

**Society for  
Interpersonal  
Theory and  
Research**

# SITAR Newsletter

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**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

## Past President

Michael Gurtman, Ph.D.  
Psychology Department  
University of Wisconsin  
Kenosha, WI 53141  
[gurtman@uwp.edu](mailto:gurtman@uwp.edu)

## President

Lynn Alden, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
University of British Columbia  
2136 West Mall  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4  
CANADA  
[lalden@neuron3.psych.ubc.ca](mailto:lalden@neuron3.psych.ubc.ca)

## President-Elect

Krista Trobst, Ph.D.  
Psychology Department  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3  
CANADA  
[ktrobst@aol.com](mailto:ktrobst@aol.com)

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Debbie Moskowitz, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
McGill University  
1205 Dr. Penfield Avenue  
Montreal, QC H3A 1B1  
CANADA  
[dsm@ego.psych.mcgill.ca](mailto:dsm@ego.psych.mcgill.ca)

## Executive Officer

Stephen Strack, Ph.D.  
VA Ambulatory Care Center  
351 East Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
[sstrack@aol.com](mailto:sstrack@aol.com)

## Members-at-Large

Kenneth Locke, Ph.D.  
University of Idaho, Moscow  
[klocke@uidaho.edu](mailto:klocke@uidaho.edu)

Terence J.G. Tracey, Ph.D.  
Arizona State University  
[ttracey@asu.edu](mailto:ttracey@asu.edu)

## President's Message Lynn Alden

Greetings to all SITAR members who, at last count, reside in 8 North American and European countries. Let me begin by announcing that our 7th annual meeting will be held on May 21-22, 2004, at the Toronto Hilton Hotel. See the call for papers included with this newsletter. We are delighted to have Dr. Sidney Blatt as our Keynote speaker this year. Dr. Blatt is best known for his theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of how social developmental experiences shape character structure and thereby vulnerability to depression. His writings, which link social developmental experiences, personality styles, and depression subtypes, provide a rich theoretical framework that has stimulated a broad range of research, from

studies of family dynamics to adolescent social behavior to psychopathology. We look forward to hearing Sid's current views on these and other topics. This promises to be an exciting talk to kick off a stimulating meeting.

Those who have attended our conferences in past years know what a warm and inviting experience it can be. The environment is intimate and there are many opportunities to socialize and discuss topics of mutual interest.



One way to stimulate and encourage dialogue on the latest developments in interpersonal theory and research is for members to bring or send pre-prints, reprints, and books that can be placed on a display table at the meeting for attendees to peruse during breaks and our poster session. The display will allow us to keep up with each other's work, particularly papers in preparation or materials in outlets that are not readily accessible. Opinion pieces and early drafts are welcome, and may stimulate suggestions from other members. Give some thought to what your research group might contribute to this exchange. If you are unable to attend the meeting, send your material for display to me or Steve Strack no later than May 7, 2004.

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## Now is the Time to Make Your Reservations for SITAR's 7th Annual Meeting in Toronto, ON, Canada

Krista Trobst and Lindsay Ayearst of York University are our on-site hosts for this year's annual meeting, to be held May 21-22 at the beautiful Toronto Hilton Hotel, in the heart of downtown. Guestrooms are equipped with two telephone lines, voice mail, data port for modem connection with high-speed internet access, minibar, hairdryers, and all the amenities you require for a comfortable and relaxing experience.

The hotel has a pool, fitness room, whirlpool, and sauna. Our special conference room rate is CAN\$169/US\$134 (single or double occupancy). Reservations can be made by calling 1-800-447-2411 in Canada, or 1-800-445-8667 outside Canada. The hotel's direct telephone is 416-869-3456. Be sure to mention that you are attending the SITAR conference, and be sure to make your reservation no later than April 20, 2004.

For more information about the hotel, check out their web site, [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)

To save money, students are encouraged to "buddy up" to share rooms and costs. Anyone who is looking for a hotel mate may contact Lindsay Ayearst, SITAR's graduate student representative, who will keep a list and assist people in making connections. Her e-mail address is [lyearst@yorku.ca](mailto:lyearst@yorku.ca)

# Interpersonal Foundations of Psychopathology: An Overview by Leonard M. Horowitz

In my book *Interpersonal Foundations of Psychopathology* (American Psychological Association, 2004), I present a new interpersonal model for describing interpersonal interactions. The model highlights the motives behind behavior, and emphasizes the ambiguity of overt behavior when the motive behind the behavior is unclear. For example, the self-starvation of a person with anorexia nervosa may be driven by a communal desire (e.g., to achieve harmony within the family) or by an agentic desire (e.g., to display one's own self-control and will power to others). The book applies the model to different forms of psychopathology.

