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Edited by Joseph P. Forgas, Kipling D. Williams and William Von Hippel

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**Responding to the Social World***Explicit and Implicit Processes in Social Judgments*

Joseph P. Forgas, Kipling D. Williams,  
and William von Hippel

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## INTRODUCTION

Social judgments are among the most important and demanding tasks people perform in everyday life. The ability to perceive and interpret the actions of others, to make reliable judgments about them and ourselves, and to anticipate and plan our future actions and responses are vitally important for successful interpersonal behavior, and for the development and maintenance of rewarding personal relationships in both our private and working lives. The objective of this book is to survey and integrate the most recent developments in research on social judgments. In particular, our objective is to explore how implicit, automatic, and heuristic judgment processes interact with explicit, deliberative, and elaborated processes in the way people judge themselves and others, and in the way mental representations about the social world are formed.

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The book is organized into three major parts. Part I considers recent evidence for the important role that fundamental evolutionary, neuropsychological, and personality processes play in social judgments. Part II focuses on intrapsychic mechanisms of social judgments, including explicit and implicit cognitive and affective processes. Finally, Part III considers the role of social variables in judgmental strategies, such as social motivation, social comparison, social exclusion, and social stereotypes. Within each of these parts, leading international researchers present their most recent integrative theories and empirical research. Our hope as editors is that the ultimate contribution of this book will amount to more than the sum of its parts. A proper understanding of social judgments requires the integration of the evolutionary, biological, cognitive, and social influences that shape our judgmental strategies within a dynamic system. In this introductory chapter, we want to offer some general theoretical and historical comments about the psychology of judgments before outlining the structure and introducing the content of the book.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL JUDGMENTS

Sociability and gregariousness are key characteristics of our species. Arguably, the ability to perform highly elaborate and sophisticated interpersonal judgments is one of the most important evolutionary achievements of human beings and an essential prerequisite for the efficient functioning of complex social systems. As phenomenological social psychologists such as Heider (1958) also observed, perhaps the most fundamental problem faced by human beings is to understand and predict the behaviors of others. This is largely accomplished by moving from observations of external behaviors to inferences about their internal causes and states, a task that requires extensive and elaborate computational resources. Much of the remarkable evolutionary success of *Homo sapiens* is attributable to our impressive ability to cooperate and interact with each other, achievements that presuppose the ability to carefully monitor, judge, and interpret the behavior of others (Buss, 1999). One view that is gaining popularity in recent psychological theorizing emphasizes the evolutionary origins of psychological phenomena (Buss, 1999). In evolutionary terms, we may think about the human mind as a complex, modular information processing device that was shaped by evolution to facilitate the solution of specific problems (Pinker, 1997).

In these terms, we may consider the ability to perform social judgments as one of the many *mind modules* that developed because they confer distinct survival advantages over evolutionary time (Buss, 1999). What were the evolutionary pressures most likely to have produced the universal human capacity to judge – infer, evaluate, and predict – social behavior? One likely explanation is that having the ability to judge others produced distinct

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evolutionary advantages because it made sophisticated interaction with other members of our species more predictable and manageable. Indeed, there are some suggestions that the evolution of that immensely powerful computational device, the human cortex, was itself a consequence of the need to manage ever more complex interaction processes within increasingly sophisticated human groups (Pinker, 1997). There is now good evidence that evolutionary influences may have shaped gender differences in how certain social judgments are computed (see Haselton & Buss, this volume), and evolutionary pressures may also have left their mark on the cognitive neuropsychology of many judgmental processes and brain structures (see Lieberman, and Zárate & Stoeber, this volume).

It is thus hardly surprising that the study of social judgments has been one of the core concerns of social psychology ever since the inception of our discipline. Classic contributors to our discipline, such as Wundt, James, Allport, Asch, Lewin, Heider, Festinger, and countless others, share an enduring fascination with how social judgments are performed. In fact, a proper understanding of how people perceive and judge themselves and each other, and how their symbolic mental representations about other persons and groups are formed and maintained, has never been of greater importance than today. Throughout the millennia of our evolutionary history, our judgmental skills and strategies were honed by living in close, face-to-face groups, surrounded by intimately known family, relatives, and friends, where almost all interaction involved well-known others. Relying on preexisting knowledge, habits, and schemas was probably a highly efficient way to perform many, if not most, social judgments when permanently surrounded by familiar and predictable others in such relatively stable and intimate social environments characterized by organic solidarity between individuals (e.g., Durkheim, 1956).

