Psychology, Human Potential and Self-Control

A recurring message of this book is that the discipline of psychology uniquely applies the scientific method to study and understand the human condition. It helps us understand why we, more than any other animal, dominate this planet. The human being shares many basic needs and drives with the rest of the animal kingdom and must adapt to its environment in order to survive individually and as a species. Yet the differences in our accomplishments appear do great as to suggest qualitative differences from even our closest DNA relatives. The following video introduces Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs to our consideration of human potential. We will consider the hierarchy in greater depth at the end of chapter 4 and refer to it frequently throughout this book.

**Video**

Watch the following video for a description of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs:
In the not too distant future, it is likely that communication will occur with the remaining few cultures not significantly impacted upon by current technologies. This could cause us to forget that the biological natural selection process, which continues albeit slowly, evolved over millions of years in an environment that has been significantly altered by human beings. The few remaining indigenous cultures remind us that for almost all our time on earth our everyday needs and experiences were similar to those of other animals.

In the Preface of his book documenting research conducted in the
Amazon between 1990 and 1996, Politis (2007) states that his study of the Nukak “probably represents one of the last opportunities to observe a hunter-gatherer society that still lives in a traditional way.” The Nukak, living day to day, have maintained a similar lifestyle for more than 10,000 years. They lack familiarity with government, property, or money. The Nukak do not have a concept of the future and their past history is limited to a few generations. For thousands of years, the Nukak have been adapting to the demands and resources of the Amazonian rainforest. If you or I had been born under such conditions, we would be very different from the way we are and vice versa for the Colombian young adult. Human potential is developed under enormously diverse environmental conditions. Psychology is the discipline which helps us understand how you became the unique individual you are and how you can conceptualize and achieve your potential.

**Video**

Watch the following video of the Nukak tribe in the Colombian rainforest: