QS STARS RATED FOR EXCELLENCE 2012

FPT Education

FPT UNIVERSITY

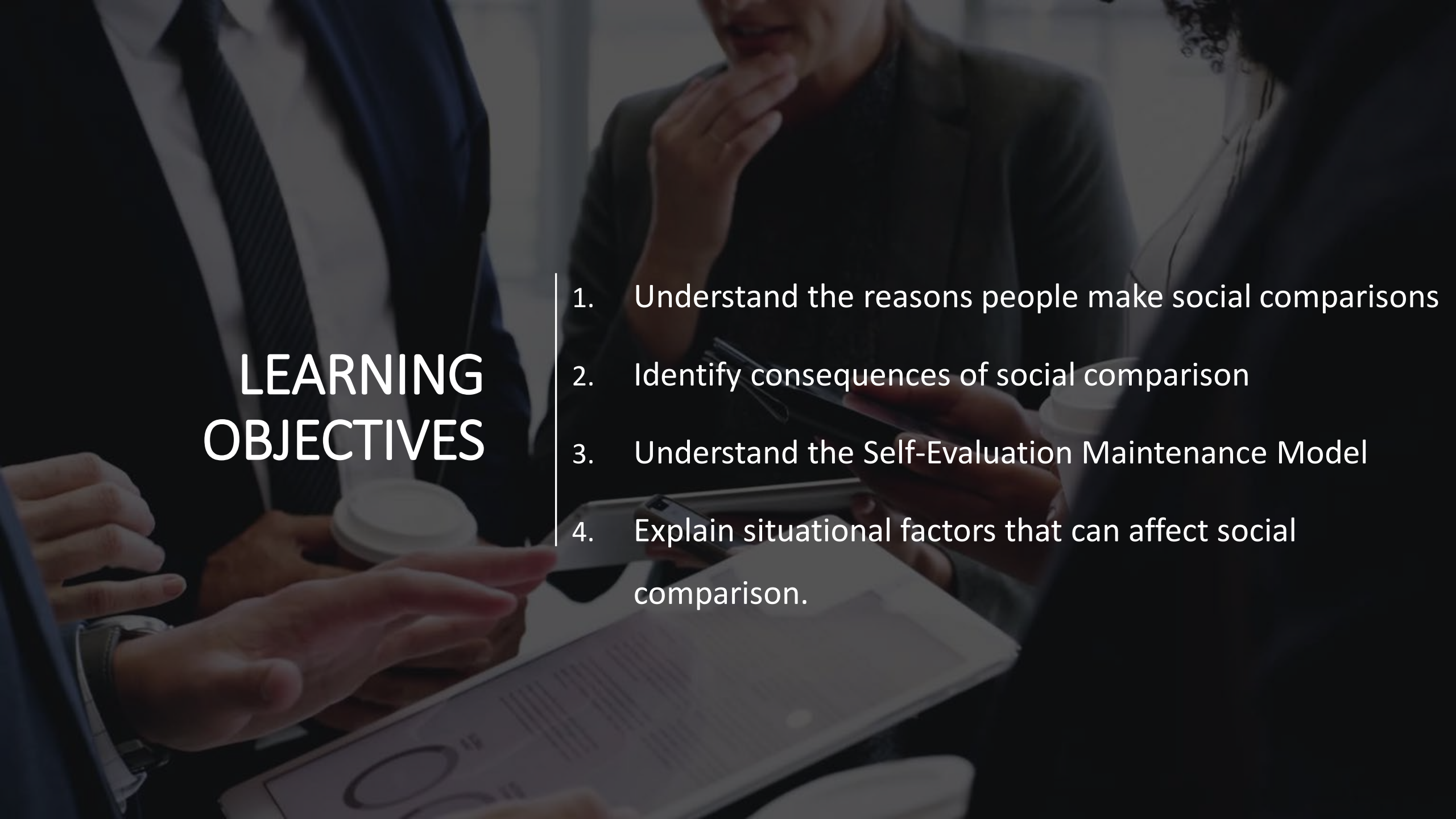
Soft Skills Department

THINKING & ANALYSIS - TEAM PLAYER - WORKING IN GROUP - PROBLEM SOLVING - CONFIDENCE - EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - LEADERSHIP

Communication and In-group Working Skills (cont.)

