The World as You Think it Is

The influence of cognition on human behavior knits up the sleeve of social psychology.

There is an old "saw" about what people see when they look at themselves in mirrors: one-third what they want to see, one-third what they expect to see and one-third what is really there to see. The same might be said of their view of the world.

Like most homilies, this one has an attractive ring. It is simple; it makes a certain elemental sense. Equally attractive counter-homilies can be found, of course, for virtually every such statement about human perceptions, attitudes and behavior. And each, no matter how it contradicts another, may be found to contain—as this one may—a germ of homely truth. But if we could truly understand what we see when we see ourselves or others, how much confusion might go out of living! How much more accurate and effective might be the decisions we can make—as individuals and as a society—about our relationships with and attitudes toward each other!

The effort to understand this most important area of human functioning—why we see what we see and behave as we do in social (read family, political, business, international, etc.) situations—is the realm of social psychology. And the demise of the notion that people "are what they are," and its replacement by the notion that the behavior of an individual in any situation is an intricate mix of personal and situational factors, is emerging as a principal focus of research in social psychology. The thesis is simple to state. But the effort to unravel it, to seek techniques that will permit this complex of perception, cognition and behavior to be understood if not predicted, is occupying the attention of a whole new breed of cognitive social psychologists.

Their quest grows out of research on human attitudes and behavior conducted in the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties, when emphasis was being placed more strictly on overt behavior or on the structure of an individual's motives or attitudes. In current social psychology, however, the focus is neither on what people do nor on their personalities, but rather on what they think and feel as it influences what they do. Surroundings—including other people—are considered significant, but only insofar as they are perceived by the individual. The study is not a direct one—there is no way to measure social perception or cognition directly. Social behavior must come into play, of course, but primarily as an indicator of what is perceived and how it is incorporated in the mind of the perceiver.

Origins

The cognitive theme that is becoming a unifying phenomenon in social psychology has been building gradually. It can be traced back to Kurt Lewin, a refugee from Nazi Germany, who exerted a strong influence on social psychology in the last quarter-century. Lewin argued that psychologists who sought an explanation of human behavior only in the external world should look elsewhere; behavior is a function of both the person and the environment, he proposed.

A major bridge from Lewin to the present cognitive approach to social psychology occurred in 1958 when Fritz Heider, a longtime friend of Lewin's, stressed the perceptual underpinnings of social behavior in the highly influential book, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. Heider focused attention on the problem of "causal attributions"—how people explain the causes of their own behavior and that of others. If we understand people's perception of themselves and others, said Heider, we can make better predictions of the social behavior that arises from that perception.

Attribution theory

The explanations people give for their behavior are often in error; an investigator...
can only infer the truth. Heider’s ideas on this score were formalized in 1965 in a seminal paper by Edward Jones and Keith Davis called, “From Acts to Dispositions.” That paper, along with an important theoretical paper in 1967 by Harold Kelley, gave added impetus to attribution research, a major element in the social psychology of the past decade. Jones, now at Princeton University, describes what is called “the theory of correspondent inferences,” outlined by himself and Davis, this way: “It begins with the idea that, if a person has a choice among behavioral options, we learn more about him from his behavior than if he has no options. But the option he chooses usually has more than one effect, so you don’t know just which one he intended.” It is only by examining effects that are unique to an action, Jones observes, that one can discover a person’s dispositions.

In 1967, for instance, in one of the first experiments testing the theory of “correspondent inferences” in the attribution of causality, Jones discovered a curious phenomenon. Brief statements defending a particular stance on a social issue, such as the viability of Castro’s Cuba, were presented to subjects. They were then asked to ascribe attitudes to the target persons who produced the statements. Even when the subjects knew that the targets had been assigned their stated positions, the subjects tended to attribute to the targets a belief in the positions espoused. In addition, they readily generalized their perceptions by stereo-typing their targets and attributing to them a range of other views. Targets who espoused views critical of Cuba, for instance, were judged as well to be critical of Communism and even to oppose liberalization of laws penalizing marijuana use.

