Running Head: AGENCY AND COMMUNION IN SOCIAL COMPARISONS

Agency and Communion in Social Comparisons

Kenneth D. Locke

University of Idaho

My aim in this chapter is to explain and extend the following ideas. Most broadly, agency and communion are cardinal axes of social life and thus are principal themes defining and shaping what social comparisons mean to people. During a social comparison people may focus more on agency or more on communion, depending on various factors such as whether or not they know the other people with whom they are comparing. Experimental studies of social comparisons have tended to direct attention more towards agentic themes than communal themes; however, these same studies have often highlighted how perceiving connections or divides between ourselves and others governs whether we continue to compare with them and, if so, how those comparisons influence our self-concepts. Finally, the agentic and communal aspects of social comparisons can have widespread effects on our thoughts, feelings, and actions; some effects are relatively direct (e.g., perceiving others as similar can enhance liking), but others involve complex interactions between agency and communion (e.g., perceiving others as simultaneously similar and superior can enhance others' influence on us as well as our own sense of status).

Social Comparisons are Intrinsically Social

Social comparison involves juxtaposing information about the self with comparable information about other "target" individuals or groups (Wood, 1996). The information from a social comparison can influence your feelings, goals, and actions, as well as how you perceive and evaluate yourself and others. But the social comparison itself is a *social* behavior.

Of course, social comparisons can have non-social causes and consequences. Indeed, the earliest formal theory of social comparison assumed that people made comparisons in order to accurately evaluate their opinions or abilities; and, although objective standards of comparison would be the most informative for that purpose, comparisons with other people would suffice

when objective standards were unavailable (Festinger, 1954). Certainly many situations exist in which people make social comparisons in order to make objective assessments. One such situation is when people make social comparisons in order to help them decide whether or not to undertake an unfamiliar challenge; for example, if you are unsure if you will survive an unfamiliar ski slope, then—before leaping into the unknown—you may assess whether you can ski at least as well as others who have survived that slope (Wheeler, Martin, & Suls, 1997). However, people do not always favor objective comparison standards. People sometimes seek social standards in addition to or in lieu of objective standards (Wood & Wilson, 2003), and sometimes social information influences self-evaluations and behavior more than does objective information (Klein, 1997, 2003). For example, when people are competing with others (e.g., for jobs, partners, or recognition), they want to know not just "Can I do this?", but "Can I do this *better than my competitors*?". Continuing our earlier example, your absolute ability level determines whether you survive a ski slope, but your ability level relative to others determines whether you survive elimination in a skiing competition.

People seem to be particularly interested in and influenced by comparisons with similar others (Wood, 1989). When comparing themselves with entire groups of individuals, people tend to compare themselves with groups to which they belong rather than groups to which they do not belong (Locke, 2007). Likewise, when comparing themselves with other individuals, people are more likely to evaluate themselves relative to fellow members of significant "reference groups" than to members of out-groups with which they are not affiliated (Hyman, 1942).

One reason why people may tend to use similar others as targets is that they consider similar others to be more relevant as standards against which to compare and evaluate the self. For example, female students felt less attractive after seeing pictures of very attractive females, but

not if they believed the targets were professional models (Cash, Cash & Butters, 1983); the

students apparently construed professional models as not in the same class as—and thus as not

relevant to—the self. More generally, people prefer to compare themselves with targets with

whom they share "related attributes" that are predictive of the attribute being compared

(Goethals & Darley, 1977; Suls, Gastorf, & Lawhon, 1978; Wheeler, Koestner, & Driver,

1982).Yet, people also prefer to compare with similar others even when the attributes that the

self and the target share are not related to or predictive of the attribute being compared (Wood,

1989). For example, Miller (1982) found that students chose to compare their scores on a

reasoning test with the scores of students similar in physical attractiveness, despite attractiveness

being unrelated to test performance. Moreover, people seem particularly interested in similar

comparison targets if the attributes they share with the target evoke a sense of closeness and

identification (Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland, 1988). In these cases, the motivation for

comparing appears to be more social than informational.

Indeed, the concern of many comparisons is not only social, but expressly and specifically

personal. Whereas *generalized comparisons* address "How do I compare generally with some set

of others (of which the target is just an example)?", *personalized comparisons* address "How do I

compare particularly with this one target person?". An example of a personalized comparison is

when Joe is evaluating whether or not he is better looking than this particular guy who is flirting

with his girlfriend (and Joe is not evaluating himself relative to anyone else). In surveys of

naturally occurring comparisons, personalized comparisons were over twice as common as

generalized comparisons, and were especially common when there was a close or emotional

relationship with the target (Locke, 2007). Even when people do compare themselves with

groups of individuals, the target groups are more often groups that are small and personal (such

as their family or team) than groups that are large and impersonal (such as their gender or ethnicity) (Smith & Leach, 2004).

One reason everyday comparisons are so often personalized and with people with whom we share some similarity or connection is that these are the comparisons and the people that matter to us. Another reason such comparisons are prevalent is that we often automatically compare ourselves with people we encounter, and we naturally tend to encounter people with whom we share a relationship or group membership or some type of similarity (e.g., friends, family, colleagues, people who enjoy the same things we do). Even when our encounters with others are not due to preexisting bonds, we are more likely to communicate with and form important relationships with those people we encounter more frequently (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950); and as those social networks crystallize, they become potent sources of social comparison and social influence (Festinger, 1954; Forsyth, 2000).

To summarize, social comparisons can have implications for where one stands in relation to specific comparison targets, in relation to other individuals or groups in addition to those specific targets, or in relation to non-social standards. For example, if you beat me in a race, I could focus on the (personalized) implications for my abilities relative to you, the (generalized) implications for my abilities relative to other racers as a group, or the (objective) implications for my health status and physical capabilities. Whereas an early assumption in the social comparison literature was that people use social comparisons primarily in the service of objective self-evaluations (Festinger, 1954), subsequent research has suggested that people are more often interested in social comparisons as a source of social information; that is, they care about where they stand relative to others—especially others with whom they share some type of meaningful connection—independent of the usefulness of that information for making objective assessments.

But regardless of the impetus for any particular comparison, *every* social comparison involves locating the self relative to a target person or group. In that sense, every social comparison is intrinsically social. If every comparison involves conceptualizing oneself relative to others, then a comprehensive model of social comparisons should be rooted in a model of the dimensions along which people conceptualize themselves relative to others. The following section summarizes the support for one such model.

Agency and Communion

Numerous theorists have suggested that the two most fundamental and pivotal dimensions along which people conceptualize themselves relative to others are a "vertical" dimension of status or agency and a "horizontal" dimension of solidarity or communion (Brown, 1965; Horowitz et al., 2006; Wiggins, 2003). The single greatest source of support for this model is the accumulation of decades of psychometric data. Factor analyses repeatedly show that the two dimensions of agency and communion account for a large proportion of the covariation in ratings of social behaviors and traits (Foa, 1961; Wiggins, 1979) as well as open-ended person descriptions (Heck & Pincus, 2001). Moreover, the interpersonal factors of the robust five-factor model of personality—namely, extraversion and agreeableness—have been shown to be rotational variants of agency and communion (McCrae & Costa, 1989). The orthogonal axes of agency and communion also furnish the structural foundation for a growing number of empirically validated measures of interpersonal dispositions, including interpersonal values, interpersonal traits, and interpersonal problems (Locke, 2011a).

Research on how people automatically represent agency and communion further suggests that they are basic and primitive experiential dimensions. Agency is automatically perceptually experienced and physically embodied along a vertical (up-down, superior-inferior) axis. For

example, activating the concept "disappointment" rather than the concept "pride" automatically causes people to decrease their posture height (Oosterwijk, Rotteveel, Fischer, & Hess, 2009). Likewise, communion is automatically perceptually experienced and physically embodied along a horizontal (close-distant, connected-separated) axis. For example, people automatically express feelings of closeness and distance by moving closer to or further from others (Holland, Roeder, van Baaren, Brandt, & Hannover, 2004), and priming spatial closeness or distance (by having people plot close or distant points on a grid) influences the attachment they feel towards their family and hometown (William & Bargh, 2008).

