

# 1 Introducing the Pillars of Social Psychology

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Saul Kassin

In 1978, I received my PhD from the University of Connecticut based on a dissertation titled “Causal Attribution: A Perceptual Approach.” I was fortunate to have obtained a postdoc with Lawrence Wrightsman at the University of Kansas. Larry had funding for research on jury decision-making, which seemed a perfect application of attribution theory. In what proved to be a formative year, I will never forget my introduction to KU. Larry graciously hosted a get-together so that I could meet others in the program – Jack and Sharon Brehm, Dan Batson, Michael Storms, Roger Barker, fellow postdoc Rick Gibbons, and others. As soon as I entered, he led me into the living room.

Then without forewarning, he introduced me to an older gentleman I’d never met but who looked familiar at first sight. It was Professor Emeritus Fritz Heider, my hero, the architect of attribution theory. At 82, Heider was brimming with the kinds of insights that filled his writings. Looking through a tome on the history of art, he marveled at “universalities” in form that he believed betrayed aspects of visual perception and human nature. That first meeting was followed by some unforgettable late afternoon tea and cookies in Fritz and Grace’s home in Lawrence, Kansas (for a pre-selfies-era photo I took of the Heiders, see [www.cambridge.org/pillarsocialpsychology](http://www.cambridge.org/pillarsocialpsychology)). That year, I learned more about the origins of my own work than I ever could have imagined.

What I did not see coming at that time was how relevant all of social psychology would become for my yet unrealized future foray into the study of wrongful convictions, and specifically the invisible phenomenon of false confessions. From the Milgramesque processes of police interrogation, which feature compliance-inducing forms of trickery, foisted upon suspects whose need to belong is frustrated by prolonged isolation, which can pressure even innocent people to produce confessions, which lead judges and juries to commit the Fundamental Attribution Error, inferring guilt despite these situational constraints, the chain of events can cause horrific miscarriages of justice – and fill the pages of a social psychology textbook.

Fast forward forty years. I taught a doctoral level course on social psychology at John Jay College, a branch of the City University of New York. Even before the pandemic stopped us all in our tracks, I thought it would be a great idea to Skype in (pre-Zoom) some of my heroes so that students could humanize the ideas and where they came from. Interacting through a large smart TV on the wall of our seminar room,

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I could not believe how much the students (and I) learned from these virtual visits that enhanced my appreciation for this field.

Opening with a discussion of the situationist theme of social psychology, we Skyped in Phil Zimbardo from his home in San Francisco. I had no idea that he and Stanley Milgram were contemporary classmates at the James Monroe High School, in Bronx, New York, in 1948! I could not quite wrap my head around the mind-numbing fact that the two social psychologists whose work most embodies a hardcore situationist perspective – Milgram on the direct power of an authority figure over the individual, and Zimbardo on the indirect power of institutional roles – walked the halls of the same high school at eighteen years old. “He was the smartest kid in the class,” Phil told us, but “I was the most popular.” Phil fondly recalled that Milgram thanked him after the Stanford Prison Experiment for redirecting the heat on research ethics.

On the topic of stereotyping and prejudice, I Skyped in Mahzarin Banaji, from Harvard, to discuss the development of the universally popular Implicit Association Test, or IAT. Marzu grew up in the cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, in India. So I opened with a simple question: What drew you to social psychology? Illustrating Albert Bandura’s (1982) point about the fortuitous nature of “Chance Encounters and Life Paths,” she talked about being in a train station in India, in 1980, browsing through a book stand, and purchasing the five volumes of *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. That purchase changed her life course. Not long after, she found her way to Ohio State University, where she worked with Tony Greenwald and received her PhD in 1986. The rest is history.

And so it went. We also Skyped riveting visits with Hazel Markus, Martin Seligman, Sheldon Solomon, and Eli Finkel. In each case, I learned something new and interesting about the history and origin of some of our most important perspectives, theories, and programs of research.

Then I had the pleasure of talking with Lee Ross during a visit to Stanford in February of 2020, just before the COVID pandemic struck. In 2018, Lee wrote a terrific article in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* titled “From the Fundamental Attribution Error to the Truly Fundamental Attribution Error and Beyond: My Research Journey.” I was in graduate school preparing my dissertation on perceptions of causality when I read Lee’s 1977 *Advances* chapter in which he coined the term “fundamental attribution error” to describe our penchant for dispositional explanations. That chapter has had a profound impact on my work to explain why people uncritically infer guilt from confessions – even when they were coerced from innocent people.

