Research Networking Programmes

Science Meeting – Scientific Report

The scientific report (WORD or PDF file - maximum of seven A4 pages) should be submitted online <u>within two months of the event</u>. It will be published on the ESF website.

<u>*Proposal Title*</u>*: On the Social Foundations of Social Cognition*

<u>*Application Reference N°*</u>*: 4839*

1) **Summary**

What are the foundations of social cognition? The classic answer to this question is that social cognition is fully reliant on preexisting , non-social cognitive mechanisms. However, there is growing realization that social cognition did not merely highjack phylogenetically older, non-social cognitive mechanisms. Instead, much social cognition may constitute specific adaptations to social pressures, and many non-social cognitive mechanisms may be founded on those specific social cognitive mechanisms. The phylogenetic pecking-order between social cognition and non-social cognition has been a matter of debate, and the issue has not been settled yet. The overarching aim of this expert meeting was to push back the frontiers on *when* and *why* social cognition may have evolved relatively independent of non-social cognition. As such, the expert meeting thoroughly examined the proposal that social cognition is not merely the "offspring" of non-social cognition and, instead, it may be the building block of non-social cognition at least on many domains. More precisely, the expert meeting helped to clarify 4 issues on the social foundation of social cognition: (1) much human cognition fulfills the function to better integrate human beings into their sociocultural contexts (see talks by Campbell and Gebauer). As such, it is feasible to assume that cognition partly evolved for sociocultural integration. (2) The fundamental content of human cognition can be sorted along two broad dimensions: agency and communion. Both dimensions are deeply social in nature, once more showcasing the social underpinnings of cognition (see talks by Abele, Paulhus, Veccione). (3) Cognition often has the ultimate function to accurately assess one's social standing, but cognition has at least as often the function to ultimately enhance one's social standing via proximate processes of self-enhancement (see talk by Sedikides). (4) The social basis of human psychology is not only ubiquitous in human thought (i.e., cognition), but also in human feeling (i.e., emotion) (see talks by Dufner

and Hess). In all, the expert meeting fleshed out the central importance of sociality in the human cognition and beyond. Each expert reported that the meeting has strengthened their belief that sociality is fundamental to human cognition. In emphasizing the "social" in social cognition, our discipline may become even more relevant in accounting for human thought, feeling, motivation, and behavior.

2)   Description of the scientific content of and discussions at the event

The first talk was given by Jochen Gebauer. He presented a sociocultural motives perspective on self and personality. The aim of the talk was to show that cognitions about oneself and even personality are inextricably linked to the sociocultural context. More precisely, psychologists have lamented that the effects of self and personality factors on their outcomes can grossly diverge across sociocultural contexts, posing a validity threat. However, such diversity need not be a threat if it follows theoretical predictions reflecting core features of self and personality factors. Unfortunately, relevant theories are scarce. Hence, Gebauer and colleagues sought to develop a theoretical perspective on *why* self and personality effects *should* diverge across socio-cultural contexts: The sociocultural motives perspective (SMP). At the heart of the SMP lies the assumption that self and personality factors are linked to the sociocultural master motives for assimilation (swimming with the socio-cultural tide) and contrast (swimming against the socio-cultural tide). Specifically, communion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are linked to the sociocultural assimilation motive, whereas agency and openness are linked to the sociocultural contrast motive. Hence, communion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness should predict outcomes most strongly in sociocultural contexts where these outcomes are *common*, whereas agency and O should predict outcomes most strongly in social contexts where they are *uncommon*. Evidence for the SMP was presented regarding the relation of self and personality with religiosity, partner preferences, and prosociality.

The second talk was given by Keith Campbell. He examined the interplay between culture and human cognition. In doing so, he focused on one novel cultural phenomenon: Geek culture. Geek culture – including fans and enthusiasts in areas of media and gaming – has been growing rapidly over the last several decades. Specific areas of geek cultural interests include: science fiction (e.g., Star Trek, Star wars), comics (e.g., Superman, The Avengers), costume design and wearing (i.e., cosplay), gaming (e.g., World of Warcraft) and live action role playing (i.e., LARPing). Today, geek culture has become so popular that it has spilled into the mainstream culture, especially in movies and fashion. In his talk, Campbell sought to explain the geek culture phenomenon via three models: (a) the *self model* focuses on narcissism and ego needs, (b) the *interpersonal model* focuses on social connection, and (c) the *cognition model* focuses on the importance of openness and intelligence. Findings from seven studies show some degree of support for each of these models. Self, interpersonal, and cognitive proclivities contribute simultaneously to the formation of new cultural movements.