Presumably the ultimate explanation for why people in every culture conceptualize social relationships in terms of agency and communion is that natural selection shaped the brains of humans (and those of many other social animals) to be sensitive to those dimensions. Throughout our evolutionary history, approaching or avoiding agency (e.g., asserting, competing, dominating) has resulted in significant costs and benefits for individuals' inclusive fitness; for example, agency can enhance access to valued roles, resources, and mates, but can also increase the likelihood of costly rivalries and failures. Likewise, throughout our evolutionary history, approaching or avoiding communion (bonding, sharing, supporting) has resulted in significant costs and benefits for individuals' inclusive fitness. For example, communion can create opportunities for achieving goals that would be difficult to pursue independently (such as exchanging resources, protecting against threats from other groups, and of course mating); but associating with others also creates opportunities for contracting costly social obligations and diseases (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). Consequently, selection has favored genes that help build brains that can cognitively represent and behaviorally coordinate agency and communion with others (Bugental, 2000; Cummins, 2005).

If natural selection did shape our brains to monitor and negotiate agency and communion, then we might expect to find affective states and neurological substrates specifically involved in the regulation of agency and communion; and we do. For example, affective states such as pride and humiliation provide proximal incentives for attaining and maintaining status, while affective states such as affection and loneliness provide proximal incentives for building and sustaining affiliations. Furthermore, different hormones and neurotransmitters appear to be associated with regulating communion (e.g., oxytocin and vasopressin; Bartz & Hollander, 2006) versus regulating agency (e.g., testosterone; Archer, 2006).

Comparison Direction

To the extent that agency and communion are essential and pivotal dimensions along which people conceptualize themselves relative to others, the axes of agency and communion should be essential and pivotal in defining and shaping the causes, contents, and consequences of social comparisons. Consider the contents of a social comparison itself, which include an attribute of the self, a corresponding attribute of the target (the *target-attribute*), and the judgment of where the self's attribute stands in relation to the target-attribute. The latter judgment is called the *comparison direction*. To the extent that people conceptualize themselves relative to others along the dimensions of agency/status and communion/solidarity, then there are four basic directions in which a comparison can go (Locke, 2003): The target-attribute can be experienced as having more agency or status than the self's attribute (an upward comparison); the target-attribute can be experienced as having less agency or status than the self's attribute (a downward comparison); the target-attribute can be experienced as similar or close to self's attribute (a connective comparison); the target-attribute can be experienced as distinct or distant from self's attribute, without either necessarily being better

or worse (a contrastive comparison).

In short, the four cardinal directions of social comparison are *above*, *below*, *together*, and *apart*. Figure 1 shows one way of visualizing these four directions. In my own surveys of naturalistic social comparisons[1], approximately 25% were upward, 25% were downward, 30% were contrastive, and 20% were connective (Locke, 2003). In other words, approximately half were "vertical comparisons" that focused primarily on whether the comparison target is better than the self or worse than the self, while the other half were "horizontal comparisons" that focused primarily on whether the target is similar to the self or different from the self.

Connective and Contrastive Comparisons and Communal Feelings

When examining the affective consequences of social comparisons, studies typically assess either general positive or negative feelings (e.g., happy, sad) or, less frequently, feelings indicating agency (e.g., fortunate, confident) or lack of agency (e.g., envious, defeated). However, social comparisons may also influence feelings reflecting communion (e.g., connected, supported) or lack of communion (e.g., isolated, alienated). The most direct of these influences is that connective comparisons tend to enhance and contrastive comparisons tend to undermine communal feelings (Locke, 2003).

Although the influence of connective comparisons on communal feelings is quite robust, it does depend to some extent on one's values or goals. The effects of connective comparisons on happy and communal feelings and on ratings of mood improvement are stronger for people who more strongly value the experience of communion with others (i.e., who say it is personally important that, for example, others "show concern for how I am feeling" and "come to me with their problems") (Locke, 2003). Moreover, compared to people with weaker communal values, those with stronger communal values are more apt to describe those with whom they feel

interconnected as similar to the self (Locke, 2012) and to deem vertical comparisons as harmful (Locke, 2003), perhaps because people with stronger communal values are more sensitive to how highlighting who is better or worse has the potential to undermine communion (Zell & Exline, this volume).

The effect of horizontal comparisons on communal feelings is unsurprising as it accords with a large body of research on interpersonal attraction. Interestingly, while the social comparison literature was becoming increasingly focused on vertical comparisons beginning in the early 1960s, the interpersonal attraction literature was becoming increasingly focused on the role of similarity (Byrne, 1971). The preponderance of findings shows that people tend to experience more attraction towards similar than dissimilar others (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). For example, attraction is predicted by similarity in such attributes as demographic and physical characteristics, personality and behavioral dispositions, and attitudes and values (Byrne, 1971). Even something as trivial as a shared birthday can enhance mutual concern and cooperation (Miller, Downs, & Prentice, 1998).

The similarity-attraction relationship applies to negative as well as positive moods and self-evaluations. Both dysphoric and nondysphoric people find it more satisfying to converse with others whose moods match their own (Locke & Horowitz, 1990). Emotional similarity—independent of emotional valence—correlates positively with relationship quality in romantic couples as well (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007). Sad people even find it more comforting to compare their feelings with those expressed in sad than in energetic music or poetry (Locke & Keltner, 1993). Naturalistic studies of spontaneous comparisons likewise confirm that the link between connective comparisons and communal feelings remains robust independent of the target attribute's desirability or the comparer's self-worth (Locke, 2005).

Various processes have been posited to mediate the similarity-attraction relationship. Balance theory posits that people should like others who like what they like and dislike people who do not (Heider, 1958). A related mechanism is that similar others validate and dissimilar others invalidate your experiences and perspectives (Byrne, 1971). A more interpersonal mechanism is that people expect that similar others will like them and dissimilar others will not, and people like others who like them (Aronson & Worchel, 1966; Condon & Crano, 1988). Finally, people may simply be automatically more attracted to anything associated with the self (Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004). These mechanisms are not exclusive and all may help explain the robustness of the similarity-attraction relationship. Regardless, horizontal comparisons are necessary to set any of these mechanisms in motion. That is, although similarity-attraction research rarely makes direct mention of social comparison processes, self-other *similarity* does involve a comparison, whether explicit or implicit.

Connective and Contrastive Comparisons as Surrounding Attributes

Although vertical comparisons—and agentic themes more generally—have been the predominant focus of social comparison research, many of these same studies have demonstrated how horizontal comparisons play key "surrounding" roles (Wood, 1989). In this section, I will briefly review research illustrating two of these surrounding roles: (1) guiding who is an appropriate comparison target, and (2) moderating the self-evaluative implications of vertical comparison information.

Horizontal comparisons guide the choice of comparison targets

When people are estimating their abilities or future performances, horizontal comparisons influence who they choose as comparison targets. If people are trying to assess their abilities and how well they are using their abilities, then—to the degree that they are guided by rational,

attributional considerations—they should compare their performances with targets with whom they share "related attributes" that are predictive of performance (Goethals & Darley, 1977; Wheeler, Koestner, & Driver, 1982); for example, if a student is assessing her mathematical aptitude, then someone who has the same number of years of education as she does will be a more informative comparison target than someone with more or fewer years of education. Likewise, if people are trying to assess if they can meet a specific performance criterion, then a target person's performance on that task will be an informative "proxy" to the extent that the self and the target performed similarly on a prior related task and share other attributes that are predictive of performance (Wheeler, Martin, & Suls, 1997; Martin, Suls, & Wheeler, 2002). At other times people compare their performances with targets with whom they share a distinctive characteristic, even when that characteristic has no rational connection to the attribute being compared (Miller et al., 1988). In all of the preceding examples, connective comparisons (e.g., shared performance levels, shared related attributes, shared distinctive attributes) were the prerequisite for making further comparisons of abilities and performances.

