

**Society for  
Interpersonal  
Theory and  
Research**

# SITAR Newsletter

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## President's Message Lynn Alden

The ballots are in, and our new Vice President is Debbie Moskowitz. Debbie will work with Michael Gurtman (Past-President), Krista Trobst (President-Elect), Steve Strack (Executive Officer), representatives Ken Locke and Terry Tracey, and I, to provide guidance for SITAR in the 2003-2004 year. I encourage other members, including students, who would like to become a more active part of SITAR, to contact me to discuss the role you might play in building our organization. In particular, we need a member-at-large to fill Debbie's vacated position. We also need a graduate student to represent the student perspective. If any of you students are willing to serve this role, please drop me an email.

More good news. Ken Locke has agreed to chair the mem-

bership committee and will be working to expand our numbers. SITAR consists of a small, stable group of interpersonal researchers. Although we enjoy the close collegial relationships inherent in a like-minded band of people, we also recognize the need for intellectual diversity. SITAR's over-arching goal is to draw together researchers from a broad range of traditions to advance the understanding of interpersonal processes. The interpersonal perspective is increasingly recognized as a theoretically rich conceptual framework within which to understand human behavior, and we want to include as many interpersonal viewpoints as possible in our organization. Let Ken know if you are willing to work with him on our new membership drive.

While we're on the topic of new members, I want to formally welcome our new members from the *Interpersonalita & Ricerca Societa di Psicoterapia*. Greetings to Laura Arduini, Paola Beffa Negrini, Luana Contiero, Tommaso Farma, Emilio Fava, Rita Erica Fioravanzo, Alessandro Cavelzani,



Silvia Giussani, Eugenio Bonfanti, Marinella Garotta, and Simona Calloni. We look forward to the opportunity to meet all of you in the future.

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## Meet SITAR's New Vice President

Debbie S. Moskowitz, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at McGill University in Montreal, QC, Canada. Her recent research efforts have focused on patterns of behavior and affect, and the relation between behavior and affect over time. An example of her work is presented in an article that begins on page 2.



Concerning her goals for SITAR, the new vice president wants to raise the profile of SITAR in the research community: "This could be accomplished by planning joint meetings with other organizations. In addition, we could organize edited volumes based on work presented at the annual meetings and also invite contributions from researchers who conduct work relevant to SITAR but who do not yet attend our meetings."

## Keep Your Sites on Toronto for 2004

A majority of those who responded to the recent mail survey chose Toronto as the venue for our 7th Annual Meeting, to be held in May, 2004. Krista Trobst and Lindsay Ayearst will be sending details about the meeting via the listserve as soon as they are available. A Call for Proposals will be mailed to members in February.

# Conceptualizing Variability in Interpersonal Behavior: Flux, Pulse, and Spin

by D. S. Moskowitz and David C. Zuroff

The language of personality description leans heavily on everyday language for encoding how people are similar to and different from one another. A limitation in developing a systematic language of description based on ordinary language is that dimensions to which humans are not sensitive do not become encoded in the language. People generate vocabulary that allows them to schematically represent consistent characteristics of persons while inconsistencies are ignored to simplify cognitive representations. Yet, variability in behavior exists; manifest behavior is not always consistent with traits. We present several types of variability in interpersonal behavior that represent stable and distinctive features of individuals.

## Fluctuation as an Individual Difference Variable

Theoreticians concerned with traits, affect, self-concept, social cognitions, and behavior (e.g., Eid & Diener, 1999; Kernis, Granneman & Barclay, 1989; Roberts & Nesselrode, 1986) have suggested that the extent of fluctuations within the individual on various dimensions constitute meaningful variables to characterize individuals. Our research examined intraindividual variability in interpersonal behaviors sampled from the domain of social behavior using the interpersonal circumplex model. Following Wiggins' (1979, 1991)

version of the circumplex, we use a model in which interpersonal behavior is organized around a circle characterized by the two orthogonal dimensions of agency and communion.

Three types of intrapersonal variability were examined: flux, pulse, and spin. *Flux* refers to variability about an individual's mean score on an interpersonal dimension. A standard deviation about the mean was used to operationalize flux. Four flux variables were calculated corresponding to the four

poles of the interpersonal circumplex: dominance, submissiveness, quarrelsomeness, and agreeableness.

Information from all four poles of the interpersonal circumplex were combined to create *pulse* and *spin* scores. The dimensions of agency and communion can be thought of as a Cartesian ( $x, y$ ) coordinate system defining the space of interpersonal behavior. Polar coordinates of angular displacement and extremity ( $r, \theta$ ) have also been used by circumplex researchers to define the space of interpersonal behavior. Figure 1 illustrates the relation between the two systems. Social behavior during an interaction is shown as a vector from the origin to the point in interpersonal space ( $x, y$ ) corresponding to the observed levels of agency and communion. Alternatively, the vector can be characterized in terms of its degree of rota-

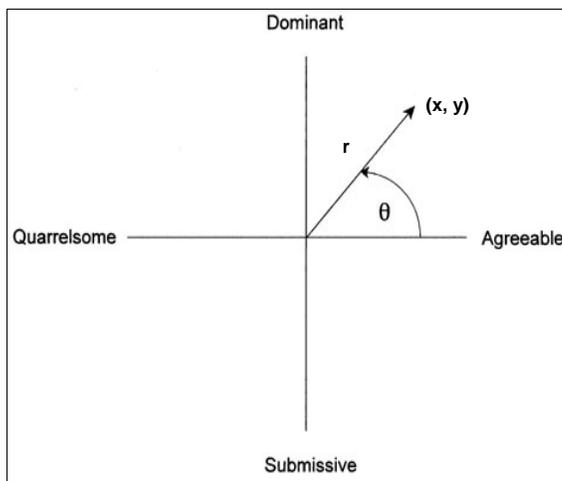


Figure 1. Representation of behavioral extremity (vector length,  $r$ ) and interpersonal style (angular rotation,  $\theta$ ).

tion (angular displacement,  $\theta$ ) from the horizontal axis and its length ( $r$ ). The  $\theta$  coordinate indicates the interpersonal style during an interaction. The  $r$  coordinate, vector length, indicates the overall extremity of behavior. The vector in Figure 1 represents interpersonal behavior of moderate extremity whose overall style falls in the dominant/agreeable quadrant.

*Spin* was defined as the variability (SD) of the angular coordinate about the

individual's mean value for  $\theta$  ( $\theta_m$ ). *Pulse* was defined as the variability (SD) of the extremity coordinate about the individual's mean value of  $r$  ( $r_m$ ). Figure 2 uses vectors from 3 social interactions to illustrate, in a simplified manner, patterns of behavior corresponding to low spin and low pulse (upper left panel), low spin and high pulse (upper right panel), high spin and low pulse (lower left panel), and high spin and high pulse (lower right panel). Variability in vector length (short, medium, and long) implies high pulse, while variability in angular displacement (behaviors falling in different quadrants of the circumplex) implies high spin.

## Methodology

We used an event-contingent recording methodology to assess behavior in the on-going lives of adults recruited from the community (for a description of the method, see Moskowitz, 1994). Individuals are provided with forms to report about their social behavior in significant social interactions. Participants typically provide us with six forms for 20 days which provides approximately 120 reports for each participant in a study.

## Some Findings

**Stability.** Our results indicated that pulse, flux, and spin are reliable dimensions of individual differences. Using coefficient alpha across weeks of the study, the stability of flux, pulse, and spin were found to be in the moderate to high range.

**Behavioral lability.** Prediction of these new variables by Neuroticism would imply that intraindividual variability was related to the dysregulation of interpersonal behavior. Flux in submissive behavior was related to Neuroticism, after controlling for mean levels of submissive behavior, indicating that fluctuations in submissive behavior were greater for individuals with higher scores on Neuroticism. Furthermore, neuroticism predicted greater pulse and spin. Large fluctuations in submissive behaviors, and in variability in kind and extremity of social behavior, ap-

pear to represent the absence of behavioral modulation and may be problematic for the individual.

It has been argued that individuals who have high scores on Neuroticism are sensitive to signals of punishment (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). Submissive and passive behaviors function to end, reduce and avoid interpersonal conflict and punishment. Neurotic individuals may be motivated to be passive and submissive to avoid punishment in their interpersonal environment. As soon as the perceived threat of punishment has dissipated, they may reduce their submissive behavior and perhaps try other behaviors, only to return to passive-submissive behavior when they again perceive possible punishment. Thus, it is possible that high Neuroticism individuals demonstrate flux on submissiveness which contributes to spin as neurotic individuals try other behaviors when not being submissive. In other words, the neurotic individual may retreat to submissive behavior when sensing interpersonal danger but may venture into less submissive behavior and other interpersonal realms when perceiving the interpersonal environment as safe. Consequently, neurotic individuals exhibit greater flux on the specific dimension of submissive behavior and also on dynamic movement around the interpersonal circle.