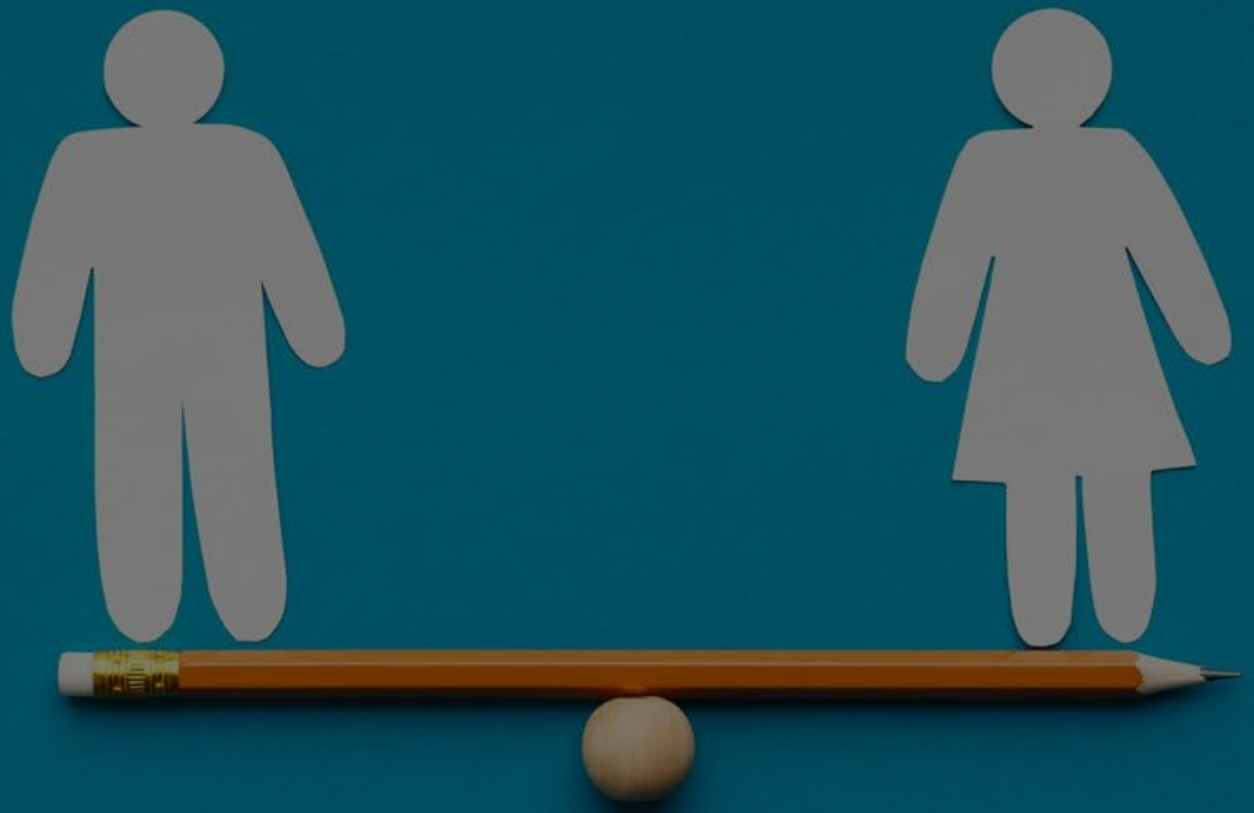
CHAPTER OUTLINE

5. Social Comparison



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the reasons people make social comparisons
2. Identify consequences of social comparison
3. Understand the Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model
4. Explain situational factors that can affect social comparison.



