Chapter 3
Social Cognition: How We Think About the Social World
Chapter Outline

I. On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking
Social cognition is the study of how people select, interpret, and use information to make judgments about themselves and the social world.
People use mental shortcuts to simplify the amount of information they receive from the environment.
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

*Automatic thinking* is thinking that is nonconscious, unintentional, involuntary and effortless.
Schemas are mental structures people use to organize their knowledge about the social world around themes or subjects: schemas affect what information we notice, think about, and remember.
People as Everyday Theorists: Automatic Thinking with Schemas

Schemas act as filters, screening out information that is inconsistent with them. Although we may notice and remember glaring exceptions, usually we attend only to schema-consistent information.
What if there were no schemas?

- Korsakov’s Syndrome
  - No memory
  - No schemas
  - Memento
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

People as Everyday Theorists: Automatic Thinking with Schemas

*Accessibility*: the ease with which schemas can be brought to mind.

*Priming*: the process by which recent experiences make schemas, traits, or concepts come to mind more readily.
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

1. "Gee, that poor alcoholic... leaning against the building drinking."

3. This guy’s been hitting the bottle early.

2. "Blah, Blah Blah Blah Blah."

OR

Gee, this novel about mental patients is really gripping.

OR

“This guy’s mentally ill.”
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

Description of Donald

Donald spent a great deal of time in his search of what he liked to call excitement. He had already climbed Mt. McKinley, shot the Colorado rapids in a kayak, driven in a demolition derby, and piloted a jet-powered boat—without knowing very much about boats. He had risked injury, and even death, a number of times. Now he was in search of new excitement. He was thinking, perhaps, he would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat. By the way he acted one could readily guess that Donald was well aware of his ability to do many things well. Other than business engagements, Donald’s contacts with people were rather limited. He felt he didn’t really need to rely on anyone. Once Donald made up his mind to do something it was as good as done no matter how long it might take or how difficult the going might be. Only rarely did he change his mind even when it might well have been better if he had.
People as Everyday Theorists: Automatic Thinking with Schemas

Perseverance effect: the tendency for people’s beliefs about themselves and their world to persist even when those beliefs are discredited.

Example: Milosevic Case

: Çamur at ızi kalsın
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

People as Everyday Theorists: Schemas and Their Influence

*Self-fulfilling prophecy*: whereby people have an expectation about what another person is like, which influences how they act toward that person, which causes that person to behave in a way consistent with the original expectation.

Example: *White Men Can’t Jump*
White Men Can’t Jump
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

1. You have an expectancy or social theory about the target person.
2. You behave toward the target in a way that’s consistent with your theory or expectancy.
3. The target responds to your behavior in a similar manner.
4. You see the target’s behavior as proof that your expectancy was right. You don’t realize the role you played in causing the target’s response.
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

The graph shows the percentage of children who gained IQ points in different scenarios:

- **10 IQ points gained**
  - "Bloomers" group: Approximately 80% of children
  - Other students: Approximately 50% of children

- **20 IQ points gained**
  - "Bloomers" group: Approximately 40% of children
  - Other students: Approximately 20% of children

- **30 IQ points gained**
  - "Bloomers" group: Approximately 20% of children
  - Other students: Approximately 10% of children

Legend:
- Red: "Bloomers"
- Blue: Other students
Mental Strategies and Shortcuts

*Judgmental heuristics* are mental shortcuts people use to make judgments quickly and efficiently.

: Where are you from?

: Look at the mother, take the daughter
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

Mental Strategies and Shortcuts

The availability heuristic is a mental rule of thumb whereby people base a judgment on the ease with which they can bring something to mind.

Doctors diagnosing illnesses
Mental Strategies and Shortcuts

The \textit{representativeness heuristic} is a mental shortcut whereby people classify something according to how similar it is to a typical case.

Nerelisin Hemşerim?
Mental Strategies and Shortcuts

*Base rate information* is information about the frequency of members of different categories in the population. It usually is not considered when people are using mental shortcuts.
On Automatic Pilot:  Low-Effort Thinking

Mental Strategies and Shortcuts

The *anchoring and adjustment heuristic* is a mental shortcut that involves using a number or value as a starting point, and then adjusting one’s answer away from this anchor.

One example of anchoring and adjustment is biased sampling, whereby people make generalizations from samples of information they know are biased or atypical.
"People seem to be avoiding me."
On Automatic Pilot: Low-Effort Thinking

The Pervasiveness of Automatic Thinking
II. Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking
Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking

*Controlled thinking* is conscious, voluntary, and effortful.
Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking

- Automatic Believing, Controlled Unbelieving

Automatic processing:
- Initial acceptance of information

Controlled processing:
- Assess truthfulness of accepted beliefs
- Unaccept if necessary
Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking

Thought Suppression and Ironic Processing

Being preoccupied reduces our ability to engage in thought suppression, or the attempt to avoid thinking about something we would just as soon forget.
Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking

Thought Suppression and Ironic Processing

*Thought suppression* is the attempt to avoid thinking about something we would prefer to forget.

- Monitoring Process: Automatic
- Operating Process: Controlled

Under cognitive load, TS is difficult.
Controlled Social Cognition: High-Effort Thinking

- Mentally Undoing the Past: Counterfactual Reasoning

*Counterfactual thinking* is mentally changing some aspect of the past as a way of imagining what might have been.
III. The Amadou Diallo Case Revisited
The Amadou Diallo Case Revisited

Improving Human Thinking

Often we have more confidence in our judgements than we should. To try to improve reasoning skills, we need to break through this overconfidence barrier and make people more aware of the limits of their cognitive abilities.