Social Cognition

Understanding the Social World

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Social Cognition

- **social cognition:** studies how we actively gather, interpret, analyze, remember, and use information about the social world.

- rather than a simple, single system our cognition is marked by:
  - sequential computer model
  - serial processing
  - parallel processing

Social Cognition

- thinking: is it effortful or effortless?
  - *naïve scientist:* highly rational and logical information processors
  - *cognitive miser:* lazy thinking shaped by habits and emotions
- dual-process models integrates the two
  - **explicit judgments:** deliberate judgments
  - **implicit judgments:** quick and automatic
- *motivated tacticians:* flexible thinkers with multiple strategies available

Social Thinking

Our social thinking can be automatic or deliberate

- reflects the debate on nature of human behavior:
  - needs, desires, emotions, impulses *("hot")*
  - cool, calculated planning, rational analysis *("cold")*
- Is social cognition hot or cold?

Social Thinking

Hot Perspective

- People are moved to act due to needs, desires, and emotions (affect)
- Cool and planned behavior is secondary to heated action that fulfills desires

Cold Perspective

- People's actions are principally influenced by rational analysis of choices
- How people think will ultimately determine what they want and how they feel

Social Thinking

- "warm" perspective: dual process theories
- describe two basic ways of thinking about social stimuli involving:
  - more deliberate, effortful, reflective thinking. no action until consequences are evaluated.
  - automatic, effortless thinking. behavior impulsively / automatically activated by emotions, habits, drives
- parallel or serial?

Social inference

- Social cognition in the more "explicit" arena.
- However, the "myth" of rational decision making has been eliminated

Steps include:

1. Gathering information
2. Deciding what information to use
3. Integrating information into a judgment

Gathering information

- <u>prior expectations</u> provide structure and meaning to novel stimuli

- but may result in inaccuracy:
  - faulty expectations
  - bias collecting info
  - overrule consideration of info
  - over-scrutinize inconsistent info

Gathering information

- Biases occur when deciding which bits are collected from the available wealth of info

- Small sample: may result in a very biased picture

- Statistical information versus case history information

- Negative info attracts more attention, hence carries more weight

Integrating Information

- Seems "haphazard" rather than "rational"
- Computers outperform humans
- Judgments of covariation – how strongly two things are related
  - illusory correlation: belief that two things are related because they seem to go together
  - stereotypes, paired distincitveness
- Framing strongly influences judgments as well
  - e.g., gains versus risks

Emotion and Inference

- Moods influence our behavior, memory, judgments, decisions, reactions to feedback
- **mood congruent memory**
- especially positive mood

d e g d y i t n d c e f
e a g e d a l w m t l t
c m e c k n p g a a d s
r w j e n c r j e f e e
e o p l a i y a u r r n
p l d d e e c h y n l i
i s w r i n k l e d y l
t y p f j t e u g v p e

Emotion and Inference

- **Automatic evaluations** - occur very rapidly and is a fundamental process

- Influences tendency to approach or avoid

- Goals can be automatically activated as well

Emotion and Inference

Motivation and Inference:

- People often evaluate information in a self-serving manner

- Or in a manner that reflects what they would like to believe

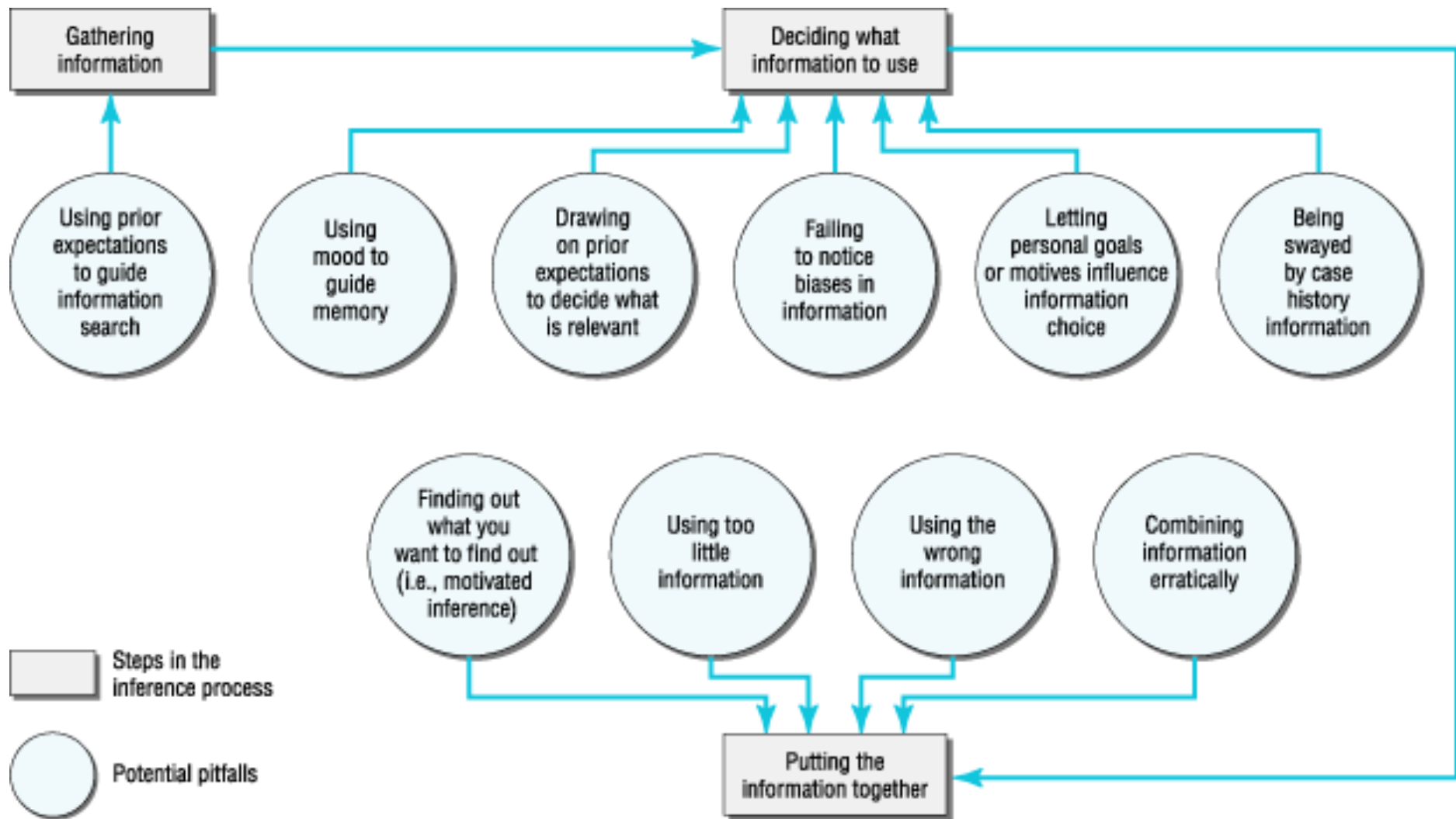- Involvement increases accuracy when decisions are easy

Emotion and Inference

- **thought suppression:** the attempt to prevent certain thoughts from entering consciousness
- important in self-regulation:
  - automatic monitoring process
  - controlled operating process
  - rebound effect (ironic reversal)
- can influence physical and mental health

Emotion and Inference

affective forecasting:

- belief that your reactions will be more intense and last longer than is actually the case

- don't realize the effect of other intervening events

Gathering information → Deciding what information to use → Putting the information together

Using prior expectations to guide information search

Using mood to guide memory

Drawing on prior expectations to decide what is relevant

Failing to notice biases in information

Letting personal goals or motives influence information choice

Being swayed by case history information

Finding out what you want to find out (i.e., motivated inference)