I wanted to talk about this article when Lee let me know that he had also written a paper that he has circulated among friends, not necessarily to be published, titled “Dissonance Theory Redux: Re-uniting Leon and Lewin.” I read it, I won’t give away his main points, or his personal reflections on Asch, Festinger, Schachter, and others, but his insights were extraordinary – and it made me wonder what other high-caliber scholars can cobble together the human stories that now comprise social psychology. What a treat it would be, I thought, to bring these pillars of social psychology together in one place for a retrospective that celebrates the field and provides historical perspectives for students of social psychology.

Sadly, Lee Ross passed away on May 14, 2021. Buried in his inbox at stanford.edu is an email I had sent just two days prior thanking him for his inspiration and asking if he'd be willing to contribute a chapter to this book. What a social psychology legend he was; what a creative genius. Our conversations helped to generate the idea for this book – which is why I dedicate *Pillars* to him along with others, past and current, including today's younger rock stars, who have influenced the field as we know it.

## Format and Contents

When I first conceived of this book, I titled it *Historians of Social Psychology*. My aim was to draw from the legends of the field, the children and grandchildren of the founders. Each would serve as a personal historian, reflecting back on their careers in the context of their time and place. Together, I figured, these personal accounts would yield a history of modern-day social psychology. Alas, reviewers of this proposal balked at the title, noting that it is misleading since, after all, the authors are not themselves historians. I argued about imposing such a literal interpretation on the word “Historians” since a history will emerge from the collection. But then I succumbed to the reviewers' consensus like a subject in Asch's conformity experiment. Hence, we are now the *Pillars of Social Psychology*.

As a result of how I had conceived of this book, my intent at the outset was to invite notable social psychologists, starting with those who have populated the field for several decades, to write their memoir, and thereby to compile a repository of stories that provide a sense of our history. Without seeking to impose a boilerplate structure on these legendary figures, I asked them to recount how they found their way into social psychology, what the field was like at the time, who and what inspired their theories and/or research, how the field they influenced has developed over the course of their careers, where they see the field headed, and what advice if any they have for future generations. Again, it was not my desire or intent to create a structurally uniform set of chapters. These questions were designed to serve merely as guideposts. As I indicated to this star-studded group of Pillars, “You will have free rein over your personal narrative.”

## Introduction to the Pillars of Social Psychology

Providing an historical perspective through today's Pillars is not easy without social psychology's founders, variously born, raised, and educated in Prussia, Poland, Romania, Germany, Austria, Turkey, France, Canada, England, and elsewhere. Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), Floyd Allport (1890–1979), Fritz Heider (1896–1988), Gordon Allport (1897–1967), Muzafer Sherif (1906–1988), Carolyn Sherif Wood (1922–1982), Solomon Asch (1907–1996), Carl Hovland (1912–1961), Kenneth Clark (1914–2005), Mamie Phipps Clark (1917–1983), John Thibaut (1917–1986), Eleanor Maccoby (1917–2018), Irving Janis (1918–1990), Leon Festinger

(1919–1989), Henri Tajfel (1919–1982), Morton Deutsch (1920–2017), Harold Kelley (1921–2003), Stanley Schachter (1922–1997), Erving Goffman (1922–1982), Robert Zajonc (1923–2008), Janet Taylor Spence (1923–2015), Serge Moscovici (1925–2014), Albert Bandura (1925–2021), Ned Jones (1926–1993), Harry Triandis (1926–2019), Stanley Milgram (1933–1984), John Darley (1938–2018), Ed Diener (1946–2021), Lee Ross (1942–2021), Herbert Kelman (1927–2022), and others have passed. But as a genealogy chart would show, their students – and their students – picked up where they left off, often extending into new and important directions.

The riveting collection of memoirs in this book form a mosaic of the field as it developed and where it stands today. As a group, our contributors obtained their PhDs between the years 1956 and 1987, spanning thirty-one years. Five entered the field in the 1950s, eleven in the 1960s, twenty-five in the 1970s, and eight in the 1980s. Together, their average PhD year was 1972 – exactly fifty years ago. In chronological order, the following Pillars tell their remarkable stories.