This observational bias, substantiated in subsequent experiments, led Jones and Richard Nisbett of the University of Michigan to propose in 1971 that viewers of an action and actors seldom perceive the same thing; what people see themselves as doing and what others see them doing can diverge sharply. Participants in situations that offer no behavioral options, Jones and Nisbett found, will see their behavior realistically—as a function of the situations in which they find themselves. Observers of that no-choice reaction, however, will attribute what they see to the actor’s dispositional characteristics, despite the absence of options. Further, in one important experiment even those who performed the acts and believed they were driven by circumstances were found to attribute their own behavior to their dispositions, rather than to compelling circumstances, once they had become observers of a videotape replay of their own behavior.

Attribution theory recognizes two categories in which an actor may explain events in which he participated: external (or situational), and internal (personal). To these, Kenneth Gergen of Swarthmore College would add, in combination, a voluntary and an involuntary, so that an explanation for any given act might be “internal voluntary” (I am not smoking because I decided to quit), “external voluntary” (My friends don’t approve) or “external involuntary” (It’s not permitted to members of my faith). An observer might say, simply, “He’s a nonsmoker.”

There is no single right explanation for a particular act, Gergen proposes, since, as Nisbett says, we have no direct access to cognitive processes; observers with different vantage points will concentrate on different aspects of the situation. “If you ask me why I did something,” Gergen says, “you’re asking a question I can’t really answer, but I’m going to try to negotiate with you for an acceptable reason.”

According to Kelley’s influential attribution model, the perceiver’s search among possible explanations for social meaning will parallel the scientist’s search for the causes of events: Presumed causes that accompany and precede the occurrence of the effects being examined will become the likely explanations.

To determine which of several possible causes might have accounted for a particular effect, the perceiver will employ what Kelley calls the “attributional criteria”—distinctiveness, consistency and consensus. Distinctiveness is the degree to which the
particular effect is uniquely associated with the presumed cause; consistency is the stability of that association across time and circumstances; consensus is the level of agreement among perceivers about distinctiveness and/or consistency. Research by Kelley and his colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles shows that these three criteria together account for most of the variance in attributional judgments.

The surrounding circumstances

The impact of circumstances on the interpretation of behavior, then, is a recurring theme of social psychology; the perceiver’s underestimation of external constraints has been called “the fundamental attribution error” and may itself by a perceptual phenomenon. “If we are focusing on a dot in a frame,” Jones explains, “and then move the frame, we’ll see the dot as moving.” If, by analogy, a changing situation causes a person to behave in certain ways, an observer nevertheless is likely to blame the actor, not the changing situation that moved him. Jones believes that our inability to appreciate the power of situations as driving forces may relate to a 19th-century emphasis on the individual that continues to permeate our thinking.

The difficulty in understanding how situations influence behavior is underscored in the recent research on Richard Nisbett on human inference, which evolved from Jones’s and Kelley’s work on attribution. Nisbett is interested in learning how people make inferences about the social world, how they answer such questions as “Why do you like him?” “How did you solve this problem?” “Why did you take that job?” But, though we generally think we know why we feel the way we feel or do the things we do, we are often incorrect in reporting the causes of our own behavior. According to Nisbett’s research, we have no direct access to our cognitive processes.

Among the best known experiment that demonstrates this unsettling idea is one that concerns the “position effect.” Passersby in stores were asked to evaluate similar items of merchandise in a display, deciding which was of the best quality and why. There was a pronounced position effect (left-to-right for the subjects encountered) in the responses; the rightmost article was chosen most frequently. Nevertheless subjects never mentioned the position of the article as a reason for their choice. Virtually all of them, in fact, denied that they had chosen an article because of its position.

To critics who say that such experiments are merely carefully selected instances of failure to report accurately on mental processes and that other instances disclose better self-awareness, Nisbett replies: “Those [latter] instances may feel like introspections, like a window on cognition, but our research suggests they’re not. People can’t examine the content of their minds.”

Intuitive theories

Some intuitive theories are good, but others are not, Nisbett maintains. The experimental subjects’ theory about why they chose a particular article was bad because it didn’t include the position effect. Commonly held lay psychoanalytic notions that explain all behavior as the mirror of some internal state in the individual are also poor because they omit the importance of situational determinants.

Nisbett’s research is closely related to that of Daniel Kahneman of the University of British Columbia and Amos Tversky of Stanford University on inferences made about the physical world. Kahneman and Tversky have shown that in this domain people make very regular inferential errors, largely because of flaws in their intuitive strategies. Much of the physical world is best understood probabilistically, but people tend to think deterministically—in terms of cause and effect. Their predictions about the physical world, therefore, are frequently wrong.

