be used to explain the relationship between the observed phenomena. By understanding the causal relationship between various events it is possible to predict future events. He also held the belief that once the rules governing the social life are identified, the social scientist can work towards the betterment of the society. This quest to produce knowledge about the society and place of the individual within it, on the basis evidence and observation is central to the origin of Social psychology. The ideas of early and later sociologist helped to shape the sociological social psychology. Mead studied the effect of social conditions on our sense of self. Other influence contributors in the development of sociological social psychology include Georg Simmel

(1858-1918), Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), and Ervin Goffman.

The emergence of modern social psychology could be traced from the nineteenth century onwards. One of the first systematic manual of social psychology *Social and Ethical Interpretation in Mental Development* was published in New York in the year 1987 by James Mark Baldwin. However, in the year 1908, it was the work of two authors; William McDougall and Edward A. Ross that gave social psychology the status of an independent scientific discipline. This year saw the publication of two books on social psychology. The names of the books are *An Introduction to Social Psychology* by William McDougall and *Social Psychology* by sociologist Edward A. Ross.

4.4.1 Defining Social Psychology

There is constant interaction between the intra-individual and social context and both influence each other mutually. Social psychology could be defined as the study of the “interface between these two sets of phenomena, the nature and cause of human social behaviour” (Michener & Delamater, 1999 cf. Delamater, 2006:11). G.W Allport (1954:5) defines social psychology with its emphasis on “the thought, feeling, and behaviour of individual as shaped by actual, imagined, or implied the presence of others”. A few other definitions of social psychology are as follows:

Social Psychology is the discipline that explores in an in-depth manner the various aspects of social interaction.

Baron and Byrne (2007) define social psychology as the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior in social situations.

To sum up we can say that social psychology is the systematic study of people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour in the social context.

4.4.2 Inter-disciplinary Approach to Social Psychology

The definition given by Allport suggests that the roots of social psychology are embedded in sociology as well as psychology. Scholars such as Cook, Fine, and House (1995), Delamater (2006) are of the view that social psychology essentially includes analysis and synthesis of major works in the field of sociology and psychology hence, it is interdisciplinary in nature. The main subject matter of social psychology is the study of the individual in the social context. In other words, the mind, self and society are the subject matters of social psychology.

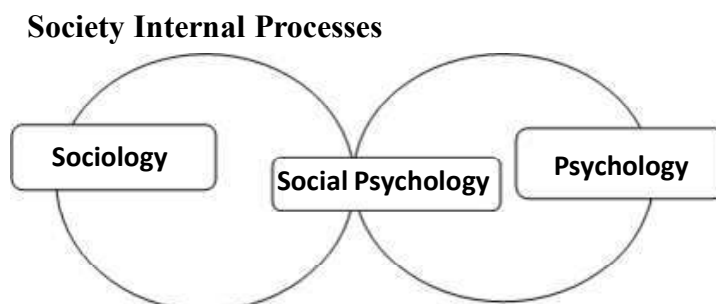


Fig.4.1: Social Psychology Mergers Elements of the Two Fields

Source: Rohall, Milkie, and Lucas (2011:9)

There are many sociological and psychological perspectives used in social psychology to explain and understand the constant influence of human and society on each other.

Depending upon the approach, purpose, and focus of the study social psychology could be further divided into *sociological social psychology* and *psychological social psychology* (this term is coined by House (1977) and Stryker (1977)). It is very difficult to make clear distinctions between the two, as social psychology tends to draw from both the disciplines of sociology and psychology.

The cognitive social psychology or the social cognition is an approach that investigates how information is processed and stored. According to Thoits (1995:1232) “information is stored as prototypes, schemas, and the like; information processing includes attending to cues, retrieving from memory, and making judgments, inferences and predictions about oneself and others.” In this approach, cognition is seen as social because it originates from the social experience and bears consequence on the interpersonal behaviour. Sociological social psychology concentrates on the mass psyche, the psychology of classes and the elements of group mentality such as customs, moral and traditions. In other words, it focuses on small group dynamics.

4.4.3 Scope of Social Psychology

As said social psychology studies human behaviour in the social context. Social psychology attempts to understand the relationship between individual’s mind and thought the processes in a group as well as in isolation. Acquisition of knowledge about the springs of human behaviour is one of the most important tasks of social psychology. This field of relationships includes the study of humans in small as well as in large groups. It also According to Delamater (1995:11) the main concern of social psychology is:

- the impact of one individual on another
- the impact of a group on its individual members
- the impact of individuals on the group in which they participate and
- the impact of one group on another.

A reciprocal relation exists between the individual and the social environment. Hence, it could be said the social psychology attempts to present an integrated picture of the social and the psychological. For instance, the prevailing culture determines how individual members of the society think and feel. There is a general level of similarity in the thought process across all the individuals socialized in a particular society. The central topics of the research under the domain of sociological social psychology include life course analysis, socialization, social networks, group dynamics, stereotyping and stigma and social stratification. In the life, individuals pass through a number of stages such as childhood, adolescence, adult, and old age. Each of the life phases is influenced by existing social norms, values, religion, and customs. For instance, child rearing practices differ across the societies which in turn have different effects on the personality of the individuals. More specifically the family and family relationships influence individual personality development. At present given the social diversity, social psychologist tends to adopt a multicultural perspective- which recognizes the potential importance of class, gender, ethnicity,

4.5 YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL TOOL KIT

You can take a few essential tools with you on your journey to study social psychology. These tools include concepts and terms which sociologists employ to develop and describe their research and theories.

