

**Society for
Interpersonal
Theory and
Research**

SITAR Newsletter

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President's Message Michael Gurtman

To start, let me wish you all a Happy New Year. I hope that you are beginning this new year of 2003—and with it, most likely, a new semester or quarter—with an excited sense of the possibilities that lie ahead. It is a time to formulate your plans and take the first steps toward their realization. Not coincidentally, included with this issue is our annual Call for Papers. If you have not done so already, it is time to consider your contribution to our upcoming program in Vancouver.

There are many reasons to look forward to and plan for our next meeting in Vancouver. Let me enumerate:

First of all, our annual meeting provides an important opportunity—both intellectual and (yes) interpersonal—for us to share our signature research

and ideas. Indeed, if you are like me, no other professional organization of which you are (or could be) a member is as well-suited to help in that endeavor.

Second, the annual meeting helps us to stay connected with colleagues who have a unique perspective on what we do. The fields of clinical, personality, and social psychology are vast, and our annual meeting provides a unique gathering of like minds; in a sense, a home for our particular orientation to and brand of psychology.

Third, the annual meeting is also just plain fun. Like most



organizations, we have an evolved culture—ours is one of conviviality, friendliness, and acceptance (or, what some of us might call, positive communality). The informal atmosphere of our meetings is a cardinal feature of our group. The interpersonal attitude, both scientific and personal, prevails—be it at the dinner, the happy hour poster session, the lunches, or the numerous other contexts for interaction and conversation.

Finally, the meeting also provides another critical function, which I hope will become increasingly important as we continue to grow and evolve. That is, we have the opportunity through our organization to help chart the future of interpersonal psychology. Of course, we cannot dictate to others or assume leadership.

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Make Your Plans Now for SITAR's 6th Annual Meeting in Beautiful Vancouver, BC, Canada

SITAR's 6th Annual Meeting 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. Committed to art, elegance, and comfort, rooms at the Listel are equipped with

computer hook-ups, hairdryers, TVs, mini-bars, etc. See the enclosed brochure and the hotel's web site for more details: www.listel-vancouver.com.

Our hosts, Krista Trobst, Lindsay Ayearst, and Lynn Alden arranged for a room rate of just CAN\$130 per night

(approx. US\$90), single or double occupancy, that is good for two nights before and after the meeting. But hurry, you only have until April 18 to lock in this special rate.

Our Friday night dinner will be served at O'Doul's Restaurant, which is located at the hotel.

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Social Fitness: Facilitating Self-expression in the Socially Inhibited by Lynne Henderson

In the last newsletter Ken Locke (2002) referred to himself as a social psychologist, despite his training as a personologist and his lack of coursework in social psychology. His assertion struck a resonant chord for me because I also am interested in the situational and societal variables involved in interpersonal interaction and how they influence agentic or communal behavior. As a clinician, particularly, I want to know what promotes adaptive self-expression and interpersonal connection. These issues appear to be on the border between personality psychology and social psychology, and are at the heart of the Social Fitness Model I am working to elaborate.

Social Fitness is intended as an evolutionary metaphor referring to adequate responses to survival problems in the natural environment, and to the functional nature of behavior, cognition and emotion (Plutchik, 1997). Social Fitness therefore addresses both the need for emotional connection and the importance of agentic responses in coping with one's environment and life circumstances (Horowitz, Dryer, & Krasnoperova, 1997). Like physical fitness, Social Fitness involves frequent social exercise, and there are many situations in which to practice. Just as we workout and participate in sports to stay physically fit, we stay socially fit by being associated with groups and communities, meeting new people, cultivating friendships, maintaining close relationships, and developing intimacy with a partner (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001). This description applies primarily to emotional connection or the communion dimension of the circumplex. The other dimension, of course, is agency. In Social Fitness training, individuals are empowered not only with the knowledge that they can take charge of their own behavior and have a choice in how they approach and deal with interpersonal situations, but with the realization that for any given social situation there are an infinite number of potential behav-

ioral responses that can be considered appropriate, or adaptive.

Changing the Focus of Shyness Research: When They Show What They Know

Much of the research on shyness has focused on personality traits, genetic predispositions, and the treatment methods necessary to change people's thoughts, feelings, behavior, and arousal levels. However, the power of the situation to promote or inhibit particular adaptive interaction patterns has not been prominent in these studies. The impact of situational context on shyness seems to me to be of particular importance, largely due to the broad variability in adaptive behavior. Vitkus & Horowitz's (1987) study of the poor social performance of lonely people struck me as relevant to the concept of Social Fitness, because when given a specific role to play, lonely individuals significantly improved their performance in social situations. As a clinician observing generalized social phobics (67% APD) in small groups over a period of time, I have been impressed by the degree of social skill they demon-

strate when they are not self-conscious or threatened by evaluation. Like the lonely subjects in the above study, when they are part of someone else's "exposure" or role-play, they are given a constructive role to play and considerable

social skill is revealed.

