

The Theory of Dual comparison

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ABSTRACT

The article introduces the dual comparison theory in social comparison process. As per the theory, social comparison process can be best explained as two stage phenomena. Stage 1 corresponds to automatic processing of stimuli, where we compare with everyone with self-enhancement as the sole motive sought. Two strategies namely stereotyping and dimension switch, were identified working at stage 1. Stage 2 corresponds to a more conscious and strategic processing of social information. The central role of co-existence motive, was identifies in this stage. The theory explains the social comparison as a more complex process than earlier thought. This article will give definite answer to debate surrounding the ubiquitous nature of comparison process. Also it reiterates the importance of self-enhancement for human well-being.

Keywords: *Social Comparison, self-enhancement, stereotyping, dimension switch, co-existence*

Survival and reproduction are the two motives guiding human behavior at the most basic level, as identified by evolutionary scientists (Bodenhausen & Hugenberg, 2008). The human mind identifies opportunities and challenges, and develops strategies for successful navigation in these domains. Even for our hominid ancestors, the well-defined work of hunting and mating, posed substantial ecological and social selection pressure. The food acquirement-related ecological pressure challenged an individual, to identify their degree of self-like; Will, I will be able to catch the prey? From where should I approach? Which animal among the group seems most vulnerable prey? All these decision-making situations led to the question “How do I perceive myself?” Similarly the social selection pressure challenged an individual to identify other people’s overt behavior and hidden intentions, to create an acceptable self-image in other’s eye. Thus aiding the individual in establishing their position in a group, with weak hierarchical positions. This type of pressure is associated with another prominent question; “How do other perceives me?”

To survive under such selection pressure, humans have been programmed to increase their valuation in their own and others people’s eye. Many evolutionary theories have predicted such formulations. This propensity to project our ability in higher terms is called *self-enhancement* motive; it is an inner motivation of stamping one’s superiority over other co-

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The Theory of Dual comparison

humans. (Fein & Spencer 1997; For Review see Leary, 2007; Wood, Giordano & Ducharme, 1999). The presence of highly positive self-valuation is directly related to improved decision making capabilities and efficiently handling of relational and group-related challenges. (Sedikides, Skowronski & Gaertner, 2011). For instance, Lynn and colleagues (2014), reported that for mating, more self-enhanced and confident individual are considered more attractive. Similarly, several skills required for successful survival are directly associated with the self-enhancement level of an individual. (Armour & Taylor, 1998; Bonano, Field, Kovacevic, Kaltman & Snyder 2002; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Scmmel, 2004; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower & Gruenewald, 2000). This beneficial nature of proving one's superiority is also evident in human studies correlating the emission of the neurochemical "serotonin" with victorious social situations (Graziano, 2016).

In the modern society, the challenges are particularly peculiar. Our evolution spanning over numerous years, along with increased constraints and affordability of the society have imbibed the self enhancement motive on to our subconscious. (Brewer, 2004; Byrne, 2000; Cummins, 1998; Seyfarth & Chenay, 1994). This dominant nature of our mind has been submerged in the fuzzy logic of the society, because it considered blatant self-enhancement inappropriate. Considering such development, humans are in a constant search of opportunities to self-enhance, without disturbing the balance of the society.

Various definitions have been proposed to define self-enhancement. A majority of these reflect on the urge to prove the superiority of our present self-concept over others. By definition, the self-enhancement motive is comparative. To be confident about one's superiority among co-humans, clarity on relative performance level is must: this information is typically obtained through a comparative assessment of one's own abilities and opinions with those of others, thus facilitating the formation of the superiority concept. Alternatively, an environment without comparison targets may devoid one of any opportunity to prove their superiority or to self-enhance. This innate comparative nature of self-enhancement designates the social comparison process as the chief vehicle, available to humans for creating self-enhancement opportunities (Taylor, 1983). Temporal comparison is also related with such a motive, but at a lower intensity. This comparative nature of human judgment (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler, 2011; Hooren & Damne, 2012; Mussweiler & Epstude, 2009; Suls, Wheeler & Martin, 2002) implies the necessity of developing strategies within the social comparison process, ensuring constant charging stations that generate self-enhancement for individuals.

Self-enhancement was first identified in social comparison literature by Thornton and Arrowood, in 1966; however, Tom Will's (1981) theory of downward comparison, firmly established it as a major self-motive associated with the comparison process. According to this theory, self-enhancement from downward comparison (worse-off target) improves the psychological wellbeing of an individual. Furthermore, through a series of experiments on cancer patients (Taylor, 1983; Taylor, Woods and Litchman, 1985) and elderly individual (Heckman and Brim, 1977) supported this deduction. These studies have used self-enhancement strategies (such as downward comparison) under threatening circumstances (cancer or old age) and established the need of a reactive strategy to prevent self-evaluation from reducing below the threshold level. Alicke and Sedikides (2011) identified two parts of the self-valuation motive; self-protection and self enhancement. Self-protection has been identified in the social comparison literature as a suitable reactive strategy. The other proactive part, self-enhancement indicates the motive to reduce the difference between the present state's self-evaluation and the aspirational point. As discussed, humans have a clear existential advantage in pursuing the self-enhancement motive as a proactive strategy. This

The Theory of Dual comparison

part has not been recognized in the social comparison experiments because given the difficulty in capturing the comparison process in the natural environment, researchers have been restricted to only exposing the subjects to various stimuli's and then noting their effects. In other words, the experiments have been designed to capture the reactive effect of the subjects. Capturing social comparison process in the naturalistic settings through self-report or self-narration methods involves several errors, such as lack of awareness, social desirability and selective recall and aggregation problems (Woods 1996) thus inhibiting the identification of self-enhancement as a proactive motive sought in the social comparison process.

The inadequacy of experimental methods in explaining the complexities of the social comparison process has also been revealed in many studies. Until 1995, humans were considered to compare themselves only with a few selected individuals based on their diagnostic quality, Gilbert and colleague's (1995) proved that humans compare with everybody they encounter, regardless of their feedback quality. The author cited Wedell's (1994) works, which suggest the context effects (Contrast and assimilation) to be the part of an early cognitive processing which is uncontrollable in nature. A Similar observation was mentioned by Goethals (1986):

“It can be hard to hear an extremely intelligent person on the radio or see an extremely handsome one in the grocery store, or participate on a panel with an expert without engaging in social comparison no matter how much we would like not to.” (p. 272).