Horizontal comparisons also inform decisions about who are appropriate targets of comparisons involving opinions and preferences. For example, people tend to compare their opinions with the opinions of others with whom they share a group membership (Festinger, 1950). When uncertain about what their preferences should be or will be, people prefer to compare with targets with whom they share "related" attributes that they believe will be predictive of such preferences (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2000). Likewise, when people are uncertain about how worried they should be about an unusual situation, people prefer to compare with someone facing a similar situation (Schachter, 1959). In all of these examples, connective

comparisons (e.g., shared group membership, shared related attributes, or shared circumstances) were the prerequisite for making further comparisons of opinions and evaluations.

The preceding discussion highlighted occasions when horizontal comparisons precede the choice of comparison targets; however, sometimes comparisons occur automatically (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), and only afterwards are horizontal comparisons made in order to appraise the implications of that spontaneous comparison. For example, it could happen that Jill (deliberately) compares her test score with Jack's only after first noting that he has the same teacher, but it also could happen that Jill (automatically) notices Jack's superior score and only then checks if she and Jack share the same teacher. Below I will be describing several of these types of interplays between and among horizontal and vertical comparisons, and the general point I want to make here is that there is rarely one particular sequence in which such comparisons must progress.

Horizontal comparisons moderate the implications of vertical comparisons

Two potential consequences of vertical comparisons on self-evaluations are assimilation and contrast. If self-evaluations increase after upward comparisons or decrease after downward comparisons, then assimilation has occurred. If self-evaluations increase after downward comparisons or decrease after upward comparisons, then contrast has occurred. Contrast is probably more common than assimilation; for example, averaging across thousands of naturalistic comparisons, downward comparisons reliably evoke more positive and agentic feelings than do upward comparisons (Locke, 2003, 3005; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). Nonetheless, downward comparisons *can* evoke negative affect and upward comparisons *can* evoke positive affect (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990). Horizontal comparisons are key moderators of whether contrast or assimilation will occur, with the most

robust pattern being that connective comparisons increase assimilation (Mussweiler, 2003),

especially upward assimilation. For example, sharing a close relationship (Lockwood & Pinkus,

this volume; Pelham & Wachsmuth, 1995), potentially sharing the same fate (Lockwood &

Kunda, 1997; Pinkus, Lockwood, Marshall, & Yoon, in press), sharing membership in a

distinguishing and self-defining group (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Mussweiler & Bodenhausen,

2002), and sharing other rare or distinctive (but not common, non-distinctive) attributes (Brown,

Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992) have all been shown to enhance assimilation.

Causal reasoning cannot explain why connective comparisons involving some of these

attributes (e.g., sharing birthdays) should promote assimilation (Brown et al., 1992). Therefore,

explicit causal attributions appear unnecessary for horizontal comparisons to moderate the

influence of vertical comparisons. Instead, construing the self and target as bound together

appears to be sufficient. For example, merely priming people to conceptualize themselves as

socially integrated or interdependent (rather than differentiated or independent) facilitates

assimilation (Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002).

However, the effect of connective comparisons on the implications of upward comparisons

is neither simple nor linear. Instead, research suggests that upward comparisons are more

threatening if the target is *moderately* similar or close than if the target is either *distinctively*

similar or close or *not at all* similar or close (Tesser, 1988). Apparently, being moderately close

or similar (e.g., being friends, being the same age) makes upward comparisons more informative

or more personally meaningful, thereby intensifying their sting; but being distinctively close or

similar (e.g., being married, being born on exactly the same day) can facilitate reflection or

assimilation (Wheeler & Suls, 2007), thereby diluting or softening the impact of inferiority.

People seem to at least intuitively appreciate how upward targets can be more threatening if

they are moderately close, and consequently employ various strategies to mitigate that threat.

One strategy is to insist—despite your inferior performance—that your underlying ability levels

are in fact similar to those of the superior target; indeed, people do tend to claim smaller

differences between the abilities of the self and an upward target when comparing with a

moderately close other than when comparing someone who is either extremely close or with

whom they have no connection (Locke, 2011b). Another strategy is to make contrastive

comparisons that frame the superior other as too different from or distant from the self to be a

relevant target for comparison (Alicke, LoSchiavo, Zerbst, & Zhang, 1997; Mussweiler, Gabriel,

& Bodenhausen, 2000). A related strategy is to physically and emotionally distance the self from

the superior other (Tesser, 1988), which tends to diminish the emotional impact of feeling

inferior. However, this tactic for protecting status comes at the cost of undermining solidarity. If

the relationship with the target is important, then creating cognitive, emotional, or physical

distance between the self and the target may be impractical or undesirable.

A strategy which enables people to enhance both their status and their solidarity is to

highlight distinctive connective comparisons between the self and the superior other. If people

can construe themselves and an upward target as sharing a close association, then they may be

able to enhance their own sense of status by basking in the reflected glory of the target's status

(Cialdini et al., 1976; Tesser, 1988) or by assimilating the target's virtues into their own self-

evaluation (McFarland, Buehler, Mackay, 2001). Even if feeling connected does not enhance

your status, though, it may help you to respond to the successful other with empathy rather than

envy (Beach & Tesser, 1995; Lockwood & Pinkus, this volume). However, in most relationships

enjoying reflection and empathy is easier if the upward target has not outperformed you in a domain in which you have staked your own self-esteem (Tesser, 1988).

Interactions and Tradeoffs between Agency and Communion

On the one hand, agency and communion are conceptually distinct dimensions of human experience, and vertical and horizontal social comparisons are conceptually distinct dimensions of social judgment. On the other hand, as we have seen, in everyday life the dimensions are interdependent and intertwined. The meaning of our inferiority or superiority to another person is shaped by our closeness to or distance from that person. And, in turn, our judgment of how close or distant we are from another person is swayed by the implications that relationship has for our sense of positive distinctiveness and status. Thus, the combination and the interactions of agency and communion together shape the causes, the contents, and the consequences of social comparisons.

To illustrate, in the following section I explore how the agentic and communal functions of social comparisons interact in shaping three types of social experiences: (1) comparisons with desirable and undesirable targets, (2) modeling and conformity, and (3) cooperative relationships. The first is interesting because it is an inevitable but often awkward aspect of social living; the latter two are interesting because they are essential foundations of communal life and group survival. What will be evident in all cases is not only how agency and communion are intertwined, but also how, as a general rule, most people prefer to experience both agency and communion. They want to feel both confidence and connection in their social interactions; they want others to deem them worthy of both respect and love; they want to believe they enjoy both status and solidarity with their peers. However, experiencing both agency and communion is easier in some circumstances than others.

Agency and Communion with Desirable and Undesirable Targets

Although vertical comparisons exert their most direct and robust influence on agentic feelings (e.g., confidence), they can also influence communal feelings (e.g., intimacy), and the nature of the influence depends on the desirability of the target-attribute.[2] Specifically, upward comparisons can cause people to feel disconnected from the target, but only if the target-attribute is deemed desirable, and especially if the attribute is relevant to one's own self-esteem (Locke, 2005; Tesser, 1988). Analogously, although horizontal comparisons exert their most direct and robust influence on communal feelings, they can also influence agentic feelings, and the nature of the influence depends on the target-attribute's desirability. Specifically, sharing a desirable attribute predicts feeling confident, whereas sharing an undesirable attribute predicts feeling insecure (Locke, 2005). Thus, if misery loves miserable company, it is because such company provides solidarity not status. What enhances status is to construe oneself to be not just among others, but "among the better ones" (Collins, 2000).

