

# Sociocultural Point of View

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the third of the three major contemporary perspectives, or the biopsychosocial aspects, of psychology.

The specific areas of focus include:

1. Sociocultural Perspective
2. Fundamental Attribution Error
3. Social Norms

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## 1. Sociocultural Perspective

Sociocultural psychology has become a major area of study more recently due to increases in travel communication technology and globalization.

The sociocultural perspective looks at the importance of the social and cultural contexts that influence the behavior of individual people.

Historically, a lot of psychology was based on American and European ideas. However, with the advances in multiculturalism--especially in the United States, but also extending through other countries around the world--there arose a greater need to understand people in a specific context, and how that context might differ from country to country.

Sociocultural psychology also examines other social differences and their effects on the mind and behavior. These include such differences as gender, economic status, and sexual orientation; anything else that defines a specific group of people can also be considered part of the sociocultural perspective.

When we're studying psychological phenomena, it's important to realize that not all of our theories can be applicable in different situations. This is because cultural relativity states that an individual's actions and beliefs should be understood by considering his or her cultural context.

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## 2. Fundamental Attribution Error

When considering how certain ideas may not be applicable in all situations, it's important to note the sociocultural concept of fundamental attribution error.

Fundamental attribution error means that when things go wrong, people tend to attribute those problems to personal traits. In other words, the problems are viewed as being within a person, as opposed to being a result of outside or environmental factors.

➦ **EXAMPLE** If somebody on the road cuts you off, you might attribute negative qualities to that person. While what this person did was an external behavior that might have been the result of something in his or her environment, you have the tendency to attribute the issue to him or her personally.

The study of fundamental attribution error has found that while this type of attribution is very common in the United States and European countries, it is not as prevalent in Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea. This is because the cultures in those countries tend to be less focused on individuals, and more on the collective or the whole.

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## 3. Social Norms

Another concept that is important to consider in relation to the sociocultural perspective is the concept of social norms.

Social norms are the ways in which people within a certain social group should or should not behave, according to that group's views.

➦ **EXAMPLE** How you're expected to act at work might be completely different from how you're expected to act at a party with your friends.

This idea also spans different social differences (e.g., culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) as well. Social norms help us to understand what's expected or not expected within our society.

As scientists of human behavior, psychologists must understand and respect the differences between various groups of people, and be sensitive to those groups' specific needs, because the behaviors or ideas that one group of people finds acceptable may be viewed in a completely different way by another group.

### BIG IDEA

As we discussed in regard to the biological and psychological perspectives, the sociocultural perspective is just one piece of the puzzle. Modern perspectives of psychology tend to encompass a lot of different perspectives, which is why we consider the biopsychosocial approach as a whole. Looking at psychology from just one of these perspectives doesn't give us the entire view of psychology today.

### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **sociocultural perspective**, the third of the three major perspectives in contemporary psychology, involves looking at the ways in which social and cultural contexts influence human behavior. Two of the most important concepts associated with the sociocultural perspective are **fundamental attribution error**, the human tendency to attribute problems to personal

traits rather than to outside or environmental factors, and **social norms**, which are the behaviors or ideas that different groups view as acceptable for their members.

You now understand that although we have taken the time to examine each of the three contemporary psychological perspectives separately, they each contribute to the larger biopsychosocial perspective of psychology. In order to get a complete view of psychology today, it's important to consider this perspective as a whole.

Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Erick Taggart.