

## SOCIAL THEORIES: EMPHASIS ON THE SITUATION

Among theories which emphasize the situation, (i) **Role theory** assumes that the most important determinant of the behavior is the particular social role a person is involved in and the society roles about appropriate behavior for those occupying that role. Some roles are ascribed and may be to some extent biologically determined (sex roles, age roles). Common problems associated with roles are: **Role confusion** is a situation where an individual has trouble determining which role he/she should assume. For example, if a graduate student were to attend a department party at a professor's home, the student may find it difficult to determine if he/she should act as a student toward the professor, exhibiting deference or respect, or as a friend or associate, showing collegiality and familiarity. **Role Strain:** refers to the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations. In contrast to role conflict, where tension is felt between two competing roles, the tension in role strain comes from just one role. Returning to the example of a mother, if she were to find that she is unable to fulfill her obligations as defined by, say, an overly demanding spouse (or religion, or child), she would experience role strain. The role expectations may be beyond what she is able to achieve or may push her to the limits of her abilities.

**Role Distance:** is the effectively expressed pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role. The individual is not

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denying the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role for all accepting performers. The concept of role distance provides a sociological means of dealing with one type of divergence between obligation and actual performance. For example, the maturing adolescent who is forced to ride a merry-go-round may display role distance by acting as though the ride does not challenge her physical abilities or frighten her. This may be displayed by riding backwards or leaning dangerously from her horse.

Immediate audiences figure very directly in the display of role distance; actors need an audience or a co-conspirator for role distancing to work. There are two ways of establishing role distance:

1. Isolating one's self from the contamination of the situation, which can be displayed through indifference (e.g., a waiter saying, "I'm just doing this to put myself through college.")
2. Joking about the situation (e.g., the young merry-go-round rider saying, "I can do this with my eyes closed.")

It is often possible to determine incidents in which role distance might be displayed solely on the grounds of the performers' gross age-sex characteristics. A seventeen year-old boy riding a merry-go-round (especially with peers) will likely display significant role distance.

**Role Embracement:** Role Embracement refers to the complete adoption of a role. When a role is truly embraced, the self disappears completely into the role. Three things seem to be involved in the earnestness with which people assume roles or the degree to which they embrace a role:

1. an admitted or expressed attachment to the role
  2. a demonstration of qualifications and capacities for performing it
  3. an active engagement or spontaneous involvement in the role activity at hand, that is, a visible investment of attention and muscular effort
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**Role over load:** lack of balance or reasonableness in the no. or extent of expectation from a job or position holder, **Role conflict:** the inner struggle that results when incompatible behaviors are demanded either by the various requirements of a role (inter-role conflict) or by the various roles that one occupies (intra-role conflict). Some roles are achieved social roles (friends, lover, neighbor and stranger) and some are occupational roles (doctors, teacher, minister, bus driver and professor).

(ii) **Systems theory** seek to explain the complex interactions in a group or organization in terms of the interlocking and interacting elements which make up the group or the organization, and the control and energy generated by that interaction. A system is a group of elements related to one another in a consistent, describable and predictable way. Systems have some boundaries and rules (explicit and implicit) according to which some systems are called open systems whereas some are called closed systems. System theorist have developed general rules about the ways in which behavior of individuals is affected by the particular system (family, group, organization, society) in which they are operating at a given time.

(iii) **Trait theory** defines personality in terms of dispositions or traits, which are seen as the primary determinants of the behavior. A trait is a readiness or tendency to behave in a similar way across a number of different situations and in response to different stimuli. They are the organizer of behavior that give coherence to our responding, and work like a filter through which stimuli pass and are rendered similar so that they are responded to in similar way. Trait theorist focuses upon the consistency within individuals, which leads them to respond in similar ways across different situations. They are also concerned with the differences between individuals, which are caused by both constitutional and environmental factors. Theorists tend to have a generally static view of human behaviors within an individual, for new or changed behaviors or for development and growth.

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The person situation debate has resulted in an **inter-actionist** position, which suggests that behavior is a function of both the individual characteristics of a person, and the context in which the person is operating. Social psychologists tend to study the effects of both individual and situational factors on the behavior, but individual factors are primarily of interest in terms of how they affect behavior in social situations. And the two important questions of study are: (i) In what ways do individual characteristics affect behavior in social situations? And (ii) In what ways do social situations affect the behaviors of individuals?

