

**Society for
Interpersonal
Theory and
Research**

SITAR Newsletter

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President's Message Krista Trobst

I would like to reiterate my tremendous pleasure in having the honor of being president of this wonderful society and I would like to take this opportunity to update everyone regarding various business matters. As I noted in a message to the listserv a few weeks ago, I am pleased to announce that Terry Tracey has been elected as our new vice-president. In accordance with our bylaws, the executive council has now also elected Marc Fournier to fill the member-at-large position vacated by Terry. As most of you know, Marc has been a long-term and active member of SITAR and he is a very welcome addition to the council. Our society can surely look forward to excellent management as we continue to grow and define ourselves.

Debbie Moskowitz has informed me that conference

Meet SITAR's New Vice President

Terence J. G. Tracey received his Ph.D. in Counseling from the Counseling and Personnel Services Department at University of Maryland, College Park in 1981. He then was employed as a Counseling Psychologist at the University Counseling Service at the State University of New York at Buffalo from 1981-1983. Following this he joined the faculty of the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He received tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1988 and

planning is going well. As you may recall, our next meeting will be held in Montreal, in June 2005, just prior to the meetings of the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR), in the hopes that we might attract some of the SPR attendees to our event. The SPR meetings are scheduled for June 22nd-26th, but given that airfares are generally much more reasonable if one includes a Saturday night stay (and that many of our members will not be attending the SPR meetings), our conference is likely to be held on Sunday, June 19th, and Monday, June 20th, although that will leave attendees of both the SITAR and SPR conferences with a day (Tuesday, June 21st) between events. We, of course, hope that the one-day lag between conferences will not discourage SPR members from coming to our talks. Our

meetings will be held at the Delta Hotel, where we had our conference the last time we were in Montreal. It is sure to be another intellectually and interpersonally stimulating event.

Chris Wagner has informed me that he has updated and streamlined our website (www.vcu.edu/sitar) and that he has plans to implement graphics and layout changes later this year. Chris has also posed to the executive several ideas for expanding the content coverage of our website. If anyone has any wishes or suggestions for the format and content of our website, please pass them along to me at

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personal models of personality and psychotherapy, the structure and development of vocational interests, and minority student academic success. He has published over 100 refereed empirical studies in these areas. He is currently an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.

As the newly elected vice president of SITAR, he is very interested in promoting the organization to others to ensure that it continues to be the exciting group that it is.



His scholarship has focused on the topics of client-therapist interaction in psychotherapy and

its relation to outcome, inter-

Interpersonal Rigidity, Interpersonal Distress and Complementarity by Terence J. G. Tracey

Interpersonal theorists posit that people are inherently social and that the only relevant situations are those that involve others. Psychological health in this view is indicated by an ability to engage in a variety of social situations with a variety of different individuals. Interpersonal theorists (e.g., Carson, 1991; Kiesler, 1996; Tracey, 1993) further posit that psychological distress is negatively related to the ability to adapt to different social situations and other individuals. Individuals who are interpersonally flexible are viewed as having less distress, and those who are more rigid (i.e., having a narrow range of behaviors) are viewed as having more distress. Interpersonal rigidity is thus an inability to alter behavior in different social situations and an over-adoption of one narrow set of behaviors regardless of the situation or norms. While this view of functioning has intuitive appeal, past research has yielded equivocal results with respect to the relation of interpersonal rigidity to broad indicators of psychopathology and psychological distress (e.g., Federman, 1980; Nelson, 1984; O'Connor & Dyce, 2001; Sim & Romney, 1990; Wiggins et al., 1988). There are two major reasons for these results: (a) ignoring of the distal nature of the rigidity-distress relation and the intervening step of complementarity and (b) using imprecise definitions of rigidity.

