SITAR Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 1

October 2002

President's Message
Michael Gurtman

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The summer is now over, and most of us have begun our Fall terms. So, it is natural for us to look ahead to the coming year, and both anticipate and plan our activities. Over the summer, Krista Trobst, Lindsay Ayearst, and Terence Tracey were busy researching potential sites for our next meeting. Based on the information they provided, the Executive Counsel has decided that Vancouver will be the site of our next meeting in May 2003. Although it is hard to imagine, we've been promised that the setting will surpass even that of last year's successful venue in Toronto. So, please plan to attend SITAR 2003, and join us in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Election Results

Krista Trobst was elected Vice President in SITAR's second membership-wide ballot. Her term began October 1, 2002. Congratulations Krista!

Debbie Moskowtiz was appointed Member-at-Large by the Executive Council to fill the vacancy left by Krista.

Members also voted on proposed changes in the By Laws. These changes were approved unanimously. Copies of the amended By Laws may be obtained from the Executive Officer, Steve Strack.

Of course, we have months to go until that time, and much to do in order to strengthen and build our organization. In the last newsletter, I noted that our Toronto meeting was our fifth, and, by that standard, a milestone event signaling a transition point in our existence. It is therefore time to seriously consider the steps we wish to take in order to ensure our vitality and development in this new phase.

As president, I have at least three goals that I would like to achieve in the next year. First, and continuing Chris Wagner's initiative, I would like to in-

crease and diversify our membership. Currently, we have 66 members; we could easily double our size (or at least cross the magic line of 100) through vigorous recruitment efforts. Are any of you interested in joining our recruitment committee and fostering that goal? Second, I would also like to increase opportunities for research collaboration and information outreach. Further development of our web site would seem an important vehicle for achieving these aims. For example, having a shared data repository, accessible to members, may help collaboration as well as the professional development of our younger members. Are any of you interested in working on this? Also, the web is a perfect place from which to share our expertise and knowledge about the state of interpersonal

All Aboard for Vancouver in 2003

Krista Trobst, Lindsay Ayearst, and Lynn Alden are working together on plans for our 2003 Annual Meeting, which will be held Friday and Saturday, May 16-17, 2003, at the stylish Listel Hotel in beautiful Vancouver, BC, Canada. Close to Stanley Park , the Listel is located right in the middle of the restaurant-bar area of Vancouver. Rooms are equipped with computer hook-ups, hairdry-

ers, TVs, mini-bars, etc. You can get a tour of the hotel and information by logging onto www.listel-vancouver. com,

At press time, an advance room rate of $CAN145/ $US93 (single or double) was being negotiated. Final details about the hotel, meeting,, and a Call for Proposals will be mailed in February.

Communing With Social Comparison
by Kenneth D. Locke

Let me start with a confession: Although my research often looks like social psychology, I have never actually taken a course in social psychology. My lack of background in this field has allowed me to make some foolish pronouncements at times, but at others times I think it has allowed me to approach some classic social psychological phenomena from a new angle.

I first encountered "social comparison theory" while trying to understand the results of a study conducted in collaboration with Len Horowitz (Locke & Horowitz, 1990). We had pairs of students take turns making self-disclosures for 30 minutes. In some pairs both members were relatively happy, in other pairs they were both relatively sad, and in others one was relatively happy and the other was relatively sad. The students rated their satisfaction with the conversation after each turn. At the beginning of the conversation people generally felt somewhat awkward. But over time satisfaction increased in the dyads in which the members shared a similar mood (both relatively happy or both relatively sad). Mismatched partners remained dissatisfied and also rated each other lower than did the matched partners on the affiliation dimension of the Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS).

In searching for literature that could help explain these findings, I encountered a number of studies suggesting that people who are feeling bad sometimes feel better after learning that someone else is feeling even worse—a process called downward social comparison (for a review, see Gibbons & Gerrard, 1991). So, could it be that our sad participants enjoyed exchanging information with sad partners because such partners provided downward comparison opportunities? I doubted it. For one thing, downward comparison, like any status game, was a zero sum game. If the partners were being at all objective, to the extent that one of them was superior in a particular domain, the other would be inferior; yet, the partners' satisfaction

ratings were positively correlated. Moreover, downward comparison could not explain why matched partners described each other as kind and tender on the IAS. If social comparisons were contributing to their warmth and satisfaction, then social comparisons had to be a source of solidarity as well as a source of status.