## **Research Methods Used in Social Psychology**

Social psychology studies the mutual influences among people, and concentrates on individual's reaction to the social environment, especially in social interactions. There are many ways of making observations and testing theories about social behavior. Theories are set of assumptions and definitions which help us, achieve the goals of our research. They aid our organization of data, provide explanations, make and verify predictions, and generate new researches. When doing research, we move back and forth between theory and observation. When researchers collect data they use one or more of several methods.

- 1) **Case History** uses a few respondents and analyses their reactions in depth. We tend to use case histories as way of generating hypothesis rather than testing hypothesis.
  - 2) **Archival Research** allows us to examine the past in quick way, but usually does not permit us to study a representative sample of behavior and many behaviors are not recorded. If we found common behavior patterns, we could generalize beyond a specific case- that is, use the information collected from our sample of situations to predict and explain behavior in similar situations.
  - 3) **Systematic Observation**- behavior is systematically observed and recorded
    - **Naturalistic observation** involves the study of behavior in real life setting and provides rich and varied data, but
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permits little control over the sample and other variables and researcher may influence the observed behavior.

- **Survey Method**—large number of people answers questions about their attitudes or behavior. We can study many variables in quick way by carefully selecting the sample, but the answers respondents give may be biased or distorted in number of ways.
  - Has many advantages
  - Must meet certain requirements
  - Issues of sampling and wording of items

4) **Experiments**—(True or natural) allow **random assignment** of subjects and **control of extraneous factors**, but they may **lack ecological validity** and study only few variables. Experiments may be conducted in the laboratory or the field and problem solving task and game would be suitable activity for laboratory experiments but an intimate conversation might not be. Experimenter manipulates the independent variable and studies the effects of manipulation on the dependent variable. Two groups of experiments are experimental group and control groups.

5) **Co-relational Method**—a scientist systematically observes two or more variables to determine whether changes in one are accompanied by changes in the other

**a. Allows predictions to be made**

i. A stronger correlation yields a more accurate prediction.

1. Correlations range from -1.00 to +1.00.

a. The farther away from 0, the stronger the correlation.

**b. Correlations can be either positive or negative.**

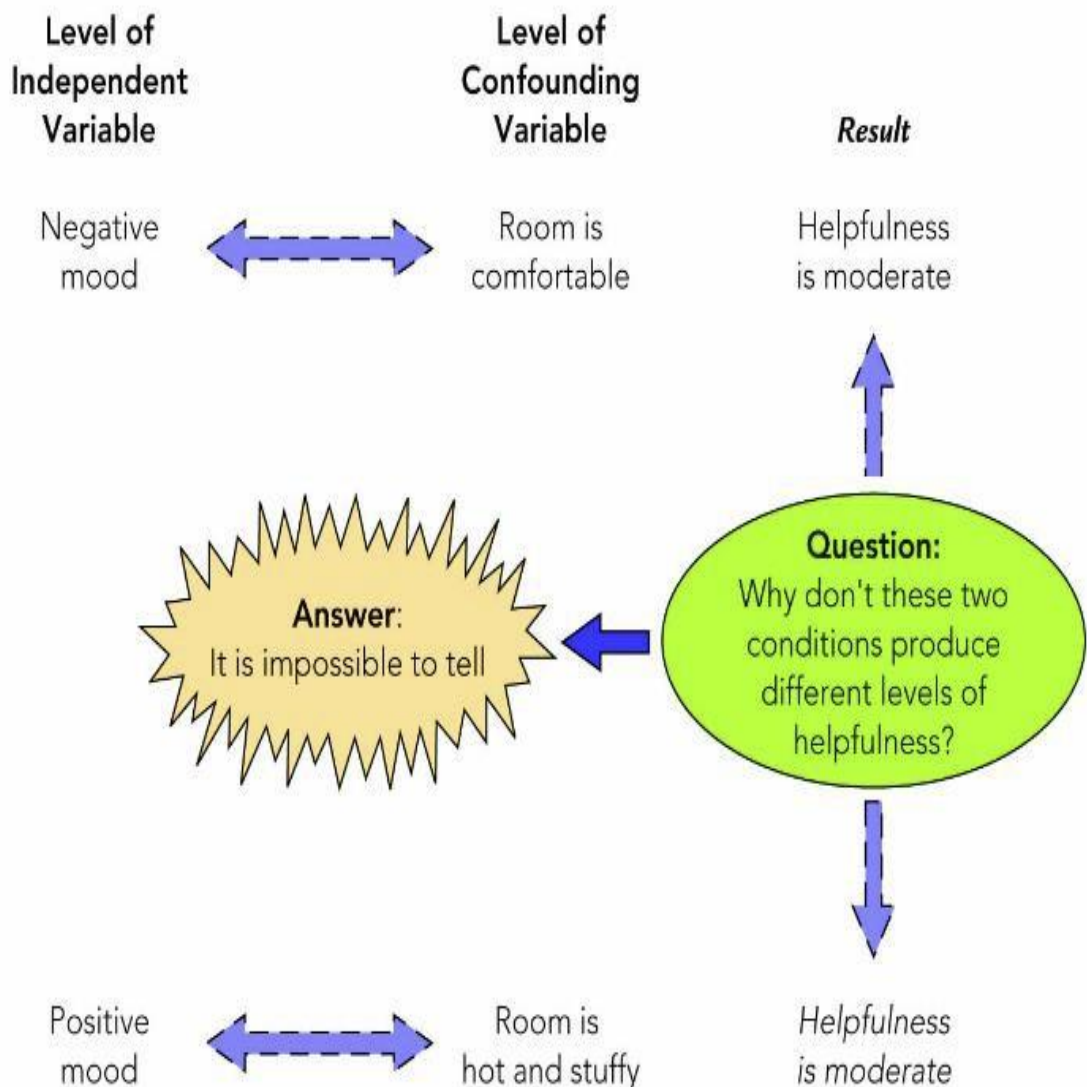
i. A positive correlation means that as one variable increases the other increases or as one variable decreases the other decreases—the two variables move in the same direction.

