Social Cognition

Introductory article

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Social cognition refers to the mental processes by which we make sense of our social worlds. The basic claim of the social cognition perspective is that accounting for the complex dynamics of social behavior requires an understanding of the cognitive structures and processes that shape the individual's understanding of the social situation.

INTRODUCTION

Defined broadly, social cognition refers to those aspects of mental processing that are shaped by social interaction, real or imagined, and which in turn influence subsequent social behavior. Defined more narrowly, social cognition refers to a research orientation that employs cognitive principles to analyze and investigate social psychological topics such as social inference, the self, and social perception. Social-cognitive research, with its adherence to the information-processing metaphor, is fundamentally the study of process; that is, social cognition is the part of social psychology that deals with the psychological mechanisms that mediate the individual's responses to the social environment. As such, the nature of mental representation and the dynamics of information processing are central topics of social-cognitive inquiry. (*See* **Information Processing**)

SOCIAL INFORMATION PROCESSING

A basic issue in social cognition research concerns the nature of impression formation. Interpersonal behavior is assumed to be dictated by the character of the impressions that people form of others. The impression-formation process has generally been assumed to proceed as follows. The social perceiver first identifies salient attributes of the target person; then searches memory for category representations that are similar to the detected attributes of the target; selects the most appropriate category representation; uses the content of that representation to draw inferences about the individual; and stores the resultant impression or evaluation in long-term memory. Thus, there is an initial 'bottom-up' or 'data-driven' process in which the features of the target trigger applicable material in memory; 'top-down' or 'theory-driven' processes then guide the perceiver's understanding of the person along particular dimensions. (*See* **Causal Perception, Development of**)

The Mental Representation of Social Information

Social cognition can loosely be broken down into two main elements: the mental structures that are used to represent social information, and the processes that operate on these representations. Broadly speaking, a mental representation is a record of the experienced past that can be constructed, retained in memory, and accessed and used by perceivers in the course of their dealings with others.

Social representations have frequently been assumed to take the form of schemata, associative networks, or prototypes. Although these theoretical viewpoints vary in terms of the internal organization assumed to characterize social knowledge and the degree of interconnectedness thought to exist among these structures, they all share the assumption that social information is represented in the form of general knowledge rather than knowledge of episodes bound to particular times and contexts. These models assume that representations are composed of the individual features that describe the 'typical' category member. That is, there is a generic summary representation of the social target, and the representation that best matches the target is used to guide the

categorization and inference processes. (*See* **Schemas in Psychology**; **Prototype Representations**)

However, evidence exists that people are able to use memory for specific episodes or individuals when making judgments, leading many social-cognitive researchers to endorse an exemplar-based account of knowledge representation. Exemplar representations, in contrast to more generic representational formats, consist of memory traces for specific stimuli or episodes. There is no summary representation for any given collection of targets, and different subsets of exemplar representations can be activated by different targets or contextual cues. According to this viewpoint, stereotypes, for example, do not exist as independently stored knowledge structures but, rather, are created in certain contexts when perceivers summarize the features of a collection of activated exemplars.

The abstraction–exemplar debate within social cognition has taken a similar form to the debate within cognitive psychology, focusing on whether each type of model can account for the effects presumed to be mediated by the other form of representation. More recently, mixed models of representation, in which the perceiver stores both details of specific episodes and generalities across episodes, have been proposed. Some evidence has suggested that the nature of the mental representation of a social group depends on the perceiver's degree of experience with the group in question, such that greater experience is associated with the use of generic knowledge representations (i.e. prototypes). (*See* **Representations, Abstract and Concrete**)

Nonetheless, even with expertise perceivers are able to recruit and use specific exemplars in social judgment, suggesting that the predominance of prototype versus exemplar use in social judgment may not necessarily reflect the manner in which social concepts are represented in memory but, rather, the default processing strategies that are engaged when social perceivers deal with familiar versus unfamiliar targets. Moreover, this general class of models has been criticized for failing to provide a parsimonious account of knowledge representation and memory function. More recently, connectionist (i.e. parallel distributed processing – PDP) accounts of knowledge representation have been proposed as an alternative to the more traditional symbolic approach for understanding social cognition.