One interesting implication is that we face a dilemma when comparing with undesirable target attributes. Connective comparisons may enhance our feeling of fellowship with the target, but they may also insinuate that we share (or might someday share) the target's undesirable attributes. Conversely, contrastive and downward comparisons with the unfortunate target may protect or enhance our sense of agency, but at the cost of undermining communion.

Our own self-worth moderates our reactions to targets with desirable and undesirable attributes in several ways. People with greater self-worth are particularly likely to believe that their own attributes are desirable (Taylor & Brown, 1988); consequently, when comparing with targets with desirable attributes, people with greater self-worth are less likely to report upward comparisons and more likely to report more connective comparisons and connected feelings

(Locke, 2005). Conversely, people with greater self-worth tend to feel more alienated from comparison targets to the extent that the targets' attributes are inferior to their own; that is, downward comparisons undermine communal feelings among people high in self-worth but not among people low in self-worth (Locke, 2005). Likewise, people higher in self-worth are more embracing of positive disclosers but are more rejecting of negative disclosers than are people low in self-worth, and this effect appears to be mediated by perceived similarity (Locke, 2008). Apparently, people with high self-worth are more selective or discriminating in their experience of solidarity; they only bestow connective comparisons and communal feelings on relatively desirable targets. Put differently, while high self-worth people may be the most open to and able to enjoy communion with targets with desirable attributes, high self-worth people may also be the least willing or able to connect with targets with undesirable attributes (Locke, 2005, 2008).

Agency and Communion in Modeling and Conformity

Modeling is a "psychological matching process" (Bandura, 1986) in which exposure to a target causes a person to become more similar to that target. Research on modeling suggests that people are more likely to attend to and reduce discrepancies with models who they perceive to be both (a) relatively successful on the behavioral dimension of interest, but also (b) similar to the self on characteristics that promise that the self can be similarly successful (Bandura, 1986). In other words, people model themselves after targets with whom they can make both upward comparisons and connective comparisons. As noted earlier, the "proxy model" of ability comparisons (Wheeler et al., 1997) describes an analogous process whereby people compare with a similar-and-successful proxy before deciding to undertake an unfamiliar challenge.

Modeling and conformity refer to kindred imitation processes (Hilmert, Kulik, & Christenfeld, 2006). Within the field of psychology, conformity research tends to be conducted

by social psychologists, while modeling research tends to be conducted by clinical, personality, and developmental psychologists. Nonetheless, the two literatures converge in suggesting that the most influential targets are those with whom people make both upward and connective comparisons—that is, targets on whom people confer both status and solidarity. For example, Newcomb's (1943) seminal research suggested that attitude conformity reflected a motive for solidarity with a respected reference group; when students entered college, that reference group became the respected members of their new community (i.e, faculty and older students). The "triadic model" of opinion comparison (Suls, Martin & Wheeler, 2000) makes an analogous observation: When evaluating their beliefs, people should prefer to compare with "similar experts" (higher-status targets with whom they share basic values).

Conformity and communion mutually influence each other: People not only make more comparisons with and subsequent adjustments to people and groups with whom they feel connected (Hilmert, Kulik, & Christenfeld, 2006), they are also more likely to be accepted by the people and groups to which they conform (Forsyth, 2000). Likewise, conformity and status mutually influence each other: People not only seek to imitate high-status targets, but being able to make connective comparisons between themselves and high-status others helps them to construe themselves as "one of the better ones" (Collins, 2000).

As an aside, there are reasons to expect that low-status individuals will engage in more conformity or modeling than high-status individuals. One reason is that, by definition, low-status individuals have a larger sample of higher-status targets to whom they can compare themselves and thus to whom they can conform. Another reason is that low-status individuals are more avoidant of risk than are high-status individuals (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006) and conformity tends to be less risky than non-conformity for several reasons. First, people who conform—that

is, who act like others do—are less likely to be noticed. Second, if their behavior is noticed and

could be negatively evaluated, people who have conformed can appeal to the covariation

principle and observe that their high-consensus behavior is apparently what a typical person does

in that situation. Third, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, conformity to what others are

doing may be the safest route; after all, the path less traveled is (both figuratively and literally)

more likely to end in quicksand. Whatever the reasons, there is growing evidence that people

who feel powerful do conform less (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008).

Agency and Communion in Cooperative Relationships

Both horizontal and vertical comparisons can play an important role in deciding whether to

form or to dissolve a cooperative relationship, such as a friendship, marriage, or athletic or work

team. In general, people want to enter into cooperative relationships with others who can offer

both agency and communion. With respect to agency, people want partners who have skills and

resources that will help them to realize their shared aspirations. With respect to communion,

people want partners who share their goals, an understanding of how to achieve those goals, and

a concern for their welfare and interests. There may be little or no practical benefit to either

communion without agency (e.g., a benevolent but bungling partner) or agency without

communion (e.g., a powerful partner whose goals, plans, and interests are in opposition to our

own).

Moreover, often the most effective partnerships involve negotiating a "division of labor", in

which the partners contribute complementary assets. For example, most team sports consist of

members who specialize in different skills, such as pitching versus hitting; in other words, the

different members contribute different means in service of achieving a shared end—in this case,

winning the game. In this way, differences can contribute to group cohesion. Therefore, in order

to be welcomed into cooperative relationships, people may want to identify and emphasize assets that they can contribute that are relatively rare. Lack of distinctiveness can imply you are an expendable (rather than uniquely valuable) member of the group, which can undermine both communion and self-esteem (Leary & Cox, 2008).

This is the logic behind the "Jigsaw Classroom" technique (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997), in which a group of students is given a shared task, and different members of the group are given different—but equally essential—pieces of the overall task. The jigsaw structure simultaneously evokes connective, upward, and downward comparisons: Members recognize their shared goal and that each of them has complementary areas of expertise. Creating this interdependence among the students has been shown to increase cooperation, self-confidence, and engagement. The Jigsaw Classroom again illustrates why it is so difficult disentangle status and solidarity. Status—in this case, unique skills and resources—can promote social acceptance; in turn, acceptance can enhance status and self-esteem (Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001).

Vertical and horizontal comparisons also play an important role in creating and sustaining another type of cooperative relationship—romantic relationships. Romantic partners may invest their status in distinct, complementary performance domains in order to prevent vertical comparisons from evoking relationship-threatening competitive or envious feelings (Beach & Tesser, 1995). But a fulfilling partnership does not simply avoid dissolution; it also generates communion (Impett, Strachman, Finkel, & Gable, 2008). In healthy romantic relationships, vertical comparisons can be an impetus for strengthening the relationship—for example, partners may respond to upward comparisons by drawing closer to their successful partner and sharing the experience of success, and respond to downward comparisons by feeling empathy and helping their partner to improve (Lockwood & Pinkus, this volume). Moreover, as in other

partnerships, one way romantic partners can enhance both agency and communion is to make vertical comparisons of complementary strengths *in addition to* more abstract connective comparisons; for example, a couple might note that one is a faster biker and the other is a faster swimmer, but they both love entering triathlons. According to exchange theories of relationship satisfaction (Sprecher, 1998), a particularly critical comparison in romantic relationships is the comparison of each partner's status within the romantic marketplace (the set of alternative partners). Once again, the partners may have different sources of status, but if they make connective comparisons of their overall status (e.g., "you're rich, I'm sexy, and, in those different ways, we're both stunningly desirable"), then the relationship will be comfortable and stable (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). In short, similarity in *overall* status is the foundation of solidarity.

To summarize, in effective and satisfying partnerships, comparisons between partners generate both status and solidarity. Perhaps people sometimes *appear* to want a moderate or optimal level of distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991) because we average together the dimensions on which they want status (i.e., distinctiveness) and the dimensions on which they want solidarity (i.e., lack of distinctiveness). Recognizing that status and solidarity are separable dimensions highlights how people can maximize both. Status can be created through vertical comparisons of the specific and distinct skills and resources each partner contributes; if each partner invests in a distinct niche, then the positive distinctiveness of one does not threaten the positive distinctiveness of the other. Solidarity, in turn, can be created through horizontal comparisons along other, more general dimensions, such as shared values and overall contributions to shared goals.