Using too little information

Using the wrong information

Combining information erratically

Steps in the inference process

Potential pitfalls

Social Cognition

- social inference - how do we organize and make sense of information?
- **categories:** mental group of objects, ideas, events sharing common properties
- **social categorization:** forming categories of people based on common attributes
- rely on readily available (salient) features
- age, sex, and race - primary categories

Schemas

- we also develop theories about our mental groups (categories)

⇨ *schemas*

- organized, structured set of cognitions about people, groups, events

- enrich our understanding of the world

- fast info processing & decision making

Schemas

- some are not well developed
- many are shaped by culture
  - gender schema (e.g., guy-like / gal-like)
- **scripts**: schemas about common events
  - dating, going to dentist, etc.
- **exemplars:** ideal examples of a schema
- **stereotypes**: schemas about members of a social group
- affect what we notice and later remember

Misremembering the past
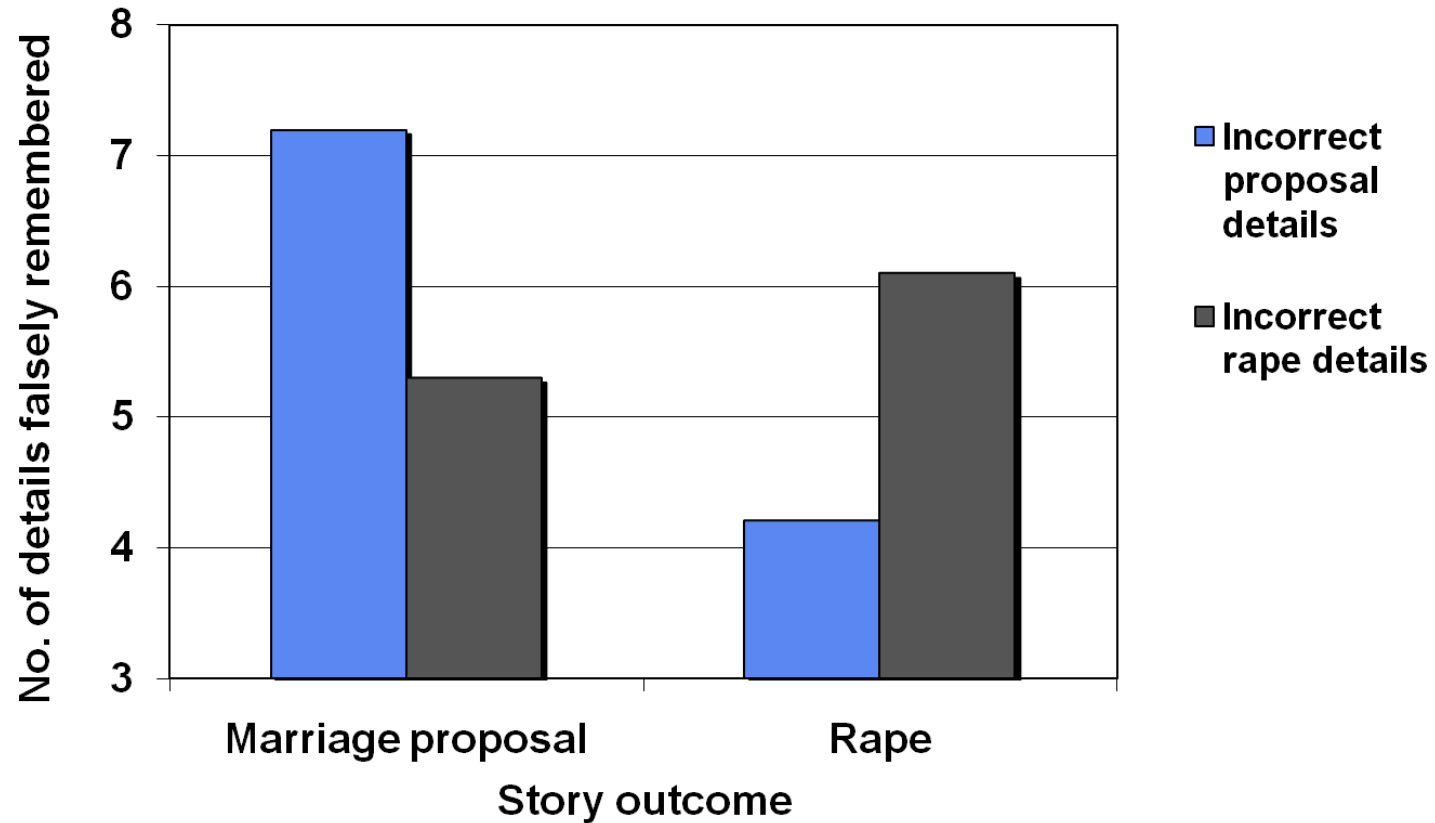
Schemas

- **priming**: recent exposure to certain stimuli / events increase accessibility of certain memories, categories, or schemas
  - e.g., frightened more easily after a scary movie?
- spontaneous and non-conscious
- situational cues -> activation -> perception
  - e.g., Donald
- also behave in consistent manners

Advantages of Schematic Processing

- Process huge information economically
- Aid recall
- Speed up processing
- Help automatic inference
