

Social Area

Social psychology focuses on the study of human behaviour within a social context, such as with family, friends or cultures. Social behaviour may involve activity within a group or between groups. Psychologists study the way people interact which includes the influence people have on each other. It is important to remember that social influence can be invisible, but that its effects are powerful.

1. Principles and Concepts:

1. The main influence on our behaviour, thought processes and emotions are the surrounding environment and other people (family, friends, institutions and wider society)
2. It believes that our social context rather than individual characteristics changes and influences people's behaviour
3. Attempts to understand how the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others

2. Research to Illustrate the Area:

Milgram (obedience) - Proves that people in the surrounding environment can influence someone's behaviour which is shown by the fact that although what they were being asked to do was wrong, they obeyed because of the authority figure.

Bocchiaro (disobedience and whistleblowing) - This supports the principle that says it is your social context rather than individual characteristics changes and influences people's behaviour, which is shown by the level of those who obeyed when they said they wouldn't.

Piliavin (subway Samaritan) - Proves that people in the surrounding environment can influence someone's behaviour which is shown by the fact that people would help after they saw one person helping and the reasons for helping could depend on who else was in the environment.

Levine (cross cultural altruism) - This follows more of the social context because results showed that more wealthier countries were less helpful than simpatia countries

3. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Area:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Useful applications- Detailed evidence- Ethical- Looks at influences rather than just behaviour- High valid results- Some research carried out in the lab- Some ecological validity (natural setting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ethical issues- Generalisability- Observer bias- Low everyday realism- Low ecological validity- Unrepresentative of target population- Socially sensitive

One strength of the social approach is that it strongly supports the nurture side of the nature/nurture debate. Milgram's research into obedience demonstrated that the situation a person is in can influence a person's behaviour, and that if there is an authority figure who looks professional then they are more likely to obey because they are afraid of the consequences if they disobey. This is a strength because it enables us to understand which behaviours are affected by the surrounding environment, and looking at the changes in the environment and how this affects behaviours further.

Another strength of the social approach is that the 'responses-to-people-in-need' theme has high ecological validity. Piliavin's research into helping behaviour demonstrated that the help a person offered depended upon the type of victim. Also, the cost of helping played a role in the help that the victim received. This is a strength because it means that because it has this high validity as it took place in their natural environment so this means the results are generalizable to the target population which means that the results are more representative.

One weakness of the social approach is that it has low everyday realism. Bocchiaro's research into disobedience and whistleblowing used a laboratory experiment which gives it high control but low ecological validity. This is a weakness because it is much harder to generalise the findings from the study as they are not representative of the real world. Because it took place in a lab and a standardised environment, it means this may have influenced how people would have reacted and although this says that it is dependent upon the environment you are in, it could be because of your biology as well but we don't know that.

Another weakness of the social approach is that it is very deterministic as it suggests that it is the people around you that alters your behaviour. Milgram's study into obedience found that the biggest influence on the obedience/disobedience was the role of the examiner and the effect of the surrounding environment. This is a weakness because it may limit the ability to hold people responsible for actions as their behaviour is seen as being determined by their environment rather than being their choice. This may also provide people with an excuse for any negative behaviours.

4. Applications of the Area

Social influence - conformity, obedience (Asch, Milgram, Bocchiaro)

Social cognition - social identity, attitudes, stereotypes

Social behaviour - discrimination, relationships, pro-social (Piliavin, Levine)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

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| (a) Explain how one core study from the social area can be related to the concept of holism. | [5] |
| (b) Explain how one core study from the social area can be related to the concept of reductionism. | [5] |
| (c) Describe one application of the social area. | [4] |
| (d) Outline the procedure used in one core study and briefly explain how this relates to the social area. | [6] |
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| (e)* Compare the social area with the developmental area in relation to their strengths and weaknesses. | [15] |