It may be interesting in further work to consider the potential impact on interaction partners of the neurotic individual's high level of spin. Is the neurotic individual perceived as erratic and unpredictable? Do others feel that they have to continually adjust their own behavior in response to the neurotic's shifting behavioral tactics? What may be the long term affective responses (e.g., anger, fatigue) to someone who is perceived as highly changeable?

*Behavioral flexibility.* We initially considered that flux, pulse, and spin were indicators of behavioral lability. However, we also considered the possibility that flux, pulse, and spin were signs of behavioral flexibility indicating adaptability to interpersonal circumstances. Correlations of the flux, pulse, and spin variables with Extraversion and Agreeableness would indicate that variability on these characteristics might represent behavioral flexibility that may contribute to subjective well-being. After accounting for mean levels of agreeable behavior, Extraversion predicted flux in agreeable behavior, suggesting that extraverts are flexible in their level of agreeableness. It has been suggested that extraverts are more sensitive to reward signals or positive stimuli in their environment (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). Engaging in agreeable behavior is associated with more pleasant affect (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998; Moskowitz &

Côté, 1995), and agreeable behavior by one person is frequently reciprocated by agreeable behavior from the person with whom that person is interacting (e.g., Kiesler, 1983). It may be that extraverts are particularly responsive to agreeable behavior from others, because agreeable behavior is associated with the reward of pleasant affect, leading to variability in their own level of agreeable behavior that closely depends on the agreeable behavior of others towards them. In essence, the extraverted person may seek the pleasant affect associated with being agreeable by being particularly responsive to the agreeable behaviors of others.

After controlling for mean level of quarrelsome behavior, trait Agreeableness was an inverse predictor of flux in quarrelsome behavior. Lower levels of trait Agreeableness predicted greater variability in quarrelsome behavior. Quarrelsome behavior in others is often reciprocated by quarrelsome behavior, and there is evidence that less agreeable individuals may be more responsive to displays of quarrelsome behaviors in others and may reciprocate even more strongly than agreeable people (cf., Foley, Fournier,

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### President's Message (cont.)

Ideally, our organizations will plan a joint meeting some time in the next several years. I can envision some interesting seminars that compare European and North American approaches to the study of interpersonal behavior.

Let me draw your attention to the next annual meeting of SITAR, which will be held in Toronto in May, 2004. We have exciting plans underway for the keynote speaker, so keep tuned for future announcements. It's time to begin planning your 2004 papers so that you can contribute to what promises to be an intellectually stimulating meeting.

Finally, if you have not yet paid your membership dues for the 2003-2004 year, please do so as soon as possible. If you have lost your membership form, just email Steve Strack, and he will help you.