Like the more traditional symbolic models, PDP models view representations as networks of interconnected units, and assume that activation spreads along these connections. However, they contend that representations, rather than being discrete, are distributed and superposed: meaning derives from the pattern of activation across many units, and the same set of units can represent different concepts depending on the pattern of activation across the units. This form of representation has been likened metaphorically to a television screen: no pixel has any specific meaning by itself, but by taking on different patterns of illumination the entire array of pixels can constitute a large number of meaningful 'pictures' or representations. In this way, distributed representation seems to be an efficient means of capturing knowledge. The distributed representation is a mechanism that both processes and stores information. This enables both greater context sensitivity and greater storage efficiency. In the area of social cognition, PDP models have been developed to explain stereotype representation, impression formation, and causal explanation.

It is important to note that all of the models described thus far are based on the probabilistic view of categorization, where targets are categorized (and judged) as a function of how similar their attributes are to the features stored in the representation. In recent years, however, a number of cognitive psychologists have argued that the feature-based probabilistic approach is insufficient and that a 'theory-based' approach to concept representation is more fruitful. Proponents of this approach have accrued evidence that categorization depends critically on factors other than similarity matching, and that similarity itself is context-dependent. Perhaps the strongest indictment of the feature-based approach is evidence that, although similarity-based approaches seem appropriate when the perceiver cannot generate an explanation for why a target belongs to a particular category, they do not seem to have strong predictive power when an explanation for category membership is available.

Although few social–cognitive psychologists have explicitly adopted the theory-based approach, evidence in the social psychology literature supports the role of theory and causal explanation in the construction of social representations. (*See* **Similarity**)

Automaticity and Control in Social Cognition

The issue of representational format aside, how does the existence of these knowledge structures influence information processing and behavior? Much of the social psychology research conducted

prior to the mid-1970s assumed, explicitly or implicitly, that people were aware of the cognitive processes underlying their judgments and behaviors and were capable of monitoring and controlling these processes. With the advent of the cognitive revolution, however, evidence emerged to suggest that the perceiver has little introspective access to higher-order cognitive processes and can be completely unaware of the role that various factors play in influencing judgments and preferences. As a result, social psychologists became increasingly interested in processes that occur outside of awareness, thereby evading the perceiver's attempts to understand and control his or her own behavior. The outcome of this revolution was an expansive literature suggesting that much of mental life unfolds in an automatic manner. Our judgments, feelings, and behaviors can be influenced by factors of which we are unaware, by factors of which we were once aware but can now no longer recall, and by factors that we can still recall but whose influence escapes our detection.

Automaticity has been observed in a variety of social judgment domains. For example, it appears that when we observe a person's behavior, we automatically make inferences about the person's underlying traits ('spontaneous trait inferences'). The mere apprehension of people, events, or objects elicits evaluative responses to these targets, and these responses are pre-conscious and automatic. Stereotypic information also appears to be activated automatically, in that it is triggered without the individual's awareness of consent. Recent research has demonstrated that even complex social behaviors can be automatic at times. Nonconscious activation of stereotypes can sometimes lead the individual to behave in accordance with those stereotypes, even if she is not a member of the relevant social category (the 'perception–behavior link'). (*See* **Automaticity**)

That these processes occur automatically is not trivial. Our automatic reactions can guide our decisions and judgments and can influence our thoughts about other people, even if we are not consciously aware of these reactions. Our evaluations of others may be inadvertently influenced by our goals, by our moods, by our stereotypes, by aspects of the situation, and by a multitude of recent experiences, without our recognition that these influences even exist.

Historically, automaticity has been defined in terms of four features: awareness, intentionality, controllability, and efficiency. Unlike controlled processes, automatic processes occur outside awareness, are carried out without intention, are uncontrollable in the sense that we are unable to stop them, and are highly efficient in that they require no attention. Most interesting mental phenomena, however, are of sufficient complexity to be composed of some automatic and some controlled features. Thus, although it appeared in earlier studies that trait inferences were automatic, further research demonstrated that the process could be circumvented by the imposition of a cognitive load, suggesting that trait inferences are conditionally rather than fully automatic. In the domain of stereotyping, some evidence suggests that imposing a processing limitation does not impede the perceiver's categorization of a target into a social group; it does, however, potentially impede the activation of stereotypes associated with that social group. Research on stereotype application suggests further that stereotypes can be automatically inhibited if the stereotypes are at odds with the perceiver's goals. Finally, it appears that the perception–behavior link is moderated by goals: to the extent that the perceiver's goals conflict with the primed concept, the perceiver will not act in accordance with that concept.

One of the most intriguing examples of how a cognitive process can be composed of both automatic and controlled components comes from the theory of 'ironic' mental control. According to this theory, the successful suppression of undesired thoughts requires the conjoint operation of an intentional, controlled search for distracters and an automatic search for the unwanted thoughts (so that they can be suppressed by distracters). When cognitive resources are scarce, the controlled search for distracters is disrupted, but the automatic search for the unwanted thoughts continues unabated, resulting in the hyperaccessibility of the unwanted thoughts. Research has demonstrated the application of this model in the context of stereotyping: actively trying to suppress stereotype use can actually lead the perceiver to rely more on the stereotype than would have been the case in the absence of these suppression attempts.

THE INTERSECTION OF MOTIVATION AND COGNITION

Not surprisingly, how we feel and what we desire can color our judgments. Beyond the level of mere knowledge activation, most cognitive activity is goal-dependent; that is, it is initiated by a perceived discrepancy between an actual and a desired state. Motivation can influence social cognition in a number of important ways. Motivational factors can determine the degree of cognitive effort

expended to process relevant information, as well as the direction that the process takes. Motivation can affect the direction of processing by facilitating the activation of goal-relevant cognitive categories, in a sense determining the 'theories' that are applicable for interpreting the available data. Finally, motivation can also affect the extent of information processing, based on how important the perceiver's goals are and how much cognitive effort (e.g. elaboration, distortion, inconsistency resolution) is required to make the current situation match the desired situation.

Cognition, of course, can also influence motivation. Motivation has a cognitive aspect, in that goals may be thought of as knowledge structures, governed by the same processes and mechanisms that govern other cognitive structures. Cognitive capacity, for example, constrains the extent to which motivation can exert its influence: to the extent that the perceiver can draw on all of her cognitive resources, motivation will have stronger qualitative and quantitative influences on processing; however, to the extent that the perceiver's resources are depleted – by virtue of distraction, anxiety, circadian rhythms, and so on – she will be less able to control both the direction and the magnitude of processing.

Affect and Cognition

The intersection of motivation and social cognition has been most clearly represented by theory and research on affect and cognition. This research has yielded several findings that suggest that encoding, elaboration, and judgment are mediated by the recall of mood-congruent information stored in memory. Ambiguous information tends to be encoded in terms of concepts of the same valence as the perceiver's current mood. Inferences that perceivers draw are often matched in valence to their current mood. Moreover, perceivers are more likely to remember information if it is affectively matched to their current mood state.

In terms of the relation between affect and cognition, three general frameworks have been proposed. The first approach views affect as an emotional state and adopts a functionalist approach to the emotion–cognition relation. Proponents of this framework assert that to make predictions regarding the direction and magnitude of cognitive activity, it is necessary to consider the adaptive significance of the emotion in question. For example, it appears that happiness, which signals to the perceiver that all is well, leads to a decline in processing activity (unless such activity is intrinsically enjoyable) – presumably because the perceiver either feels no need to engage in deep processing or does not want to risk the decline in mood that could accompany such effort. Sadness, in contrast, presumably signals to the perceiver that something is amiss. Sad perceivers tend to engage in deeper processing, perhaps to distract themselves from, or to find a remedy for, their emotional state. Interestingly, these patterns translate into greater stereotyping by happy perceivers and less stereotyping by sad perceivers, relative to perceivers in a neutral mood. High-arousal emotions such as anger and anxiety also lead to greater stereotyping; in this case, however, this appears to be a function of the capacity-diminishing nature of arousal, rather than of any appraisals of emotional significance.

The second framework is exemplified by the 'mood as information' view of affect. Proponents of this approach suggest that feelings may serve informative functions, and that perceivers use their apparent affective responses to targets as a source of information in evaluating those targets. The impact of feelings on these evaluative judgments depends on their perceived informational value: to the extent that affective reactions seem to offer relevant information, they will influence evaluations of the target; however, to the extent that affective reactions are deemed irrelevant, they will not be used as a basis for judgment.

Unlike the frameworks in which affective information can become linked to the cognitive representation of some target, a third framework proposes that emotions themselves provide a framework within which targets may be categorized and represented. That is, emotions do not simply activate congruent information; rather, they actually lead individuals to reorganize conceptual space according to emotional equivalences. This reorganization then determines how people perceive similarities and differences among objects and events and how they respond to them. Thus, emotions affect not only memory but also category construction and use. Emotional response categorization is assumed to be functional: a category of things that have elicited a particular emotion enhances the perceiver's understanding of the meaning of that experience in terms of his or her own personal learning history. This, in turn, facilitates the perceiver's ability to imagine the consequences of reactions to new objects.

THE SELF

Social cognition theorists assume that social behavior is mediated not only by mental representations

of others, but also by actors' currently active representations of themselves. Much of the research in social cognition that concerns the analysis of the self has focused on the person's mental representation of his or her own personality attributes, social roles, past experiences, and future goals, and how these representations influence social inference and social judgment. (*See* **Self, Psychology of**)

Self-knowledge

People differ in which attributes they consider central and self-defining. For each of their most central attributes, individuals may develop elaborate self-schemata (i.e. integrated sets of memories and beliefs about their relevant behaviors). Although people have many stable and enduring memories about the self, their working self-concepts (that is, their sense of self at a given moment) vary from one occasion to another, as different subsets of self-knowledge become activated. People are 'self-schematic' on dimensions that are important to them, on which they think of themselves as extreme, and on which they are certain that the opposite is not true.

Information pertaining to the self has implications for both self- and other-perception. People demonstrate a self-reference effect, such that information relating to the self is processed more thoroughly and deeply, and hence is remembered better, than other information. People who are schematic on a given trait can make judgments about their standing on that trait very rapidly, can back up these judgments with extensive personal examples, and are reluctant to accept evidence that questions these self-views. They also possess more general expertise about this trait, which they draw upon to make sense of others' behavior. We often evaluate other people by comparing their behaviors and traits to our own.

The context-specificity and flexibility of the self-concept has also been a topic of interest to social cognitive researchers in the domain of intergroup relations. Researchers in the self-categorization tradition, for example, have addressed how the self is shaped by the social context. These researchers have argued that the self is not a fixed mental structure; rather, it is viewed as the expression of a dynamic process of social judgment. Thus, self-perception and self-definition do not reflect the activation of preformed self-concepts but, rather, a flexible, constructive process of judgment in which varying self-concepts are constructed to fit the perceiver's relationship to the current social environment. These self-concepts have implications for the perceiver's inferences about other individuals and social categories: how perceivers define themselves – in relation to the other individuals or groups present in the current situation – affects the goals, beliefs, and expectancies that they bring to the situation.

Self-regulation

Although the goal of the self-categorization research was to make the case that the content of the self could vary as a function of the intergroup context, the perspective also highlighted the fact that self-concept flexibility has functional utility. Having a concept of one's self – and especially a flexible conception of one's self – is integral to social functioning. It permits the perceiver to relate to people and to be an active agent and decision-maker. That is, the self-concept does not merely provide the person with self-knowledge, it also allows for self-regulation.

In recognition of the functional utility of the self, recent social cognitive research has turned to investigations of the 'executive function' of the self. The self-concept summarizes information about oneself as an object in the world in order to serve self-regulatory functions. The 'self-digest' summarizes a person's relations to his or her world and the personal consequences of these relations. In this framework, knowledge about oneself as an object in the world is represented to the extent that it is functional in self-regulation, in agentic decision-making and behavior. The self-digest, then, helps the person fulfill needs and achieve goals when interacting with the world.

The Self as a Nonprivileged Concept

Whether or not the self merits the status of a privileged concept has been a matter of debate, largely stimulated by the phenomenal experience of the self and of self-relevant information as 'special'. Most recent social–cognitive theorizing on the self, however, has accorded it no privileged status, arguing that the extensive processing associated with self-relevant information is due to the self being a highly familiar and well-organized body of knowledge. The self-concept may be the most central, the most important, and the most complex concept available to the person, but the processes through which it is developed and through which it exerts its influence have been regarded, to date, as largely the same processes involved in the representation and use of other social (and perhaps non-social) concepts.

PERCEIVING PERSONS AND GROUPS

Perhaps the most central topic to the field of social cognition is that of impression formation, the process by which the perceiver integrates information about and evaluates target individuals. Indeed, the impetus for virtually all social–cognitive research on memory and information processing stems from interest in understanding how the social perceiver makes sense of others.

