



Social Mindscales: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology

By Eviatar Zerubavel

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Why do we eat sardines, but never goldfish; ducks, but never parrots? Why does adding cheese make a hamburger a "cheeseburger" whereas adding ketchup does not make it a "ketchupburger"? By the same token, how do we determine which things said at a meeting should be included in the minutes and which ought to be considered "off the record" and officially disregarded?

In this wide-ranging and provocative book, Eviatar Zerubavel argues that cognitive science cannot answer these questions, since it addresses cognition on only two levels: the individual and the universal. To fill the gap between the Romantic vision of the solitary thinker whose thoughts are the product of unique experience, and the cognitive-psychological view, which revolves around the search for the universal foundations of human cognition, Zerubavel charts an expansive social realm of mind--a domain that focuses on the conventional, normative aspects of the way we think.

With witty anecdote and revealing analogy, Zerubavel illuminates the social foundation of mental actions such as perceiving, attending, classifying, remembering, assigning meaning, and reckoning the time. What takes place inside our heads, he reminds us, is deeply affected by our social environments, which are typically groups that are larger than the individual yet considerably smaller than the human race. Thus, we develop a nonuniversal software for thinking as Americans or Chinese, lawyers or teachers, Catholics or Jews, Baby Boomers or Gen-Xers. Zerubavel explores the fascinating ways in which thought communities carve up and classify reality, assign meanings, and perceive things, "defamiliarizing" in the process many taken-for-granted assumptions.

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Editorial Review

Review

One can perceive a cognitive turn in much of sociology over the past decade, but its progress has been more halting than in other fields, in part because we have had no natural framework for thinking about the role of cognition in social relations. *Social Mindscales* provides such a framework. Eviatar Zerubavel has given us the field-defining primer we have needed, an invitation to cognitive sociology written with sufficient sophistication that senior scholars will find it engaging and persuasive, yet with such grace and clarity that students will also understand and learn from it. (Paul DiMaggio, Princeton University)

This book extends the tradition of Karl Mannheim and Erving Goffman in an exciting search for the social roots of ideas. (Lewis A. Coser, Boston University)

Zerubavel, who has done pioneering work on the social construction of time, here expands his approach to include a broad spectrum of cognitive processes. This is an important book--sophisticated, well argued, comprehensive--and, last not least, eminently readable. (Peter L. Berger, Boston University)

The author--a sociologist--proposes that sociology takes into account cognition and the ideas of cognitive science, only to return to the problem of knowledge from a sociological perspective and denounce cognitive science's emphasis on the individual thinker and the discovery of universal laws of cognitive functioning, at the expense of contextual and cultural factors. The book is very well written and will be of interest to psychologists who dislike individualistic accounts of intelligence and look for a more contextualised approach to cognition. (*Infancia y Aprendizaje [Italy]*)

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From the Back Cover

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Jesus Sandiford:

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information currently can get by anyone with

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Tyrone Smith:

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Martin Hobson:

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