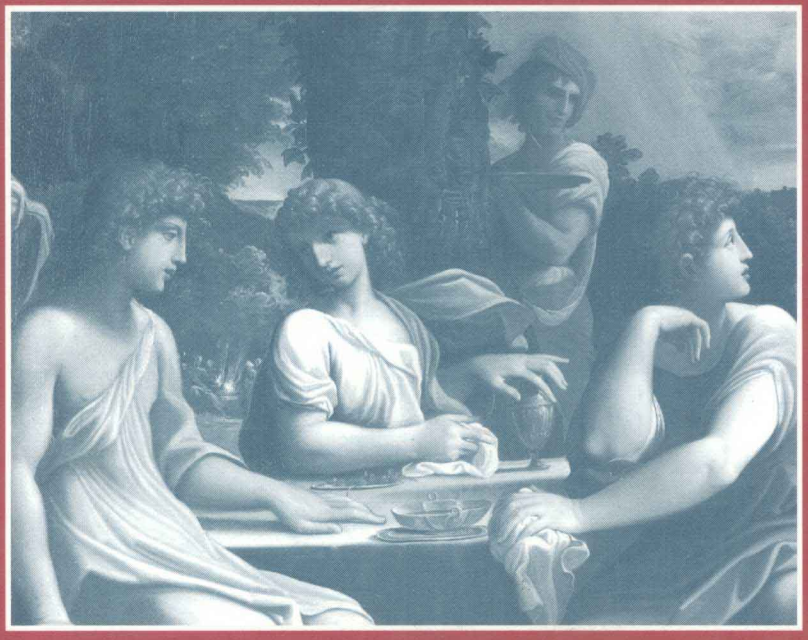
The Social Mind

Cognitive and Motivational Aspects of Interpersonal Behavior



Edited by

Joseph P. Forgas,
Kipling D. Williams, and Ladd Wheeler

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The Social Mind

Effective social interaction requires sophisticated mental and motivational strategies. *The Social Mind* reviews and integrates recent psychological research on the relationship between people's thoughts and motives – their "social mind" – and their interpersonal strategies. The research shows that success in personal relationships, group behavior, and strategic interaction is significantly influenced by how individuals interpret and explain the social world around them. The implications of this research for personal adjustment, organizational effectiveness and clinical counseling, and health psychology are also explored.

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To Teeshie, Cindy, and Helen

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Preface

Social psychology is undergoing some exciting changes at the moment. After decades of interest in devising ingenious *impactful* experiments to study *real* interpersonal behaviors, the last two decades were characterized by the ascendance of research that focused on the cognitive, motivational, and information processing strategies of isolated individuals. This book argues that these two traditions are essentially complementary. The key objective of this volume is to show that a proper understanding of interpersonal behavior requires a careful analysis of social actors' cognitive and motivational strategies. In turn, the study of social cognition and motivation cannot be complete without the study of how these strategies influence real interpersonal processes.

This duality between concern with the *social* and concern with the *individual* has been an enduring feature of social psychology throughout its history. However, the present appears to us a particularly auspicious time to propose an integration between social and individual theories, and between methods that emphasize the cognitive and the interpersonal aspects of social life. Despite extensive interest in social cognitive phenomena in recent years, there have been relatively few attempts to present a comprehensive review and integration of what we know about the links between social cognition, motivation, and interpersonal behavior. This book seeks to provide an informative, scholarly, yet readable overview of recent advances in this field, featuring invited contributions from a select and eminent group of investigators.

We are very much aware that edited books have certain intrinsic strengths and weaknesses. At their best, they should amount to more than the sum of their parts. They can serve as a catalyst and produce new insights and new theoretical approaches that would not have

emerged otherwise. This is just what we hope to achieve with this volume, and we have used a number of strategies and procedures to achieve this objective. In other words, this is not simply an edited book in the usual sense. Perhaps a few words are in order about the genesis of this volume, the second in a new series entitled the Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology, organized at the University of New South Wales, Australia. This project has been carefully planned over a two-year period and has benefited from substantial financial support from granting agencies, including a Special Investigator award from the Australian Research Council and support from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Prize, Germany.

The availability of financial support allowed the careful selection and funding of a small group of leading researchers as contributors. Draft papers by all contributors were prepared well in advance of the symposium and were made available to all participants on a dedicated Web site. A critical part of the preparation of this book has been an intensive face-to-face meeting of all invited contributors during the Second Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology. This three-day meeting allowed free-ranging and critical discussion among all participants, with the objective of exploring points of integration and contrast between the proposed papers. Revised versions of the chapters were prepared soon after the symposium, incorporating many of the points that emerged in our discussions.