Person Perception and Impression Formation

The process of impression formation has been debated since the inception of social psychology. Early theorists assumed that the full range of information known about the target individual was integrated into one's impression of that person. From a Gestalt perspective, the perceiver was assumed to merge the diverse features of the target person into a coherent, unitary impression that took into account the meaning of individual features as well as their interrelationships. From an elemental perspective, the perceiver was assumed to assess the implications of each piece of information about the target person and then combine them algebraically into a summary impression.

More recently, models of impression formation have distinguished between top-down and bottom-up processes. These newer approaches have assumed that it is necessary to distinguish between the influences of stereotypic information on the one hand, and attribute-based or individuating information on the other. Two such models – the dual-process model and the continuum model – have received particular attention. Although the two approaches differ in the extent to which they allow for stereotypic and individuated processing to operate in tandem, both assume that perceivers first engage in stereotype-based processing and then, depending on motivation and ability, correct their impressions on the basis of individuating information. Moreover, both assume that the use of stereotypic and individuating information involves fundamentally different processes.

Recent approaches have criticized these influential models. A 'parallel constraint satisfaction' model of impression formation has been proposed and has postulated that stereotypic and individuating information are processed simultaneously and given equal weight in the impression-formation process (within certain limiting conditions). More recently, other criticisms have noted the possibility that individuated impressions may rely on a conjunction of sterotypic and idiosyncratic information, and that reliance on stereotypes may actually facilitate the perceiver's ability to simultaneously process individuating information.

Spontaneous trait inferences and effortful attributional analysis

People tend to make trait inferences spontaneously when they observe trait-relevant behaviors, even when they have no explicit intention of doing so. The term 'correspondent inferences' was coined to refer to the tendency of social perceivers to infer that observed behaviors correspond to underlying traits. Early work tended to assume that these correspondent inferences were, in fact, dispositional inferences; that is, they assumed that perceivers spontaneously infer that an actor's behavior was indicative of an underlying personality. More recent research, however, has challenged this view. At this point, it remains unclear as to whether these spontaneous trait attributions are in fact dispositional inferences. Empirical evidence suggests that perceivers do spontaneously (automatically) generate inferences regarding the trait meaning of observed behaviors, but that they do not necessarily generalize from this inference to beliefs about the stable disposition of the actor. It appears that the perceiver automatically infers the trait meaning of observed behaviors; more controlled processes then either encourage or discourage the perceiver from making judgments about the actor's chronic disposition.

Social Categorization and Stereotyping

The mere categorization of individuals into social groups initiates cognitive processes that function to promote the perception of within-group similarities and between-group differences. The most effective of these processes is undoubtedly the activation and application of stereotypes. (*See* **Stereotypes**)

Stereotype activation

By endorsing the view that semantic priming is an inevitable consequence of mere apprehension of a stimulus in the environment, social psychologists have concluded that stereotype activation must be an unconditionally automatic process. Indeed, ample evidence has emerged to suggest that once the target's group membership has been identified, the relevant stereotype is activated without intent or awareness.

As noted earlier, however, very few processes satisfy the criteria for unconditional automaticity.

Research on stereotype activation in recent years has begun to accumulate evidence that the process is only conditionally automatic. Mere exposure to a stereotyped target, then, may be insufficient to trigger category activation.

Two factors appear to moderate the activation of stereotypes: processing goals and attitudes. Goal states can function not only to interfere with stereotype activation, but also to promote stereotype application. Recent empirical work, for example, has demonstrated that participants who are motivated to view a target in a particular way are able to simultaneously activate the stereotype that favors their desired impression and inhibit the stereotype that contradicts that impression, and that these processes occur spontaneously.

Perceivers' chronic beliefs about social groups also appear to moderate the activation of categorical thinking, a finding that is at odds with conventional thinking on the dynamics of the categorization process. Until relatively recently, it has been widely accepted that both prejudiced and egalitarian individuals activate stereotypes to the same degree when they encounter members of stereotyped social groups. In fact, empirical evidence now demonstrates that egalitarians display little or no evidence of stereotype activation when presented with categorical priming stimuli. These findings suggest that stereotype activation, rather than being fully automatic, is a conditionally automatic process.