**The interpersonal motive.** To begin with, the model assumes that interpersonal behaviors are motivated. Motivational constructs, of course, vary in their breadth. A desire for intimacy is very broad, whereas a desire to spend time with a romantic partner is narrower, and a desire to date the woman next door is extremely narrow. Usually the term motive is used to denote a broad motivational construct and the term goal to denote a narrow construct. Following other writers, I have assumed that a motive for intimacy subsumes narrower motivational constructs, and they, in turn, subsume still narrower constructs, forming a hierarchy of motivational constructs. Two very broad constructs stand at the top of the hierarchy, namely, communion and agency. Communal motives emphasize relationships and connections with others, whereas agentic motives emphasize the self—being autonomous, influencing others. Communion and agency reflect two tasks in life that every person encounters from childhood on, namely, (a) connecting with other people to form a larger protective community and (b) achieving a reasonably stable and realistic sense of self.

When Person A does something to Person B, we assume that A wants something from B. By emphasizing A's

motives, we acknowledge that B (for B's own reasons) may not provide the reaction that A desires, thereby frustrating A's motive. The model also assumes that a frustrated motive leads to negative affect (e.g., anger, sadness, or anxiety).

**Interpersonal complement.** Interpersonal behaviors may be organized in two dimensions that correspond to the two broad classes of motives. Communion ranges from "disconnected/indifferent behavior" to "connected/close behavior." Agency ranges from "controlling/influencing behavior" to "yielding/deferential behavior."

According to the model, when Person A dominates Person B, A wants B to yield. When A makes a bid for closeness, A wants B to reciprocate closeness. Like most interpersonal models, we assume that an interpersonal behavior and its complement are similar with respect to communion and reciprocal with respect to agency.

In our view, disconnectedness invites disconnectedness, but hostile behavior does not invite hostile behavior. Hostile behavior, according to our model, reflects anger that arises from the frustration of an important motive. A person who wants to be left alone might well become irritated or angry if a partner kept offering love or intimacy. In other words, Person A might experience (and perhaps display) anger or hostility, no matter whether B frustrated A's desire for closeness, solitude, control, or deference. Thus, the assumption of earlier models—that hostile behavior leads to hostile behavior—would seem to hold only when both partners frustrate each other's motives.

Sometimes an interpersonal behavior is ambiguous because the motive behind it is unclear. For example, a wife might say

to her husband, "Let's straighten up before we go out." Her goal may be primarily a desire for closeness through teamwork (communal), or it may be primarily a desire to influence her husband's behavior (agentic). As a result, two people may have different perceptions of the same interaction, and ambiguities may give rise to miscommunications.

The book uses the model to interpret relevant literature on attachment and on the self. It considers, for example, how people perform "interpersonal tests" to confirm (or disconfirm) desirable (or undesirable) hypotheses about the self. Particular motives become intensified as a way of protecting the self from anxieties and sensitivities that have been acquired through earlier interpersonal interactions.

**Personality disorders.** Much of the book applies the model to psychopathology. It shows, for example, that most personality disorders revolve around a characteristic (and chronically frustrated) interpersonal motive. That frustrated motive leads to a characteristic set of interpersonal problems associated with the corresponding personality disorder. The defining criteria of most personality disorders fall into one of four categories in describing: (a) the salient interpersonal motive associated with the disorder; (b) strategies that the person uses to satisfy that motive; (c) negative affect that results when the motive is frustrated; and (d) characteristic ways in which the person tries to reduce negative affect. Salient interpersonal motives often highlight an intense need to attain some desired state (e.g., attention or admiration from others) or to avoid some aversive state—e.g., abandonment, humiliation, criticism, rejection. As an extreme example, consider the paranoid personality disorder. To protect the self from humiliation or exploitation, the person has become highly suspicious of others, and the intensity of the motive seems to lower a person's objectivity. The paranoid person has a single-minded purpose, namely, to detect early signs of forthcoming deception, exploitation,



"The model highlights the motives behind behavior, and emphasizes the ambiguity of overt behavior when the motive behind the behavior is unclear."

or betrayal. Therefore, the person conducts a biased search; evidence to the contrary is simply ignored. When individuals with a paranoid personality disorder apply interpersonal tests and detect hints of malice, they quickly become convinced that their suspicion has been confirmed, and this "discovery" reinforces the original need for vigilance.

