

Evolution and the Social Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and Social Cognition

Edited by **Joseph P. Forgas, Martie G. Haselton, and William von Hippel**

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Evolutionary psychology (EP) has now been around for a good 20 years, a bit longer or a little shorter depending on your exact metric. In that time, it has spread outwards from a set of core classic areas of research to encompass a healthy range of topics. Despite this, EP has failed to engage successfully with much of what I’ll term ‘traditional psychology’, with a few notable exceptions. In particular, social and evolutionary psychology continue to lack much interaction. I have found this both disappointing and a bit of a challenge, as I try to work in the overlap between the two. Pondering how an evolutionary approach might be brought to bear on topics such as implicit and explicit attitudes, stereotyping, social categorization, goals, inferences, and attributions has occasionally preoccupied me. I have been particularly concerned with how the findings from social cognition might integrate with an evolutionary framework.

So it was with some delight that I stumbled across *Evolution and the Social Mind* in the “New Books” section of this *Bulletin*. Perhaps here was a tome that would lay the groundwork for a merging of the two fields. However, having now read through it, my delight has been muted. This is not to say that the quality of the work, drawn from the 9th Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology, is below par—it is certainly not. Furthermore, the range of contributors, to the extent I know their work, is top notch. Nonetheless, the contributions, with some exceptions, do not strongly advance an integration of EP and social cognition, contrary to what is implied by the subtitle. This is not to say that the reader will not encounter novel work, or that the exercise of reading this volume will not broaden one’s knowledge of an evolutionary understanding of social behavior; it’s just that, to invert a popular expression in the UK, it doesn’t do what it says on the tin—the product doesn’t quite deliver on it’s promise.

The volume consists of 18 chapters, the first an introductory chapter and the remaining 17 subdivided into four parts: I. Foundations, II. the evolutionary psychology of affect and cognition, III. the evolutionary psychology of mate selection, and IV. the evolutionary psychology of interpersonal processes. The three chapters in Part I cover Dunbar’s Social Brain hypothesis, the evolution of social inference processes, and an evolutionary perspective on cognitive disjunctions—situations where there is a non-linear relationship between two cognitive processes that both contribute to a task, such as visual attention to and encoding of a stimulus. Those familiar with Dunbar’s work on the social brain hypothesis will not glean much that is new here, though it’s a fine up-to-date summary of the topic and should be useful to those not familiar with EP in setting the appropriate evolutionary setting for the remaining chapters. (Unfortunately, one of the drawbacks of this volume is that authors don’t always build on what has come before. Instead, each chapter stands alone, which can be useful if you wish to dip, but gets repetitive when for the umpteenth time an author explains the basics of an evolutionary approach). The discussion by Gangestad and Thornhill of social inferences focuses on explaining the basics of a signaling system, with the standard issues such as origins of signals, functions, errors, and

deception. Again, this chapter will not be informative to an EP audience but could provide a new angle on social inference for others, though anyone versed in communication should not be surprised by anything here except, perhaps, the issue of honesty through costliness. Doug Kenrick et al.'s discourse on cognitive processing disjunctions provides a valuable lesson—not so much the fact that cognitive adaptations are finely tuned, but in highlighting how examining the proximate mechanisms thoroughly can uncover surprising aspects of a process. For example, individuals, when tested for recognition of previously viewed faces, overestimate the number of previously viewed threatening faces versus non-threatening faces, suggesting high attention to the threatening faces, even though they viewed those faces less than the non-threatening stimuli. There are lessons here for both sides of the EP/non-EP divide.

Part II consists of chapters on theories of emotions, social and moral emotions, the advantages of not being too happy, and on non-clinical depression. The first three chapters in this section, contributed by Phoebe Ellsworth, Ross Buck, and Joseph Forgas, are light on an integration of EP into their respective topics, while being detailed and informative in their own right. The fourth one, on depression, by Paul Badcock and Nicholas Allen, was more successful, perhaps because there is a longer history of evolutionary thinking on depression.