- Add (fill in) missing information
- Add information
- Aid interpretation
- Provide expectations
- Contain affect (emotions)

Mental Shortcuts: Heuristics

- **heuristics**: time saving, mental shortcuts that aid us make social judgments
- low-intensity work
- save time, but not always correct
- select which schema to use

Heuristics

- **representativeness heuristic**
- judge category membership based on how closely they match "typical" or "average" member of that category
- **conjunction error:** several events that seem to go together will co-occur
- **base-rate fallacy**

Heuristics

availability heuristic:

- judge the frequency or probability based on how easy it comes to mind

anchoring and adjustment heuristic:

- bias towards the starting value (anchor) in quantitative judgments

Heuristics

simulation heuristic

- actively imagining (mentally simulating) past/ future events

- the ease with which a scenario comes to mind ->judge what is likely to happen

hindsight bias

- after an event occurs, we overestimate our tendency to have foreseen it

Heuristics

counterfactual thinking:

- evaluate events by imagining alternative versions of outcomes

- after negative/unexpected events

- how we might have prevented it

- feel better, achieve future success, sometimes not productive

Heuristic thinking = stupid thinking?

- use heuristics rather than careful analysis when
  - no time for systematic analysis,
  - overload of information,
  - not too important for us,
  - little other knowledge / information to use,
  - situation makes it available (priming),
  - in positive mood