Introduction of Social Comparison

Social Comparison Theory

In 1954, psychologist Leon Festinger hypothesized that people compare themselves to others in order to fulfill a basic human desire:

The need for self-evaluation.

Social Comparison Theory (cont)

Leon Festinger’s core idea:

People know about themselves (their own abilities, successes, and personality) - by comparing themselves with others.

Social Comparison: Basics

Social comparison:

- is a well-known concept to advertisers
- creates idealized images that influence consumers' self-perceptions as well as the things they feel they must buy in order to be satisfied.

[Image: SenseiAlan, http://goo.gl/XOwjq5, CC BY 2.0, http://goo.gl/ T4qgSp]

Social Comparison: Basics

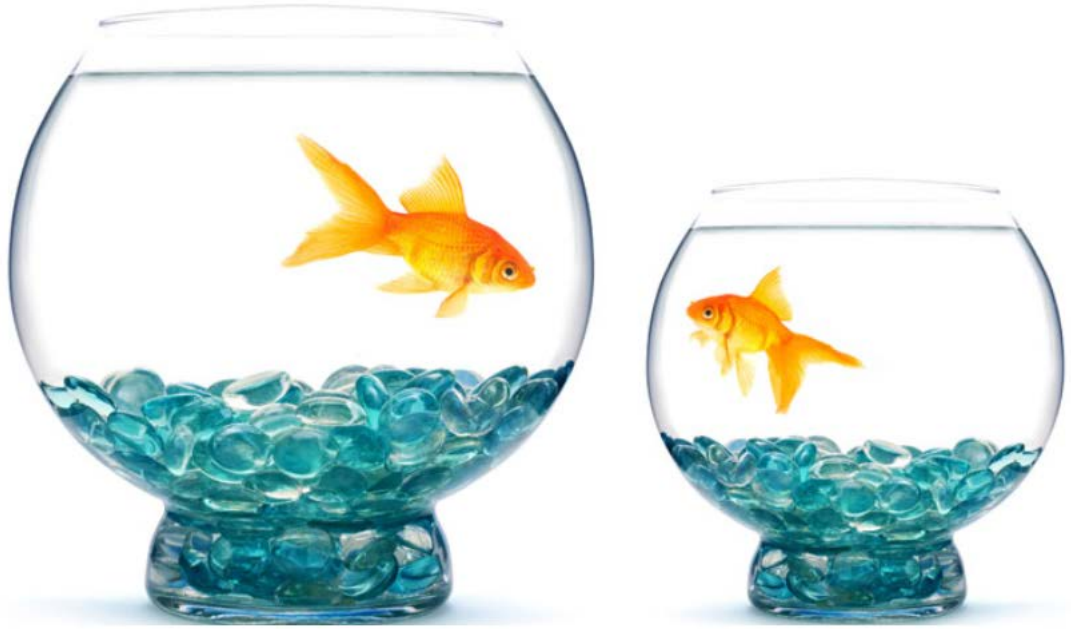
- When comparing, **similarity** is important.
- A professional athlete is far more likely to compare his or her own performance against that of other professional athletes than that of an amateur.

[Image: Doma-w, https://goo.gl/2NM9Ii, CC BY 3.0, https://goo.gl/b58TcB]

Social Comparison: Relevance and Similarity

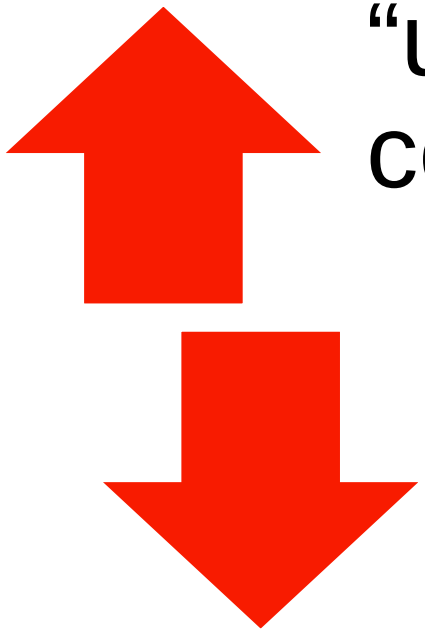
The performance dimension has to be relevant to the self (Festinger, 1954)

For example, if excelling in academics is more important to you than excelling in sports, you are more likely to compare yourself with others in terms of academic rather than athletic performance



Direction of Social Comparison

Social comparison is a bi-directional phenomenon where we can compare ourselves to people who **are better than us** or **worse than us.**



“upward comparisons”

“downward comparisons.