Complementarity as a mediator

A central construct in interpersonal theory is the complementarity of behavior, which refers to the extent to which the behaviors of interacting individuals "fit" with one another. This "fit" is typically defined using the Interpersonal Circle composed of the two dimensions of dominance and affiliation. Each interpersonal behavior has a complement that is defined as having a similar amount of affiliation and a reciprocal (or opposite) amount of dominance. Other behaviors will have varying degrees of complementarity relative to their proximity to the complement. This representation of orderly, self-enhancing interaction forms the basis of interpersonal interaction in interpersonal theory. It is hypothesized (Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1996; Tracey, 1993) that for relationships to continue over time, at least a moderate amount of complementarity is

required. Complementarity has been found to be related to relationship quality (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997) and relationship productivity (Estroff & Nowicki, 1992).

It is the construct of complementarity that provides the hypothesized link between rigidity and psychological distress. Rigid individuals would presumably be less able to adapt their behavior to the preceding behavior of others. Rigid individuals would be prone to act in one narrow manner and not adapt to the behavior of the other. Hence complementarity would be low and the continuance and productivity of the relationship would be in jeopardy. With an inability to establish productive relationships with many different types of individuals, more rigid individuals would not be as able to successfully negotiate with others and have fewer satisfying relationships. Rigidity would thus be positively related to distress because of the mediating step of rigidity being negatively associated with greater ability to alter behavior, engage in complementarity interactions, and then complementarity would be negatively associated with distress. The link between rigidity and distress is one of many steps and is thus distal. The lack of strong support for the rigidity-distress relation does not negate its validity given this distal relation. The crucial step is hypothesized to be the adaptability of behavior and the presence of complementarity. Rigidity results in less adaptability and lower complementarity, which results in poor relationships and distress. A better examination of the relation would include an examination of the mediation of complementarity in the rigidity-distress connection. The direct relation between rigidity and distress may or may not exist but the key is that complementarity is the intervening step.

Definition of rigidity

The definition of rigidity is also imprecise. As noted by O'Connor and Dyce (2001) there are no common indices of interpersonal rigidity/flexibility in the literature even though this is a construct that is part of the definition of many types of psychopathology. The terms are used often but without clear explication. Rigidity/flexibility is imprecise with respect to (a) appropriateness of behavior and (b) confusion of rigidity

and extremeness.

In interpersonal theory, rigidity is viewed as exclusive usage of certain interpersonal behaviors as represented on the Interpersonal Circle. Interpersonal rigidity is thus hypothesized to exist at the trait level, as some people are generally more likely to engage in only one type of behavior regardless of context. This trait level index of rigidity is viewed as a proxy of the ability to vary one's behavior in social situations. Given this trait focus, rigidity is typically examined using the Interpersonal Adjective Scale, and represented using the vector score. The vector score represents the point in two dimensional space (dominance and affiliation) that best characterizes the profile of eight scales and as such carries information about the direction (most prominent type of behavior demonstrated) and strength (vector length) of this behavior. The assumption in interpersonal theory is that the length of this vector is an indicator of rigidity. The greater the vector length, the more that individual uses only certain types of behaviors and more extreme versions of these behaviors.

As discussed in the literature, the terms rigidity and extremity are used interchangeably (e.g., Kiesler, 1996; O'Connor & Dyce, 2001). Not only is the relatively exclusive use of certain behaviors regardless of context (i.e., rigidity) hypothesized to be related to distress, but so too is the extremeness of behavior (i.e., relative amount or magnitude of any behavior). These two aspects are overlapping but different. Two individuals can always be critical (i.e., rigid) but they can vary on how extreme they are, perhaps, for example, with one individual always yelling and the other more quietly chastising. So one of the issues relating to the use of the vector score is that it confounds rigidity and extremeness. For individuals to score high on the vector score they need to have a narrow range of behavior (i.e., rigid) and score very high on these behaviors (i.e., extreme). Low vector scores are associated with a variety of behaviors and less extreme levels. It is possible that individuals act in extreme ways but that this is not rigid in the sense that they vary their

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Psychopathy and Interpersonal Theory

by Ronald Blackburn, University of Liverpool



Most of my clinical and academic career has been spent working with forensic psychiatric patients detained in maximum security hospitals in England because of their dangerousness.