The book also examines reasons that important interpersonal motives get frustrated. As one example, ambiguous interpersonal behavior is easily misinterpreted, so a person with a histrionic personality disorder, trying to establish communal connections, might seem manipulative; an obsessive-compulsive person, trying to be above criticism, might seem pedantic; a dependent person, trying to secure nurturance, might seem excessively needy; an avoidant person, trying to protect the self from rejection, might seem to have little interest in connecting. As the person's efforts backfire, they frustrate the very motive that they were meant to satisfy. As a result, the person suffers subjective distress, which the person tries to alleviate in maladaptive ways. An interpersonal treatment therefore needs to focus on each aspect of this formulation—the frustrated interpersonal mo-

tive, ineffective strategies for satisfying that motive, the resulting negative affect, and self-defeating ways of coping with negative affect.

Clinical disorders. In addition, the book examines syndromes and Axis I disorders from an interpersonal perspective. It examines the kinds of interpersonal experiences that often produce a characteristic vulnerability in people (e.g., for depression). Details of one person's vulnerability to depression, however, differ from those of another person. For some potentially depressed people, for example, the vulnerability includes a heightened sensitivity to communal losses; for other potentially depressed people, the vulnerability includes a heightened sensitivity to agentic losses (e.g., loss of face through performance failures). The book considers the importance of such distinctions for treatment.

SITAR has been a real catalyst to my thinking about these issues, and I am indebted to our members for all the support and helpful feedback that I have received over the years. Needless to say, I feel very grateful to our society.

For further information, please contact Len Horowitz at [len@psych.stanford.edu](mailto:len@psych.stanford.edu)

## President's Message (cont.)

Following from discussions at last year's meetings, Debbie Moskowitz and I are exploring the possibility of publishing an edited volume based on papers presented at recent SITAR meetings, supplemented by invited contributions on specific topics. Such a volume could take a variety of forms, and we welcome your suggestions as to format and issues to be included. An edited series not only provides an outlet for research that highlights interpersonal themes, it will raise the profile of contemporary interpersonal theory, and serve as an archive for our society.

I hope that you will be able to join us in Toronto. We have a track record of quality presentations and supportive collegial interactions that make these meetings a high point of the year. Remember that thought papers, discussions of thorny research problems, and theoretical exchanges are welcome. We will also discuss, and I hope resolve, issues related to expanding, or not expanding, our membership, and more formal links to other organizations. See you in Toronto.

# The Interpersonal Nexus of Personality Disorders: A Response to Pincus by Mardi J. Horowitz

Aaron Pincus presented an important outline for the next steps in advancing the frontier of understanding and treating personality disorders in his paper at SITAR's 6th Annual Meeting in Vancouver, BC, May 2003, as reprinted in the SITAR Newsletter (Vol. 3, Issue 3, June 2003). I will recapitulate briefly his main points and then continue onwards.

I agree that a theoretical step is needed, followed by an empirical and then a practical approach. The reason is that existing approaches are based on theories, which are in part out of date. This is a time for revitalization and consolidation. A good start is for us to agree on a provisional definition of personality disorders (PDs) as suggested by Pincus. He listed five elements, which I, in agreement, summarize below. PDs are based on:

1. Internalized relational patterns (schematizations), affect, self-concept, and perception of others.
2. The presence of maladaptive schemas interferes with accurate encoding of new interpersonal experiences so that the person does not learn from new opportunities but, instead, repeats misappraisals.
3. The result is a repetitive, maladaptive interpersonal behavioral pattern.
4. Such disturbances of interpersonal patterns typically develop in predisposed young people who experience traumatic and deficit situations that impair self-regulation, adept information processing, and integrated formation of person schemas.
5. There is often a lack of conscious self

and relational observation as a part of this picture. The person distorts appraisals according to the internalized relational patterns rather than arriving at realistic new interpretations. Starting from such a shared definition one has to then, as a next step, address the existing categories that so many people memorize. Within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association lies a problem. The style of maladaptive interpersonal transaction is confounded with organizational capacity. Styles such as histrionic, compulsive, and dependent occur at various levels of integrational capacity, from normal to dissociated or fragmented. New theory would have at least two dimensions: (1) the content of the maladaptive behavioral pattern, and (2) the harmony or dissociativeness of person schemas.