The effects of social comparison

	Upward Comparison	Downward Comparison
Positive Effects	Hope, Inspiration	Gratitude
Negative Effects	Dissatisfaction, Envy	Scorn

Consequences of Social Comparison

- **Impact self-esteem:**

  For example, having the best final score in a class can increase your self-esteem quite a bit.

- **Feeling of regret & envy:**

  - Regret: *comparing the negative outcome of one's investment strategy to the positive outcome of a different strategy taken by a neighbor*
  - Envy: *As when someone with thinning hair envies the thick hair of a colleague.*

- **Behave more competitively:**

  For example, you are among the top 10% on your class mid-term you might feel competitive with the other top students.

Consequences of Social Comparison

- Comparing your behavior to that of other people might

make you jealous, regretful or more motivated.

- Stickers and online badges that proclaim

“I voted” or “I gave blood” are common examples of leveraging social comparison to achieve positive social outcomes.

[Image: CAVE CANEM, http://goo.gl/ifKSiE, CC BY 2.0, http://goo.gl/v4Y0Zv]

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model (SEM)

- Builds on social comparison theory.
- Points to a range of psychological forces that help and maintain our self-evaluation and self-esteem.
- Reveals the importance of relationship closeness affects self-evaluations.

***Self-esteem: The feeling of confidence in one's own abilities or worth.*

The SEM model suggests that managers may prefer **sub-optimal candidates** who aren't likely to challenge their standing in the organization.

Individual Differences

- The social comparison and its effects on self-evaluation will often **depend on personality & individual differences.**

For example, people with mastery goals may not interpret an upward comparison as a threat to the self but more as challenge, and a hopeful sign that one can achieve a certain level of performance.

Individual Differences

Another individual difference is whether one has a "fixed mindset" or "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2007).

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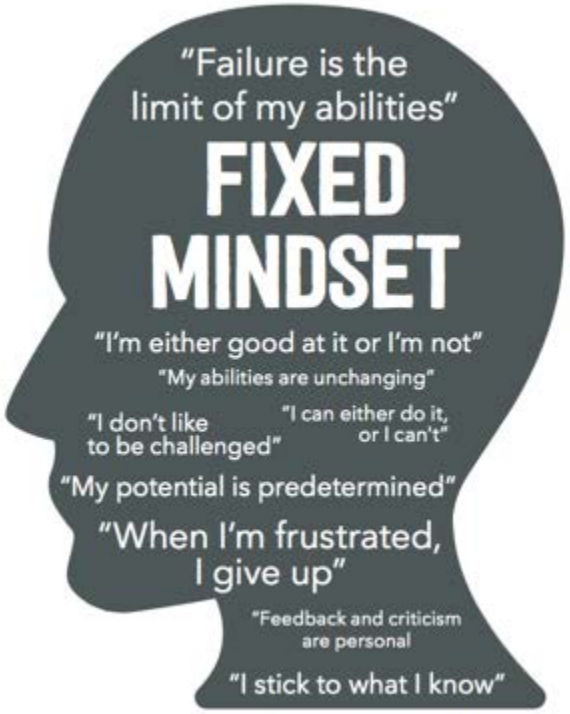
People with growth mindsets: likely to interpret an upward comparison as a challenge, and an opportunity to improve themselves.



Fix Mindset & Growth Mindset

- **People with fixed mindsets:** think that their abilities and talents cannot change

→ upward comparison will likely threaten their self-evaluation and lead them to experience negative consequences of social comparison, such as competitive behavior, envy, or unhappiness.