Yet, similarity seems to promote cooperative relationships even when there is no obvious connection between the shared attributes and the shared task, perhaps because perceived similarity can automatically activate kinship cognitions (Park & Schaller, 2005). The connective comparisons cause people to experience "you and me" as a "we"—that is, as a cohesive unit. In exceptionally "communal" or "communal sharing" relationships (Fiske, 1992), such as often exist in families and intimate relationships, members may be less likely to compare each other's respective contributions. In such cases, connective comparisons alone—in the absence of complementary upward comparisons—are sufficient to sustain cohesion.

Situational Influences on Communal Motives and Experiences

We have seen how theory and research converge in supporting agency and communion as key dimensions of social cognition, including social comparison. Yet, interestingly, for years the social cognition literature emphasized the agentic dimension more than the communal dimension. Communal experiences tended to be framed as moderators of agentic experiences, rather than as intrinsically important. The following section explores one reason why communal experiences may have been neglected: The situations in which social comparisons were studied may have made agentic concerns more salient and communal concerns less salient (to both the participants and the researchers).

Three situational variables which may influence the degree to which a social comparison involves or evokes communal concerns and experiences are (1) the relationship with the comparison target, (2) whether there is an interpersonal interaction with the target, and (3) the type of attribute that is being compared. Other situational factors may also activate communal concerns or experiences, such as the opportunity to befriend the target individual or join the target group, and, more broadly, uncertainty about your connection with the target individual

or group (perhaps because they are unfamiliar or have conveyed evidence of being dismissive or rejecting); however, these other situational variables have been less extensively studied. Therefore, in the following sections, I will focus on the effects of closeness, interaction, and target-attribute.

Effects of Feeling Close

Not surprisingly, the relationship with the target influences the contents and consequences of a comparison. Comparisons with close targets are much more likely to be connective and generate communal feelings than are comparisons with mere acquaintances or strangers (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992; Locke & Nekich, 2000; Locke, 2003). One explanation is that people simply have more in common with close others. Another possible explanation is that people in close relationships avoid vertical comparisons because they appreciate how such comparisons can be upsetting to both individuals (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Zell & Exline, this volume). Finally, when upward and downward comparisons do occur, close relationship partners are more apt to experience empathy rather than envy, and shared fate rather than schadenfreude (Lockwood & Pincus, this volume).

Effects of Interacting

When people make a comparison while interacting (e.g., socializing, conversing) with the target, their primary concern is less likely to be evaluating the self or determining who is superior, and more likely to be whether the self and the target can or do share a connection and common bond (Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995; Locke & Nekich, 2000). Social comparisons made during interactions are also associated with more downward and fewer upward comparisons, more connective comparisons, and a variety of positive feelings, including feelings of connectedness (Locke & Nekich, 2000; Locke, 2003). Although people can feel

connected simply by noticing or thinking about others, it appears to be more common for

comparisons made in the absence of interaction to involve mulling over how one is different

from and worse-off than others.

Effects of Target-Attribute

In everyday life, people tend to make more connective comparisons, and feel more

connected to a target, when the target-attribute is desirable than when the target-attribute is

undesirable (Locke, 2003, 2005). These findings concur with earlier research showing that

people perceive themselves as more similar to more physically and vocally attractive others

(Marks & Miller, 1982; Marks, Miller & Maruyama, 1981; Miyake & Zuckerman, 1993).

Most people may tend to make connective comparisons with desirable target-attributes

because they not only want to believe but also really do believe that their own attributes are

also above average in desirability (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

In his original formulation of social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) wrote: "With

respect to abilities, different performances have intrinsically different values", whereas "…no

opinion in and of itself has any greater value than any other opinion. The value comes from the

subjective feeling that the opinion is correct and valid…" (pp. 124-125). In addition to

abilities, other attributes that are perceived as having an intrinsic, objective, or commonly

shared basis of evaluation include accomplishments (e.g., *good* grades), physical appearance

(e.g., *good* looks), and wealth (e.g., a *good* income); I will call these *objective attributes.* In

addition to opinions, other attributes that are perceived as having subjective bases for

evaluation include feelings, beliefs, and lifestyle choices (e.g., eating a vegetarian diet); I will

call these *subjective attributes*. In everyday life, when people compare a subjective (rather than

objective) attribute, they are more likely to make horizontal comparisons and to be primarily

concerned with whether they are similar to and whether they can connect with the target (Locke & Nekich, 2000). Arguably the limiting case of a subjective attribute is a purely subjective experience such as a sensation, thought, or feeling. Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, and Pyszczynski (2006) call the belief that the self and another are having identical subjective experiences *I-sharing*, and their research suggests that I-sharing may be a stronger predictor of liking than sharing other attributes, at least for comparers who are in need of connection.

Yet, the links between attribute subjectivity and comparison outcomes are complex. Although sharing subjective attributes may help us to embrace and humanize others, denying that others share our subjective attributes—for instance, by doubting that their experience is as wise or colorful as ours—establishes the foundation for dehumanizing and mistreating them (Haslam, 2006). For example, describing the self as having more distinctively "human" traits than do others is associated with greater self-reported aggression towards others (Locke, 2009). A related issue is that humans display a disconcerting talent for transforming even the most subjective of attributes into a basis for comparing status. For example, people can make downward comparisons with others who they judge as failing to experience the same rapture they do in response to a work of art. In fact, we are more likely to make downward comparisons when comparing subjective attributes than when comparing objective attributes (Locke & Nekich, 2000), perhaps because when comparing subjective attributes there are no objective criteria that can challenge our presumption of superiority (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). On the other hand, people can transform even the most objective of attributes, such as scores from academic or athletic performances, into a basis for solidarity, perhaps because they assume that others who produce similar performances (e.g., excellent swim times) also share in common certain subjective attributes (e.g., the experience of many

hours of intense training).

Effects of Research Situations

In short, some situations push communal concerns and experiences to the foreground and other situations push them to the background. To the extent that each research study constitutes its own unique situation, some research studies may constitute situations that foreground communal concerns and experiences and others may constitute situations that background communal concerns and experiences. For example, during the early years of social comparison research, research conducted in group interaction situations highlighted needs for consensus and cooperation (Festinger, 1950) and research conducted in unusual situations in which participants could have contact with each other highlighted needs for clarity and affiliation (Schachter, 1959).

However, from the 1960s through the 1980s, experimental social comparison research (e.g., Hakmiller, 1966; Thornton & Arrowood, 1966; Wheeler, 1966) employed situations which tended to elicit agentic motives and vertical comparisons. In order to clearly define and control the direction and content of the comparison, the target-attribute was typically preselected to be an objective attribute (such as a test score). Moreover, in order to minimize the influence of extraneous factors, the procedure often precluded any significant contact or interaction with the target, who was typically either a stranger or a person or group that was not actually present during the experiment. As explained above, these are exactly the types of situations that are likely to stimulate agentic concerns and vertical comparisons rather than communal concerns and horizontal comparisons. Consequently, during this time there was decreasing emphasis on communal or social motives for social comparison such as cooperation and consensual validation, and increasing emphasis on agentic or *self*-focused

motives, such as *self*-evaluation, *self*-enhancement, or *self*-improvement (Wood, 1989).

Concomitantly, upward and downward comparison information (i.e., information about

inferiority or superiority) was framed as the essential substance of a social comparison;

meanwhile, connective and contrastive comparison information was framed as *related* or

surrounding attributes that mattered to the comparer mainly as aides in selecting an

appropriate vertical comparison target and in interpreting the (self-evaluation, self-

enhancement, or self-improvement) implications of the vertical comparison information

(Wood, 1989).