This Observation also suggests the presence of an uncontrolled element in the comparison process. Further, Goethals and Darley's (1977) comment on similarity hypothesis of Festinger's study (1954) also identified a subconscious stage; “If an individual already knows that someone is similar, that implies that a comparison process has already occurred”. Thus ,the aforementioned experiments and observations verify the presence of a subconscious element in the comparison process, which thus far is considered to be a strategic process executed to satisfy certain motive and goals such as, self-evaluation, enhancement and improvement (for review see Corcoran, Crusius, & Mussweiler, 2012; Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Suls, Martin & Wheeler, 2002; Taylor, Wayment, & Carrillo, 1996; Woods & Taylor, 1991).

Such existential dichotomies have been identified in dual process theories literature. The dual process theory provides an account of how a phenomenon can occur in two different ways or as a result of two different processes. The theory establishes the dichotomy of automatic and controlled process in explaining various phenomena in social, personality, cognitive and clinical psychology (Bargh & Chartrand 1999; Chaiken & Troupe 1999; Epstein, 1994; Evans 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Gilbert, 1989; Kahneman, 2003; Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977; Sherman, Gawronski & Troupe, 2014; Sloman, 1996; Smith & Decoster, 2000). In case of social comparison, we propose the possibility of an automatic stage, along with a controlled one .Thus, the central proposition of our new theory of social comparison process is that “the process comprises of two stages, stage 1 is automatic and works at a cognitive level, whereas the stage 2 is more conscious and controlled ; Together they constitute the complete social comparison process.”

Corollary 1: The immediate question arising from above conceptualization is “what for?” What prompts the development of such automatic stage imbibed on to our conscious? We propose that the constant and critical need of self-enhancement, following societal constraints, has led to the development of this stage. Hipple and Trivers (2011) provided an

The Theory of Dual comparison

interesting analogy of *masturbation* to such intrapersonal processes having origin in interpersonal activity; it is developed for enjoying the happiness originating from copulation when the circumstances conspire against sharing the happiness with others. Similarly we propose that “the societal constraints in blatantly projecting self enhancement behavior, have led to the development of an automatic stage in the comparison process, which functions at the cognitive level and aims to achieve self enhancement as the sole motive.”

Corollary 2: The dual process theories differ in the context of interaction architecture of the two processes which are automatic or controlled. The *new family* of duality models in social cognition (Lieberman & Trope 2003; Smith & Decoster, 2000; Starck & Deutsch, 2004) propose a more interactionist approach between the two processes for explaining the social judgment and behavior compared with the *one for all* explanation of the behavior proposed earlier. In our theory, we suggest an interplaying of automatic and controlled processes in an *orienting* architecture, where the controlled process is launched by the automatic process (for review on various interplay modes see Wegner & Bargh, 1998). The car driving analogy is most suitable for explaining the interaction between the two processes in our model: with car driving experience, our familiarity with driving instruction also increases, and over the years, without realizing, the driving process becomes automatic. However, the moment we encounter any new stimulus e.g. failure of brakes, the process immediately becomes controlled, and we start developing strategies to encounter the situation; this interactional architecture is orienting, highlighted by the automatic process launching the controlled instigated by change in the incoming stimuli. Thus “the first automatic stage in social comparison is followed by a controlled stage activated by the change in incoming stimuli.”

Corollary 3: Being automatic, stage 1 only processes the involuntary information being reflected from the comparison target, whereas stage 2 only initiates, when we receive any novel information about the target other than that obtained in stage 1.

- 1. The dual comparison Theory: Overview** Stage 1 of the comparison process is an automatic process etched deeply into our cognitive mind. . Because it entails a contrast effect, this stage functions at the initial part of cognitive processing and is beyond individual control (Wedell, 1994, p. 1007); therefore we compare ourselves to everyone in this stage. This automatic process, with a single goal of self-enhancement has developed from frequent and consistent experience in an environmental domain. Considering the advantage of self-enhancement in survival and mating, humans imbibed self-enhancement strategies in their cognitive minds with evolution, and eventually, the process becomes automatic. Hence the routine conscious self-enhancement process associated with behavioral response to the environment becomes subsumed by efficient automatic processes operating without conscious guidance, attention or awareness (Wendel & Bargh, 1999). Automatic processes, varies with the condition that sets them into operation, In this theory; for initiation, stage 1, just need a stimuli to start, which includes encountering any social information involuntarily provided by the target. The stimuli are typically physical characteristics for unknown targets, whereas for known targets, these include information known about them. After Initiation, stage 1 function independently, without requiring any conscious guidance or monitoring; it is a rapid and efficient process consuming a very small amount of cognitive energy. In addition, their defined characteristic confirms stage 1 to be an automatic process (Bargh, 1994).When dealing with involuntary information from a stereotyped character (for unknown targets) or the already known facts and information (for known targets) we

The Theory of Dual comparison

process information automatically, aiming to self-enhance with selected strategies. However, as we encounter new information about the target, controlled stage 2 of comparison is initiated, to understand and fit this new piece of information into what we already think we know. Stage 2 of the comparison process is highlighted by no pre-decided self-motive initially. Unlike stage 1, the final motive in stage 2 is based on the intermediary step of self-evaluation. In this stage the new information is consciously assessed with respect to self; this self-evaluation serves as a criterion for further processing of information (Staple and Kooman, 2000). The final motive can be self-improvement or self-enhancement depending on various identified moderators. Most of the literature on social comparison has spoken about this stage and identified the aforementioned mentioned goals (Kruglanski & Maysseles, 1990; Suls, Martin & Wheeler 2002; Woods & Taylor, 1991; for review see Corcoran et al. 2012). The discussed outline of the theory is depicted in Figure 1.