4.5.1 The Sociological Imagination

Our day today life is influenced by a variety of factors, which include the family values and other norms which in turn are shaped by the larger social forces. An important tool to see forces at work in our everyday life is sociological imagination. C. Wright Mills (1959) defined sociological imagination as for how individuals understand their own and other's past in relation to history and social structure. Mills argued that sociologist must understand the larger cultural, structural, and historical factors that influence individual before arriving at any conclusion. By observing individuals and societies and how they interact through this lens sociologist are able to examine what influences attitudes, behaviour and culture.

Sociological imagination equips social psychologists with the vision essential to think about all the possible social factors and conditions that may influence individual's thought process, feelings, and behaviour.

4.5.2 Social Norms and Values

Social norms are behavioural guidelines that regulate our behaviour. It is associated with the rules of conduct which are ought to be followed by individuals. Values refer to some deeply held ideals and beliefs. Values portray an ideal, the standard that society would like to embrace and live upto.

4.5.3 Culture

Culture refers to the unique patterns of behaviour and beliefs specific to a particular society. All societies have their own culture. The components of culture include-symbols, language, values, beliefs, norms and material artifacts. Culture is shared.

4.5.4 Roles and Status

Roles are patterns of behaviour that we recognize in each other that are representative of a person's social status. For instance, while reading this text you play the role of the students, besides this, you have many other roles such as 'son/daughter', 'brother/sister', a 'neighbour' to name a few. The term status is used to describe the responsibilities, benefits, and prestige person experiences depending upon his/her rank and role in the society.

4.5.5 Socialisation

Socialisation is the process through which begins at birth and is a continuous process when new born child acquires the social norms behavior pattern, beliefs,

standards, and values deemed significant and appropriate by his social group. Socialisation serves many functions for the society, most important one to maintain the social order.

4.6 CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGY USED IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology draws on many concepts and methods of sociology to study the reciprocal relationship between human and social environment. In sociology, Max Weber emphasized that influence of culture on human behaviour had to be taken into account. He introduced the concept of *verstehen*, a German word that means “to understand in a deep way.” In *verstehen*, the researcher attempts to understand the social process or the cultural activities of the small social group from an insider’s point of view. This approach led to the development of methods, where the sociologists strive to capture the subjectivity involved in the social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. The aim of the researcher is to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of the social worlds he is observing rather than draw board generalizations. This is seen as the fundamental difference between the qualitative and quantitative research methods in sociology. Following this, research methods in social psychology could be qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative research in social psychology uses large-scale surveys (which involves a large number of participants), experiments (including two different groups), and statistical techniques are used to analyse the data which leads to predict general patterns of human behaviour. Qualitative research method seeks to understand the human behaviour using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of content sources. With the expansion of social psychology, it is adopting methods such ethnography and qualitative approach which are the core methods in the domain of sociology.

4.6.1 Middle Range Theory

Middle range theory is principally used in sociology to guide empirical inquiry. The concept of Middle range theory was developed by American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1949). Middle range theory is intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behaviour, organization, and change to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all. Middle range theories deal with delimited aspects of social phenomena. According to Merton the assumption of ‘functional unity of society’ (this assumption states that any part of the social system is functional for the entire system. All parts of the society are seen to work together for the maintenance and integration of society as a whole) is doubtful in the case of complex and highly differentiated societies. He provides the example of religious pluralism to prove his case. In a society with a variety of faiths, religion may tend to divide rather than enhance the unity. Hence, he postulates middle range theories to explain certain social processes and aspects of social behaviour which do not try to encompass the social as a whole. Middle range theories are used by social psychologists to explain certain phenomena. The field theory given by Kurt Lewin is an example of middle range theory. The social psychological theories such as theories of frustration, aggression, change of attitude, cooperation, and competition fall under the ambit of middle range theories.

4.7 PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

We can understand from the previous discussions that there are many ways to investigate the role and impact of society on individual's day-to-day life. Depending upon your interest, you may focus on your immediate vicinity or you may try to understand the effects of larger social phenomena- for example, the effect of globalization on people's life. Sociological social psychologists work within the board perspectives and attempt to provide some general as well as specific explanations for behaviour across societies, time and space.

