Social Psychology 4e

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Written by four award-winning teachers and researchers who represent the breadth and depth of the field,
Social Psychology, Fourth Edition, encourages students to become critical thinkers about the research,
theories, and applications of social psychology. The new formative, adaptive learning tool, InQuizitive,
keeps students learning and interacting with content in a variety of ways to improve student comprehension.

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Xander says

I read this book as part of self-study (following an online course on Psychology) and I was particularly interested in the application of psychological science to the field of our social world. In other words: how we shape, and are shaped by, our social situations. Even though the field of social psychology is indeed interesting, I found the book (and the field) a bit tiresome, biased and uninformative.

(1) The book was tiresome because of the hundreds, or even thousands, of experiments. This becomes a bit boring after 50 pages. Also, I find social psychology, philosophically speaking, a very weak science. I base this on the many experiments that are reported in books like this. Highly artificial and simplistic lab experiments, using (mostly) a very selective convenience sample of students, are used as arguments to explain real-life situations. This is not meant in a derogatory way: there are indeed many interesting, reliable and valid experiments that tell us a lot about the human condition. But there is also much unreliable and/or invalid reasoning.

For example: when studying the effects of violence in video games and movies on human behavior there is much confusion between correlation and causation. Concluding that playing violent video games increases aggression is hasty generalization. It is extremely likely that only a subset of people who play violent video games suffer from increasing aggression in real life. This is implicitly acknowledged in the textbook when it says that violence has declined (an objective fact) and video game use has skyrocketed (an objective fact). And this is just an illustration of much of the reasoning in the social sciences. Flawed conclusions, hasty generalizations, overestimation of minimal effects, etc. This last point is the most important message to take home: in many instants, significant effects are reported, yet the size of the effects almost never is. It is possible to find a significant effect and hence to infer causality, yet without the size of the effects found this is meaningless - finding that watching violent movies increases aggression (the significant effect) says nothing if you don't report the size of increase of aggression. For example, movie watchers are 1% more likely to act aggressive would mean that the effect is almost non-existent.

(2) This book was biased because it is highly political correct and neatly fits into the modern day multicultural, progressive worldview. For example, when discussing topics like racism and sexism, almost all of the studies done report on the racism and sexism of white people, especially males. I object to the (modern day) use of racism and sexism and declare these topics to be particular instances of human discrimination toward 'others'. This viewpoint is backed by social psychological research: arbitrarily/randomly dividing a group of people into two groups, based on nonsensical arguments, leads to in-group/out-group differentiation. In other words: creating a team blue and team red leads to inter-group hostility; claiming the people in both groups are 'color-phobic' is nonsensical. We daily use all cues available to us to categorize the world around us, including other human beings. Singling out one particular group as inherently prone to this categorizing (e.g. the infamous 'angry white man') is unscientific and unwarranted. For example, I would be highly interested in the existence of racism an sexism in minority cultures, yet these studies will likely never be funded, since cultural marxism pervades universities - the people who decide the funding for studies are highly selective in their political, economical and social standpoints (there are, luckily, exceptions to this rule). In that sense ideology drives what sciences studies, which results in highly biased results.

Also, the book is biased in that there's way too much stress on cultural differences between groups and the influence of culture on our personality. I do acknowledge that the amount of stress put on honor varies

between cultures and that this variation has impact on our world; honor cultures are associated with more violence, more oppression, more oppression of women and gays, etc. But there are many more ambiguous situations in which 'culture' is simply put forward as an scientific explanation in order to avoid having to postulate 'biology' as a (more parsimonious and consistent) explanation. For example, aggression and the oppression of women (including rape) should be seen as a biological phenomenon, ultimately having to do the influence of the differentiation of reproductive pressures between men and women. Postulating culture (i.e. society corrupts men, leading them to behave aggressively towards each other and towards women) might sound comforting, yet in science comfort should make way for truth. And even in politics, policy based on truth has much more chance to succeed than policy based on comforting delusions. Evolutionary psychology clearly shows that differences between groups are smaller than differences within groups. Frankly, I don't believe the modern paradigm that cultural differences matter that much; human beings all across the world are highly similar in the goals, desires, needs and intentions.

(3) And lastly, the book was (relatively) uninformative in that most of the content of the book is dealt with in basic psychological textbooks that describe the same (at least the most important) experiments and their conclusions. For example, the infamous Stanford prison experiment, the Milgram experiments, the studies on group formation and inter-group conflicts, etc. etc. The main message of the book is that social psychology shows us that we, as human beings, are lesser influenced by our own personality (construal) and more influenced by the particular social environment we find ourselves in (situation) than we would like to admit. This has a biological imperative: our ancestors had to increase their chances of survival and reproduction by managing their social environment; hence, we are hardwired to let the situation we find ourselves in guide our behavior. In that sense, there is nothing new under the sun.

Read this book if you haven't read any other book on (social) psychology; if you have already read more on these topics, ignore this book.

Sidong says

The point I learned from reading this thick textbook: Human beings' behaviours are so biased and unconsciously so subject to the influence of environment! However, being aware of these patterns can not only help us to avoid these pitfalls or businesspeople's intentional manipulation but also utilize these psychological principles for doing good.