- **People with growth mindsets**: likely to interpret an upward comparison as a challenge, and an opportunity to improve themselves

Situational factors

- Number
- Local
- Proximity to a Standard
- Social Category Lines

Situational factors

NUMBER

As the number of comparison targets (i.e., the number of people with whom you can compare) increases, social comparison tends to decrease.

For example, imagine you are running a race with competitors of similar ability as your own, and the top 20% will receive a prize. Do you think you would try harder if there were only 10 people in the race, or if there were 100? The findings on N-Effect (Garcia & Tor, 2009; Tor & Garcia, 2010) suggest the answer is 10.

As the number of competitors increases, social comparison—one of the engines behind competitive motivation—becomes less important. Perhaps you have experienced this if you have had to give class presentations. As the number of presenters increases, you feel a decreasing amount of

Situational factors

LOCAL

People are more influenced by social comparison when the comparison is more localized rather than being broad and general.

For example, if you wanted to evaluate your height by using social comparison, you could compare your height to a good friend, a group of friends, people in your workplace, or even the average height of people living in your city. Although any of these comparisons is hypothetically possible people generally rely on more local comparisons. They are more likely to compare with friends or co-workers than they are to industry or national averages. So, if you are among the tallest in your group of friends, it may very well give you a bigger boost to your self-esteem, even if you're still among the shortest individuals at the national level.

Situational factors

LOCAL

It is natural to make comparisons between oneself and others on a variety of different standards and to compare oneself with a variety of different people. Comparisons to friends are among the most influential of all.

[Image: Corrie M, http://goo.gl/FRbOfQ, CC BY-ND 2.0, http://goo.gl/FuDJ6c]

Situational factors

PROXIMITY TO A STANDARD

Social comparison involves the proximity of a standard - such as the #1 ranking or other qualitative threshold. One consequence of this is an increase in competitive behavior.

For example, in childhood games, if someone shouts, "First one to the tree is the coolest-person-in the-world!" then the children who are nearest the tree will tug and pull at each other for the lead. However, if someone shouts, "Last one there is a rotten-egg!" then the children who are in last place will be the ones tugging and pulling each other to get ahead. In the proximity of a standard, social comparison concerns increase. We also see this in rankings. Rivals ranked #2 and #3, for instance, are less willing to maximize joint gains (in which they both benefit) if it means their opponent will benefit more, compared to rivals ranked #202 and #203 (Garcia, Tor, & Gonzalez, 2006; Garcia & Tor, 2007). These latter rivals are so far from the #1 rank (i.e., the standard) that it does not bother them if their opponent benefits more than them. Thus, social comparison concerns are only important in the proximity of a standard.

Situational factors

SOCIAL CATEGORY LINES

Social comparison can also happen between groups. This is especially the case when groups come from different social categories versus the same social category.

For example, if students were deciding what kind of music to play at the high school prom, one option would be to simply flip a coin—say, heads for hip-hop, tails for pop. In this case, everyone represents the same social category—high school seniors—and social comparison isn't an issue. However, if all the boys wanted hip-hop and all the girls wanted pop, flipping a coin is not such an easy solution as it privileges one social category over another (Garcia & Miller, 2007).