When They Tell and When They Listen

Chronically shy people in group treatment disclose a great deal about themselves and are willing to reveal considerable vulnerability in important interpersonal interactions, such as negotiation and conflict resolution (Henderson, 1992). I have also been struck by shy group members' consideration for each other, and their empathy, or perspective-taking skill when someone is struggling, is late for a group meeting, or fails to do their homework. At first I saw this as evidence of a lack of self-assertion toward the recalcitrant group member, but over time recognized a

different quality in many of their responses, when they had nothing in particular to lose or gain in relation to the struggling person's behavior. The quality was empathy, arguably one of the most important skills in interpersonal interaction, particularly in a diverse society whose survival may depend on the ability to understand others culturally different from oneself. They appeared to be motivated more by caring needs and values than a lack of initiative. Was the group process filling a need for acceptance in shy clients, so that members felt free to be themselves? Were people who experienced shyness particularly aware of the importance of empathy and therefore strived to be good listeners for others? Was the positive side of their sensitivity to evaluation their capacity to adopt the perspective of others?



So the question became: what are the conditions we can create to generate sufficient emotional support to facilitate self-expression and interpersonal connection, while facilitating the sophisticated empathetic tendencies of the participants? Interpersonal theories of emotions, motives and values in social interaction seemed the logical place to look for answers.

Creating Conditions

My recent study with Len Horowitz, Deborah Tatar and Kirsty Bortnik examined the effects of shy and non-shy listeners preoccupied by evaluation or "just being themselves" on speakers who were telling a story about an experience in which they felt vulnerable. We expected that the preoccupation engendered by the threat of evaluation would distract shy listeners, and that speakers would feel less comfortable with them and evaluate them less positively than the non-shy listeners.

We also questioned, based on Jonathan Cheek's (1986) finding that verbal crea-

"Social Fitness is intended as an evolutionary metaphor referring to adequate responses to survival problems in the natural environment, and to the functional nature of behavior, cognition and emotion (Plutchik, 1997)."

Henderson (cont.)

tivity was equal in shy and non-shy students when shy students were not under evaluative threat, and on my clinical observation that shy clients were socially skilled and empathic when not under evaluative threat, whether shy students would be better listeners than the non-shy if they didn't feel threatened. Therefore, when we designed the "just listening" condition we attempted to satisfy the communal need for acceptance by telling participants to "just be themselves."

So far, our results point in the predicted direction, that is, shy students are better listeners than non-shy listeners when they are "just being themselves" in a naturalistic condition that satisfies communal needs. In contrast, non-shy listeners are evaluated more positively than shy listeners when they are being evaluated, and less well when they are behaving naturally.

Considering Values and Context

Recent research using a new shyness questionnaire I developed with Philip Zimbardo (2000, the ShyQ., www.shyness.com) reveals that, in college students, higher scores on the ShyQ are associated with communal values, such as putting others' needs first, avoiding anger, and feeling connected with others, in addition to the expected association with avoiding social humiliation (Locke, 2000). Scores are not related to valuing forcefulness, having the upper hand, or seeking revenge. A large sample of visitors to the shyness.com web site also scored higher on interdependent self-conceptualizations than independent self-conceptualizations, and shy college students scored lower on independent self-conceptualizations than non-shy college students (Bortnik et al., 2002; Kato & Markus, 1993), suggesting a greater concern with interpersonal harmony and caring for others, and less emphasis on individualistic values such as affirming the self as unique and special.

Does Talking Equal Thinking?

Incidentally, perhaps the primary way to affirm the self as unique and special in Western culture is to talk a lot, and less talk time is associated with shyness

and with perceptions of lower intelligence, although shyness and talk time are uncorrelated with intelligence (Paulhus & Morgan, 1997). Notably, however, recent cross cultural research is challenging the Western assumption that talking is connected with superior thinking, increasingly demonstrating that cultural assumptions create reality, rather than simply revealing it (Kim, in press).