<b>Contributor</b>	<b>PhD year / Institution / Advisor</b>
Thomas Fraser Pettigrew	1956; Harvard University; Gordon Allport
Robert Rosenthal	1956; UCLA; Bruno Klopfer
Florence Denmark	1958; University of Pennsylvania; Albert Pepitone
Elliot Aronson	1959; Stanford University; Leon Festinger
Philip G. Zimbardo	1959; Yale University; Neil Miller
Jonathan Freedman	1962; Yale University; Carl Hovland
Anthony G. Greenwald	1963; Harvard University; Gordon Allport
Elaine Hatfield	1963; Stanford University; Leon Festinger
Bibb Latané	1963; University of Minnesota; Stanley Schachter
Bernard Weiner	1963; University of Michigan; John Atkinson
Ellen Berscheid	1963; University of Minnesota; Elliot Aronson
Alice H. Eagly	1965; University of Michigan; Herbert Kelman
Richard E. Nisbett	1966; Columbia University; Stanley Schachter
Kay Deaux	1967; University of Texas; James Bieri
Wolfgang Stroebe	1968; London School of Economics; Norman Hotopf
Joel Cooper	1969; Duke University; Edward E. Jones
Michael Harris Bond	1970; Stanford University; Albert Hastorf
Robert B. Cialdini	1970; University of North Carolina; Chester Insko
Edward L. Deci	1970; Carnegie Mellon University; Daryl Bem
Phoebe C. Ellsworth	1970; Stanford University; J. Merrill Carlsmith
James M. Jones	1970; Yale University; Robert Abelson
Claude Steele	1971; Ohio State University; Thomas Ostrom
Daniel Batson	1972; Princeton University; John Darley
Carol S. Dweck	1972; Yale University; Dick Reppucci
Mark Snyder	1972; Stanford University; Daryl Bem and Philip Zimbardo
Letitia Anne Peplau	1973; Harvard University; Zick Rubin
Hazel Rose Markus	1975; University of Michigan; Robert Zajonc

Michael F. Scheier	1975; University of Texas; Arnold Buss
Margaret Clark	1977; University of Maryland; Judson Mills
John F. Dovidio	1977; University of Delaware; Samuel Gaertner
James W. Pennebaker	1977; University of Texas; Robert Wicklund
Richard E. Petty	1977; Ohio State University; Timothy Brock
Gary L. Wells	1977; Ohio State University; Anthony Greenwald
Timothy D. Wilson	1977; University of Michigan; Richard Nisbett
Roy F. Baumeister	1978; Princeton University; Edward E. Jones
Susan T. Fiske	1978; Harvard University; Shelley Taylor
Brenda Major	1978; Purdue University; Kay Deaux
William B. Swann, Jr.	1978; University of Minnesota; Mark Snyder
Rupert Brown	1979; University of Bristol; Henri Tajfel
Jennifer Crocker	1979; Harvard University; Shelley Taylor
John A. Bargh	1981; University of Michigan; Robert Zajonc
David M. Buss	1981; University of California at Berkeley; Kenneth Craik
Thomas Gilovich	1981; Stanford University; Lee Ross
Miles Hewstone	1981; Oxford University; Jos Jaspars
Daniel Gilbert	1985; Princeton University; Edward E. Jones
Mahzarin R. Banaji	1986; Ohio State University; Anthony Greenwald
Patricia G. Devine	1986; Ohio State University; Thomas Ostrom
Shinobu Kitayama	1987; University of Michigan; Robert Zajonc

Finally, I am pleased to note that many Pillars have posted some remarkable photographs. Some of these images are called out in their chapters, most were added later. These images can be found in what feels like a family photo album posted in the Resources tab of a web page created for this book ([www.cambridge.org/pillarsofsocialpsychology](http://www.cambridge.org/pillarsofsocialpsychology)). So, enjoy this collection of chapters; savor the stories. I will follow up afterward with my own reflections on what it all means and what lessons are to be learned from these extraordinary individuals and their careers.

### Suggested Reading

- Bandura, A. (1982). The psychology of chance encounters and life paths. *American Psychologist*, 37, 747–755.
- Ross, L. (2018). From the fundamental attribution error to the truly fundamental attribution error and beyond: My research journey. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13, 750–769.