English mental health legislation permits the detention of offenders with personality disorder. Initially influenced by Eysenck, but subsequently by interpersonal theorists, I developed a lasting interest in the contribution of personality theories to understanding psychopathic personality and other personality disorders.

The term "psychopath" has a convoluted history, often being dismissed as an epithet for someone we don't like. However, research guided by Cleckley's seminal concept has established its utility. In our early work, we used self-report measures, but Hare's Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), based on a semi-structured interview, currently provides the most valid assessment. This depicts the psychopath as arrogant and manipulative, affectively cold and callous, behaviorally impulsive, and socially deviant in lifestyle.

Although Cleckley did not see psychopaths as necessarily criminal, psychopathy is of particular interest to the criminal justice system.

The PCL-R is one of the best predictors of violent recidivism, and is now widely used in risk assessment with offenders. Perhaps because of this emphasis on the psychopath as a criminal type, the concept has developed separately from recent concepts of personality disorder. Antisocial personality disorder in the DSM is assumed to represent psychopathy, but this is a diluted version of Cleckley's concept that fails to capture the central traits. Arrogance, manipulateness, and contempt for others are more clearly found among the criteria for narcissistic and histrionic disorders.

We have, in fact, found that the "antisocial" dimension found in factor analyses to pervade the DSM cluster B disorders is essentially equivalent to psychopathy as measured by the PCL-R (Blackburn & Coid, 1998). We construe this dimension as a maladaptive variant of "normal" personality. In these terms, the notion of "psychopaths" as a distinct type is, like other categories of personality disorder, a convenient fiction. Identifying the nature of the underlying dimension is crucial to understanding psychopathy and associated disorders.

Psychopathy as interpersonal style

Theories of psychopathy typically propose intrapersonal mediators that inhibit socialized development or impair emotional responsiveness to others. Most writers, however, emphasise interpersonal dysfunctions as the hallmark of psychopathy, and it has been observed

that psychopathy could not exist in a socially isolated castaway on a desert island. A deficit theory seems inadequate to explain what motivates psychopaths and the purpose and function of their behavior, but these issues are directly addressed by interpersonal theory.

Leary linked abnormal personality to the structural model of personality provided by the interpersonal circle (IPC). Each octant of the circle identified a mode of adjustment defined by the "security operations" expressed, and formed a continuum from adaptive to maladaptive functioning. In Leary's original scheme, psychopathy was the extreme of an aggressive-sadistic mode (the DE octant), in which fear is inspired in others through subtle forms of critical, humiliating, and punitive interactions. Adjacent to this in the circle was the competitive mode (the BC octant), the extreme being narcissistic personality, reflecting self-love, arrogance, and exploitation. The former mode was motivated by desire to humiliate, the latter by a need for status. Neither type was specifically associated with criminal behavior. These hostile and hostile-dominant modes, or styles as later theorists prefer, seem to encompass the current conception of psychopathy.

In our research, we assess the IPC by simple behavior ratings. The Chart of Interpersonal Reactions in Closed Living Environments (CIRCLE) is a 49-item rating scale of observed institutional behavior (e.g. "dominates conversations", "demands attention to his own rights"). Items are scored on eight scales (Dominant, Coercive, Hostile, etc.; see Figure 1) that represent the octants of the interpersonal circle and meet the geometric requirements of a circumplex (Blackburn & Renwick, 1996).

CIRCLE originated from our attempts to develop alternatives to self-reports to assess psychopathy (see Blackburn, 1998). In an early study, we serendipitously "discovered" the IPC by rotating the first two principal components in self-report and rating data, including ratings of Cleckley's criteria of psychopathy. Consistent with Leary's analysis, psychopathic and aggressive traits clustered in the hostile and hostile-dominant segments of the circle. We therefore construe the core features of psychopathy to be exemplified by extreme inter-