Adding Another Dimension to the Experience

> To show that social comparison involves both status and solidarity, we conducted a series of naturalistic diary studies

Comparison direction traditionally has referred only to whether the comparison target is perceived as standing above the self (an upward comparison) or below the self (a downward comparison). This implies that social comparison can only go in two directions, and so exists along a single dimension—a vertical dimension, a dimension of status. But those are not the only directions a comparison can take. People can notice that they share something in common with another person (a connective comparison) or that they differ from another person without being better or worse (a contrastive comparison). Connective and contrastive comparisons define a second dimension of comparison—a horizontal dimension, a dimension of solidarity.

Interestingly, much of the initial research on social comparison did emphasize the importance of solidarity, and not coincidentally focused on the comparison of attitudes and feelings between real persons (Schachter, 1959). But after the early 1960s, social comparison research largely ignored the dimension of solidarity, and, again not coincidentally, focused primarily on how people rank themselves on objective characteristics (like test scores) in comparison to strangers, bogus others, or general norms.

To show that social comparison involves both status and solidarity, we conducted a series of naturalistic diary studies (Locke & Nekich, 2000; Locke, in press). Each time participants noticed themselves making a social comparison

they recorded features of the comparison (such as the target, the direction, and the feelings evoked) on a Social Comparison Record. A total of 527 participants recorded 6,239 spontaneous comparisons. The most relevant findings are summarized below.

Affective Consequences of Social Comparisons

When examining the affective consequences of social comparisons, previous research has typically focused either on overall affective valence or on feelings specifically relevant to upward and downward comparisons, such as feeling envious or lucky. However, to the extent that social comparisons are interpersonal acts, we expected them to have consequences for communal feelings (such as feeling connected and intimate) as well as agentic feelings (such as feeling proud and confident). And this is what we found.

Downward comparisons made people feel better than upward comparisons, and this difference was much greater for agentic feelings than for communal feelings. Connective comparisons made people feel better than contrastive comparisons, and this difference was greater for communal feelings than for agentic feelings. Connective comparisons did sometimes evoke agentic feelings, but only to the extent that the shared characteristic was desirable. If misery loves company, it is because such company provides solidarity, not status. What enhances confidence is perceiving oneself to be not just among people, but among the best.
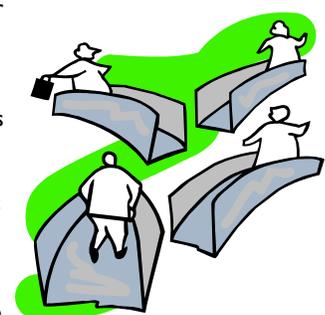
Individual Differences in Comparison Experiences

While downward and connective comparisons generally appear to evoke

Locke (cont.)

more positive affect than upward and contrastive comparisons, there may be individual differences in the magnitudes of these effects. Previous research assumed that people used comparisons mainly to evaluative or enhance self-worth, and so only tested whether traits related to self-worth (such as self-esteem and depression) moderated the affective consequences of comparison direction (for a review, see Wood & Lockwood, 1999). In contrast, our research assumed that people were also concerned with the interpersonal implications of comparisons, and so tested whether interpersonal values also moderated the affective consequences of comparison direction.

The values measure was the *Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values* (Locke, 2000), which asks people to rate the importance of experiencing interpersonal stances associated with each octant of the interpersonal circle. As expected, we found that horizontal comparisons had a greater impact on people who placed greater importance on experiencing interpersonal communion. In contrast, agentic values did not magnify the effects of vertical comparisons, and in fact dampened the impact of upward comparisons on feelings of insecurity and unhappiness. Perhaps people who value agency are less bothered by upward comparisons because they convince themselves that they are or can be in the same class as the upward comparison targets, or that the ways in which they are inferior are less important than the ways in which they excel.