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ii. A negative correlation means that as one variable increases, the other decreases—the two variables move in opposite directions.

iii. And, all factors that might affect behavior other than the independent variable must be held constant.

1. If not, the independent variable may be confounded with another variable, which results in meaningless findings.



- Because experiments are often conducted in laboratory settings, the issue of external validity—the extent to which the findings can be generalized to real-life social

situations and to people different from those who participated in the experiment—often is raised.

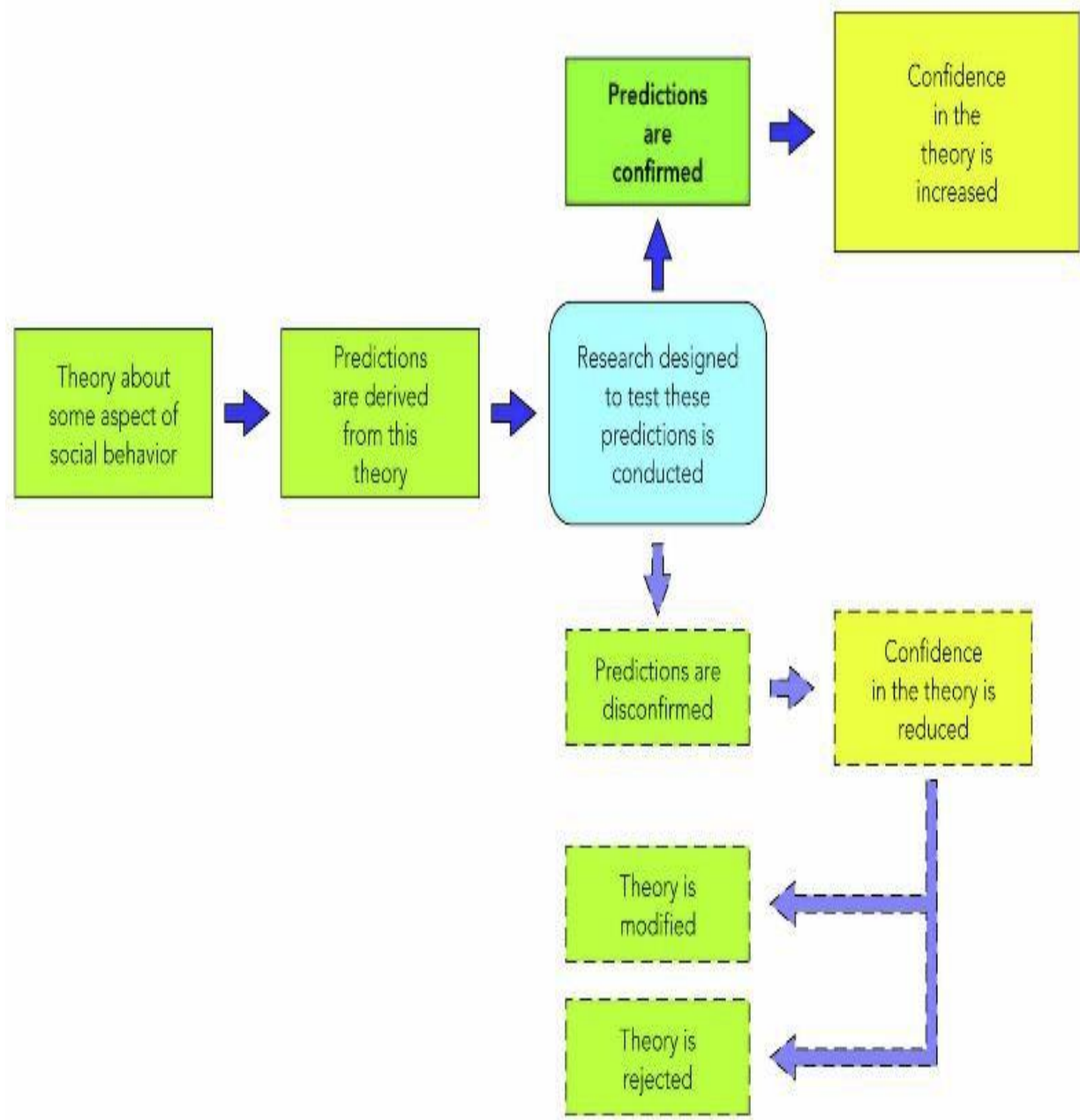
## - RESEARCH METHODS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