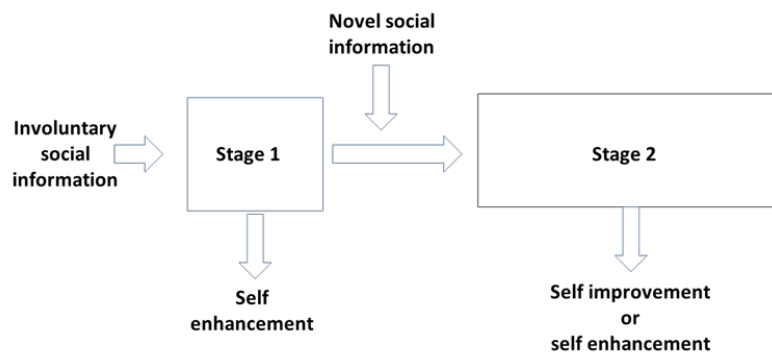


Figure 1. Outline of the Dual comparison Model

In the next section, we discuss this theory in detail, with explanation of various strategies employed at both the stages of the comparison process. A crucial part of our conceptualization is based on the knowledge regarding the target, namely the closeness variable, which has strong influence on our comparison process, as reported in both comparison (Locke 2004 ;Tesser 1988,1994) as well as evolutionary (Caporael ,1997) studies. Hence we have divided our explanation on the basis of an individual's closeness with target.

1.1 Comparison Process with Unknown Target. One-third of the people we encounter during the day are unknown to us (Locke, 2007; Locke & Nekich 2000; Pinkus, Lockwood, Schimmack & Fournier 2008) .We are seeing them for the first time. Comparison with them poses some unique challenges for an individual. First, because prior information about them is unavailable, a substantial amount of cognitive energy is used in understanding the new social information. Second, hundreds of such targets may be encountered in a day increasing individual's cognitive load further.

The following is our theory regarding such targets, where we discuss both the stages and strategies involved in successful navigation along with the challenges they posed.

2.1.1 Stage 1 of comparison with unknown targets. Suppose a professor is sitting in his cabin, and an unknown visitor opens the door and enters inside; as the professor gets the first glimpse of the visitor, he begins perceiving clues reflecting from visible stimuli. He attempts to identify the target's dimension (Attribute) repository, defined as the set of individually relevant attributes an individual carries. These attributes or dimensions are important to

The Theory of Dual comparison

one's self-definition to the extent that they strive for competence in these dimensions, describes themselves in terms of these or freely choose to engage in tasks related to them (Beach & Tesser, 2000; Tesser, 1988,1994). These can be defined from both individual's (what I carry) and perceiver's (what you carry) points of view. A dimension can be non-skill-based (e.g., skin color) or skill-based (e.g., Painting).The reason for humans carrying such attributes is potentially explained by evolutionary sciences as well. Because humans are aware about the differing values of various resources or their contribution in establishing status and social attractiveness (Which in turn has survival and reproductive advantages), they start developing specialization, which can also facilitate in group living. These specializations are the aforementioned dimensions or attributes. (For details discussion, see Beach & Tesser, 2000; Ellis, 1992; Gilbert, 1992).

Considering the social cognition principle of cognitive efficiency, people are cognitive misers (Taylor, 1981) and have to be efficient in using of scarce cognitive resources (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler 2010, 2011). In the case of no prior knowledge about the target, the use of stereotypes is an effective tool for summarizing the characteristics of unknown others while using minimum cognitive energy. For the professor in our example, the impression formed would be highly influenced by the inventory of stereotyped characters in his mind. Stereotyping is identified as the first step for recognizing an unknown target and their characteristics. This enables people to form quantitative and qualitative judgment regarding the dimensions of a comparison target. These characteristics may be limited to one's thoughts alone; however, these are generally formed culturally and shared by the population with some specific interest (Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1988; Contreras, Banaji & Mitchell, 2011; Fiske & Nuberg, 1990; Fiske, 1998; Lippmann, 1922; For Complete Review. see Schneider 2004, p. 321-375; Tajfel, 1969). For example when one sees an African man on the street, his mere appearance induces the formation of a stereotyped character. Most people immediately associate aggressive nature with African people. Stereotyping highlights a particular set of dimension attached with the target, without involving a considerable amount of cognitive energy. Similarly, whenever we encounter an unknown comparison target, even for a fraction of second (e.g., when watching someone from a moving car) we automatically form a picture of that person with particular traits and opinions. This occurs so fast and spontaneously that sometimes we do not even realize it. As in our example, when the unknown visitor enters the room, the professor assesses his personality through involuntary clues. The black-colored skin, prompt the stereotyped black male character in his mind. With this background information, his mind contains an explicit array of dimensions about the target, he is physically strong, highly aggressive and less interested in studies.

Woods (1996) defined social comparison as “the process of thinking about one or many other people in relation to the self”; hence for the comparison process to be complete, the social information must be evaluated with self. We propose that, that self-enhancement is the sole motive in this case (i.e., stage 1); hence we assess the social information obtained from the stereotyped character with self, such that our superiority is proven and the much needed self enhancement is obtained.

Taylor (1983) identified a phenomenon while studying cancer patients; the author noticed that older female patients with breast cancer compared themselves with younger patients, pitying their “young age” and “productive life ahead” as a worse scenario than having such disease at an older age (their own condition). She mentioned the verbatim as; “the people I feel sorry for are these young gals. To lose a breast when you're so young must be awful. I am 73; what do I need a breast for?” (p.1166). Taylor further identified that everyone is better off, as long as they pick the right dimension to compare. This phenomenon was

The Theory of Dual comparison

further studied under compensatory self enhancement techniques. Tesser (1988) mentioned this strategy while studying the effect of upward comparison (threat condition), where the dimension of comparison is relevant to the subject. Taylor (1988), Taylor and Brown (1994), Kuyper (2007) and Colvin and Block, (1994) also conducted major studies, establishing that these phenomena exist under situation of threatening upward comparison. Shinner (2008), proved this by studying Mexican immigrants. This phenomena, could be identifies in the experimental condition after the subject was primed with threatening condition, that is, a reactive strategy could be noted. We propose that such a strategy can be proactive as well. In a neutral threat condition, an individual can select one of his own attribute as a comparison dimension (in which he is confident of his superiority over the target) and generate a self enhancement opportunity. We define such a proactive phenomenon as *dimension switch*. Thus we next propose “that after identifying the dimension repository of the unknown target, we immediately perform dimension switch and compare ourselves on a selected dimension, which have an edge for us and make us feel superior. By doing so we treat the comparison with unknown target as a downward comparison and generate a self-enhancement opportunity”. The process is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Stage 1 of comparison process with unknown other