Since the 18th century, social organization has undergone a revolutionary change as small, face-to-face *primary groups* gradually lost importance and massive, faceless, impersonal industrial societies emerged. The same implicit habits of mind that served us so well in our evolutionary past may be less well adapted to coping with life in the modern, impersonal mass societies that have evolved in most Western countries. This profound transformation of social life, and the changes it has brought with it in our interpersonal relationships, have preoccupied some of the most creative social scientists such as Durkheim (1956), Weber (1947), and others. These societal changes occurred within a very short period of time – less than 200 years. Indeed, the scope and speed of social change have been further accelerating rather than diminishing in recent decades. As a result, our interactions with others within modern societies have become increasingly complex and impersonal, imposing new and ever-increasing demands on our judgmental capabilities, as most of our encounters now involve people we know superficially at best, if at all (Durkheim, 1956; Goffman, 1972).

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As a result, social judges now increasingly need to rely on explicit, controlled cognitive processes to supplement the implicit, automatic judgmental strategies they spontaneously deploy to make sense of the world (see also Brewer, this volume). One of the key integrative objectives of this book is to explore the subtle interplay between implicit, automatic and explicit, conscious processing strategies in the performance of social judgments (see especially Bless, Schwarz, & Wänke; Fielder & Freytag; Forgas & East; Funder; Kruglanski et al.; Shaver & Mikulincer; and Stapel, all this volume). A better understanding of the interaction between these mechanisms is essential to an appreciation of how people evaluate social stimuli, how they form and maintain mental representations, and how they plan and execute their interactions with others (see especially Chartrand & Jefferis; Galinsky, Martorana, & Ku; Johnston & Miles; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler; von Hippel, Vargas, & Seskaquaptewa; and Williams, Case, & Govan, all this volume).

#### THE NATURE OF SOCIAL JUDGMENTS

Perhaps the most fundamental feature of social judgments is that they require the use of high-level cognitive processes to interpret and infer the complex, ambiguous, and often latent characteristics of people and events that are not obvious or directly observable (Heider, 1958; Kelly, 1955). In other words, social judgments are highly constructive. At least since the seminal work of Bruner (1957), it has been well recognized that judgments also involve an act of categorization, in which the expectations and states of the judge often play a more important role than do the actual characteristics of the judgmental target. Because social judgments involve highly constructive information processing, the outcome of judgments can be very dependent on the information processing strategy people adopt, as well as the content of people's preexisting knowledge, memories, and ideas about the world. The history of research on social judgments demonstrates that there are a host of influences on the way social information about another person is attended to, selected, interpreted, learned, remembered, and evaluated in judgments.

#### Historical Background

There are several important theoretical frameworks within the history of social psychology that continue to exert an influence on the study of social judgments. Symbolic interactionism, and the work of George Herbert Mead in particular, represent a comprehensive attempt to link interpersonal behavior to mental representations and judgments. For Mead (1934), it is the uniquely human ability to construct enduring symbolic representations based on direct interpersonal experiences that is the fundamental feature

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of all social judgments. Mead believed that symbolic representations about the social world constructed in the course of social judgments – our mental models of how interpersonal behavior should be enacted – are both the *product* of past social experiences and the *source* of planned behaviors. Thus, social judgments are not just temporary interpretations of fleeting events, but also have an enduring long-term influence on the construction of consensual reality. It is through social judgments and symbolic processes that a stable view of the world is created, and this is the foundation on which both enduring social systems and a sense of stable personality rest. A person develops a sense of unique individuality “only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment” (Mead, 1934, p. 138). Along the same lines, James (1890/1950) also argued that it is judgments and reactions by others that determine our sense of personhood (Forgas & Williams, 2002). These themes continue to be important in contemporary research on social judgments, as some of the chapters included here clearly illustrate (e.g., Funder, Kruglanski et al.).

