

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
Spring 2009

CORE QUESTIONS – ANSWER BOTH 1 AND 2

1. Social psychological perspectives provide the theoretical framework for research in many sociological fields or substantive areas such as criminology, mental health, family, work, etc. Choose **two** social psychological theories or perspectives from two different social psychological traditions (i.e., symbolic interactionism, social structure and personality, structural social psychology) and discuss how each has informed **one** sociological field or area. In your answer you should include a discussion of (a) the key assumptions from each theory/perspective, (b) examples of empirical work from each theory/perspective as applied to the area you chose, and (c) the strengths and weaknesses of each theory/perspective as applied to the area you chose.
2. Much of the discussion about the relative strengths and weaknesses of methodological approaches centers around issues of internal and external validity. Discuss experimental design(s), survey research, and a qualitative method of your choice with respect to these two concepts. Using a topic or substantive area of your choice, give examples of how each of these methodological approaches “fares” with respect to each type of validity. What are the advantages of using multiple approaches vis a vis your example? What are the challenges a researcher might face when attempting to use multiple methods?

EXTENDED QUESTIONS – ANSWER 2 OF THE FOLLOWING 4 QUESTIONS

3. Sociological social psychology in recent decades has been increasingly interested in the study of social variables in human emotions. What assumptions does sociological social psychology make about emotions, society, and the causal connections between society and emotion? Compare **two** different theoretical approaches used by sociological social psychologists in their studies of emotions in social groups and society.
4. In a recent article in Nature magazine (January 2009, Vol. 457, pp. 528-530) entitled “Secret Signals,” a provocative challenge is raised. That is, psychologist John Bargh of Yale University is quoted as saying, “It is difficult for people to accept, [but much of a person’s everyday life] is determined not by their conscious intentions and deliberate choices, but by [non-conscious] mental processes put into motion by their environment”. In short, the argument made in this piece is that humans’ conscious, rational intentions have little to do with behavior.

Of course, "cognition" is a central feature of the Symbolic Interactionist understanding of social behavior, insofar as behavior is thought to result from people’s antecedent attitudes

and evaluations of objects in the social environment. Contrary to the S.I. view, the view adopted by some scholars in other fields, such as John Bargh, conceives of behaviors as decoupled from things such as antecedent attitudes and evaluations. There is little, if any, connection between what are assumed to be conscious intentions and deliberate choices and subsequent behaviors. It is all an illusion; an after-the-fact rationalization.

For this question, discuss how Mead and at least two other major representatives from the Symbolic Interactionist tradition in sociological social psychology would respond to the contention that cognitions, including social attitudes and evaluations, are basically irrelevant to behavior. Provide sufficient detail to develop as strong a rejoinder as possible.

5. Two theories that seem to dominate much of the research in structural social psychology are exchange theory and expectation states theory. Compare and contrast these two theories in terms of their fundamental concepts, basic assumptions, and scope conditions. Finally, argue whether you believe these theories are fundamentally different or are more similar than traditionally recognized. For example, is there any way to think of expectation states theory in exchange-theoretic terms?
6. Early role theory predicted that the enactment of multiple roles would be distressing for individuals, resulting in a high risk of failure, role conflict/overload and poor psychological and behavioral outcomes. However, more recent research indicates that multiple roles actually are associated with a host of positive outcomes including better physical and mental health. What developments in our social psychological understanding accounts for these differences in theoretical opinion? What was the evidence associated with the more traditional view of multiple roles as damaging? Is the research evidence convincing in terms of the more recent developments that connect multiple roles to positive outcomes? Why or why not?