

**Psychology 607 - Comparison Processes, Social and Otherwise
Winter 2006**

Wednesdays, 2:00-4:50, Straub 137

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(and by appointment)

331 Straub

COURSE CONTENT:

Comparison processes are ubiquitous in human cognition. It is perhaps obvious that they are critical in forming evaluations, making choices and influencing how we feel about ourselves, but less apparent that they play a fundamental role in some of our most basic sense-making tools. This course draws comparison research from the fields of Cognitive Science, Judgment and Decision-Making, and Social Psychology. We will focus on behaviors associated with higher order cognitive processes (i.e., we will not be able to cover processes at the neural level). Although the class as a whole will not read about specific applied domains in which research on comparison processes has proved useful, individual students will provide presentations on some of these domains.

The assigned readings will provide a common ground and jumping off point for discussions, but I am very interested in exploring related topics that are of particular interest or relevance to the seminar participants. I hope discussions will allow for a clearer understanding of topics in the readings and will allow participants to engage in activities that are critical to field of psychology: the generation, presentation and discussion of ideas.

COURSE READINGS:

Readings are mostly empirical articles from peer-reviewed psychology journals, with some review papers and chapters. There is no textbook for the course. Readings are to be read by everyone before the seminar meets. Most readings will be available electronically on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.uoregon.edu/>). If there are problems getting the readings, please let me know as soon as possible. Full references are provided for all the readings, so you may read them in the original journal or book if you wish.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Class participation: This course is a seminar, thus class participation is extremely important. Your contributions are part of the course material for other students. All participants are expected to read all required readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss them fully. In particular, participants should try to go beyond the information provided in the readings, raising new questions, generating new research proposals, critiquing methodology, and making connections to other readings.

As a formal contribution to each discussion, each week participants should prepare either a set of questions prompted by the readings that they would like to discuss OR an outline of an

experiment to test some idea prompted by the readings. The goal of this assignment is to promote high level discussion of the current week=s readings, but questions or ideas about previous weeks= material are not discouraged (especially if you can link past readings to the current ones). Your comments should ideally reflect that you=ve done ALL the readings. It=s my hunch that if you actually have a hard copy of your ideas in front of you, you will feel more comfortable discussing them in class, so please bring a copy for yourself, but please also post your comments to other seminar participants on Blackboard by 1:30 on Thursday.

Because attendance is a prerequisite of in-class participation, please attend. If you know in advance that you must miss a class, I would appreciate it if you let me know. Keep in mind that your absence affects the quality of other participants= experience in the seminar.

2) **Special topic/Applied Presentation:** Each student will be responsible for a 20-30 minute presentation about the role of comparison processes in one of the following:

- envy and jealousy
- marketing (up to you to narrow this down)
- medical decision making
- negotiation
- procedural justice
- psychological well-being
- risk assessment
- or some other topic of your choice that you have cleared with me

The special topic may be related to your final paper topic (see below) but does not have to be. It may also be a topic related to your particular area of expertise. You are expected to post a bibliography on Blackboard for any readings that are central to your presentation. Please feel free to talk with me about your presentation in advance.

3) **Research paper:** Each seminar participant will write a final paper in one of two possible formats:

a. You may write an introduction and methods section for an empirical study (or series of studies). If it is not explicitly clear from the theory outlined in your introduction, you should also provide expected results. I encourage students to use this option as a way to develop a viable research project that can actually be conducted. **OR**

b. You may write a theoretical paper about a topic related to the class. The theoretical paper should be *Psychological Review* type paper, outlining a novel theoretical interpretation of pre-existing literature (thus, this paper is NOT just a review of the literature).

Whichever format you pick, a description outlining what you plan to do for your paper (about a page or two) is due in class Week 7 (Feb 22). I encourage you to discuss your ideas about your paper with me at any point. The first draft of your paper is due MONDAY, March 13 (not a day class normally meets) to another student who is your assigned class editor. Each of you will read and provide feedback on the paper of another seminar participant and thus, each of you will be given feedback that you should consider incorporating into your final draft. Edited papers will be returned no later than Friday, March 17 (it will be up to you arrange the exchange of papers with your editor). Final hard copy versions of the paper are due to me at 4 pm,

Tuesday, March 21. The final paper (either format) should be written in APA style.

GRADING:

The course may be taken graded or pass/no-pass. In order to pass the course, each separate component (participation, presentation, and paper) must be at a passing level (non-compensatory model). If you take the course for a grade, your paper will be 50% of your grade, participation (posted comments and verbal contributions) will be 30%, and your presentation will be 20%.

OTHER DETAILS:

As listed in the bulletin, registration for the seminar requires the instructor's permission. Psychology Department graduate students are automatically eligible.

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon. Please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Readings should be done BEFORE the class meeting for which they are listed. This schedule will be adhered to as closely as possible. Should changes occur, you will be notified.

January 11, Week 1 - Organizational Meeting

January 18, Week 2 - Alignability; No difference without similarity

Gentner, D., & Markman, A. B. (1994). Structural alignment in comparison: No difference without similarity. *Psychological Science*, 5, 152-158.

Markman, A. B., & Gentner, D. (1996). Commonalities and differences in similarity comparisons. *Memory and Cognition*, 24, 235-249.

Slovic, P., & MacPhillamy, D. (1974). Dimensional commensurability and cue utilization in comparative judgment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 11, 172-194.