Despite its theoretical promise, symbolic interactionism failed to become a major theory within social psychology, probably because its emphasis on symbolic representations was not easily amenable to empirical research. The contemporary social cognitive paradigm often deals with exactly the same kinds of questions that were also of interest to Mead: How do people interpret and make sense of social experiences, how do they construct a coherent and stable symbolic representation of the social world, and how do these representations, in turn, influence their plans and responses to novel situations? However, whereas Mead always emphasized the social, interpersonal origins of symbolic representations (social cognition), contemporary social cognition researchers often adopt a far more individualistic, cognitive perspective (Forgas, 1981, 1983). It is only during the past few years that social cognition has embraced a far wider variety of affective, motivational, social, and cultural variables (Kunda, 1999).

In fact, Mead’s influence on social psychology has been largely indirect, through his influence on writers such as Erving Goffman (1972), whose dramaturgical account of interpersonal judgments and behavior has contributed important insight into the strategic aspects of social judgments. For Goffman, much public behavior has the quality of role playing or *pretending*, and the main task of social judges is thus to interpret such performances and infer the intended objectives and meanings of actors. Goffman’s work neatly captures the fundamental dilemma of most social judgments: What we see is almost never what it seems. The meaning of social events has to be inferred and constructed from ambiguous and often inadequate information. Social psychological theories essentially attempt to explain the constructive, generative nature of social judgments, as the next section will show.

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### Constructivist versus Mechanistic Models

The constructive, top-down nature of social judgmental processes is now clearly recognized in the literature. It was classical theorists such as Heider (1958), Kelly (1955), Bruner (1957), and Asch (1946) who first argued that the expectations and ideas of the perceiver have a major impact on social judgments. Judgments of even the simplest kinds of social stimuli – such as, famously, the size of a coin – may be subject to constructive perceptual biases as judges seek to interpret and categorize the information in the light of their prior knowledge, feelings, and experience (Bruner, 1957) and attempt to impose meaning, shape, form, or *Gestalt* on complex and often indeterminate stimulus information (Asch, 1946).

This line of thinking owes much to various phenomenological theories in social psychology. A classic example is Fritz Heider's pioneering work (Heider, 1958) exploring the kinds of inferences social actors must rely on in order to judge and interpret strategic interpersonal behaviors successfully. Heider's phenomenological ideas became the foundation of such key areas of judgmental research as the study of person perception and causal attributions, balance and dissonance theories, and research on the dynamics of attitude organization (see, e.g., McClure, Sutton, & Hilton; von Hippel et al., both this volume). Kurt Lewin, like Heider, also believed that understanding the subjective mental representations, or the phenomenological *life space* of individuals, should be the focus of social psychological inquiry. Early research on *personal constructs* by Kelly (1955) provides another important insight into the critical role that enduring subjective differences between judges play in how identical people and events are perceived. Subsequent research on implicit personality theories provided hard empirical evidence for the important role that individual differences in mental representations and constructive processes play in social judgments (Rosenberg & Sedlak, 1972). Other studies have also shown that not only person judgments, but also judgments about common social events or *social episodes*, are fundamentally determined by each individual's implicit theory of events (Forgas, 1979, 1982). Several of the chapters included here also present strong evidence for the constructive role that subjective and often implicit mechanisms play in judgments (see, e.g., the chapters by Bless et al., Chartrand & Jefferies, Fiedler & Freytag, Forgas & East, Suls et al., von Hippel et al., and Williams et al.).

This strong tradition of constructivism in the study of social judgments was not universally accepted, however. Alternative, perhaps more atomistic and mechanistic approaches were also quite popular. *Cognitive algebra*, a field pioneered by Anderson (1974) and clearly based on the psychophysical measurement tradition, conceptualized social judgments as the predictable outcome of simple, arithmetically derived information integration processes. The individual expectations, states, and constructions of

