

Brief of “The Theory of Dual comparison”

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ABSTRACT

Our 90% of the existence as a human current form is in the form of hominids spending their time in caves hunting animals for food. This put immense ecological and social selection pressure of performance on humans in the specific jobs of hunting and finding a mating partner. To survive under such selection pressure, humans have been programmed to increase their valuation in their own and other people's eyes. 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-humans. The presence of highly positive self-valuation is directly related to improved decision-making capabilities and efficiently handling of relational and group-related challenges.

THEORY OF DUAL COMPARISON

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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. 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. The innate comparative nature of self-enhancement designates the social comparison process as the chief vehicle, available to humans for creating self-enhancement opportunities [2].

There exist some existential dichotomies in the Social comparison literature, conflicting views over its nature and the kind of outputs it provide has been a constant source of discussion till date. As per our 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.

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 [3]; 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. 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.

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When dealing with involuntary information from a stereotyped character (for unknown targets) or the already known facts and information (for known targets) we 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 [4]. The final motive can be self-improvement or self-enhancement depending on various identified moderators (**Figure 1**).

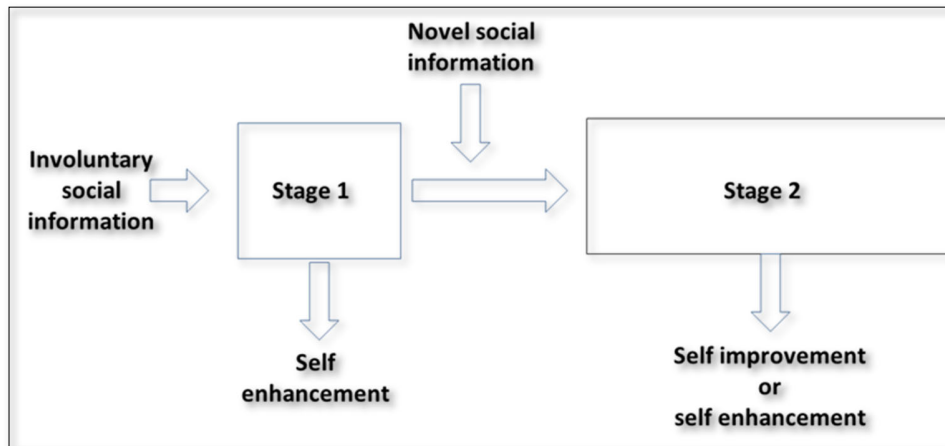


Figure 1. Process Overview.

An example will explain the working, first with unknown target.

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 (selecting winning dimension) 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 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). If there is no further interaction, then this comparison process will end. But in case we encounter some novel information about the target, then stage 2, corresponding to self-evaluation will kick in. Stage 2 proceeds only if an individual finds the highlighted dimension relevant to their dimension repository (one's own set of dimensions). The output can be downward or upward comparison depending on the person (**Figure 2**).

The dynamics 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 with a

known target more complex. Another factor, influencing the process dynamics is the motive of coexistence between subject and 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 psychic equilibrium is a quasi-static equilibrium attained through a process involving some time duration. Here, the partners have merged the self-