Tversky, A. (1972). Elimination by aspects. *Psychological Review*, 79, 281-299. *(note: I find this article very difficult to read; you might too. Please TRY - read over all of it, even if you lose the thread in spots. It=s remarkable how this article anticipates a number of ideas that will come up subsequently in this course.)*

January 25, Week 3 - Direction of comparison

Aguilar, C. M., & Medin, D. L. (1999). Asymmetries of comparison. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 6, 328-337.

Hodges, S. D., & Hollenstein, T. (2001). Direction of comparison in typicality judgments. *Social Cognition*, 19, 601-624.

Mussweiler, T. (2001). Focus of comparison as a determinant of assimilation versus contrast in social comparison. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 38-47.

Tversky, A., & Gati, I. (1978). Studies of similarity. In E. Rosch & B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 81-98). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. *(Probably best to read this one first)*

February 1, Week 4 - The making of a referent

- Bowdle, B. F., & Medin, D. L. (Unpublished manuscript). Reference point reasoning in similarity and difference comparisons.
- Catrambone, R., Beike, D., & Niedenthal, P. (1996). Is the self-concept a habitual referent in judgments of similarity? *Psychological Science*, 7, 158-163.
- McKenzie, C. R. (2004). Framing effects in inference tasks B and why they are normatively defensible. *Memory and Cognition*, 32, 874-885.
- Polk, T. A., Behensky, C., Gonzalez, R., & Smith, E. E. (2002). Rating the similarity of simple perceptual stimuli: Asymmetries induced by manipulating exposure. *Cognition*, 82, B75-B88.
- (Optional) Pratkanis, A. R., & Farqhar, P. H. (1992). A brief history of research on phantom alternatives: Evidence for seven empirical generalizations about phantoms. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 13, 103-122.

February 8, Week 5 - Feature cancellation and unique features

- Hodges, S. D. (1997). When matching up features messes up decisions: The role of feature matching in successive choices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 1310-1321.
- Hodges, S. D. (2005). Feature matching in social comparisons. In M. Alicke, D. Dunning, & J. Krueger (Eds.), *The self in social perception* (pp. 131-153). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Houston, D. A., Sherman, S. J., & Baker, S. M. (1991). Feature matching, unique features and the dynamics of the choice process: Predecision conflict and postdecision satisfaction. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 27, 411-430.
- Nelson, L. J., & Miller, D. T. (1995). The distinctiveness effect in social categorization: You are what makes you unusual. *Psychological Science*, 6, 246-249.

February 15, Week 6 - Anchoring

- Mussweiler, T., & Strack, F. (2000). Consequences of social comparison: Selective accessibility, assimilation, and contrast. In J. Suls & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (pp. 253-270). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Strack, F., & Mussweiler, T. (1997). Explaining the enigmatic anchoring effect: Mechanisms of selective accessibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 437-446.
- Wilson, T. D., Houston, C. E., Etling, K. M. & Brekke, N. (1996). A new look at anchoring effects: Basic anchoring and its antecedents. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 125, 387-402.
- Epley, N., Keysar, B., Van Boven, L., & Gilovich, T. (2004). Perspective taking as egocentric anchoring and adjustment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87, 327B339.

February 22, Week 7 - Everything is relative

- Hsee, C. K., & Loewenstein, G. F., Blount, S., & Bazerman, M. H. (1999). Preference reversals between joint and separate evaluations of options: A review and theoretical analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 576-590.
- Schkade, D. A., & Kahneman, D. (1998). Does living in California make people happy? A

focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction. *Psychological Science*, 9, 340-346.

Simonson, I., & Tversky, A., (1992). Choice in context: Tradeoff contrast and extremeness aversion. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29, 281-295.

Slovic, P. (1995). The construction of preference. *The American Psychologist*, 50, 364-371.

March 1, Week 8 - Social comparison processes: Not necessarily motivationally

biasedChambers, J. R., & Windschitl, P. D. (2004). Biases in social comparative judgments: The role of nonmotivated factors in above-average and comparative-optimism effects. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 813-838.

Gilbert, D. T., Giesler, R., & Morris, K. A. (1995). When comparisons arise. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 69, 227-236.

Klar, Y. (2002). Way beyond compare: Nonselective superiority and inferiority biases in judging randomly assigned group members relative to their peers. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 331-351.

March 8, Week 9 - Social comparisons: Motivational influences and individual differences

Eiser, J., Pahl, S., & Prins, Y. R. (2001). Optimism, pessimism, and the direction of self-other comparisons. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 37, 77-84.

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.

Ogilvie, D. M. (1987). The undesired self: A neglected variable in personality research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 379-385.

Stapel, D. A., & Koomen, W. (2005). Competition, cooperation, and the effects of others on me. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 1029-1038.

March 15, Week 10 - Metaphor & analogy

Bowdle, B. F., & Gentner, D. (2005). The career of metaphor. *Psychological Review*, 112, 193-216.

Gentner, D., Bowdle, B. F., Wolff, P., & Boronat, C. (2001). Metaphor is like analogy. In D. Gentner, K. J. Holyoak & Kokinov, B. N. (Eds.), *The analogical mind: Perspectives from cognitive science*, (pp. 199-253). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Holyoak, K. J., & Thagard, P. (1997). The analogical mind. *American Psychologist*, 52, 35-44.