Related Phenomena

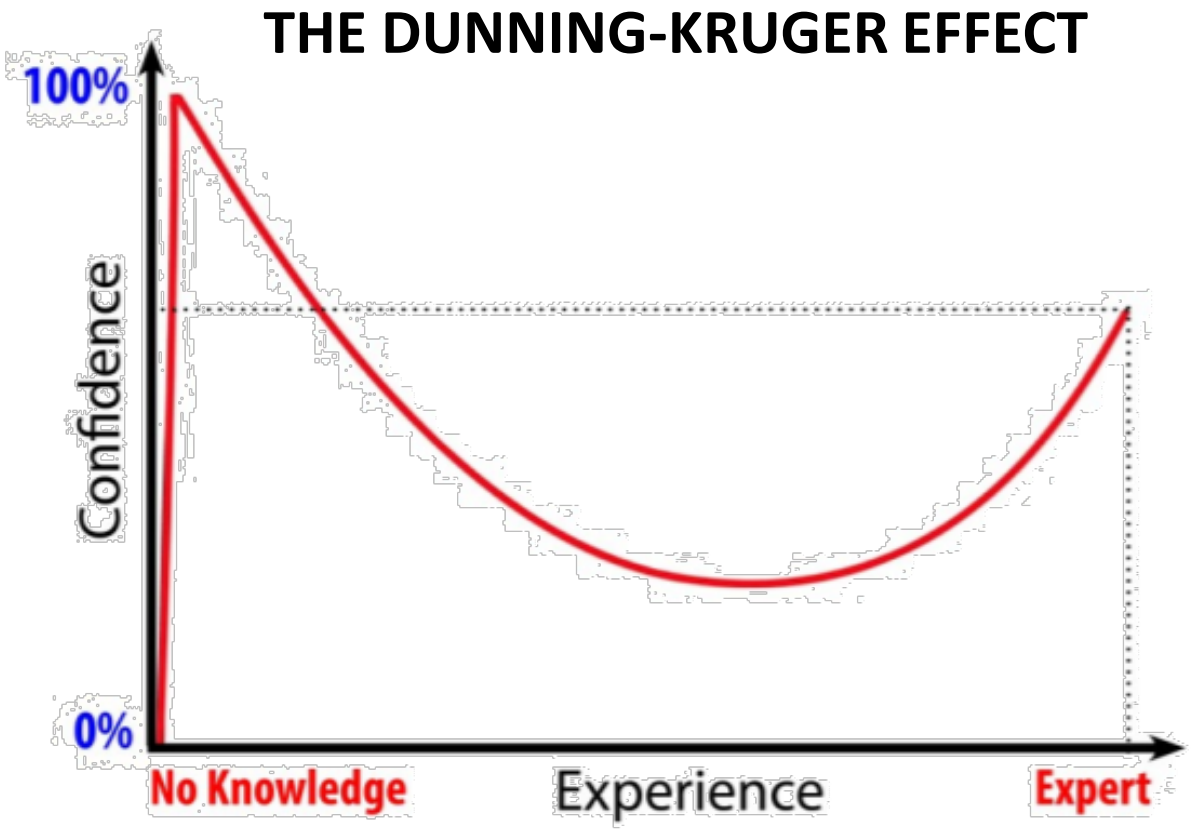
FROG POND EFFECT

As a frog, would you rather be in a small pond where you're a big frog, or a large pond where you're a small frog?

People in general had a better academic self-concept if they were **a big frog in a small pond** *(e.g., the top student in their local high school)* **rather than a small frog in a large one** *(e.g., one of many good students at an Ivy League university).*

According to Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke and Koller (2008)

Related Phenomena



The Dunning-Kruger Effect shows that the least experienced and least knowledgeable people are over-confident. These people don't know what they don't know and are more likely to overestimate their own abilities.

Social comparison

Conclusions

Think about it: How could you ever gauge your skills in chess without having anyone to compare yourself to?

- Social comparison is a natural psychological tendency and one that can exert a powerful **influence on the way we feel and behave.**
- Social comparison is not an ugly phenomenon to be avoided.
- Social comparison **has many positive aspects.**
- The engine of social comparison can also provide the push you need to rise to the occasion and **increase your motivation**, and therefore make progress toward your goals.

Discussion Questions

- On what do you compare yourself with others? Qualities such as attractiveness and intelligence? Skills such as school performance or athleticism?
- Do others also make these same types of comparisons or does each person make a unique set? Why do you think this is?
- How can making comparisons to others help you?
- One way to make comparisons is to compare yourself with your own past performance. Discuss a time you did this. Could this example be described as an “upward” or “downward” comparison? How did this type of comparison affect you?

Q&A