

The Evolutionary Roots of Human Social Interaction

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Humans are social creatures maintaining shared complex systems of communication, skills and knowledge. Human sociality appears to be unique throughout the animal kingdom in its complexity as well as its impact on the lifestyle and environment of the species. Indeed, human sociality forms such an exception amongst animal behaviours that it has often been used to define what it means to "be human". Underlying human social interactions is a conglomerate of cognitive abilities often summarized as social cognition. The main goal of this research project is the reconstruction of the evolutionary history of human social cognition by comparing the capacities of different non-human primate species and humans with different cultural backgrounds, using observational as well as experimental methods. More specifically, the abilities to reason about others' current and past visual access, desires and beliefs will be investigated in members of all ape genera including three diverse human cultural groups. By doing so, it will be possible to make assumptions about both the phylogenetic as well as the cultural basis of human social cognition.

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