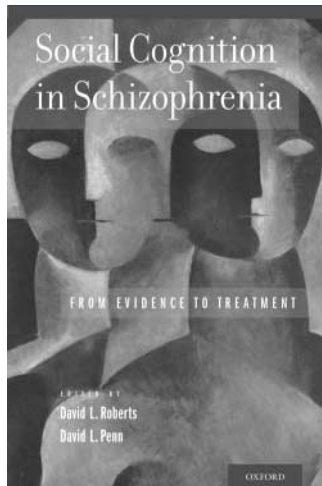


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Social Cognition  
in Schizophrenia:  
From Evidence  
to Treatment**

Edited by David L. Roberts  
& David L. Penn.  
Oxford University Press USA. 2013.  
£52.00 (hb). 452 pp.  
ISBN: 9780199777587

This is a weighty book, conceived from an expert consensus panel convened by the US National Institute of Mental Health, which summarises expert theory and developments in therapy across the field of social cognition as it relates to schizophrenia.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section examines the construct of social cognition through the respective lenses of social psychologists and schizophrenia researchers. While the former have focused on broad concepts, such as whether mechanisms behind mental representations are under automatic or higher control, schizophrenia research into social cognition has looked at areas of malfunction, such as biases in attribution, limitations in emotional expression and impairments in tasks which require a theory of mind.

The second section examines the relationship between social cognition deficits and functional outcome in schizophrenia, concluding that social cognition appears to act as a mediator between neurocognition and functioning, and postulating that social cognition may be the better target for remediation. There is then an exposition of the evidence for specific social cognitive deficits in schizophrenia, looking in turn at affective disturbance, theory of mind impairments and attribution bias with resultant paranoid thinking, and reporting evidence that social deficits emerge early on in the course of illness, and persist when acute psychotic symptoms remit.

The final section brings us into the clinical sphere, starting with 'proof of concept' studies which show that social cognitive deficits may be malleable, followed by a critique of the current evidence base for the various therapy programmes which have been developing over the past decade.

The concluding chapter emphasises the need for a framework to test going forwards. The authors discuss the idea of a 'dual process framework' of social cognition, with lower-order 'automatic processing' of social information taking place, which is modified by higher-order 'controlled processing' to yield an end product. Controlled processing will use a variety of 'heuristics', that is shortcuts, so that a person can process information more efficiently. In schizophrenia it is postulated that there is a combination of excessively salient and aberrant

automatic processing and impaired higher-order controlled processing; a person may therefore be primed to have paranoid thoughts by selectively responding to negative information and then lack the higher-order cognitive capacity to make rational sense of their experience.

The authors question whether, by focusing on specific deficits and training people with schizophrenia to learn normal social responses to fill gaps, we may in fact be missing the point. If people without psychosis exhibit heuristic biases, then a person with schizophrenia's attribution biases, albeit unusual, may not be any less accurate. Future treatment strategies might therefore benefit from moving away from training patients to 'get it right' and instead focus on helping them to tolerate uncertainty rather than jump to erroneous conclusions.

In summary, this book broadens our understanding of negative symptoms in schizophrenia, and the chapters on possible remediation strategies are welcome to bring the book into the clinical context. However, the duration and intensity of the therapy programmes described will challenge their applicability to clinical settings.

The idea of a dual processing framework is not unique to social cognition. Similar 'bottom-up v. top-down' processing theories are developing in other areas of neuroscience, for example in visual processing. The dual processing framework for social cognition appears to make intuitive sense and provides a base to generate new paradigms for experimental research. Whether current therapies should adapt their approaches (for example, changing the focus from getting it right to avoid getting it wrong and tolerating uncertainty) or whether novel approaches are needed remains to be seen.

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**Addiction Trajectories**

Edited by Eugene Raikhel  
& William Garriott.  
Duke University Press. 2013.  
US\$29.95 (pb). 360 pp.  
ISBN: 9780822353645

I found this a fascinating book but not always an easy read. The chapters deconstructed all the usual notions one holds about addiction trajectories and opened up a myriad of trajectories of temporal, cultural and spatial dimensions.

This is a distillation of a number of presentations delivered in 2009 at a workshop on the anthropologies of addictions. While