METHOD	STRENGTH	WEAKNESSES
CASE HISTORY	Involves a real event, high mundane realism; in-depth study of a single event; generate hypotheses.	Cannot determine cause and effect; no control over independent variables; no randomization of subjects; relies on recall, which may be faulty.
ARCHIVAL RESEARCH	Involves a real event, high mundane realism; involves many incidents, so increases generalizability; easy and cheap to collect data; generates hypotheses.	Cannot determine cause and effect; no control over independent variables; no randomization of subjects; relies on second hand reports; possible biases in reports; often very incomplete account of events and responses.
SURVEY	Collects much information from a wide variety of subjects; can deal with a variety of events; easy to collect data.	Cannot determine cause and effect; no control over independent variables; relies on people memory which may be faulty.
EXPERIMENT	Allow determination of cause and effect; random assignments of subjects to conditions; maximum control over independent variables; high control over extraneous variables.	Often low mundane realism; difficult to achieve high generalizability; time-consuming; limits type and intensity of independent variables.
FIELD EXPERIMENT	Allow determination of cause and effect; high mundane realism; some control over independent variables; permits study of wide range of subjects.	Difficult to control extraneous variables; may be impossible to test some complex hypotheses in such settings.
CORRELATION	Allow studying behavior in real setting; findings obtained can be served as the basis for more detailed laboratory settings can be extended to include different variable at a time for checking.	Findings are ambiguous with respect to cause and effect relationship

- **Interpreting Research Results**
    - **Inferential Statistics**—special form of mathematics that allows the evaluation of the likelihood that a given pattern of research results occurred by chance alone
      - If the likelihood that the results were due to chance is low (less than five times in a hundred), the results are described as significant.
    - **Results are viewed as tentative until replicated.**
  
  - **Interpreting diverse results**
    - Involves a statistical technique called research synthesis or meta-analysis
      - Data are combined from independent studies in order to determine whether specific variables (or interactions between variables) have significant effects across these studies.
  
  - **Beyond replication: Converging operations in Social Psychology.**
    - Before social psychologists accept a finding as valid, they prefer that it be obtained in other settings and under other conditions that, although different from the original context, this principle is known as converging operations.
  
  - **The Role of Theory in Social Psychology**
    - Procedure involved in building theories:
      - Theories are proposed on the basis of existing evidence.
      - Theories help to organize information and make predictions about observable conditions.
      - Hypotheses based on a theory are tested by research.
      - If results support theory, confidence in theory is increased. If not, theory is modified and further research is conducted.
      - In the end, the theory is accepted or rejected, but always remains open to further testing and refinement.
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- Theory: An IMPORTANT Basis for Research in Social Psychology



**Balancing the quest for knowledge with study participant's rights**

While doing research in the field of psychology one technique is used known as **deception**: involves efforts by the researcher to with hold or conceal the information about the purpose of the study from the participants. The reason for using this procedure is simple; many social psychologists believe that is participants known the true purpose of the investigation, their behavior will be changed by the

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knowledge. Then the research will have little chance of providing the valid information.

This issue raised many ethical concerns regarding the rights of participants so it was desired that partial or mild deception is okay if proper **informed consent** (procedure, receiving as much information as possible about the procedures to be followed before making any decision to take part in the experiments.) and **debriefing** (a full explanation of all aspects of the study, including its true goals, plus an explanation of the need for temporary deception) has been taken into account for the participants rights protection.