Stereotype application

Stereotype application can take two forms. First, stereotypes can serve as frameworks for the assimilation and integration of expectancy-consistent information, leading the perceiver to emphasize stereotype-consistent information to a greater extent than he or she would have in the absence of categorical information. At the same time, stereotypes can also sensitize the perceiver to unexpected information, leading to a greater emphasis on stereotype-inconsistent information following stereotype activation.

A functional analysis of stereotyping suggests that the perceiver can accrue benefits from the application of stereotypes. Stereotype-based expectancies provide a framework that facilitates the identification and comprehension of consistent information, such that the processing of that information requires little deliberative attention or thought. The fluency of expectancy-consistent information means that substantial attention may be redirected to other concurrent tasks, including the encoding of inconsistent information. The benefits of stereotype application in demanding environments are thus twofold: first, expectancy-consistent information can be processed in a relatively effortless manner; second, remaining attentional resources can be redirected to unexpected information, enabling the perceiver to process and remember this potentially important individuating information. (*See* **Attention**)

A variety of motivational factors also seem important to stereotype application. The use of stereotypes can be overridden by accuracy motivation, but can be enhanced by ego-defensive motivations by providing a basis for downward social comparisons. 'Social judgability' concerns also play a role, and perceivers are unlikely to report stereotypic judgments unless they believe there is a legitimate informational basis for such a judgment.

Stereotype suppression

As we have already discussed, several studies have documented the ironic consequences of stereotype suppression for perceivers' evaluations of, memory for, and behavior towards stereotyped targets. Notwithstanding these demonstrations, doubt remains over the generality of these effects. Low-prejudice participants, for example, are apparently not susceptible to 'rebound' effects. It also seems that perceivers may be more consistent in their efforts to avoid stereotyping for sensitive social groups, thereby preventing the emergence of rebound effects. This suggests that stereotype suppression can be effective to the extent that perceivers are motivated by concerns of egalitarianism. (*See* **Thought Suppression and Mental Control**)

Entitativity: Perceiving Persons and Groups

Although research on both impression formation and stereotyping have long and rich histories within social cognition, little research has been directed towards understanding how the two processes might be similar or different. In both cases, research is concerned with how a perceiver comes to develop a conception of a social target, either a person or a group. But do the same mechanisms and processes govern social perception in these two domains?

Recent research on 'entitativity', or the extent to which a target is seen as coherent and unified, suggests that default expectancies for individuals versus groups has implications for how the perceiver forms impressions of individuals and develops conceptions of groups. The fundamental postulate of this research is that the social perceiver

assumes unity in the personalities of others: persons are seen as coherent entities, and the perceiver's impression of a target person should reflect that unity and coherence. In general, however, perceivers do not expect the same degree of unity and coherence among members of a group as they expect in the personality of an individual.

As a result of holding this assumption, the perceiver seeks to draw inferences about the dispositional properties constituting the core of the person's personality, but not about the 'disposition' of the group. The result is that the perceiver draws inferences quickly when the target is a person, but not so rapidly when the target is a group. The expectation of consistency in the traits and behaviors of individuals, rather than groups, also leads the perceiver to strive to resolve inconsistencies in the information acquired about the target person, but to tolerate inconsistencies in the information acquired about different group members.

This is not to suggest that processing information about individuals will necessarily be different from processing information about groups. Although research on entitativity does indeed demonstrate that the default assumption is that individuals form more coherent entities than do groups, groups can also vary in their perceived entitativity. Empirical evidence exists to suggest that perceivers process information about groups and individuals in a similar manner when those groups are perceived to be high in entitativity. The nature of the social target, person or group, then, is not the crucial element in determining the impression-formation process. When expectancies of unity, consistency, and coherence are controlled or equated, the processes and outcome of impression formation are very similar for individual and group targets.

CONCLUSION

Any attempt to define and summarize a broad domain must necessarily be non-exhaustive and this article is no exception. Social cognition, with its broad mandate to investigate the mental processes that mediate relations between the individual and his or her social world, encompasses not only the topics reviewed here, but also many other mental processes central to social functioning, such as goal-setting, decision-making, and heuristics and biases in social judgment. Also important are the emerging field of implicit social cognition and recent work on the diversity of the processes (e.g., perceptual and conceptual) believed to characterize the complexity and flexibility of the social perceiver's mental life. Ultimately, the goal of social cognition is to explain how all of these processes interact to determine social behavior.

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