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the perceiver were of little interest within this paradigm. It was only recently that some reformulations of the model did suggest that some internal states such as affect could be incorporated within the information integration equation (Abele & Petzold, 1994; Kaplan, 1991). Anderson's (1974) model essentially assumes that (1) social traits may be treated as "given" and (2) that such traits retain permanent, enduring meanings. Both of these assumptions have been open to serious doubts. It is now almost universally recognized that contrary to Anderson's (1974) model, in social judgments the information is hardly ever given but has to be constructed and selected from what are usually exceedingly complex and ambiguous information arrays (Forgas, 1981). Indeed, biases in determining exactly what the most relevant information is can have a potentially major impact on social judgments, as work by Asch (1946), Kelly (1955), and Heider (1958) showed (see also the chapters by Bless et al., Fiedler & Freytag, Galinsky et al., McClure et al., and von Hippel et al., this volume). Secondly, the meaning of social information, such as personality traits, is almost never constant or given (see, e.g., the chapter by Funder). As Asch (1946) suggested, personality traits do seem to live an intensely "social" life, their meanings forever shifting and changing, depending on their association with other traits. Being "intelligent" or "determined" can have quite different meanings, depending on whether the person in question is also described as "warm" or "cold." Ultimately, the mechanistic information integration approach and its metaphor of the social judge as a passive and predictable information processor may at best offer an incomplete account of how realistic social judgments are performed (Forgas, 1981, 1983).

### **The Social Cognition Approach**

The conflicting assumptions embodied in the holistic, constructivist and the mechanistic, reductionist views of social judgments were ultimately reconciled in the currently dominant social cognitive paradigm. This approach focuses on the role of information processing strategies and memory structures in social perception. For example, the field of *person memory* was initially defined as the study of the cognitive processes involved in the encoding, retrieval, and combination of information about other people (Hastie et al., 1980; Wyer & Srull, 1989). In these terms, social judgments involve a process of cognitive categorization, requiring the translation of information about people and events into semantic representations, and the subsequent activation of prior experiences and knowledge structures (Wyer & Srull, 1989).

In line with Bruner's (1957) original suggestions, it is the process of categorization and the activation of representational structures that allow perceivers to rely on past knowledge and so "go beyond the information given" by engaging in top-down processing, making inferences and

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attributions about their target based on their prior knowledge and experiences with people. The contribution of the social cognition approach lies in linking social judgments, clearly involving high-level cognitive processes, with established information processing and memory paradigms from cognitive psychology. Research within this tradition has shown that principles of learning, attention, memory, and semantic and evaluative priming do play an important role in explaining how realistic social judgments are constructed (Kunda, 1999; Wyer & Srull, 1989; see also Bless et al., Forgas & East, Kruglanski et al., Stapel, and von Hippel et al., this volume).

However, as Forgas (1981, 1983) argued almost two decades ago, the original social cognition paradigm also suffered from some important shortcomings. Like most cognitive psychology models, it also assumed “cold” cognition on the part of the perceiver, whereas feelings, emotions, and preferences were relatively neglected (Forgas, 1981, 1983). The model’s focus on the isolated, lonely perceiver, separated from the social and cultural context in which judgments are usually made, has been another recurring point of criticism. The past few years saw a major expansion of the social cognitive approach to include careful consideration of the social, cultural, and evolutionary influences that also influence the processing and content of social judgments (see Haselton & Buss, this volume). It is this revised and extended social cognitive framework that is probably responsible for informing the majority of contemporary investigations into social judgmental phenomena, as the contributions to this volume also illustrate.

**Which Process?** Cognitive information processing theories that initially informed judgmental research typically assumed robust, universal, and relatively context-independent cognitive mechanisms (Wyer & Srull, 1989). The implicit assumption was that information processing models capture fundamental properties of the human mind; as such, they should apply to all minds and to all situations. In fact, few if any cognitive theories achieve such universality. During the past 20 years, cognitive researchers had to settle increasingly for more circumscribed and more context-sensitive information processing models (Neisser, 1982). Social cognitive research has undergone a similar shift as the discovery of numerous boundary conditions, situational variations, and other moderating and mediating influences came to limit the applicability of our models.

One response to the context sensitivity of many social cognitive processes has been the creation of various dual-process and even multiprocess theories of social judgments (e.g., Brewer, 1988; Chaiken, 1980; Forgas, 1995, 2002). These models often distinguish between superficial, fast, heuristic processing styles, on the one hand, and slower, more effortful, systematic processing styles, on the other. Indeed, there is some evidence that these two processing styles may correspond to neural activity located at two distinct sites within the brain (see Lieberman, this volume). *Deep processing*



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is more automatic and reflexlike, occurs at the subcortical level, and reflects evolutionary developmental experiences (see also Brewer, Haselton & Buss, and Shaver & Mikulincer, this volume). In contrast, *high processing* is slower, more inferential and deliberative; it is localized at the prefrontal cortex, and it is often based on intentional, motivated mechanisms (see, e.g., Brewer, Chartrand & Jefferis, and Galinsky et al., this volume). These two processing styles serve different but often complementary functions, according to several of the authors represented here (see especially Brewer, this volume).