Beginning in the 1980s, research involving real relationships or more realistic situations

has helped to expand the scope of the social comparison literature and make it more inclusive

of communal functions. First, research on people with medical or other major problems, while

confirming the role of needs for clarity and enhancement, also recognized the role of needs for

connection; for example, when cardiac patients compare with other patients, they report

making connective comparisons more often than vertical comparisons, and experiencing more

comfort from contact with the connective comparison targets than contact with the upward or

downward comparison targets (Helgeson & Taylor, 1993). Second, research on comparisons

with friends, romantic partners, and other close targets also has highlighted the importance of

communal concerns (Lockwood & Pincus, this volume); for example, research supporting the

self-evaluation maintenance and extended self-evaluation maintenance models show that

people can delight in the superior performance of a close other, at least when the performance

is not in a domain that is critical to their own self-esteem (Tesser, 1988; Beach & Tesser,

1995). Third, studies of naturalistic social comparisons (e.g., Locke, 2003, 2007; Locke &

Nekich, 2000; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992) underscored how laboratory situations were often not

representative of the contexts in which social comparisons naturally arise. In everyday life, people compare with close others (friends and family) more often than with distant others (acquaintances and strangers), and usually have compared with their comparison targets in the past and expect to do so again in the future. Approximately half of the comparisons occur while interacting with the target, and almost half involve subjective attributes. In sum, in everyday life, social comparisons are often comparisons of subjective qualities made during interactions with specific, close others—all of which should increase the likelihood of communal motives and horizontal comparisons. And, in fact, during naturalistic social comparisons the person often *is* seeking a common bond, the focus often *is* personalized, the target often *is* experienced as neither better nor worse, and the feelings generated often *are* those of connectedness and closeness.

Summary and Conclusions

To summarize, I conceptualize social comparisons as *intrinsically social* cognitions that place the self *above* or *below* and *together with* or *apart from* another person or group. While many experimental situations (e.g., seeing strangers' test scores) focus attention on vertical comparisons and on concerns and feelings related to agency and status, many naturalistic settings (e.g., interacting with close others) focus attention on horizontal comparisons and on concerns and feelings related to communion and solidarity.

There are simple, direct, and robust links between vertical comparisons and agentic motives, feelings, and actions (such as self-enhancement, pride, and assertion), and between horizontal comparisons and communal functions and motives, feelings, and actions (such as relationship-enhancement, intimacy, and affiliation). Yet, there are also more complex links between a comparison's direction and its agentic and communal causes and consequences. Distance or

closeness to a target often moderates the significance of inferiority or superiority, and inferiority or superiority to a target often moderates the desire for and enjoyment of distance and closeness. One example was that when we compare with a desirable target-attribute, a connective comparison can enhance agency, while an upward comparison can undermine communion. Moreover, the synergy between the two dimensions can have important behavioral consequences; for example, we tend to imitate and collaborate with people with whom we make both connective comparisons (that enhance solidarity) and upward comparisons (that enhance respect).

A model that emphasizes only agentic causes, contents, and consequences of social comparisons is, literally, one-dimensional. A model that also incorporates communal causes, contents, and consequences composes a more complete picture. However, even a two-dimensional model appears flat when compared with the multidimensional reality of our social lives.

Of course, that limitation will be true, to some extent, of any abstract, scientific model. Perhaps the medium better able to articulate the texture and depth of a social experience is a play or a novel. To illustrate the point, consider these words that Serpohovskoy says to Vronsky in the classic novel, *Anna Karenina*: "But listen: we're the same age, you've known a greater number of women perhaps than I have." (Tolstoy, 1877/2002, p. 311). Without having read the novel, we can suppose that Serpohovskoy has made a connective and then a vertical comparison; however, we cannot appreciate their *meaning*—and even whether the vertical comparison is upward or downward or a mix of both—without understanding the relationship between Serpohovskoy and Vronsky and the relationship between Vronsky and women (especially Anna Karenina). In short, to understand the comparisons, we should really read the whole, sprawling novel.

The same is true of any social comparison. The less we know about the comparer, the more we can only guess what the comparison means. Nonetheless, we at least can make a thoughtful guess. The evidence in this chapter has demonstrated how the two cardinal axes of social life—agency and communion—together provide a simple yet powerful and generative framework for defining what social comparisons mean to the people who are living them. Therefore, in trying to understand any social comparison, an educated guess is that agency and communion may be principal themes shaping that comparison's antecedents, contents, and consequences. Social comparisons influence not only our judgments and feelings of status and agency, but also communal phenomena ranging from modeling and socialization to forming, sustaining, and dissolving cooperative relationships and groups. Viewing social comparisons through a wider compass reveals them to be a pervasive presence in the panorama of social life.

References

Alicke, M. D., LoSchiavo, F. M., Zerbst, J., & Zhang, S. (1997). The person who outperforms me is a genius: Maintaining perceived competence in upward social comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 781–789.

Anderson, C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2006). Power, optimism, and risktaking. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 36*, 511–536.

Archer, J. (2006). Testosterone and human aggression: an evaluation of the challenge hypothesis, *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews, 30*, 319–345.

Aronson, E., & Patnoe, S. (1997). *The jigsaw classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Aronson, E., & Worchel, P. (1966). Similarity versus liking as determinants of interpersonal attractiveness. *Psychonomic Science, 5*, 157-158.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bartz, J. A., & Hollander, E. (2006). The neuroscience of affiliation: Forging links between basic and clinical research on neuropeptides and social behavior. *Hormones and Behavior, 50*, 518-528.

Beach, S. R., & Tesser, A. (1995). Self-esteem and the extended self-evaluation maintenance model. In M. H. Kernis (Ed.), *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem* (pp. 145–170), New York: Plenum Press.

Berscheid, E., & Reis, H. T. (1998). Attraction and close relationships. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindsey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology: Vol.* 2 (4th ed., pp. 193–281). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17,* 475– 482.

Brewer, M. B., & Weber, J. G. (1994). Self-evaluation effects of interpersonal versus intergroup comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66, 268–275.

Brickman, P., & Bulman, R. J. (1977). Pleasure and pain in social comparison. In J. M. Suls & R. L. Miller (Eds.), *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives* (pp. 149-186). Washington, DC: Hemisphere.

Brown, J. D., Novick, N. J., Lord, K. A., & Richards, J. M. (1992). When Gulliver travels: Social context, psychological closeness, and self-appraisals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*, 717-727.

Brown, R. (1965). *Social Psychology*. New York: Free Press.

Bugental, D. B. (2000). Acquisition of the algorithms of social life: A domain-based approach. *Psychological Bulletin, 26*, 187-209.

Buunk, B. P., Collins, R. L., Taylor, S. E., VanYperen, N. W., Dakof, G. A. (1990). The affective consequences of social comparison: Either direction has its ups and downs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*, 1238-1249.

Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm.* New York: Academic Press.

Cash, T., Cash, D., & Butters, J. (1983). "Mirror, mirror, on the wall . . .": Contrast effects and self-evaluations of physical attractiveness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 9*, 351-358.

Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34,* 366–375.

Collins, R. L. (2000). Among the better ones: Upward assimilation in social comparison. In J.

 Suls & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research (pp. 159 –*

 171). New York: Kluwer Academic.

Condon, J. W., & Crano, W. D. (1988). Inferred evaluation and the relation between attitude

 similarity and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54,*

 789–797.

Cummins, D. (2005). Dominance, status, and social hierarchies. In D. M. Buss (Ed.), *The*

 Handbook of evolutionary psychology (pp. 676–697). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Dunning, D., Meyerowitz, J. A., & Holzberg, A. D. (1989). Ambiguity and self-evaluation: The

 role of idiosyncratic trait definitions in self-serving assessments of ability. *Journal of*

 Personality and Social Psychology, 57, 1082-1090.