Working closely with Lee Ross of Stanford University, who is doing similar work with his colleagues, Nisbett has applied the intuitive strategies identified by Kahneman and Tversky to the social realm, demonstrating how time and again intuitive inferences lead us to make faulty behavioral predictions. This inferential flaw is obviously not fatal, and Nisbett admits that some errors may cancel each other out while others may not cause us any real trouble. “On the other hand,” he proposes, “most human lives include an awful lot of unhappiness and conflict. Much of it may be the result of our failure to use the proper probabilistic inferential rules…in our social judgments.”

Seeing others

Cognitive structures extend beyond the self to our perception of others. Seymour Rosenberg of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, has studied person-perception for over a decade. His first major project was an analysis of the basic dimensions used by Theodore Dreiser in his writings. One reason Dreiser was chosen is that much independent information was available about him against which to check the findings of the study.

In a collection of Dreiser short stories called Gallery of Women, Rosenberg found detailed descriptions of more than 200 characters, both male and female. Extracting every trait description of these characters—over 6,000 linguistic units—he grouped the traits into categories and selected those that occurred most frequently: such categories as young, beautiful, attractive, charming, etc. (Dreiser was a womanizer, “indefatigably, compulsively promiscuous,” according to one of his biographers, W. A. Swanberg.)

The trait descriptions were compared to each other to see how often they co-occurred in the same character. Co-occurrence is a measure of psychological proximity of two traits; if two traits co-occur frequently, the psychological distance between them in the perceiver is small or, in other words, they are associated strongly with each other.

The proximity notion permits traits to be mapped with regard to their co-occurrence. A technique called multidimensional scaling is used for this purpose. A trait map is constructed, like a road map, by using the psychological distances between traits. Multiple regression, a statistical technique, is used to determine whether particular dimensions fit on the general map of traits and, if so, exactly where they belong. (Conformity-nonconformity and male-female were dimensions that fit well in the Dreiser trait map.)

After the Dreiser study, Rosenberg turned to living subjects. Believing the technique may prove of value to psychotherapists since, he notes, the problems of many patients revolve around their distorted impressions of people, he wanted to develop a technique he could use with anyone.

Recruiting students from an undergraduate seminar, he asked them to develop a list of 100 people, including those with whom they were personally acquainted and others who were public or fictional figures. The subjects were then required to prepare two vocabularies: a “trait” vocabulary that described the people and a “feeling” vocabulary that listed the emotions the people aroused in them. The target names and samples of the vocabularies were incorporated in computer programs, and the computer prepared a multidimensional map for each subject, as was done for Dreiser.

From the profiles that emerged, Rosenberg concluded that everyone has a general evaluative dimension—good-bad or like-dislike—and various specific dimensions.
The latter would be the ones by which they identify themselves, and it is these individual differences that are the starting point for Rosenberg's current work on self-concept.

The influence of expectations

When we think of someone who thinks about other people in terms of stereotypes, a stereotype—an Archie Bunker—comes to mind. Mark Snyder knows better. The most intelligent, the best educated of us, he says, hold views similar to Bunker's about women, blacks, homosexuals and many other groups. Snyder, a social psychologist at the University of Minnesota, has no trouble finding educated subjects whose thinking is dominated by "simplified, exaggerated, overgeneralized ideas about various kinds of people. Some stereotypes are idiosyncratic, but many are widely held."

The basic finding to come out of Snyder's research on social stereotypes so far—he studies the consequences rather than the origins of such thinking—is that once they are formed they are tenaciously preserved. People tend to resist contradictory evidence, reinterpreting or filtering it to fit their stereotyped beliefs.

In one investigation, Snyder and his colleague Seymour Uranowitz gave subjects identical biographies of a woman named Betty K. One week later, some participants were told that Betty K was currently living a lesbian lifestyle; others learned that she was currently living a heterosexual lifestyle; still others knew nothing about her lifestyle. This new information then influenced their answers to factual questions about the actual events of Betty K's life.