Returning to our example, after identifying the dimension repository of the visitor, the professor compares the target’s dimension with his own and selects the one that will make him feel superior, such as white-colored skin color or educational status. The process of switching the comparison dimensions to his educational status or skin color and confirming his own superiority over the visitor, who has not even once spoken to him, can span over only a fraction of second, (200 to 300 milliseconds, as identified with cognitive processing; Wegner & Bargh, 1998). Similarly, while moving past an overweight or obese woman in a market, a slim woman will select her slim figure as the dimension of comparison, regardless of any interaction between them. Notably, the process will function in a similar manner for the obese women: the obese women will also perform a dimension switch at her level and probably stereotypes the slim women as less intelligent, by selecting intelligence as the dimension of comparison; she compares the women with her higher college degree or

The Theory of Dual comparison

intellectual job (thus proving her intelligence). She also self-enhances herself and moves on feeling confident, ready to survive and probably look for a mating partner (although not in a direct sense).

In general, outer physical characteristic (non-skill-based dimensions) seems to be the first to be noticed and hence are increasingly used for stage 1 comparison with unknown targets. An interesting example of this phenomenon is the worldwide hair style revolution, particularly in countries such as Malaysia. Hair styles provides an immediate visible dimension for an individual to compare and win (with regard to style quotient). Being a part of intrapersonal behavior, the dimensions of comparison can have high variety such as skin and hair color, height, hairstyle, money, owned car, clothes, family life, professional life, country of residence, cast and culture etc. Notably, because dimension switch is intrapersonal, the person is the referee for deciding their own superiority in the dimension in question. Thus this process becomes very flexible but innately selfish; in other words these automatic processes are self-serving (Deutsch & Starck, 2004; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Serosis & Gilbert, 1990). The process of dimension switch functions at the cognitive level and elucidating the exact process through an experiment and then defining the underlying mechanism is difficult (If not impossible). However, although we are excluding it in our current discussion, we intent to study the subject in future. The achievement of self-enhancement through the stereotyping process followed by dimension switch terminates comparison process stage 1. Next, we elaborate stage 2.

2.1.2 Stage 2 of comparison with unknown targets. The comparison with unknown target terminates if no further chance of interaction and receiving any new social information exist. This happens more frequently, because we encounter hundreds of such comparison daily and very few of them move beyond stage 1. However, if one receives further social information, then the dynamics of comparison process unfold in a more conscious and controlled manner.

For instance, consider a man (the subject), who has always felt good about his expensive and stylish car and over time, this car has become an prominent dimension in his repository; he is now waiting in this car on the red light. At this moment, another car stops right next to his car. Our subject immediately performs dimension switch and selects his car as the comparison dimension and self-enhances himself. Suddenly, our comparison target (the driver), who is of similar age, lights up a cigarette, increases the volume of his car audio and races past our subject's car the moment light turns green. This turn of events, becomes the novel social information for the subject, initiating stage 2 of the comparison process.

The first step in this stage is the identification of the dimension, being highlighted in the new social information. Stage 2 proceeds only if an individual finds the highlighted dimension relevant to their dimension repository. Here, we support the *relevance* clause of Tesser (1988), which highlights the diagnostic quality of the comparison target as the deciding criterion for further processing of comparison process (Festinger, 1954). If the subject does not have the particular dimension in his repository, the comparison process would simply terminate, with self-enhancement achieved in stage 1 as the end product. However, if the dimension is relevant to one's repository, for e.g. considering our example, the new information is highlighting *adventurous* as the dimension, which may have an active element in his our subject's dimension repository. This realization will instigate the self-evaluation of the target performance with his own performance level, in relation to adventurous dimension. This self-evaluation process is an intermediates step; the outcome of social comparison process is further determined by the processing of social information during this process (Staple & Kooman, 2000). This Self-evaluation step renders stage 2, conscious and

The Theory of Dual comparison

controlled. The result of self-evaluation can yield either of the two results: we find the target's performance better (upward comparison) or worse (downward comparison) than ours. This evaluation is generally honest because individuals assess relative strength impartially. However, some personalities can be dishonest and frequently identify their target's performance as inferior to theirs. These personalities are identified as narcissist (Krizan & Bushman 2011).

In the self-evaluation phase, if our subject identifies the adventurous attribute of the target driver as inferior to his (e.g., the subject can do better car stunts) then he will recognize the comparison as downward and obtain a boost of self-enhancement from his superiority over the target. Alternatively, he may recognize the target as more adventurous than he is. In such situation, the way an individual reacts to this upward comparison depends on the strength, boundaries and structure of that particular dimension (here adventurous). Staple and Kooman (2000) defined it as mutability of the dimension, defined as the scope of further growth that someone recognizes in a particular dimension. A more mutable dimension is open for new information from the environment to improve the dimension strength further. Sprinters consider their dimension of speed mutable, because they know that their timing of a 100m run can be improved. Therefore, if our subject's adventurous dimension is mutable that is, he is open for learning and knowing about the way people explore their adventurous side then he appreciate the target's style of smoking and will try to understand his driving skills. In this case, the comparison process will end with Self-improvement as the self-motive achieved. By contrast, if his adventurous dimension is non-mutable and he has highly rigid boundaries, then he will not accept the superiority of anybody related to the dimension in question. Nevertheless, internally he will consider, and at some level, recognize that the target's performance is superior to him. This paradox creates a situation wherein an individual will self-deceive. Such self-deception can occur when one has very few dimensions developed in his repository. In such situations, the individual has no other choice but to favor his superiority claim and end the comparison process with further self-enhancement. People who have narcissistic personality syndrome typically carry such deceptions (Bogart, Benotsch & Pavlovic, 2004). Self-deception is a very wide topic in itself and is believed to have a dual nature (for details see Hipple & Trevers, 2011). Notably, stage 2 involves having self-enhancement and self-improvement as end-products in the various aforementioned situations. The intermediary Self-evaluation step is pivotal in deciding the end product in stage 2 of this part. The complete comparison process with an unknown target is illustrated in Figure 3. We next explain the social comparison process when the comparison target is known to the subject.

