



An Introduction to Social Psychology

Cognitive Social Definitions

Ontology:

Within cognitive social psychology, researchers see the person as a thinker in society, one whose thought processes are shaped by and helped create the world in which they live. Within this tradition there are two main approaches. One, associated with mainstream social cognition, tends to see the individual as a cognitive miser. This looks at the way in which social thinking and information processing biases result from the fact that individuals have limited cognitive resources. Within the second, social identity tradition, the emphasis is more on the person as a socialised thinker, as someone whose cognitions are structured by group memberships that are located within a particular social system.

Methodology:

The methodology of cognitive social psychology is primarily quantitative. Typically, researchers conduct studies in which they gather quantitative data and test theory based hypotheses using standard statistical techniques.

Methods:

Within cognitive social psychology researchers' primary tool is the laboratory based experiment. However, experiments are not confined to the laboratory, they can also be conducted in the field. For example, in the workplace, the classroom, the crowd. Moreover, researchers also use other techniques such as surveys and questionnaires as well as case studies and observational methods.

Unit of analysis:

Because psychological processes only take place in the minds of the individual, there is a sense in which the individual is the primary unit of analysis in cognitive social psychology. Significantly though, the approach is also interested in the ways in which individuals psychology is affected by social context. And so researchers argue that attention also needs to be placed on the group memberships, inter group relations and broader social structures that impinge upon the individual. In this sense the approach is interactionist, wanting to study an individual's cognitions, but also appreciate the way in which these are structured by the social world they inhabit and help to create.