Effects of Interpersonal Context

Social comparison research has typically examined comparisons with acquaintances or strangers. Sometimes the *only* information known about the target is their standing with respect to the characteristic being compared. However, we found that in everyday life people are more likely to compare with someone with whom they have a close, ongoing relationship (such as a friend, sibling, or romantic partner) than with a stranger. Moreover, comparisons with close others were more likely to be connective comparisons and evoke communal feelings than were comparisons with strangers or acquaintances.

Social comparison research has also typically examined comparisons in the absence of any interpersonal interaction. However, we found that in everyday life people are more likely to make comparisons while interacting with the other person than in the absence of interaction. Moreover, when the comparisons were in the context of an interpersonal interaction, people were less concerned with who was better or worse, were less likely to make vertical comparisons and more likely to make connective comparisons, and were more likely to feel connected and confident. Of course it does sometimes happen that people feel connected and reassured simply by noticing or thinking about another person. However, our results suggest that it is more typical for comparisons made in the absence of interaction to involve mulling over how one is different from and worse off than others.

Conclusions

Social comparison research has focused on how comparisons influence judgments—typically self-evaluations—that transcend the relationship with the comparison target. However, whatever implications a social comparison ends up having, it starts as information about

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status and solidarity in relation to particular individuals. Moreover, our status and solidarity relative to others, especially others with whom we have ongoing relationships, are not just metrics for self-assessment but also intrinsically important values. Indeed, the implications for status and solidarity are often what makes us want to know our strengths and weaknesses and similarities and differences in the first place. In short, social comparisons are interpersonal acts, and play a pervasive and important role in our everyday interpersonal experiences.

For further information about this research, contact Ken Locke: klocke@uidaho.edu

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President's Message (cont.)

psychology with the rest of the world. Third, we need to continue our efforts toward defining ourselves and identifying our special niche within psychology. In a recently-published chapter entitled *Interpersonal Foundations for an Integrative Theory of Personality*, our colleagues Aaron Pincus and Emily Ansell confronted the basic issue of what defines an interpersonal situation, and, indirectly, an interpersonalist. The answer is not as simple as would appear, and indeed the line between interpersonal and other traditionally-defined domains of research and inquiry seems increasingly blurred. I highly recommend their chapter as a starting point for our journey of self-examination.

In closing, this is an exciting time to be a member of SITAR. I look forward to working as president on these and other goals. Let's continue to grow and thrive as an organization.

SITAR: Mission, Aims, and Activities

The Society is an international, multidisciplinary, scientific association devoted to interpersonal theory and research. By encouraging systematic theory and empirical research, it seeks to clarify the processes and mechanisms of interpersonal interactions that explain interpersonal and intrapersonal phenomena of normal and abnormal psychology.

The goals of the Society are (1) to encourage the development of this research, (2) to foster the communication, understanding, and application of research findings, and (3) to enhance the scientific and social value of this research.

The activities of the Society include: (1) regular meetings for the communication of current research ideas, methods, and findings; (2) discussion of work in progress; (3) maintenance of an inventory of data and data-gathering resources available for use by members of the Society; and (4) facilitation of collaborative research.

WANTED: NEWSLETTER EDITOR

SITAR's Executive Council is seeking an individual to edit its Newsletter. The Editor will work with the Newsletter Subcommittee in developing articles for the thrice-yearly publication (February, June, October), editing submitted material, and composing/typesetting each issue. The Newsletter is currently composed using Microsoft Publisher, but the Editor may choose other resources, as appropriate. No prior editing experience is required. We need an energetic and motivated individual with excellent computer and word-processing skills. The Editor will have a good eye for lay-out and be compulsive enough to accurately proof-read material set in small type like this.

The Newsletter Subcommittee will assist the Editor in all phases of production. Printing and mailing is currently handled by the Executive Officer. For further information or to apply, contact Steve Strack or Aaron Pincus.

More Pix From Toronto
May 18-19, 2002

From left: Michael Gurtman, Debbiesiu Lee, Christy Hofsess, and Chris Wagner

From left: Lynne Henderson makes a point with Ken Locke and Maryanne Fisher.

Right: Future SITAR member catches some "z"s while mother Myriam Mongrain attends the conference.

From left: Karl Hennig with Anthony Ruocco and Giovanni Foti.

In Press and Recently Published Work by SITAR Members

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