The Theory of Dual comparison



Stage 1 ends, Stage 2 starts

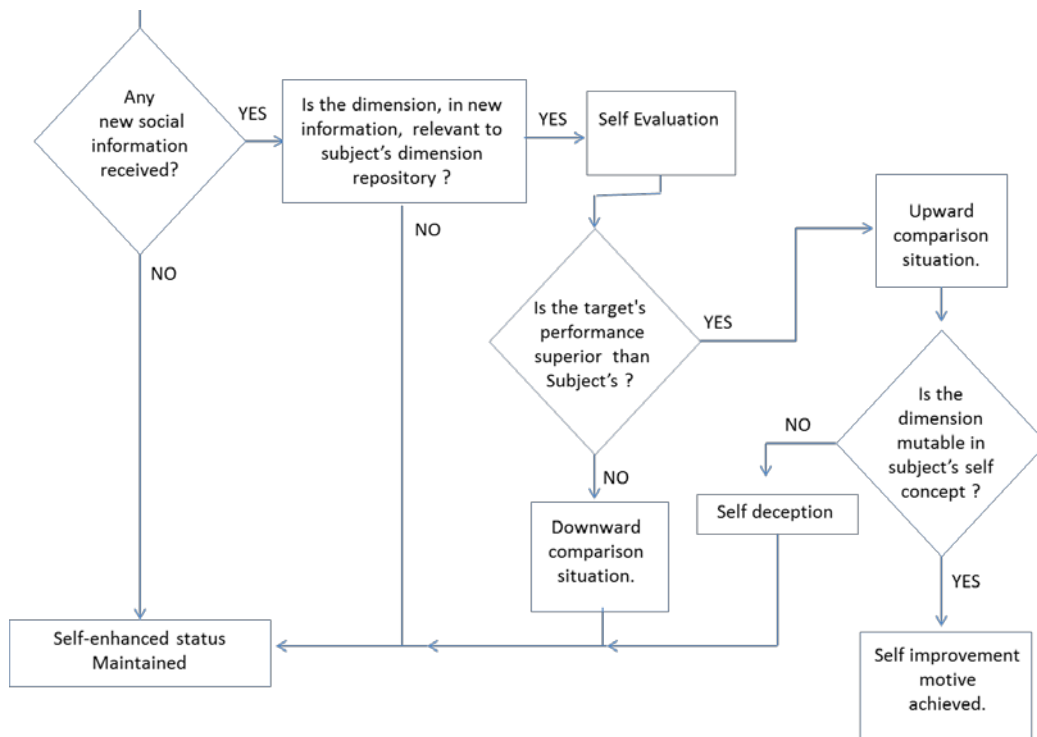


Figure 3. Complete comparison process with unknown targets

1.2 Comparison with known Targets Known targets include people about whom we have prior knowledge of their specific personalities, abilities, and opinions; they include our spouses, close friends, friends and mere acquaintances. We do not have to depend on strategies, such as stereotyping, to assess the qualities of these targets. This mutual knowledge makes the comparison process

The Theory of Dual comparison

with a known target more complex. Another factor, influencing the process dynamics is the motive of coexistence between subject and known targets. Over the course of evolution, humans began focusing on particular specialization in self, developing central dimensions helpful in survival. However, because they had to share the abundant resources among a social group, they molded their self into finding a way for making a unique or salient contribution to the larger group, simultaneously being molded to support other's effort contribute (Beach and Tesser, 2000). This coexistence motive has changed how we compare ourselves with known.

2.2.1 Stage 1 of comparison with known targets. Given that we know our significant others quite well, we have a definite idea about their strengths, weaknesses, abilities and opinions. In brief, we have a list of their dimension repository. Given the chances of repetitive interaction, the employment of dimension switch at every instance to gain self-enhancement seems unlikely. Hence the basic dynamics of this stage 1 differs from that with Unknown targets. If two people continue self-enhancing themselves and repetitively try to prove their superiority over each other, then the relationship will never develop. The identification of co-existence as a motive, introduces mutual benefiting strategies to them; this is the underlying principle in stage 1 of comparison with known targets.

At the beginning of a new relationship, both partners start understanding the dimension repository of each other over few initial meetings and interactions. Furthermore, along with self-enhancing themselves (by establishing their own superiority in some dimension), they begin recognizing and accepting the superiority of the other partner in some non-interfering dimensions and then reciprocate by providing self-enhancement to them. They both eventually form a code of mutual understanding, where they identify each other's superiority and channelize incoming social information as per each other's strengths. This creates a win-win situation, where both provide and receive self-enhancement by forming a continuous source in each other. We define this arrangement, wherein two people started to co-exist in a mutual beneficial manner as the state of *psychic equilibrium*. Here, the partners have merged the self-enhancement motive with coexistence motive, to reach a level where they do not self-enhance every time they meet, but maintain a mutual equilibrium of superiority in different dimensions. Over time, people imbibe this arrangement in their subconscious mind. Hence, on meeting somebody they know, they automatically self-enhance themselves in a fraction of second, without going through any calculation regarding the dimensions. This process saves a considerable amount of cognitive energy, and gets established as a stable system. A similar strategy was mentioned by Tesser (1988) for comparison with close others.

This psychic equilibrium is a quasi-static equilibrium attained through a process involving some time duration. For instance, in the initial few meetings of a couple, the wife may select financial knowledge as her dimension and the husband may select creative profession as his dimension. Thus, they both will reach psychic equilibrium in the relationship to co-exist happily. They may or may not explicitly discuss this settlement; nevertheless, subsequently, they will not repeatedly use dimension switch, whenever they meet. The stage 1 of comparison process becomes a well-written law between them. Notably psychic equilibrium is not necessarily based on a single dimension; the partners may select many dimensions to establish this equilibrium. Some of these may be central to the existence of the equilibrium, whereas some may be casual and more dynamic. In a relationship, the presence of numerous dimensions forms the core of its stability. Moreover, as per our understanding, the stable of a marital relationship is based on how early the couple achieves this equilibrium; a delay in

The Theory of Dual comparison

reaching this equilibrium creates a considerable amount of discomfort ,potentially leading to very stressful relationship and eventually divorce.