Festinger, L. (1950). Informal social communication. *Psychological Review, 57*, 271-282.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*, 117-140.

Festinger, L., Schachter, S., & Back, K. (1950). *Social pressures in informal groups: A study of a*

 housing project. New York: Harper.

Fiske, A. P. 1992. The four elementary forms of sociality: Framework for a unified theory of

 social relations. *Psychological Review, 99, 689-723.*

Foa, U. G. (1961). Convergences in the analysis of the structure of interpersonal behavior.

 Psychological Review, 68, 341-353.

Forsyth, D. R. (2000). Social comparison and influence in groups. In J. Suls & L. Wheeler

 (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (pp. 81-103). New York:

 Plenum

Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Gruenfeld, D. H., Whitson, J. A., & Liljenquist, K. A. (2008).

Power reduces the press of the situation: Implications for creativity, conformity, and

dissonance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1450-1466.

Gardner, W. L., Gabriel, S., & Hochschild, L. (2002). When you and I are "we," you are not

threatening: The role of self-expansion in social comparison. *Journal of Personality and

Social Psychology, 82,* 239–251.

Gilbert, D. T., Giesler, R. B., & Morris, K. E. (1995). When comparisons arise. *Journal of

Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 227-236.

Goethals, G. R., & Darley, J. M. (1977). Social comparison theory: An attributional approach. In

J. M. Suls & R. L. Miller (Eds.), *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical

perspectives* (pp. 259-278). Washington, DC: Hemisphere.

Gonzaga, G. C., Campos, B., & Bradbury, T. (2007). Similarity, convergence, and relationship

satisfaction in dating and married couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,

93,* 34-48.

Hakmiller, K. L. (1966). Threat as a determinant of downward comparison. *Journal of

Experimental Social Psychology, 2* (Suppl.1), 32-39.

Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology

Review,10,* 252-264.

Heck, S. A., & Pincus, A. L. (2001). Agency and communion in the structure of parental

representations. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 76*, 180-184.

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations.* New York: Wiley.

Helgeson, V. S., & Mickelson, K. D. (1995). Motives for social comparison. *Personality and

Social Psychology Bulletin. 21,* 1200-1209.

Hegelson, V. S., & Taylor, S. E. (1993). Social comparisons and adjustment among cardiac

patients. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *23*, 1171-1195.

Hilmert, C., Kulik, J., & Christenfeld, N. (2006). Positive and negative opinion modeling: The

influence of another's similarity and dissimilarity. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 90*, 440-452.

Holland, R. W., Roeder, U., van Baaren, R. B., Brandt, A., & Hannover, B. (2004). Don't stand

so close to me: Self-construal and interpersonal closeness. *Psychological Science*, *15*, 237-

242.

Horowitz, L. M., Wilson, K. R., Turan, B., Zolotsev, P., Constantino, M. J., & Henderson, L.

(2006). How interpersonal motives clarify the meaning of interpersonal behavior: A revised

circumplex model. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*, 67–86.

Hyman, H. (1942). The psychology of status. *Archives of Psychology*, no. 269.

Impett, E., Strachman, A., Finkel, E., & Gable., S. L. (2008). Maintaining sexual desire and

sexual satisfaction: The importance of approach relationship goals. *Journal of Personality &

Social Psychology*, 94, 808-823.

Jones, J. T., Pelham, B. W., Carvallo, M., & Mirenberg, M. C. (2004). How do I love thee? Let

me count the Js: Implicit egotism and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality and

Social Psychology, 87*, 665–683.

Klein, W.M. (1997). Objective standards are not enough: affective, self-evaluative, and

behavioral responses to social comparison information. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 72*, 763-74.

Klein, W. M. (2003). Effects of objective feedback and "single other" or "average other" social

comparison feedback on performance judgments and helping behavior. *Personality and*

Social Psychology Bulletin, 29, 418-429.

Kurzban, R., & Leary, M. R. (2001). Evolutionary origins of stigmatization: The functions of

social exclusion. *Psychological Bulletin, 127,* 187–208.

Leary, M. R., & Cox, C. (2008). Belongingness motivation: A mainspring of social

action. *Handbook of motivation science.* In J. Shah & W. Gardner (Eds.), *Handbook of*

Motivation Science (pp. 27-40). New York: Guilford.

Leary, M. R., Cottrell, C. A., & Phillips, M. (2001). Deconfounding the effects of dominance and

social acceptance on self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81,* 898–

909.

Locke, K. D., & Horowitz, L. M. (1990). Satisfaction in interpersonal interactions as a function

of similarity in level of dysphoria. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, 823-

831.

Locke, K. D. (2003). Status and solidarity in social comparison: agentic and communal values

and vertical and horizontal directions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*,

619-631.

Locke, K. D. (2005). Connecting the horizontal dimension of social comparison with self-worth

and self-confidence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 795-803.

Locke, K. D. (2007). Personalized and generalized comparisons: Causes and consequences of

variations in the focus of social comparisons. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,*

33, 213-225.

Locke, K. D. (2008, May). Self-worth influences reactions to positive and negative disclosures.

Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Interpersonal Theory and Research,

Tempe, Arizona.

Locke, K. D. (2009). Aggression, narcissism, self-esteem, and the attribution of desirable and

humanizing traits to self versus others. *Journal of Research in Personality, 43*, 99-102.

Locke, K. D. (2011a). Circumplex measures of interpersonal constructs. In L. M. Horowitz & S.

Strack (Eds.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychology: Theory, Research, Assessment, and*

Therapeutic Interventions (pp. 313-324). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Locke, K.D. (2011b). Interpersonal moderators of the effects of upward comparisons on ability

judgments. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 33*, 37-46.

Locke, K. D., Craig, T. Y., Baik, K., & Gohil, K. (2012). Binds and bounds of communion:

Effects of interpersonal values on assumed similarity of self and others. *Journal of*

Personality and Social Psychology, 103, 879-897.

Locke, K. D., & Keltner, D. (1993). Using art for comparison and distraction: Effects on

negative emotions and judgements of satisfaction. *Cognition and Emotion, 7*, 443-460.

Locke, K. D., & Nekich, J. (2000). Agency and communion in naturalistic social comparison.

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26, 864-874.

Lockwood, P. & Kunda, Z. (1997). Superstars and me: Predicting the impact of role models on

the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 91-103.

Marks, G., & Miller, N. (1982). Target attractiveness as a mediator of assumed attitude

similarity. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 8*, 728-735

Marks, G., Miller, N., & Maruyama, G. (1981). Effect of targets' physical attractiveness on

assumptions of similarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 41*, 198-206.

Martin, R., Suls, J., & Wheeler, L. (2002). Ability evaluation by proxy: Effects of maximal

performance and related attributes in social comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social*

Psychology, 82, 781-791.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1989). The structure of interpersonal traits: Wiggins'

circumplex and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*,

586–595.

McFarland, C., Buehler, R., & MacKay, L. (2001). Affective responses to social comparisons

with extremely close others. *Social Cognition*, *19*, 547-586.

Miller, D. T., Downs, J. S., Prentice, D. A. (1998). Minimal conditions for the creation of a unit

relationship: The social bond between birthdaymates. *European Journal of Social

Psychology, 28*, 475-481.

Miller, D. T., Turnbull, W., & McFarland, C. (1988). Particularistic and Universalistic

Evaluation in the Social Comparison Process. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 6*, 908-917.

Miyake, K., & Zuckerman, M. (1993). Beyond personality impressions: Effects of physical and

vocal attractiveness on false consensus, social comparison, affiliation, and assumed and

perceived similarity. *Journal of Personality, 61,* 411-437.

Mussweiler, T. (2003). Comparison processes in social judgment: Mechanisms and

consequences. *Psychological Review, 110,* 472–489.