Participants reconstructed the events of this woman's life in ways that supported and bolstered their own stereotyped interpretations of her sexual orientation. Participants who were told that Betty K was living as a lesbian reconstructed the events of her life in a manner that reflected stereotyped beliefs about lesbians. Participants told that Betty K was living as a heterosexual reconstructed the events of her life in a manner that reflected stereotyped beliefs about heterosexuals. This outcome occurred in spite of the fact that Betty K's life history was equally rich in factual events that "fit" stereotyped concepts about either heterosexual or homoosexuals.
sexual women. "Additional evidence," Snyder notes, "suggested that these results are best characterized as the product of an interaction between stereotypic conceptions of female sexuality and genuine memory for factual events."

Such processes—called cognitive bolstering by the psychologists—may provide the perceiver with an "evidence base" that gives compelling cognitive reality to his or her existing beliefs about people. Moreover, these beliefs may serve as grounds for predictions about people's future behavior and may guide and influence the perceiver's interactions with them.

Additionally, however, Snyder's research has demonstrated that beliefs can and do create their own social reality by causing the stereotyped individuals to confirm the perceiver's stereotype by their behavior. The expectations may generate behavior on the part of the target that erroneously confirms the predictions and validates the beliefs of the perceiver.

In one such investigation, Snyder and his co-workers, Beth Tanke and Ellen Berscheid, investigated the impact of stereotyped beliefs about physical attractiveness (e.g., 'beautiful people are good people') on the unfolding dynamics of social interactions.

Pairs of previously unacquainted individuals were introduced by telephone. The investigators gave one subject, the perceiver, physical descriptions of the other, the target. In anticipation of forthcoming meetings, perceivers fashioned "erroneous" images of their discussion partners that reflected general stereotypes about physically attractive people. Perceivers who anticipated attractive partners expected to interact with comparatively sociable, poised, humorous and socially adept individuals. By contrast, perceivers faced with the prospect of meeting relatively unattractive partners fashioned images of rather unsociable, awkward, serious and socially inept persons.

Moreover, perceivers developed different expectations for the behavior of targets whom they perceived to be "attractive" than they did for the "unattractive" targets. These differences, in turn, elicited and nurtured behaviors in the targets that were consistent with the perceivers' initial stereotypes. Targets who were perceived (unknowningst to them) to be physically attractive actually came to behave in a friendly, likable and sociable manner. "The perceivers' stereotype-based beliefs had initiated a chain of events that had produced actual behavioral confirmation of these beliefs," Snyder says.

How stable and enduring are the effects of the behavioral confirmation process? Will behavioral confirmation be limited to the confines of the specific interaction between perceiver and target, or will it persevere?
that internalization and perseveration are self-image, Snyder and his colleagues found, then these new behaviors may be internalized—incorporated. If internalization occurs, the target may then be prepared to act on his or her new self-image in other situations. "Empirical evidence suggests," Snyder says, "that internalization and perseveration are fostered when behavioral confirmation first occurs in environments that are structured to encourage targets to regard their new behaviors as representative reflections of their underlying stable traits."

The effect of such initial cognitive assumptions on behavior—of both the perceiver and the perceived—is a profound one with profound societal implications: "Those who want to change stereotypes ...," Snyder points out, "are going to have their work cut out for them." For example: "We shouldn’t expect the various civil rights movements to show quick and dramatic results. ... The success of civil rights movements in changing negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes will have to be measured in generations, rather than in months or years. ... These movements are fighting the basic psychological forces that run people’s lives. ... The social forces for change will have to be as powerful as the psychological forces that serve to perpetuate erroneous stereotypes."

**Perceptions of self**

A separate line of current cognitive research is concerned with mental structures that allow us to represent the social world in thought and memory and that guide processes like inference. Hazel Markus, one of Nisbett’s Michigan colleagues, studies cognitive schemata—subjective theories or generalizations that influence the processing of information. These systems of self-perception are developed by individuals to help them understand, explain and integrate their behavior in particular areas. "Having a schema," Markus explains, "is something like being an expert in a subject; you possess a package of information, a structure or framework of thoughts and feelings. The package makes you more attentive to this subject and makes your judgments and predictions about the subject more confident and more consistent over time than those made by a person who is aschematic or without a schema about the subject. ... They can be thought of as road-maps to your own personality."

Schemata, Markus suggests, probably begin to develop as soon as people are able to recognize themselves as independent entities—around 18 months to 2 years of age. As these structures become solidified, behavior that doesn’t fit them is ignored; evidence that contradicts them isn’t processed. "Our basic self-schemata may stay with us all our lives," she says, "even as we change and they become inappropriate." Thus schemata, as structures, influence behavior in the same manner as the process of behavioral confirmation does. Slim people who were fat as children and teenagers, for example, may continue to perceive themselves as fat.