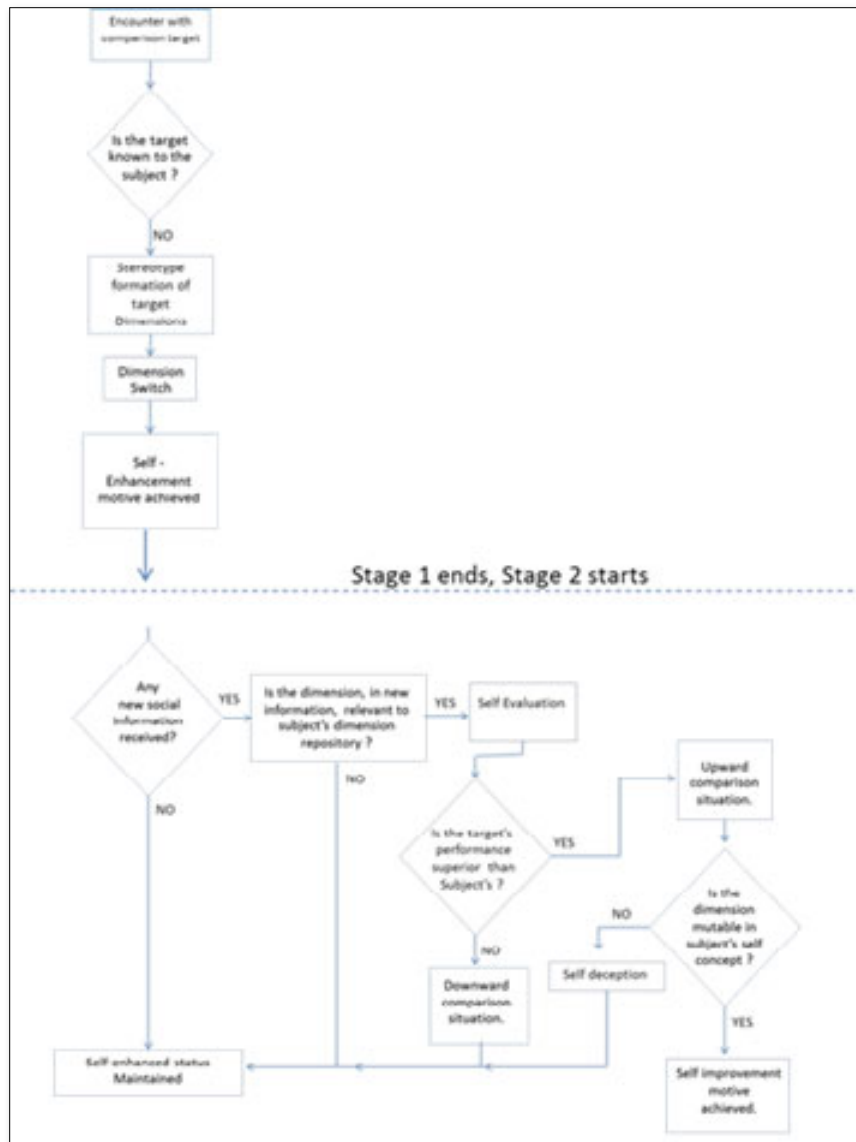


Figure 2. Complete process with unknown targets.

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. 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.

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 output of second stage depends on the strength of relationship and can lead to either strengthening of relationship or creation of psychological distance (Figure 3).

Comment of Dr. Ladd Wheeler (Through Electronic mail interaction)

“I have read your Theory of Dual Comparison and found many interesting things in it. You certainly have a good grasp of the literature. Social comparison theory was based upon the need to evaluate one’s opinions and abilities. Subsequent research forced us to accept that self-enhancement was also part of the picture. So, Jerry Suls and

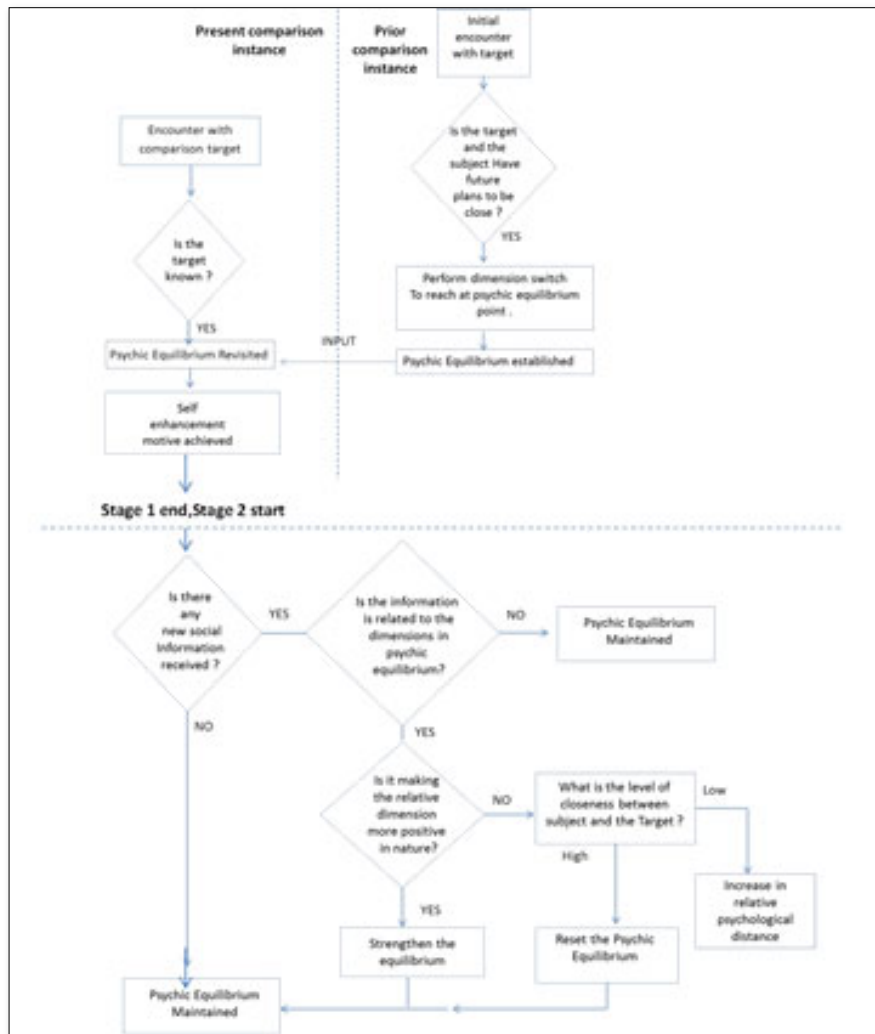


Figure 3. Complete process with known targets.

I now think of social comparison as a combination of self-evaluation and self-enhancement. We have even coined a term, “evaluhancement” to talk about the joint operation of these two motives. You seem to have been more influenced by Tesser’s SEM than by Social Comparison Theory (SCT). Tesser was not interested in self-evaluation, and you don’t seem to be either. He didn’t even use self-evaluation as a DV. Your emphasis and Tesser’s is entirely upon self-enhancement. However, Tesser doesn’t recognize the possibility of downward comparison leading to increased self-evaluation (or mood), and you give a lot of emphasis to that, so you have used that part of SCT in your new formulation. I find Stage 1 hard to swallow. A person goes through life comparing himself favorably to everyone he meets but is entirely unaware that he is switching dimensions to do this. How would you provide evidence for this? Wheeler & Miyake had people record all their comparisons as they occurred, and many were upward or

lateral. Why weren’t they all downward? Were these Stage 2 comparisons?”

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