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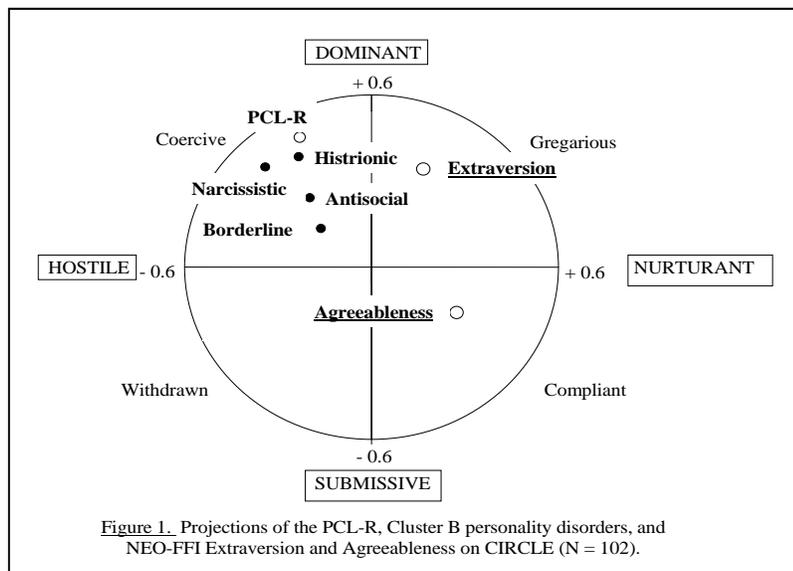


Figure 1. Projections of the PCL-R, Cluster B personality disorders, and NEO-FFI Extraversion and Agreeableness on CIRCLE (N = 102).

Blackburn (cont.)

personal styles falling in the hostile-dominant quadrant of the IPC. However, in CIRCLE, the hostile-dominant (coercive) octant covers both the aggressive-sadistic and competitive styles described by Leary.

A few studies have looked at the relationship of the PCL-R to other measures of the IPC, and these consistently indicate an association with hostile-dominance (Harpur, Hart & Hare, 2002; Kosson, Steuerwald, Forth & Kirkhart, 1997). A recent study of CIRCLE with forensic patients (in preparation) provides further support. The coercive axis measured by rotating the main IPC axes through 45° correlated relatively strongly with PCL-R score ($r = .50$; $N = 102$). We found similar correlations with DSM-IV narcissistic, histrionic and antisocial disorders assessed by the International Personality Disorder Examination (Figure 1), suggesting a common factor underlying these disorders, psychopathy, and a coercive style of relating. A coercive style was highly predictive of future institutional misconduct over two years, and exceeded the predictive power of the PCL-R.

Proponents of the five factor model of personality (FFM) argue that the axes of the IPC are essentially rotations of Agreeableness and Extraversion, and that psychopathy is primarily a reflection of low Agreeableness (antagonism), which falls in the hostile-dominant quadrant. Our findings using the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) are consistent with these proposals (Figure 1). FFM proponents also argue that because the IPC measures primarily these two dimensions of Agreeableness and Extraversion, it is subordinate to the FFM as a representation of the major sources of personality variation. However, we recently replicated findings that two superordinate factors underlie the Big Five (Blackburn, Renwick, Donnelly & Logan, 2004). We suggest that rather than being subordinate to the FFM, the IPC may actually measure these superordinate dimensions.

Psychopathy as malevolent agency
CIRCLE simply describes regularities in interpersonal behavior, but these are not explained by the IPC. However, interpersonal theorists conceptualise such styles as relatively consistent modes of self-presentation that are maintained by the reactions they elicit from others. Different interpersonal styles are hence underpinned by beliefs

about the self and others, and explanations for the behavior of psychopaths may be found in cognitive schemas and scripts. From a social cognitive perspective, Carson proposed that interpersonal styles reflect expectations of the reactions of others and that these function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Carson's model implies that psychopaths expect both hostile-dominance and hostile-submission and that the function of their coercive style is to induce these expected reactions.