In line with the dominant rationalist assumptions of our age, most judgmental research focused on high-level, systematic processing in the past, and the influence of deep processes on social judgments has been relatively neglected. One objective of this book is to rectify this imbalance and to show that evolutionary, subcortical, and implicit mechanisms do play a critical role in judgments (see especially Haselton & Buss, Lieberman, and Stapel, this volume). In particular, Kruglanski et al. (this volume) outline a powerful new unified theory of social judgments that holds out the promise of reuniting and integrating the various dual-process and multi-process theories in our field within a comprehensive unimodal model of judgments.

***The Question of Accuracy.*** A common issue in judgmental research has been a concern with the question of accuracy (see Funder, this volume). When is a judgment accurate, and when does it demonstrate errors and biases? This question has been extensively explored in early person perception research (Cronbach, 1955), with rather disappointing conclusions. In the absence of reliable yardsticks of what constitutes accurate judgment, the very concept of accuracy turned out to be rather nebulous. Further, as Cronbach's (1955) insightful analysis showed, accuracy is a multifaceted construct, and accuracy in perceiving features of a category to which a target belongs rarely goes hand in hand with accuracy in perceiving the unique differentiating features of an individual target of judgment.

More recently, the issue of judgmental accuracy reemerged following the work of Kahneman and Tversky (1996), who proposed a normative view and argued that the various heuristics, shortcuts, and simplifications that inevitably characterize most real-life judgments represent "errors" and "biases." Others, such as Gigerenzer (2000), questioned the epistemological validity of this claim, and argued that it is inappropriate and misleading to define judgmental accuracy in relation to absolute, normative standards, as Kahneman and Tversky have done. According to Gigerenzer, judgmental accuracy should be defined more functionally, in terms of the judge's prevailing goals and objectives at the time (see also Brewer, this volume). Thus, judgmental heuristics or shortcuts do serve a functional purpose, even if their operation can sometimes produce normatively questionable

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outcomes, especially in the highly manipulated and impoverished experimental situations used by Kahneman and Tversky (1996). Gigerenzer's functionalist perspective is also closely related to adaptive evolutionary ideas. For example, as Haselton and Buss (this volume) argue, when dealing with inherently ambiguous social information, judges do not necessarily seek normatively optimal outcomes, but may have a built-in bias toward judgments that optimize the balance between false-positive and false-negative errors.

Of course, this does not mean that social judgments cannot be subject to some genuine errors. An excessive reliance on stereotypes when judging unique individuals is perhaps the most salient example of a judgmental failure that has important real-life consequences. As several chapters here illustrate, motivated attempts to control such judgmental tendencies do not always yield desirable results (e.g., Galinsky et al., Johnston & Miles). Affective responses constitute another, and particularly important, internal source of potential judgmental distortions, as suggested by the work of Forgas and East, Shaver and Mikulincer, and Stapel here.

Of course, this necessarily brief survey of the various theoretical antecedents of research on social judgments is far from complete. Social psychology has an extremely rich tradition of theorizing about the implicit and explicit mechanisms involved in producing social judgments. The past few decades in social psychology have been dominated by the growing influence of the social cognitive paradigm. Despite its early rigidities and excessively individualistic approach, the social cognitive framework has now developed into a much more flexible and comprehensive approach that allows the investigations of how social judges combine their preexisting mental representations, feelings, and intentions with the observed features of people and events in constructing a social judgment. Many of the chapters included here offer impressive illustrations of how social cognitive methods can be applied to study these processes (see, e.g., Bless et al., Fiedler & Freytag, Forgas & East, Kruglanski et al., and von Hippel et al., this volume).

#### OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

Contributions to this volume have been organized into three parts dealing with the role of (1) fundamental evolutionary, neuropsychological, developmental, and personality influences on judgments, (2) cognitive, affective, and other intrapersonal influences on social judgments, and (3) interpersonal and social influences on social judgments. The chapters address many of the key issues in contemporary social judgment research, including the following: What are the evolutionary and neuropsychological influences on social judgments (Haselton & Buss, Lieberman, Zárate & Stoeber)? How do childhood experiences impact on preferred