Thanks to these intensive collaborative procedures, the book does not simply consist of a set of chapters prepared in isolation. Rather, the volume presents a collaborative effort by this leading group of international researchers intent on producing a comprehensive, up-to-date review of research on the links between social cognition, motivation, and interpersonal behavior. The contributions cover most of the key issues in contemporary research linking social cognition, motivation, and interpersonal behavior. The chapters in Part I of the book discuss the fundamental nature of the relationship between cognitive processes and interpersonal behavior, covering such topics as the nature of socially constructed thought systems, the role of affect in interpersonal behavior, dissonance mechanisms that link attitudes and behavior, and the cognitive and motivational dynamics of everyday social life.

Part II of the book focuses on the role of the social self and individual difference variables such as narcissism and uncertainty orientation in self-presentation and interpersonal behavior. Part III looks at social

and motivational processes in personal relationships and analyzes the role of mental representations and cognitive distortions in responding to others. Finally, Part IV looks at the social minds of groups, including self-categorization and social influence processes. A better understanding of how cognitive and motivational processes influence social behavior is also of considerable applied importance, as many of the chapters argue. The interface between social cognition and motivation on the one hand, and social interaction on the other, lies at the heart of many professional applications of psychology, including counseling and clinical psychology, organizational research, health psychology, and marketing and advertising research.

Given the coverage of the book, the main target readers for this volume are practitioners, professionals, students, and researchers in theoretical and applied psychology, sociology, communication studies, and cognitive science. The primary audience is likely to be practitioners and students in social, cognitive, personality, counseling, and clinical psychology at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The book will also have considerable textbook potential for the growing number of undergraduate and graduate courses dealing with the interpersonal consequences of social cognition and motivation.

We should note that this book is the second in a new and so far highly successful series of publications, the annual Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology volumes. So far, three symposia have been held. Contributions to the First Sydney Symposium have already been published with the title *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition* (edited by J. P. Forgas and published by Cambridge University Press, 2000). This first symposium featured invited contributions by Robert Zajonc, Jim Blascovich and Wendy Mendes, Craig Smith and Leslie Kirby, Eric Eich and Dawn Macaulay, Leonard Berkowitz, Leonard Martin, Daniel Gilbert and Tim Wilson, Herbert Bless, Klaus Fiedler, Joseph Forgas, Carolin Showers, Tony Greenwald and Marzu Banaji, Mark Leary, and Paula Neidenthal and Jamin Halberstadt.

The forthcoming third volume in this series, edited by J. P. Forgas and Kip Williams, will be titled *Social Influence: Direct and Indirect Processes* and will contain chapters by Robert Cialdini, Eric Knowles, Bibb Latané and Martin Bourgeois, Mark Schaller, Ap Dijksterhuis, Jim Tedeschi, Richard Petty, Herbert Bless, Joseph Forgas, Sik Hung Ng, Fritz Strack, Kip Williams and Lara Dolnik, Chuck Stangor and Gretchen Sechrist, Debbie Terry and Michael Hogg, Stephen Harkins, Barbara David and John Turner, Robin Martin and Miles Hewstone,

and Russell Spears and Tom Postmes. The Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology series thus occupies a particular niche in regular international small-group meetings in our discipline. Our objective is to identify and discuss important and emerging middle-level topics in social psychology that are broad enough to be of interest to a cross section of researchers. However, our aim is to bring a tightly argued integrative emphasis to these topics in order to identify commonalities and linkages between related research programs that may not have emerged otherwise. In order to achieve these objectives, each volume in this series has been produced using the same intensive multistage collaborative approach between contributors described earlier.

Last but not least, we want to express our gratitude to several people and organizations that have helped to make the Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology such a resounding success and contributed to this volume in particular. The idea of organizing such an international symposium in Sydney owes much to discussions with, and encouragement by, Kevin McConkey and subsequent support by Chris Fell, Merilyn Sleigh, Sally Andrews, and numerous others at the University of New South Wales. Our colleagues at the School of Psychology at UNSW – Stephanie Moylan, Cheri Robbins, Meg Rohan and Lisa Zadro – as well as many others, have helped with advice, support, and sheer hard work to share the burden of preparing and organizing the symposium and the ensuing book. We are indebted to Julia Hough, Cathy Felgar, and Helen Wheeler at Cambridge University Press, New York, for all their hard work and enthusiasm for this project. Financial support from the Australian Research Council and the University of New South Wales were, of course, essential to get this project off the ground. Most of all, we are grateful for the love and support of our families.