Part III contains work on heuristics for mate choice, mate preferences across the ovulatory cycle, inbreeding avoidance, and the role of the self in attaining and maintaining relationships. Peter Todd's application of heuristics to mate choice can probably serve as fertile ground for non-EP decision-making researchers looking to move into a classic EP topic. As an EPer, I found the actual application rather superficial, if tantalizing: Todd examines a narrow portion of mate choice behavior, but because much of the mate choice literature is more focused on cues than cognition for choice and competition, this adds another dimension to that literature. The chapter by Simpson and Lapaglia on mate choices across the ovulatory cycle was particularly lacking in a social cognitive angle and a missed opportunity to stress that humans operate contingently on ecological and life history factors. Lieberman's chapter on inbreeding avoidance does try to relate her work to issues in social cognition, such as categorization. Finally, the chapter by Fletcher and Overall on the self in intimate relationships probably goes farthest of the chapters in this section toward merging the EP and social cognition literatures.

Finally Part IV covers jealousy (Buunk et al.), leadership (van Vugt and Kurzban), prototypicality in faces (Halberstadt), strategies related to predictability in self-behavior (Ybarra et al.), ostracism (Spoor and Williams), and behavioral mechanisms of disease avoidance (Schaller and Duncan). I found the chapters in this section the most interesting, combining as they did both specific topics with either a good marrying of the two literatures, or at least the literature of one with the methodology of the other. An exception was the review by Spoor and Williams of ostracism, which seemed to tack on EP to the front and back end of the chapter, but this contribution was also one of the most interesting for me, given my research focus. So an important caveat applies to what I say on this volume: if any of the work relates to your own interests, then the relevant chapter(s) should serve as useful reading, just don't expect it to offer a platform to easily step from EP to social cognition, or vice versa.

I can only commend the editors and contributors for laying down a sound beginning for integrating EP and social cognition. A volume such as this advances us toward a fuller integration of evolutionary psychology with traditional psychology. The primary drawback with this

collection is that much of the work either remains firmly ensconced in EP, thus not relating the EP approach to the corresponding material in the social cognition literature, or else consists of a good review of findings on a topic as studied within social cognition, but with an evolutionary framing tacked on to the chapter rather than integrated.

A contributory factor that leads to this shortcoming is that the chapters almost all focus on some particular body of relevant empirical work, inevitably conducted through the particular lens of EP or social cognition, making it difficult to usefully reinterpret the work in a thorough fashion. In contrast, chapters that adopted a more review-only approach tended, if not all successfully, to meld more effectively the two fields in a way that provided a level of integration. I suppose what I was hoping for was an effort that takes the existing social cognition field and frames it with an evolutionary approach. Efforts such as this volume at least bring together practitioners of both disciplines under one roof and move us toward better integration.

Another drawback of the volume is that there are too many chapters related to mate choice. This is a topic that has been fruitful for an evolutionary approach, and is one of the areas where EP has revolutionized the field. Nonetheless, it is just one topic—albeit an important one—of many in the social arena, and yet 8 of the 18 chapters (17 if we exclude the introduction) focus on mate choice either totally or substantially. It reinforces an impression that the volume lacks sufficient breadth to meet either its supposed goal of marrying EP and social cognition, or of impressing those who are not yet within the evolutionary flock.

I do think that the book could prove a useful basis for an advanced or seminar course on evolution and social cognition, although it might need to be complemented with additional readings to compensate for the sufficient lack of integrative papers. I can't particularly recommend the volume for general reading to an EP reader because a well informed EP reader will be well-enough up on the areas covered that the return on cost and effort will be relatively low. Specific chapters that appeal may best be acquired from your library's copy.

Rick O'Gorman is a lecturer in psychology at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK, having received his PhD in evolutionary biology from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 2003. His research interests focus on social norms, cooperation, altruism, culture, multilevel selection, computer modeling, and figuring out why only some people like to read on the john.