Expectations and Action

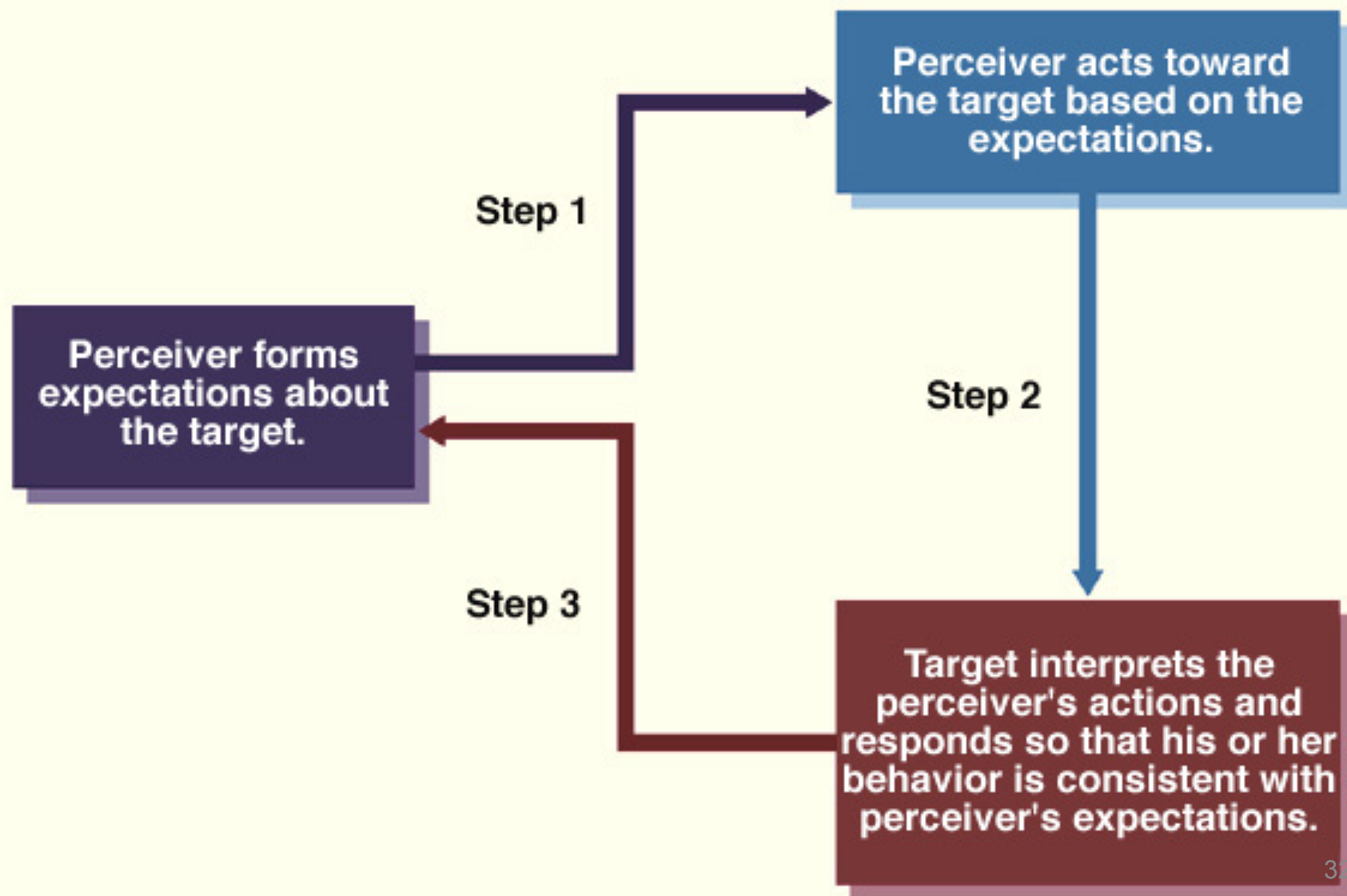**confirmation bias (confirmatory hypothesis testing)**

- seek info that supports our beliefs (hypotheses) and ignore disconfirming info

- e.g., introvert or extravert?

- inhibits problem solving if belief incorrect

Expectations and Action

self-fulfilling prophecy

- our expectations about a person / group leads to the fulfillment of them

- create reality based on our beliefs

- Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968): "potential bloomers" at elementary school

Development of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Perceiver forms expectations about the target.

Step 1

Perceiver acts toward the target based on the expectations.

Step 2

Step 3

Target interprets the perceiver's actions and responds so that his or her behavior is consistent with perceiver's expectations.

Expectations and Actions

just-world belief:

- world is a fair and equitable place, people get what they deserve

- defensive reaction to twists of fate

- illusion of more control over life

- greater life satisfaction

- can lead to unfortunate social judgments (defensive attributions)

Schemas and Action

learned helplessness:

- an unpleasant situation perceived as inescapable

- angry, anxious -> helpless, depressed