The existence of the aforementioned arrangement is based on the coexistence principle, which highlights the mutual support of close individuals to survive in a society. By helping the other individual self-enhance easily and continuously, we help them achieve the required confidence to develop skills and ensure resources to survive. The previously mentioned husband-wife relationship is an extreme example of such a relationship. Close friendship also survive on such psychic equilibrium existence. Beach and Tesser (1995) and Pinkus et al. (2008) have also mentioned such arrangement. The process is depicted in Figure 4.

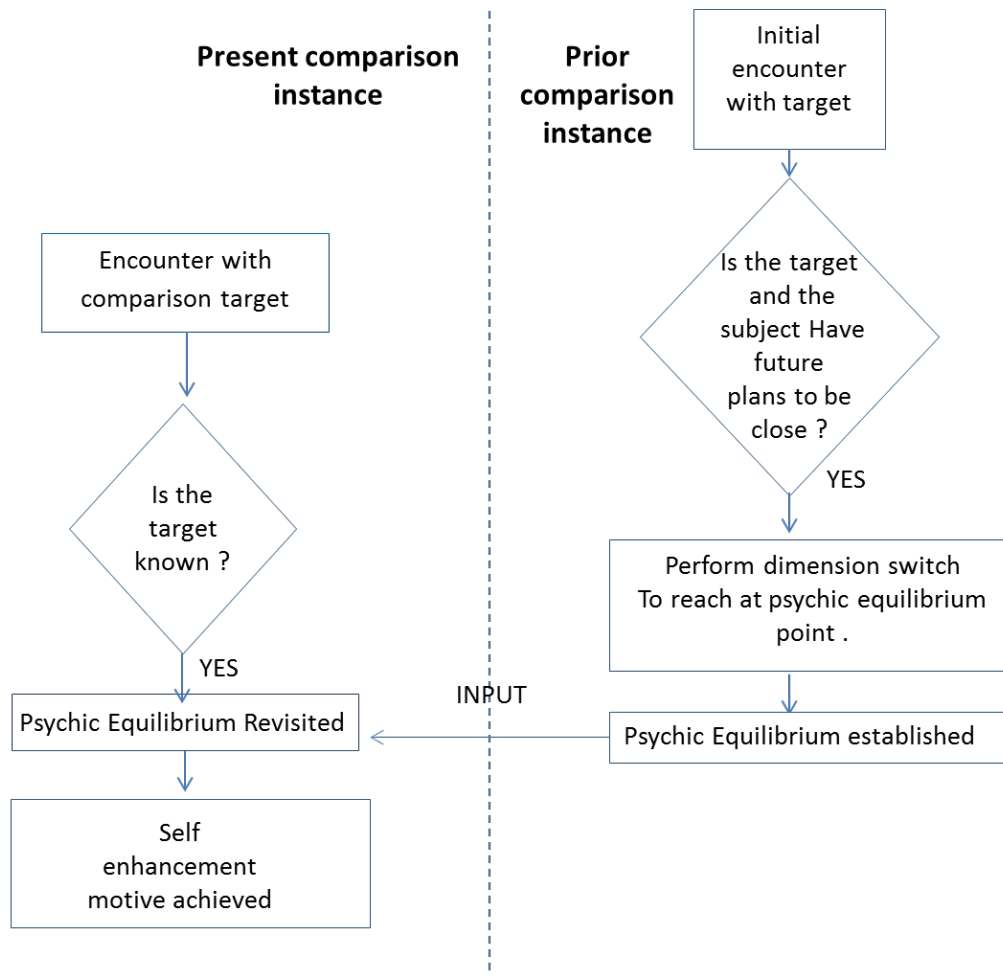


Figure 4. Stage 1 of comparison process with known targets

The equilibrium between close others is relatively stable, but it requires readjustment whenever a new piece of information flows in between the partners, thus indicating the beginning of stage 2 of this process.

2.2.2. Stage 2 of comparison with known others. A disturbance in the psychic equilibrium between known partners caused by the introduction of some new social information initiates stage 2 of this comparison process. In 1998, Tesser (1988) studied the comparison process with close others in detail and put forward the self-evaluation maintenance model Here we explain our model in correlation with the findings of Tesser and Beach experiment; the authors mentioned a hypothetical story to establish the basic three strategies for countering various comparison situations arising from new social information. Their analysis was missing the kind of relationship the two friends enjoying prior to mentioned situation. We

The Theory of Dual comparison

will try to complete the picture by our own, to prove the strategies explanation as per our model.

In the story, the author mention a situation where two good friends Alice and Barbara audition for the school symphonic band, but only Barbara is selected. Although playing violin is important for both, Barbara plays better violin than does Alice. Here the authors mention three probable strategies for Alice: alter the closeness of her relationship with Barbara, change her own self-definition or, attempt to sabotage Barbara's performance. Our analysis of this situation initially explored on the type of psychic equilibrium that the two friends were carried before the competition was even announced. If they are good friends (high closeness), their equilibrium must be pretty strong and based on many dimensions in between. Their dimension repositories in equilibrium may be as follows:

- Alice: I am beautiful; Barbara is better a violin player.
- Barbara: I am better Violin player; Alice is beautiful.

In case of such an arrangement, the new social information about the selection of Barbara in the violin group will only strengthen the equilibrium; Alice will bask in the glory for her friend, who in turn will gain self-enhancement through this reaffirmation of superiority. However, as mentioned, if playing violin is important to both to a level that they both carry this dimension with them, then their respective repositories may be as follows:

- Alice: Barbara and I are both good Violin player and I am beautiful.
- Barbara: Alice and I, are both good Violin player and I am taller.

In such situation, where there is a competing dimension existing between the two partner, psychic equilibrium may be achieved with allocating equal weightage to both partners performances. Thus apart from attaining equilibrium in other dimension, they have violin playing also in the list of dimension on which equilibrium is attained. The selection of Barbara is potential social information, which can disturb the delicate balanced between the two. In case Alice would like to continue the relationship (Their equilibrium dimensions other than violin playing are strong), she may change her self-definition and focus on the other dimensions (beautiful), to maintain the psychic equilibrium and attain regular self enhancement. In contrast, the negative version of aforementioned option is the attempt to sabotage Barbara's performance and thus Alice trying to reestablish the equilibrium with Barbara having her superiority in violin playing. The third option corresponds to the case, where the equilibrium between the two is not very strong and Alice prefers to end the relationship with Barbara (i.e., altering the closeness).