Markus studied perceptions of body weight because it offered an objective, independent referent of subjects’ self-perceptions. In her experiment, the subjects included four groups: (1) overweight people who thought they were overweight and thought body weight was important to their overall self-evaluation; (2) overweight people who did not think they were overweight and did not think it was important; (3) people of normal weight who thought that body weight was important to their overall self-evaluation; and (4) people of normal weight who did not think that body weight was important.

In one task, the subjects were presented with silhouettes of people ranging from very fat to very thin and were asked to determine whether the silhouette was like them or not. People with body weight schemata (those who thought that body weight was important) could easily tell which of the silhouettes represented them. But the aschematics (those who did not think about body weight)—even those who were quite fat—could not.

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Marked differences in responses also were found when subjects with and without body weight schemata were presented with pictures of food and with trait adjectives such as "chubby," "slender," etc. "Being fat" could not explain the differences in response, but "thinking fat" (or thinking about fat and body weight) did. In related studies, Markus and her colleagues have found that in many areas of behavior significant differences in patterns of response may be due to differences in the way people think about themselves, or in the mental structures they use to represent themselves in thought and memory, rather than to the way they actually are.
On being out of step

A different approach to self-concept research is taken by William McGuire of Yale. Instead of asking subjects to react to sets of characteristics defined by the investigators, McGuire allows them to name characteristics of their own choosing with which to describe themselves. Eliciting spontaneous responses, he believes, is the best way to discover what is truly salient in the person's sense of self.

One phenomenon he has uncovered and finds relevant to self-perception is that "one tends to notice those aspects ..., that are different." Says McGuire, we will notice something distinctive about ourselves, a dimension such as left-handedness, but ignore something as ordinary as right-handedness. The dimension must be distinctive in relation to our surroundings—a left-handed person wouldn't notice his left-handedness at a convention of left-handed people.

McGuire, using the technique of asking school children to "tell us about yourself," sought the salience of such physical characteristics as height, weight, hair color and eye color, as well as of ethnicity in ethnically mixed schools and gender relative to the male-female ratio in the child's family. The distinctiveness hypothesis was confirmed in all cases, with some particularly interesting social implications.

The more ethnically integrated a school becomes, McGuire has shown, the more aware people are of their ethnic differences. This suggests that integration and ethnic de-emphasis may be antithetical, a possibility society should be aware of as it integrates its institutions. The proposition also is relevant in interracial adoption. In the early nineteen-seventies, some influential groups protested the adoption of black children by white couples on the grounds that the children would lose their sense of blackness. Such adoptions have declined dramatically. But McGuire's research indicates that black children raised in white households would be more aware of their blackness than those raised in black households.

Sets of beliefs

Cognitive structures, then, can be considered a form of belief system, a belief system about oneself and others. One question that has been debated within political and social science is whether an individual's beliefs are necessarily consistent with each other. Some say that any possible combination of beliefs, no matter how incongruent, may occur together, that there is minimal connection between beliefs. Yale's McGuire disagrees. "People's beliefs are completely interconnected, very coherent, very consistent," McGuire asserts as his working hypothesis. "If I change one belief in an ideological system there are repercussions throughout the system."

McGuire says that people strive to maintain consistency, but that instead of believing a given statement is either absolutely true or absolutely false, they assign it a probabilistic truth value. The model of cognitive structure derived from this assumption argues that logical consistency is also mediated by "hedonic consistency" (events that are desired by the individual are given a higher probability rating than undesirable events) and by inertia (the number of logical steps that one must take from one given belief to another will attenuate the effect of changing that belief).

In one test of the model, McGuire has run what are called Socratic-effect experiments. As part of these, subjects were asked their beliefs about related topics on successive occasions. The fact that beliefs were more coherent the second time around, says McGuire, indicates that there is a force to consistency.

A second test of the model measured the subjects' beliefs on a given topic, then measured them again after they were told what experts thought about them. The second belief test covered not only the explicit topic but also unmentioned but inferentially related topics, many of which were affected by acceptance of the convincing core or expert information.

