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Preface

When I first started teaching social psychology, I had trouble figuring out how the various topics in this expansive field fit together. I felt like I was presenting a laundry list of ideas, research studies, and phenomena, rather than an integrated set of principles and knowledge. Of course, what was difficult for me was harder still for my students. How could they be expected to understand and remember all of the many topics that we social psychologists study? And how could they tell what was most important? Something was needed to structure and integrate their learning.

It took me some time, but eventually, I realized that the missing piece in my lectures was a consistent focus on the basic principles of social psychology. Once I started thinking and talking about principles, then it all fell into place. I knew that when I got to my lecture on altruism, most of my students already knew what I was about to tell them. They understood that, although there were always some tweaks to keep things interesting, altruism was going to be understood using the same ideas that conformity and person perception had been in earlier lectures—in terms of the underlying fundamentals—they were truly thinking like social psychologists!

I wrote this book to help students organize their thinking about social psychology at a conceptual level. Five or ten years from now, I do not expect my students to remember the details of a study published in 2011, or even to remember most of the definitions in this book. I do hope, however, that they will remember some basic ideas, for it is these principles that will allow them to critically analyze new situations and really put their knowledge to use.

My text is therefore based on a critical thinking approach—its aim is to get students thinking actively and conceptually—with more of a focus on the forest than on the trees. Although there are right and wrong answers, the answers are not the only thing. What is perhaps even more important is how we get to those answers—the thinking process itself. My efforts are successful when my students have that “aha” moment, in which they find new ideas fitting snugly into the basic concepts of social psychology.

To help students better grasp the big picture of social psychology and to provide you with a theme that you can use to organize your lectures, my text has a consistent pedagogy across the chapters. I organize my presentation around two underlying principles that are essential to social psychology:

1. Person and situation (the classic treatment)
2. The ABCs of social psychology (*affect, behavior, and cognition*)

I also frame much of my discussion around the two human motivations of *self-concern* and *other-concern*. I use these fundamental motivations to frame discussions on a variety of dimensions including altruism, aggression, prejudice, gender differences, and cultural differences. You can incorporate these dimensions into your teaching as you see fit.

My years of teaching have convinced me that these dimensions are fundamental, that they are extremely heuristic, and that they are what I hope my students will learn and remember. I think that you may find that this organization represents a more explicit representation of what you're already doing in your lectures. Although my pedagogy is consistent, it is not constraining. You will use these dimensions more in some lectures than in others, and you will find them more useful for some topics than others. But they will always work for you when you are ready for them. Use them to reinforce your presentation as you see fit.

Perhaps most important, a focus on these dimensions helps us bridge the gap between the textbook, the real-life experiences of our students, and our class presentations. We can't cover every phenomenon in our lectures—we naturally let the textbook fill in the details. The goal of my book is to allow you to rest assured that the text has provided your students with the foundations—the fundamental language of social psychology—from which you can build as you see fit. And when you turn to ask students to apply their learning to real life, you can know that they will be doing this as social psychologists do—using a basic underlying framework.

Organization

The text moves systematically from lower to higher levels of analysis—a method that I have found makes sense to students. On the other hand, the chapter order should not constrain you—choose a different order if you wish. Chapter 1 "Introducing Social Psychology" presents an introduction to social psychology and the research methods in social psychology, Chapter 2 "Social Learning and Social Cognition" presents the fundamental principles of social cognition, and Chapter 3 "Social Affect" focuses on social affect. The remainder of the text is organized around three levels of analysis, moving systematically from the individual level (Chapter 4 "The Self" through Chapter 6 "Perceiving Others"), to the level of social interaction (Chapter 7 "Influencing and Conforming" through Chapter 10 "Aggression"), to the group and cultural level (Chapter 11 "Working Groups: Performance and Decision Making" through Chapter 13 "Competition and Cooperation in Our Social Worlds").

Rather than relying on “modules” or “appendices” of applied materials, my text integrates applied concepts into the text itself. This approach is consistent with my underlying belief that if students learn to think like social psychologists they will easily and naturally apply that knowledge to any and all applications. The following applications are woven throughout the text:

- Business and consumer behavior (see, for instance, [Chapter 5 "Attitudes, Behavior, and Persuasion"](#) on marketing and persuasion and [Chapter 11 "Working Groups: Performance and Decision Making"](#) on group decision-making)
- Health and Behavior (see, for instance, [Chapter 3 "Social Affect"](#) on stress and [Chapter 6 "Perceiving Others"](#) on attributional styles)
- Law (see, for instance, [Chapter 2 "Social Learning and Social Cognition"](#) on eyewitness testimony and [Chapter 10 "Aggression"](#) on Terrorism)

Pedagogy

Principles of Social Psychology contains a number of pedagogical features designed to help students develop an active, integrative understanding of the many topics of social psychology and to think like social psychologists.

Research Foci

Research is of course the heart of social psychology, and the research foci provide detailed information about a study or research program. I’ve chosen a mix of classic and contemporary research, with a focus on both what’s interesting and what’s pedagogical. Rather than boxing these findings, they are part of the running text—simply highlighted with a heading and light shading.

Social Psychology in the Public Interest

Social psychological findings interest students in large part because they relate so directly to everyday experience. The Social Psychology in the Public Interest Feature reinforces these links. Topics include Does High Self-Esteem Cause Happiness or Other Positive Outcomes? ([Chapter 3 "Social Affect"](#)), Detecting Deception ([Chapter 6 "Perceiving Others"](#)), Terrorism as Instrumental Aggression ([Chapter 10 "Aggression"](#)), and Stereotype Threat in Schools ([Chapter 12 "Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination"](#)). The goal here is to include these applied topics within the relevant conceptual discussions to provide students with a richer understanding within the context of the presentation.

Thinking Like a Social Psychologist

Each chapter ends with a section that summarizes how the material presented in the chapter can help the student think about contemporary issues using social psychological principles. This section is designed to work with the chapter summary to allow a better integration of fundamental concepts.