In general the new information flowing between the two individuals is first analyzed for its relevance that is, whether there is any partner dimension repository present in the psychic equilibrium for the dimension involved in incoming novel social information..

The new social information can be classified as follows:

1. Not concerning any dimensions in the psychic equilibrium (both partners).
2. Positive information regarding the partner's dimension, strengthening the equilibrium.
3. Negative information regarding the partner's dimensions, weakening the equilibrium.

Possibility 1 will not disturb the equilibrium and not instigate stage 2. The new social information will be processed without generating any new comparison situation. For instance in our husband-wife case, the husband gets new hair style, and the wife likes it; this will not generate any further comparison. Possibility 2 will make the psychic equilibrium stronger, because the information will reinforce the superiority of the relevant dimension in

The Theory of Dual comparison

their repository involved in the psychic equilibrium. The individual will bask in glory of the other partner, whose dimension is getting strengthened, making the equilibrium even stronger (Cialdini, 1994). Overall this situation will reinforce the psychic equilibrium strength.

The problematic situations is options 3, here the incoming social information is relevant to dimensions involved in equilibrium and have a potential to disrupt its balance. In such situation the level of closeness between the partners decides, whether they will try to reset the equilibrium or will hold on to the strategies, thus creating a psychological (Or Physical) distance between them. In this context, the comparison between romantic partners highlighted with high interdependency is a peculiar example. We believe that the high level of empathy, as reported in various studies can be attributed to the high level of closeness in such relationships, leading to the strategies where both partners try to reestablish the equilibrium. This is relatively easy, because the equilibrium in such a relationship is based on many dimensions and reestablishing equilibrium is relatively easier in nature .The complete comparison process with known targets is summarized in Figure 5.

The Theory of Dual comparison

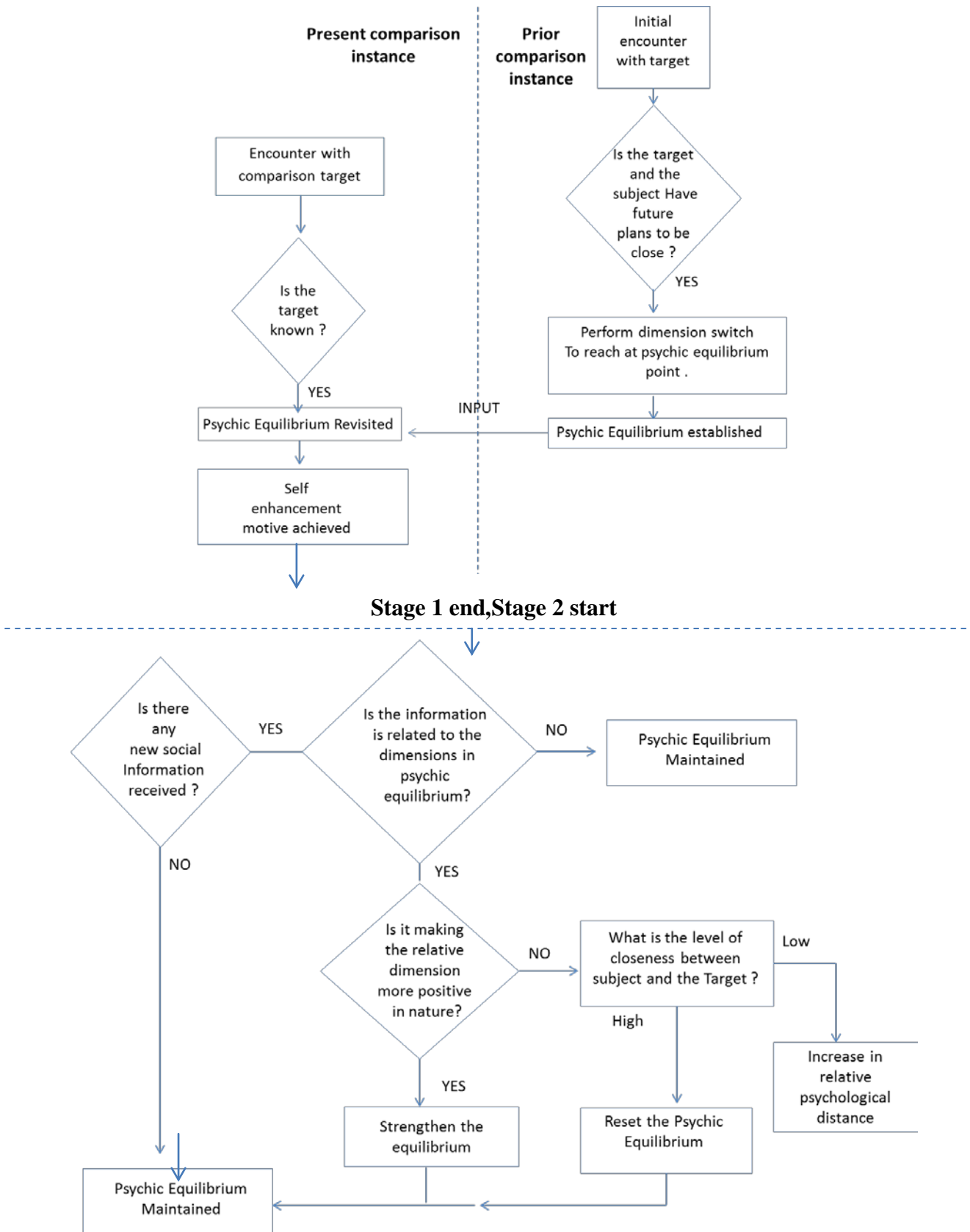


Figure 5. Complete comparison process with known targets.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF FACEBOOK

Facebook provide new information about known others who are generally considered mere acquaintances (Kille, Woods & Forest, 2013). Lacking closeness with these comparison targets, the concern psychic equilibrium has a delicate balance. Another problem with Facebook is that it has been developed to broadcast the dimension repository of an individual with others collectively. Regardless of the dimensions used for maintain psychic equilibrium with separate individuals; people broadcast their entire dimension repository to all their contacts. For instance, suppose 1000 people, who had very limited information about your dimensions, receiving new social information about you on daily basis. One of them, who had maintained a psychic equilibrium with you in a particular dimension, suddenly finds you superior in that dimension. The equilibrium with mere acquaintances is typically built on single dimension and disturbing this, can severely damage the coexistence motive maintained thus far. This could have retaliating effect on the other person, eventually destabilizing the equilibrium from both sides. In the physical world, this delicate equilibrium is maintained by avoiding any new social information about the target. However, this avoidance is not possible on social media platforms; hence this phenomenon is making people more individualistic and reducing the coexistence motive in the society.