April 2000
Sydney, Australia

Joseph P. Forgas
Kipling D. Williams
Ladd Wheeler

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1. The Social Mind: Introduction and Overview

JOSEPH P. FORGAS, KIPLING D. WILLIAMS, AND LADD WHEELER

Introduction

Human beings are an intrinsically gregarious species. Much of our remarkable evolutionary success is probably due to our highly developed ability to cooperate and interact with each other (Buss, 1999). It is thus not surprising that the study of interpersonal behavior has long been one of the core concerns of social psychology. Understanding how people relate to each other and how their mental representations about other individuals and groups guide their interpersonal strategies has never been of greater importance than it is today. Throughout most of our evolutionary history, human beings lived in close, face-to-face groups where almost all interaction involved intimately known others. In contrast, with the development of large-scale industrialized societies since the 18th century, our interactions have become increasingly complex and impersonal. Most of our encounters now involve people we know superficially at best (Durkheim, 1956; Goffman, 1972). Effective social interaction thus requires ever more sophisticated and elaborate cognitive and motivational strategies. The scientific study of how people understand and represent the social world around them and how they plan and execute their interactions with others is thus of critical importance.

This work was supported by a Special Investigator award from the Australian Research Council, the Research Prize by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to Joseph P. Forgas, and an Australian Research Council grant to Kipling Williams. The contribution of Stephanie Moylan and Lisa Zadro to this project is gratefully acknowledged. Please address all correspondence in connection with this chapter to Joseph P. Forgas, at the School of Psychology, University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052, Australia; email jp.forgas@unsw.edu.au

Of course, the study of interpersonal processes has a long and proud tradition in our discipline. However, during the past several decades social psychology has been increasingly dominated by an individualistic social cognitive paradigm that has focused predominantly on the study of individual thoughts and motivations (Forgas, 1981). Perhaps inevitably, the study of "real" interpersonal processes has declined in relative importance (Wegner & Gilbert, 2000). Although we have made major advances in understanding how people process information about the social world, relatively few attempts have been made to explore how processes of social cognition and motivation may influence interpersonal behaviors. One of our objectives in this volume is to draw on the best of the achievements of recent cognitive and motivational research in social psychology and to show how this knowledge can be applied to understanding interpersonal phenomena.

We argue in this book that a juxtaposition of the "social" and the "individual" in our discipline is neither helpful nor necessary. Any meaningful explanation of interpersonal behavior must be based on a careful analysis of the thoughts and motivations of individual social actors. In turn, social factors such as our personal relationships, group memberships, and culture play a critical role in shaping our mental representations and motivations. One of the oldest debates in the history of psychology is about whether our discipline should be concerned with the study of "mind" or "behavior" (Hilgard, 1980). It seems to us that any meaningful approach to social psychology necessarily involves paying as much attention to the thoughts, motivations, and feelings of social actors as to their interpersonal behaviors. In other words, the interaction between the mental and the behavioral aspects of social life should be the proper focus of our research. The term *social mind* featured in our title is intended to signify this close interdependence between the mental and the behavioral, the social and the individual spheres in our discipline. The contributions to this volume all report theories and research that illustrate the benefits of adopting such an integrative approach to the analysis of social cognition and motivation on the one hand and interpersonal behavior on the other.

The substantive task of this book is thus to explore the role of mental representations about the social world in how people understand themselves and others, and how cognitive and motivational processes influence their interpersonal behaviors. Of course, the idea that there is a close interdependence between interpersonal behavior on the one hand and cognitive and motivational processes on the

other has an interesting history in our discipline, as the next section will argue.

The Background

The close links between symbolic mental processes and interpersonal behavior have long been recognized in social science theorizing. Several influential theories sought to deal with this question. The theories of Max Weber (1947), although rarely invoked in social psychology nowadays, provide one outstanding example of such an approach. Weber assumed a direct relationship between the individual's cognitions, beliefs and motivations – the social mind – and larger social systems and structures. Weber's well-known analysis of large-scale sociohistorical processes, such as his theory linking the advent of capitalism with the spread of the Protestant ethic and values, is fundamentally social psychological in orientation. In this work, as well as most of his other writings, Weber assumes that individual beliefs and motivations – such as the spreading acceptance of the Protestant ethic – are the fundamental force shaping large-scale social and economic processes, such as the advent of capitalist social organization (Weber, 1947). Max Weber's concern with mental representations as the key to understanding interpersonal and societal processes is particularly noticeable in his work on bureaucracies. Here he argues that understanding the mind set of the bureaucrat is essential to understanding how bureaucracies function; on the other hand, the explicit rule systems that define bureaucracies play a critical role in shaping and maintaining the social mind of the bureaucrat that, in turn, governs his or her behaviors.

Weber was also among the pioneers who argued that any understanding of social and interpersonal behavior must involve a study of the externally observable causes of that behavior, as well as the subjectively perceived meanings that are attached to an action by the actor. Weber's methodologies involved an ingenious attempt to combine empirical, quantitative data about social processes with the simultaneous analysis of subjective beliefs and motivations of individuals. Several of the chapters here report important progress in research on the interface of individual minds and social behavior that has a distinctly Weberian flavor (e.g., those of McGuire and McGuire, Nezlek, Baumeister and Catanese, Hogg, and Kerr). Indeed, one could make a plausible case that Max Weber was one of the precursors of the

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