The third talk was given by Michele Vecchione. Following von Hippel and Trivers's (2011), he started with the assumption that self-deception evolved for credible and successful other-deception and he examined the content of self-deceptive cognition. He found two such content dimensions: Agentic and communal self-deception. Study 1 (n=2049) was aimed to develop

and validate a new self-report measure of agentic and communal self-deception. Study 2 (n=191) employed a Latent Growth Curve approach to examine the developmental trajectories of agentic and communal self-deception from late adolescence to emerging adulthood. Study 3 (n=182) used a Latent State-Trait analysis to assess the extent to which agentic and communal self-deception represent: a) stable individual differences, and b) systematic effects of the situation and/or the person-situation interaction. Study 4 (n=304) used a multi-rater approach to further address the nature of agentic and communal self-deception. The distinction between the two self-enhancing tendencies was found for both self- and other ratings, which showed a considerable degree of convergence. The research shows that self-deception falls into two factors: agentic and communal self-deception. Because agency and communion are fundamentally interpersonal in nature, this research supports the idea that self-deceptive cognitions proximately arise for ultimately interpersonal gains.

The third talk was given by Del Paulhus. He showed that people's beliefs about their own knowledge can stand in the service of self-deception, which in turn stands in the service of other-deception (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). More precisely, Paulhus provided an overview on his research on the over-claiming technique (OCT). Respondents are asked to rate their familiarity with a set of persons, places, items, or events. Twenty percent of the items are foils: That is, they do not actually exist. Such responses can be scored via the signal detection method to yield both accuracy and bias scores for each respondent. Respondents receive high accuracy scores to the extent that they claim real items and disclaim foils. A high bias score ensues from the overall tendency to claim items – especially foils. The tendency to claim non-existent items is an a priori index of self-deception. The research illustrates that even factual knowledge can stand in the service of self-deception, with self-deception standing in the service of making socially desirable impressions on others.

The fourth talk was given by Constantine Sedikides. He showed how autobiographical memory can stand in the service of self-protection, with self-protection allowing people more successful navigation through the social world. Although people remember negative information better than positive information ("bad is stronger than good"), this effect applies to information about others. When it comes to information about the self, the reverse is true. Sedikides's talk discussed a theoretical model – the mnemic neglect model – and presented an experimental paradigm that exerts tight control over the to-be-remembered material. Participants recall poorly self-threatening feedback compared to self-affirming or other-relevant feedback (*mnemic neglect*). The phenomenon is motivational: it is in the service of self-protection. Self-protection is important to successfully navigate through the social world.

The fifth talk was given by Andrea Abele-Brehm. She showed that agency and communion are the fundamental content dimensions of social cognition. Additionally, she showed that agency and communion differ in their importance within self cognitions vs. social cognitions. Specifically, she presented a *Dual Perspective Model of Agency and Communion* (DPM; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014) developed to show that the two dimensions are differently linked to the basic perspectives in social interaction, that is, the actor versus the observer/recipient perspectives. She reviewed numerous research confirming three general hypotheses of the DPM. First, communal content is primary among the fundamental dimensions. Second, in the observer/recipient perspective (perception of others), communal content receives more weight than agentic content. Third, in the actor perspective

(self-perception), agentic content receives more weight than communal content. We then discuss the complex issues of relations of agency and communion to valence as well as associations between agency and communion. Although they are logically independent and their inferences are based on different cues, the two content dimensions of meaning frequently function as psychological alternatives in social cognition.

The sixth talk was given by Michael Dufner. He showed that affective contingencies have a strong social basis in that they represent a motivational core aspect of affiliation. According to classical motive disposition theory, individuals differ in their propensity to derive pleasure from affiliative experiences. This propensity is considered a core process underlying the affiliation motive and a pervasive cause of motivated behavior. In this study, we tested these assumptions. We presented participants with positive affiliative stimuli and used electromyography (EMG) to record changes in facial muscular activity that are indicative of (subtle) smiling. We were thus able to directly and physiologically measure positive affect following affiliative cues. Individual differences in these affective contingencies were internally consistent and temporally stable. They converged with self- and informant-reports of the affiliation motive and also with picture story exercise (PSE) scores, indicating they are partly accessible for the self, observable to outsiders and overlap with implicit systems. Finally, they predicted affiliative behavior in terms of situation selection and modification across a wide variety of contexts (i.e., in daily life, the laboratory, and an online social network).

The final talk was given by Ursula Hess. She elaborated on the social underpinnings of emotion. Specifically, emotional mimicry is the imitation of the emotional expressions of others. According to the classic view on emotional mimicry (the Matched Motor Hypothesis), people mimic the specific facial movements that comprise a discrete emotion expression. In the present talk I propose an alternative Emotion Mimicry in Context view according to which emotional mimicry is not based on mere perception, but rather on the interpretation of signals as emotional intentions in a specific context. The Emotion Mimicry in Context view takes into account the relationship between observer and expresser, and suggests that emotional mimicry depends on this relationship and functions as a communicative signal and social regulator.