Conclusions

These results lead me to suspect that while the motives, values, and self-conceptualizations of shy individuals may not be reflected as much as those of the non-shy in mainstream cultural

"[S]hy students are better listeners than non-shy listeners when they are 'just being themselves' in a naturalistic condition that satisfies communal needs."

values and self-presentations in an individualistic society, they nonetheless serve adaptive purposes not only in evolution, but in ongoing relationships. Our initial findings, and those of others, suggest the usefulness of understanding shyness in relation to Social Fitness, and investigating how different cultures construe and facilitate adaptive social participation and sanction different ways of expressing communal and agentic goals. The study of distinct interpersonal groups shown in a sample of social phobics (Kachin, Newman, & Pincus, 2001) and suggested in a factor analysis of the IIP in our Shyness Clinic sample will also help differentiate subgroups, with different needs and values, as will further research on interpersonal pathoplasticity (Kasoff & Pincus, 2002). Much can be gained in understanding the consequences of these motivations for interpersonal relationships and for group life.

For further information about this research, contact Lynne Henderson: lynne@psych.stanford.edu

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President's Message (cont.)

But we have a collective investment in the interpersonal approach to theory and research. The work that we present at the meetings is often the first step in a process leading to wider dissemination of our research ideas through articles, books, and chapters. The meeting is therefore, in a sense, a crucible for determining what will happen next. Refined at the meeting, those products may (and, I hope, should) help inform others about what is state-of-the-art in our field.

For all those reasons, and other personal ones that may be of particular importance to you, I hope that you will join us in Vancouver. I'm looking forward to seeing you there.



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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.

Annual Meeting in Vancouver (cont.)

Executive Chef Ray Evans will be cooking up a storm. He has made the restaurant one of the top 10 eating spots in Vancouver!

For the first time ever, meeting registrants can bring their guests to dinner by pre-paying a "dinner only" option of US\$40 per guest. This includes all taxes and tips. Also for the first time, paid registrants and guests can specify a vegetarian meal for Friday dinner by indicating their preference on the registration form (included with this mailing).

The advance registration fee is just US\$150 for members, US\$175 for nonmembers, and US\$125 for students. As in past years, this fee includes admission to all paper and poster sessions, and all meals through Saturday afternoon.

Update on Jerry Wiggins from Krista Trobst



Jerry and Krista at SITAR's 5th annual meeting in Toronto, May 17, 2002.

Jerry S. Wiggins, Ph.D., a founding member of SITAR, suffered a massive stroke on September 27, 2002, from which he will not recover in any truly meaningful sense.

Jerry's theoretical and research contributions to the field of interpersonal behavior expanded significantly upon Harry Stack Sullivan's original theorizing, and Timothy Leary's early thinking and operationalization of an interpersonal circumplex framework. It is difficult to imagine an interpersonal world in which Jerry is not a part. Perhaps some of what each of us does is only possible because of his substantial efforts towards creating precise measurement procedures within this field of inquiry, and his dedication to keeping the interpersonal tradition alive.

Jerry was honored at the 2002 meeting of the Society for Personality Assessment with the *Bruno Klopfer Award* for outstanding achievement in personality assessment. Jerry's acceptance talk was highly personal and very entertaining; it culminated in what I was told was the first standing ovation in the Society's history. Jerry was so very delighted to have been honored in this way, and by this society. His talk will be published in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*.

Jerry's last book, *Paradigms of Personality Assessment*, is to be published this year by Guilford Press. His book discusses the five paradigms of personality assessment (i.e., psychodynamic, interpersonal, personological, multivariate, and empirical) with respect to their histories, assumptions, and methods. A "collaborative case study" is also presented within which one individual is assessed by leading proponents of each of the paradigms—"The Case of Madeline G." makes for fascinating reading for psychologists of all persuasions.

With respect to his current status, Jerry is severely incapacitated but remains, inter-

personally, "very Jerry." (Oh how he would love that!) After nearly four months in hospital he was recently moved to a nursing home where he is receiving excellent care. He continues to proudly wear the "Steigenplex" t-shirt displaying his "user-friendly" interpersonal circumplex (Steigenplex t-shirt requests should be directed to Steve Strack at snstrack@aol.com). Jerry also recognizes and welcomes all visitors. Regards and reminiscences of times spent with Jerry are particularly welcome and should be sent to ktrobst@aol.com, or to our home address: 4259 Bethesda Road, Stouffville, ON, CANADA L4A 7X5.



Jerry (middle) being 'squeezed' by colleagues following a *festschrift* in his honor at the 1998 APA Convention in San Francisco, CA.