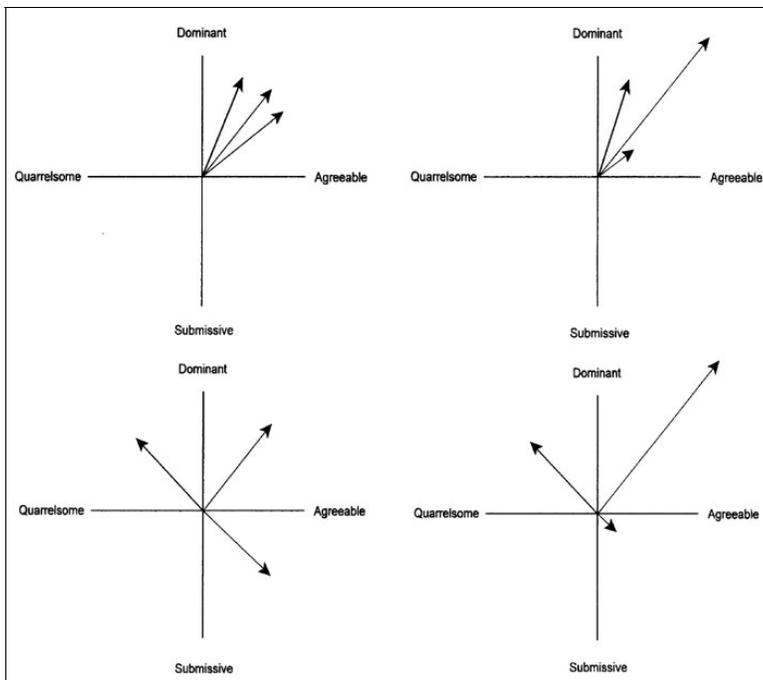


Figure 2. Representations of combinations of pulse and spin using vectors from 3 events: Low spin-low pulse (top left); low spin-high pulse (top right); high spin-low pulse (bottom left); high spin-high pulse (bottom right).

## Moskowitz & Zuroff (cont.)

Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2001; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001). This would be consistent with findings that aggressive individuals are more likely to respond with hostile actions to insults and threats (Dodge & Coie, 1987). If low agreeable individuals are particularly responsive to perceptions of quarrelsome behavior in others, then their quarrelsome behavior may be more variable, increasing and decreasing depending upon perceptions of quarrelsome behavior in the other.

It might be thought that agreeable individuals would be particularly responsive to agreeable behaviors in others. However, Foley and associates (2001) found that agreeable individuals are relatively insensitive to agreeable behavior in others; they remain agreeable even when others are not. Thus the flux that occurs in agreeable behavior is not predictable by five-factor trait Agreeableness. The relatively low responsivity of high trait agreeable individuals may also explain the lower levels of spin in their behavior. Less contingency between their behavior and the behavior of others may reduce spin.

In summary, responsivity to different aspects of the other's interpersonal behavior may be crucial to the explanation of why traits predict behavioral variability. Neurotic individuals may be responsive to the possibility of interpersonal punishment. Extraverted individuals may be responsive to perceived agreeable behavior in others. Low agreeable individuals may be particularly responsive to perceived quarrelsome behavior in others. While flux on agreeableness may be positively related to well-being through an association with Extraversion, the overall pattern of results suggest that high levels of pulse, spin, and flux on submissive and quarrelsome behavior are associated with traits (Neuroticism and low Agreeableness) suggesting poor subjective well-being and behavioral maladaptiveness.

Thus, interpersonal traits predict flux, pulse, and spin in behavior as well as mean levels of behavior. However, substantial proportions of variance remain to be explained in the intraindi-

vidual variability of social behaviors even after accounting for mean levels of behavior and broad personality traits; pulse, spin, and flux in behaviors are not identical with personality traits and should be considered discriminable from the five-factor interpersonal traits.

### Conclusion

Considerable previous work has demonstrated that temporal intraindividual variability in affects are a class of individual difference variables (Eid & Diener, 1999; Larsen, 1989; Penner et al., 1994). The present results suggest that temporal intraindividual variability in interpersonal behaviors is another class of individual difference variables that may be useful for characterizing the individual and that requires further investigation. Intraindividual variability can be characterized in terms of flux on specific dimensions, pulse in the overall extremity of interpersonal behaviors, and spin around the interpersonal circle. The study of fluctuations in interpersonal variables may have potential to illuminate unmodulated behavior and further illuminate the relation of behavior to situation. In order to understand the origins of stable individual differences in intraindividual variability in social behavior, it will be important to investigate determinants of responsiveness to the others' behavior as well as how characteristics of an individual's interaction partners produce consistency or variability in their social environments.

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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.

**WANTED: NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

With this issue the *SITAR Newsletter* begins its 4th year in circulation. The Executive Council is seeking an individual to serve as Newsletter editor. 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 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 (e.g., 9-10pts). For further information or to apply, contact Steve Strack or Aaron Pincus.

**Recent Work by SITAR Members (cont.)**

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*Editor's Notes:* This list was compiled in September, 2003. Requests for preprints and reprints should be directed to the first author, unless otherwise indicated.

**More Pictures From the 6th Annual Meeting in Vancouver, May 16-17, 2003**



From left, Michael Gurtman, Aaron Pincus, and Lindsay Ayearst check out a poster presented by Patricia Cardona.



Pavel Zolotsev of Stanford University ponders tables and graphs offered by Rotem Regev of York University.



William Piper (left) and Len Horowitz take refreshments during a break.



Lynne Henderson (left) and Colleen Allison discuss the morning presentations at lunch.