Mussweiler, T., & Bodenhausen, G. (2002). I know you are but what am I? Self-evaluative

consequences of judging ingroup and outgroup members. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 82,* 19–32.

Mussweiller, T., Gabriel, S., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2000). Shifting social identities as a

strategy for deflecting threatening social comparisons. Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 79, 398–409.

Newcomb, T. M. (1943). *Personality and Social Change*. New York: Dryden Press.

Oosterwijk, S., Rotteveel, M., Fischer, A. H. & Hess, U. (2009). Embodied emotion concepts: How generating words about pride and disappointment influences posture. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 39*, 457-467.

Park, J. H., & Schaller, M. (2005). Does attitude similarity serve as a heuristic cue for kinship? Evidence of an implicit cognitive association. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 26*, 158-170.

Pelham, B. W., & Wachsmuth, J. O. (1995). The waxing and waning of the social self: Assimilation and contrast in social comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 825–838.

Pinel, E. C., Long, A., Landau, M., Alexander, K., & Pyszczynski, T. (2006). Seeing I to I: A path to interpersonal connectedness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 243–257.

Pinkus, R.T., Lockwood, P., Marshall,T., & Yoon, H.M. (in press). Responses to comparisons in romantic relationships: Empathy, shared fate, and contrast. *Personal Relationships*.

Schachter, S. (1959). *The Psychology of Affiliation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Smith, H. J. & Leach, C. W. (2004). Group membership and everyday social comparison experiences. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 34,* 297-308.

Sprecher, S. (1998). Social exchange theories and sexuality. *The Journal of Sex Research, 35,* 32-43.

Suls, J. M., Gastorf, J., & Lawhon, J. (1978). Social comparison choices for evaluating a sex- and age-related ability. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 4,* 102-105.

Suls, J., Martin, R., & Wheeler, L. (2000). Three kinds of opinion comparison: The triadic model. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*, 219-237

Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin, 103*, 193-210.

Tesser, A. (1988). Toward a self-evaluation maintenance model of social behavior. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology: Vol. 21* (pp. 181-227). San Diego: Academic Press.

Thornton, D. A., & Arrowood; A. J. (1966). Self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and the locus of social comparison. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Supplement J,* 40-48.

Tolstoy, L. (1877/2002). *Anna Karenina* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). New York: Penguin Books.

Walster, E., Walster, G., & Berscheid, E. (1978). Equity: Theory and research. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Wheeler, L. (1966). Motivation as a determinant of upward comparison. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 2* (Suppl.1), 27-31.

Wheeler, L., Koestner, R., & Driver, R. E. (1982). Related attributes in choice of comparison others. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 20,* 263–271.

Wheeler, L., Martin, R., & Suls, J. (1997). The proxy model of social comparison for self-assessment of ability. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 1,* 54–61.

Wheeler, L., & Miyake, K. (1992). Social comparison in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62,* 760–773.

Wheeler, L., & Suls, J. (2007). Assimilation in social comparison: Can we agree on what it is? *Revue Internationale de psychologie sociale, 20*, 31-51.

Wiggins, J. S. (1979). A psychological taxonomy of trait-descriptive terms: The interpersonal domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 33*, 409–420.

Wiggins, J. S. (2003). *Paradigms of personality assessment*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Williams, L.E., & Bargh, J.A. (2008). Keeping one's distance: The influence of spatial distance cues on affect and evaluation. *Psychological Science, 19*, 302-308.

Wood, J. V. (1989). Theory and research concerning social comparisons of personal attributes. *Psychological Bulletin, 106*, 231-248.

Wood, J. V. (1996). What is social comparison and how should we study it? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22*, 520-537.

Wood, J. V., & Wilson, A. E. (2003). How important is social comparison? In M. Leary & J. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 344-366). New York: Guilford.

Footnotes

[1]Most of my own research on social comparisons has employed event-contingent self-recording procedures to assess naturally occurring social comparisons (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). Each time participants noticed themselves making a social comparison they completed a standardized "social comparison record" form on which they indicated features of the comparison (such as the direction) and the situation (such as the target) as well as accompanying thoughts and feelings. In conducting these studies (Locke & Nekich, 2000; Locke, 2003, 2005, 2007), I collected 11,116 social comparison records from 1,018 participants. Since I am intimately familiar with these data sets, in this chapter I will rely primarily on them to describe the features of ordinary, everyday comparison experiences.

[2]Target attribute desirability refers to whether the comparer judges the target-attribute to be desirable or undesirable. For example, people typically deem kind manners to be a desirable target-attribute and rude manners an undesirable target-attribute. It is important to distinguish target-attribute desirability from comparison direction. Naturally, comparisons with unusually desirable target-attributes (e.g., an IQ of 135) are much less likely to be downward and somewhat less likely to be connective than comparisons with more ordinary target-attributes. Likewise, comparisons with unusually undesirable target-attributes (e.g., an IQ of 65) are less likely to be upward or connective than comparisons with more ordinary target-attributes. Nonetheless, such comparisons do occur.
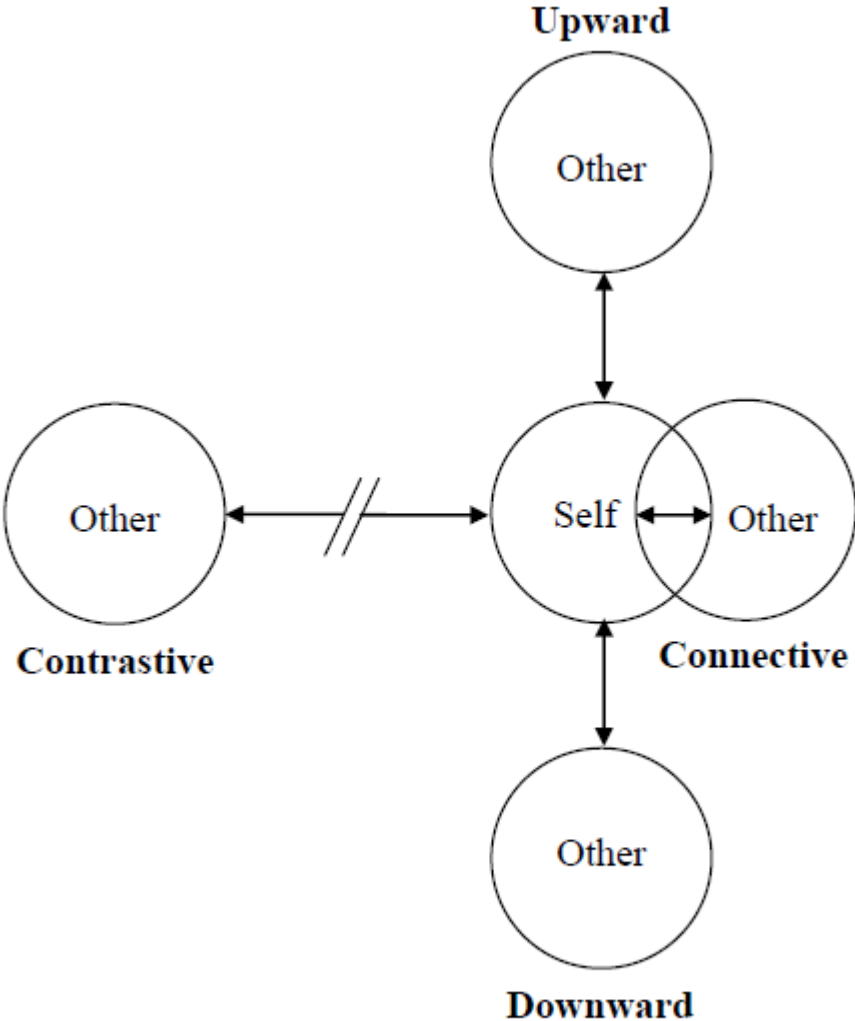
Figure 1. The four basic social comparison directions.