Efforts to make beliefs more resistant to persuasion offer a third way of testing the model. If people's beliefs are really related, there should be more resistance to persuasion on a given belief if related beliefs are reinforced, since altering one belief would involve altering a whole set of connected beliefs. To make people more aware that a given belief is part of a network, McGuire asks them what would happen if, say, there were gas rationing. After they have developed a whole set of implications, he presents arguments on the core premise. The experiments showed less attitude change in subjects who had been sensitized to their related belief systems than in a control group.

The active audience

Attitude change research does have its experimental roots in the behaviorism that flourished in the nineteen-fifties. But there has been a decided change in approach. "The old paradigm," says Anthony Greenwald of Ohio State University, "was 'who says what to whom,' with the focus on the 'who says' and the 'what.' The audience was just a passive terminal for information. Now it is regarded as an active information processor—
in effect rewriting the message as it is received, putting it in a form more useful to the audience's own purposes. If we understand what the form is, then we can plot its persistence in the information structure over time.

Two experimental techniques, along with the failure of the neobehavioristic approach, have confirmed the audience's role as active information processor. If a subject is interrupted while he is receiving a persuasive communication and asked to list his thoughts, he gives lots of information that isn't in the communication itself. Moreover, if he is asked to perform a task while listening to the communication—even so mild a distraction as the pushing of a button whenever a light comes on—the impact of a message is changed. But the change is not quite predictable; a message that might ordinarily be rejected might not be, or, conversely, message impact might not last as long.

Greenwald has developed a computer-mediated procedure in which he can present many messages to subjects in a very short period of time. Two kinds of messages have been used: consumer-product messages, which give ratings of various brands of products such as might appear in Consumer Reports, and short policy statements that a political candidate might use to express his opinion in an election campaign.

The consumer-product messages are retained for a much shorter time, Greenwald has found, perhaps because people are ordinarily inundated by them and see them for what they are. Policy statements are filtered through a more complex structure; people have a lot of information in their minds by which to judge these messages, and find them more interesting as well as less strident.

Having developed a replicable procedure applicable to the real world, Greenwald wants to explore its potential. He has found, for example, that there is a "sleeper effect," in which a message, particularly one from an untrustworthy source, has delayed impact if awareness of the source does not accompany the message itself. "Politicians who advertise in campaigns," he suggests, "might get this sleeper effect by postponing the legally required identification of the message's source for as long as possible."

**Implications**

If cognition is becoming a dominant theme in social psychology, expressed as it is in everything from attribution of causality to attitude change, the implications for the discipline are even more profound. Kenneth Gergen of Swarthmore College is considering some of these implications in his research on the social psychology of social explanation. Just as attribution theory assumes naive perceivers to search for causes the way scientists do, Gergen suggests that science should, itself, be examined as a cognitive process. "As cognition gains predominance in the field," says Gergen, "one is forced to reconsider the function of the scientist. You have to look at yourself not as an objective observer of social reality, but as a cognitive being who's reconstructing the world."

Psychology evolved from two major philosophic traditions: "positivist empiricism," which holds that there is an objective, external reality we must capture with our minds, and "rational idealism," which says we must construct the world by virtue of what goes on in the mind. The empiricists' view has dominated the world of science, but the demonstrated importance of cognition in social behavior, says Gergen, signals that a change to a rational idealist perspective must be made in many of the social sciences. Our observations of the social world, he contends, are affected by the cognitive processes we use to make them.

"The social science that I foresee," says Gergen, "would be one in which the primary product was ideas, not data. The data, if one did experiments, would be looked on as illustrations for points of view rather than proofs of hypotheses. The ideas should challenge the dominant assumptions of society, or else why have them? What the culture needs is reconstructors willing to challenge what everybody knows in a way that opens up new courses of action."

Theories put forward to explain human behavior, Gergen observes, have values associated with them and ought also to be subject to negotiation. He believes that social science should be a sea of conflicting theories where competing values clash. The emergence of cognition as fundamental to an understanding of human social behavior may be a step in that direction.

Whether their substantive interests are in social perception, attribution, self-concept or attitude change, today's leading social psychologists share a common cognitive perspective. As Mark Snyder summarizes, "The things that people believe have a powerful influence on the ways that they live their lives . . . . We want to understand the processes of social thought because we believe that these processes underlie and generate the processes of social interaction and interpersonal relationships."

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