3)   **Assessment of the results and impact of the event on the future directions of the field**

Social cognition is a descriptive term. It refers to human thought about humans (e.g., the self, other persons, social groups). The expert meeting sought to illuminate the psychological mechanisms on which social cognition is founded. The traditional notion has been that social cognition is based on already existent, non-social mechanisms (e.g., Holyoak & Gordon, 1984; Lingle, Altom, & Medin, 1984; Spencer & Hirschfeld, 2004). However, accumulating evidence suggests that a great deal of social cognitive mechanisms are not merely minor tweaks of phylogenetically older non-social mechanisms. Instead, social life has been so paramount to human survival and reproduction that social cognitive mechanisms may have evolved as specific adaptations to the very unique challenges of social life (Baumeister, 2005; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006). Moreover, it is entirely possible that many non-social cognitive mechanisms were based on existing social cognitive mechanisms. To provide an example, the two fundamental content dimensions of social cognition, agency/competence and communion/warmth (*Abele, Cuddy,* Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008), likely constitute specific adaptations for navigating through social life (Baumeister, 2005) but

also find application in non-social domains such as consumer products (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). Together then, the phylogenetic pecking-order between social cognition and non-social cognition is not sufficiently understood, and this order may well depend on the investigated domain at hand. The overarching aim of the proposed expert meeting was to examine thoroughly the proposition that social cognition is much more than a mere derivative of non-social cognition. An emphasis of the "social" in social cognition may enrich our discipline's efforts to account for human thought, feeling, motivation, and behavior.

Each speaker presented his or her most recent line of research in the area of social cognition. As a result, the presented research was very diverse. But each speaker sought to link their results to the meeting's general proposal that social cognition is much more than a mere derivative of non-social cognition. Instead, human cognition is often forged by the evolutionary pressure to master humans' social reality. There was consensus among the speakers that this general proposal was (at least implicitly) supported by all presented research. The expert meeting made the experts aware of the need to be more explicit about this additional merit of their research in their future writings. Thus, the experts agreed that the expert meeting provided an important impetus for understanding their research as evidence for the uniquely social foundations of social cognition.
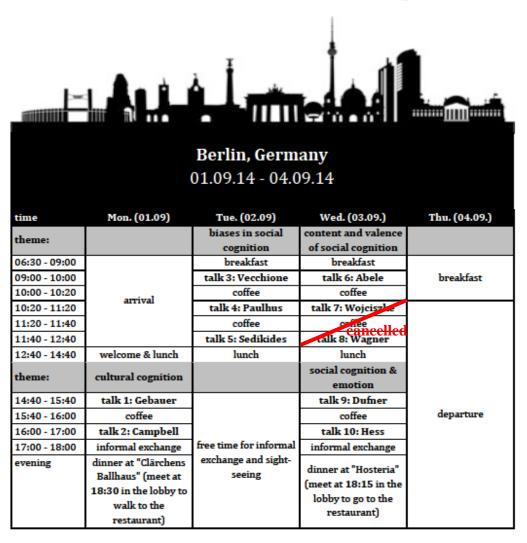
4)   **Annexes 4a) and 4b): Programme of the meeting and full list of speakers and participants**

Annex 4a: Programme of the meeting

ESCON
European Social Cognition Network

EUROPEAN **S**CIENCE **F**OUNDATION

ESCON Expert Meeting

On the Social Foundations of Social Cognition

Berlin, Germany
01.09.14 - 04.09.14

time	Mon. (01.09)	Tue. (02.09)	Wed. (03.09.)	Thu. (04.09.)
theme:		biases in social cognition	content and valence of social cognition	
06:30 - 09:00		breakfast	breakfast	breakfast
09:00 - 10:00		talk 3: Vecchione	talk 6: Abele	
10:00 - 10:20	arrival	coffee	coffee	
10:20 - 11:20		talk 4: Paulhus	talk 7: Wojciszke	
11:20 - 11:40		coffee	coffee	
11:40 - 12:40		talk 5: Sedikides	talk 8: Wagner ~~cancelled~~	
12:40 - 14:40	welcome & lunch	lunch	lunch	
theme:	cultural cognition		social cognition & emotion	
14:40 - 15:40	talk 1: Gebauer		talk 9: Dufner	
15:40 - 16:00	coffee	free time for informal exchange and sight-seeing	coffee	departure
16:00 - 17:00	talk 2: Campbell		talk 10: Hess	
17:00 - 18:00	informal exchange		informal exchange	
evening	dinner at "Clärchens Ballhaus" (meet at 18:30 in the lobby to walk to the restaurant)		dinner at "Hosteria" (meet at 18:15 in the lobby to go to the restaurant)	

Annex 4b: Full list of speakers and participants

*Andrea E. Abele-Brehm (Universität Nürnberg-Erlangen)
*W. Keith Campbell (University of Georgia)
*Michael Dufner (Universität Leipzig)
*Jochen E. Gebauer (Universität Mannheim)
*Ursula Hess (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
Andreas D. Nehrlich (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
*Delroy L. Paulhus (University of British Columbia)
*Constantine Sedikides (University of Southampton)

Last minute cancellations, due to flight cancellations or illness:

*Jenny Wagner (Leibniz-Institut für die Pädagogik der Naturwissenschaften und Mathematik)
*Bogdan Wojciszke (University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Sopot)