Facebook use also affects self-esteem. Several researchers have studied Facebook use and its effects on psychological wellbeing, specifically in relation to an individual's self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Chen, Widjaja & Yen, 2015; Lee & Cheung, 2014; Toma, 2013; Williams, 2014) We have deliberately avoided the use of self-esteem as a concept, for clarity in this article thus far. We consider it to be the currency of self enhancement: when we self-enhance ourselves, our self-esteem reservoir fill up.(for review see Cast & Burke, 2002)

Individuals mainly, early teenagers, have very few dimensions developed. They mostly survive on either non-skill-based dimensions, such as skin color and hairstyle; alternatively they have possessions-related dimensions in their dimension repository. As discussed, these non-skill based dimensions are dynamic and do not support the self-enhancement motive for their entire life. The understanding and development of skill-based dimensions is necessary for a more fulfilling life. Teenagers upload their selfies to obtain hundreds of *likes*: projecting physical beauty and possessions is very common on Facebook (Chen & Lee, 2013); this creates an illusion that possessing the non-skill-based dimensions is sufficient for survival. In extreme cases, people upload photo-shopped pictures of themselves and generate false and deceptive dimensions for themselves. This seems fine until it is limited to comparison on Facebook; however, when this individual approaches other people in real life, these flawed dimensions cannot stand as strongly as on social media. This may make these individuals very introverted, to the extent that they started avoiding the real world; they would feel confident in winning comparison stages in virtual world compared with that in the real world. Suicidal tendencies related to social media use have also been reported. We believe that our explanation of the basic social comparison theory could facilitate people in using the social media more constructively for an improved lifestyle.

ANOTHER CASE STUDY TO BRING HOME THE POINT

The mental wellbeing of older adults in later life is a crucial social subject: in particular, older adults who live alone have low psychological wellbeing (Cheng, Fung, & Chan, 2008; Chou, Ho, & Chi, 2006; Gierveld & Tilburg, 1999; Osborn et al., 2003; Savikko, Routasalo, Tilvis, Strandberg, & Pitka' la', 2005; Van Gelder et al., 2006; You & Lee, 2006).

The Theory of Dual comparison

As we proposed in our theory, throughout their life, an individual compare themselves with others to find self-esteem through the process of self enhancement. A majority of self-enhancement is obtained through stage 1 of the comparison process with both known and unknown targets. Older adults who live alone do not have the privilege of a constant source of self enhancement from known others (close family members and friends) and they have to rely upon self enhancement from mere acquaintances or unknown targets. A young individual can live alone without feeling low self-esteem because they have a dimension repository that is rich at young age (with both skilled and non-skilled dimensions). By contrast, older adults have a depleted dimension repository; as the age increases, non-skill-based dimensions lose their strength: at old age, you do not look as handsome or as fit as you were at the age of 25 or 30 years. In addition, you retire from work, fading the dimensions related to work and professional success. At this stage, when the dimension repository typically has only the dimensions related to past glory (Rickabaugh, & Tomlinson-Keasey, 1997), winning stage 1 comparison with an unknown targets or mere acquaintance will be difficult. The dose of self-enhancement begins to reduce, eventually deteriorating the psychological wellbeing. The situation can be much better, if the family members stay with the ageing adults and constantly provide with much needed self-enhancement through psychic equilibrium, established years before, and for which no cognitive energy is required.

Future Directions

This is our attempt to give a more comprehensive explanation to the social comparison process. We encourage researchers to study the stage 1 of comparison using more sophisticated cognitive process identification tools. A more detailed understanding of the complexity of this two-stage comparison process can aid in further understanding various important psychological phenomena related to human social life and survival. Because contextual output from stage 1 can probably affect stage 2 processing of stimuli, the detailed architecture underlying the interactions between the two stages need to be explored. In future, understanding the development of dimensions with age can critical aid research on personality development at an early age. We could not discuss the effect of cultural variations on the development and use of various dimensions. Further studies should also explore the personality related topics such as introvert and extrovert personalities in relation to dynamics of our comparison theory. We have shed some light on various social phenomena in the modern society .Further research on these new social trends can aid understanding of human behavior further.

In addition, additional studies on the comparison process will further reduce any ambiguity, and potentially provide a new line of research for future social scientist.

CONCLUSION

We based our theory on the evolutionary need of survival and reproduction of humans; various studies have reported the necessity of self-enhancement as a basic requirement for achieving these needs, thus providing a compelling argument for our theory's basic assumption of self-enhancement motive as an integral part of the comparison process. By placing the comparison process at the core of human understanding of the world and social structure, our theory provides an intuitive basis for its existence. Over the course of evolution, various environmental and societal norms have transformed brain to have a dual or non-unitary nature. The coexistence of automatic (cognitive) and more conscious part in our mind is one of the corner stone of our theory.

Our theory conceptualizes the comparison process as a two-stage process. Stage 1 functions at the cognitive level, wherein we compare ourselves with everyone we encounter (even the

The Theory of Dual comparison

social information via other sources), with the sole aim of self-enhancing ourselves; this stage highlights the highly selfish nature of our thinking and depicts the more intrapersonal aspect of interpersonal process of comparison. In our paper we restored the various findings of previous research on comparison process, by identifying a more conscious stage 2 process, which is more strategic in nature in terms of both selections as well as self-motive sought. The dissociation of the process is identified as the function of time, with stage 1 occurring almost instantly, and sometimes without the knowledge of even the subject, whereas the stage 2 occurring more gradually.

We believe that there is more to this phenomenon which need to be identified such as the dimension dynamics and the role of various moderators influencing the particular stage. We believe that this dual comparison theory can open new paths to the understanding of human social interaction and facilitate in creating a better and more mentally fulfilling life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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