Some of our data support an association of coercive style with hostile expectations (Blackburn, 1998), but we have not yet found that this also applies to the PCL-R. However, Kosson et al. (1997) found that the emotional reactions of interviewers, such as trepidation or the avoidance of confrontation, were significantly related to interviewees' PCL-R scores and to ratings of their hostile-dominant style, which seems consistent with the theory.

Wiggins views the IPC dimensions as concrete representations of agency (dominance) and communion (nurturance). The hostile-dominant style of psychopaths can hence be construed as a disposition to engage in interpersonal transactions that communicate a high degree of concerns about power and status in social hierarchies (agency), but also the rejection, or avoidance of intimacy (communion). Their behavior seems understandable in this light as an attempt to maintain status or mastery of a social environment from which they feel alienated.

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Tracey (cont.)

behavior (albeit extreme) to fit different contexts. While it makes conceptual sense given the Interpersonal Circle to define rigidity in this manner, it is possible that other, more pure measures of extremeness would better capture the issues at hand. It is thus important to examine the validity of this mixture of rigid and extreme relative to other measures that may capture only extremity or rigidity. If interpersonal theory is correct, it is the combination of rigidity and extremeness that is important; the vector score should demonstrate greater relations to complementarity and interpersonal distress than these other more pure extremeness or rigidity measures do.

The viability of many of the interpersonal tenets rests upon better specification and evaluation than has been done in the literature. Research into interpersonal concepts such as the relation between rigidity and distress requires a better examination of the underlying definitions and concepts. Specifically, not only have I argued that complementarity mediates the relationship between rigidity and distress, but also that the meaning of rigidity must be clearly evaluated.

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President's Message (cont.)

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With respect to membership expansion, my mini task force has begun a multi-pronged process of literature searches in an attempt to pinpoint researchers who would likely be welcome additions to our membership and to our meetings. My hope is that by the next time I write I will be able to report that numerous letters of invitation have been sent and that many interpersonal scholars have decided to join our wonderful society. To aid in these efforts though, I would be most appreciative if all existing members would give some thought to who they think would be appropriate members and would send me any names that come to mind. I will also solicit suggestions via the listserve in the coming weeks.

I have also not forgotten that we need to revisit our self-definition, not only in terms of reevaluating the appropriateness of our mission statement, but more specifically for aiding in our membership expansion efforts. Finding other scholars who employ interpersonal circumplex measures is a clearly defined and easy task, but that is not all that we do, nor all that we are about. Deciding in which ways to more widely cast our interpersonal net, however, requires careful consideration and input from all of our membership. Now that most of us are re-engaged in the new academic year, I would like us all to be thinking about this longstanding issue and for the membership to give consideration to this matter in preparation for my queries along these lines in the weeks to come. I would most welcome a full-fledged debate regarding this matter because, although I am certain that we will need to re-visit this issue from time to time as we develop as a society, our present expansion efforts seem to place us at a developmental crossroad in which some clarification is needed in order to ensure that we grow well.

As always, I welcome any and all thought given to any aspect of our society. I am most easily contacted at ktrobst@aol.com and I look forward to corresponding with you in the coming months and to seeing you in June.

In Press and Recently Published Work by SITAR Members

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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.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICER WANTED—Steve Strack has notified the Executive Council of his desire to step down from the job of Executive Officer (EO) when his term expires in May 2005. As outlined in the By Laws, the EO serves in a number of important roles. Among these are: (1) Serve as the Secretary-Treasurer General of the Society; (2) serve as member of the Executive Council; (3) supervise the timely collection and circulation of minutes of the annual session of the Convention and of Executive Council meetings; (4) maintain the official records of the Society; (5) receive, manage, and disburse the funds of the Society; and (6) handle legal correspondence concerning SITAR's incorporation and tax exempt status.

Interested persons are encouraged to contact Steve Strack as soon as possible to discuss the position and their qualifications. Steve may be reached at senstrack@aol.com

Recent Work by SITAR Members (cont.)

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Editor's Notes: This list was compiled in September, 2004. Requests for preprints and reprints should be directed to the first author, unless otherwise indicated.