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2020 Fremont Avenue  
P.O. Box 608  
South Pasadena, CA 91031-0608

Phone/FAX: 626-441-0614

Newsletter e-mail: [snstrack@aol.com](mailto:snstrack@aol.com)

**SITAR**

Listserves:  
[sitar-l@venus.vcu.edu](mailto:sitar-l@venus.vcu.edu)

Web Site:  
[www.vcu.edu/sitar](http://www.vcu.edu/sitar)

## **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.

## **Get Involved in Your Organization**

As a small research society, SITAR is dependent on its members to step forward to take roles in running the organization. The **Membership Committee** works to assure a stable base of dues-paying members, invites new people to join, and helps to develop member services. The **Website Committee** oversees operation and development of our website and listserv. The **Newsletter Committee** coordinates publication and distribution of our newsletter three times each year. Most committee activities can be done while you are at home or the office, and no previous experience is needed. Time commitment is variable and rarely exceeds 1-2 hours per month.

## **Donations to SITAR are Tax Deductible for US Members**

Did you know that SITAR is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization in the US? This means that all donations made to the organization—cash, goods, and services—may be deductible on US federal and state income tax returns. Think of SITAR the next time you consider making donations to charitable, scientific organizations. Your contribution will help build a solid foundation to help ensure SITAR's long-term growth.

## **Mardi J. Horowitz (cont.)**

In this revision of categories it would be helpful to note that patients have different states of mind. They have different interpersonal behaviors, some adaptive and some not so, in these different states of mind. There may be cycles where they go from one state of mind to another state of mind (and behavioral style). They cycle through different maladaptive and adaptive components. This means that people have a repertoire of self and other images rather than a single fixed maladaptive identity complex or projection.

Practically everyone is willing to use the language of schemas to discuss this theoretical position so I sense that a very good agreement could be reached in 2004. There would be room for lots of disagreement and interesting arguments. Those arguments could be settled by observation and reliability-validity tests in empirical studies.

Inquiries about this article should be directed to Mardi J. Horowitz, MD, Director, Center on Stress and Personality, Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute, 401 Parnassus Avenue, Box F-0984, San Francisco, CA 94143. E-mail: [mardi@itsf.ucsf.edu](mailto:mardi@itsf.ucsf.edu)

## **Sidney Blatt Featured Keynote Speaker at SITAR's 7th Annual Meeting in Toronto, ON**

Sidney J. Blatt, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Psychology, and Chief of the Psychology Section, at Yale University. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, was a post-doctoral fellow at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, and is a 1972 graduate of the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis.

"Sid," as he is known by friends and colleagues, has a strong research interest in how people develop cognitive-affective schemas of self and others, the ways these internal representations can be impaired in people with a variety of disorders (e.g., depression and schizophrenia), and how they can be changed in the therapeutic process.

The author of numerous articles, chapters, books, and assessment instruments, Sid has received many accolades for his contributions to science, including the *Bruno Klopfer Award* for outstanding professional

contributions to the field of personality assessment by the Society for Personality Assessment, and the 2004 *Distinguished Scientific Contributions* award from APA's Division of Clinical Psychology.

In his latest book, *Experiences of Depression* (American Psychological Association,

2004), Sid integrates nearly 30 years of clinical insight and research exploring the nature of depression and the life experiences that contribute to its emergence. He paints a compelling portrait of two types of depression that, despite a common set of symptoms, have distinct roots. One, termed *analytic* depression, arises from feelings of loneliness and abandonment. The other, called *introjective* depression,

is born of feelings of failure and worthlessness. By integrating many years of clinical and research findings, Sid provides a new understanding of the nature, etiology, and treatment of this common, troubling disorder.