4.7.1 Symbolic Interactionism

The symbolic interactionism takes into account the mutual influences of society and self that shapes many social processes. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is one of the influential figures to develop symbolic interactionist perspective in the field of sociology. In his work, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Mead (1934) argued that meaning is created as a result of interaction with people. Symbolic interactionism originates from a concern with language and meaning making. It focuses on the details of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make sense of what the others say and do. The meanings we attach to ourselves, other people, and objects are negotiated over time. Language and symbols are used to give meaning to everything in the world. According to Ervin Goffman (1956:1) "when an individual enters the presence of other they commonly seek information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed". Hence, the interaction could be defined as "reciprocal influence of individuals upon another's action when in one another's immediate physical presence." According to symbolic interactionism, society is a web of communication or interaction, where people make sense of their everyday life taking into account their mutual perspectives. The ideas and imagery are collective, where humans are not passive respondents to the external stimuli of the environment rather they are active and creative thinking beings who act and interact within the given environment and make sense of it. Social psychology depends on symbolic interactionists approach which pays attention to the "structural relationships, organizational features of social environments and generalized expectations or norms that influence behaviour" (Thoits, 1995:1233).

4.7.2 Social Structure and Personality

Social structure and Personality perspective is concerned with connections between larger societal events, conditions and its influence on the individuals. More specifically, it means the influence of social structure on individuals. Social structure and personality perspective assume that our position in the social structure is dictated by some larger social processes to some degree as we are expected to think, feel and behave in certain ways which correspond to the existing social norms. For instance, Karl Marx believed that the economic system we live in affect both our social relation and individual thinking process (Rohall, Milke and Lucas, 2011).

4.7.3 Group Processes

This sociological social psychology perspective lays emphasis on how basic social processes function in group contexts (Rohall, Milke and Lucas, 2011). The group is one of the most important components of the social life and both sociology and psychology spend a great deal of time and energy to study and understand group behaviour. A group needs a minimum of two individuals and human beings spend a most of their life time with different social groups such as family, friends, and co-workers. Cooley (1909) gave the theoretical formulation of primary and secondary groups. Primary groups are those where individual have face-to-face contact and close relationships, for instance, family and friends. The secondary group is large and relatively less intimate relationship exists between the group members. According to Cooley, there is a fundamental difference between the kind of interactions produced in primary and secondary groups.

The group processes perceptive attempts to analyses the interaction and positions of individuals within and across social groups. Status and roles become important while studying group behaviour. You must have noticed in your own group of friends that some talk more and give their opinion quite often and take leadership. While others remain silent. How are these differences determined? How is power within the group distributed? A social psychologist is interested in answering such sorts of questions by systematically studying the social context in which a group is located. Table 1 shows the three perspectives in sociological psychology in a comparative manner.

Table 4.1: Three Perspectives in Sociological Psychology: A Comparison

Perspective	View of Role of Individual in Society	Area of Focus
Symbolic Interaction	Individual is active participant in construction of society	Meaning-making Process
Social Structure and Personality	The nature of interaction is based on adherence to roles that people play	Emphasizes process of how larger social structures influence individuals
Group Processes	When individuals form into social groups, certain basic processes regularly emerge in interactions	Processes that occur in group contexts

Source: Rohall, Milkie, and Lucas, (2011:13)

4.8 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

As mentioned earlier social psychology focuses on the analysis of individual's behaviour in relation to others as well as with the social environments. The main objectives of social psychology research could be categorized into the following heads:

- 1) **Observation and Description** – One of the main objectives of social psychology is to observe and describe social behavior under different circumstances in a systematic manner so that possible reliable generalizations could be drawn from a large population.
- 2) **Cause and Effect Relationship** – All the studies based on scientific method seek to establish cause and effect relationship between different variables. The social psychologist attempts to analyse the effect of changes in a social institution such as change in values, culture, and tradition on human behavior. For example, does the provision of free and compulsory education till Elementary level have any impact on the attitudes of parents towards girls' education.
- 3) **Proposing New Theory** – One of the objectives of social psychology is to propose a new theory based on the causal analyses of the social behaviour to explain and understand why human beings under particular situations behave the way they do.
- 4) **Application** – The knowledge gained from the above efforts could be utilized to suggest possible solutions for some of the problems faced by individuals in their everyday life.

4.9 IMPORTANCE OF SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Sociological social psychology can make a diagnosis of contemporary situations to explain adequately the reciprocal influence of individuals and their social environment by attending to all of its psychological and social levels of analysis. Social psychology attempts to provide a two-way link between situation and behaviour and gives and predicts the causal sequence of relations between groups.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed the origin and evolution of sociology and psychology as an independent academic discipline. We have also defined sociology and psychology, discussing the nature of respective disciplines. An attempt is also made to understand the linkages between sociology and psychology. Further, the origin of social psychology as an inter-disciplinary subject is also discussed. This introduction to the inter-relatedness of sociology, psychology and social psychology is useful for students who want to learn sociology and its relationship with other disciplines. Both psychological and sociological social psychologists study the social context in which human thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are shaped and influenced. Perspectives and methods of the field of sociology are used in social psychology.

4.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Discuss the origin of social psychology.
- 2) Do you think sociology and psychology have something in common? If yes, explain.

- 3) Explain the scope and nature of social psychology.
- 4) How would you define your role in the society using any of the sociological perspectives in social psychology?
- 5) What are the main objectives of research in social psychology?

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