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Social Comparison Processes

Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

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assistance with the indexing. We are grateful to our wives and children for their affection and support during this project. Finally, we would like to dedicate this volume to the memory of Nick Cottrell and David Mettee, whose untimely deaths during the production of this book have left us all with a sense of loss.

Jerry M. Suls
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1 Social Comparison Theory and Research

An Overview from 1954

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INTRODUCTION

The question of how people come to understand themselves has always been asked. For centuries, however, the question appeared to be exclusively the property of theologians and philosophers. Their proposed answers varied considerably but reflected a fundamental dichotomy. Platonists and theologians believed the process of self-understanding and self-evaluation stemmed from comparison with absolute standards (e.g., The Absolute, God). Others, such as Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics,* interpreted self-evaluation as a social process in which people compared themselves with other people. Of course, both processes may work simultaneously; neither excludes the other.

What has changed in recent times is the emphasis placed on the social underpinnings of the self-concept. By self-concept, we mean individuals' feelings of self-worth, their perceived personal characteristics, and their evaluations of their abilities, opinions, and values. The social sciences have played a large role in this shift of emphasis. It is now widely accepted that one's self-concept is vitally affected by social comparison. That is, one's self-concept is based in part on how one compares to other individuals with regard to traits, opinions, and abilities. This notion suggests that the self is relativistic in its nature, since it depends on the particular comparison others available. It may be more than coincidence that this notion should emerge in the same century that our view of the physical world has also taken a relativistic turn.

The present volume brings together the work of several psychologists who have examined the processes by which individuals learn about themselves through comparison with others. These psychologists' efforts have, in one way or another, been directed by one of the more influential theories of self-evaluation, Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison processes (1954a). This theory attempts to stipulate why comparison is used, with whom comparisons are made, and what effects comparison has. The purposes of the present chapter are to review briefly the major tenets of this theory and to summarize the work that serves as

The author is indebted to Gerald Gaes, Bruce Layton, and Fred Tesch for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

the point of departure for the theoretical and empirical developments presented in subsequent chapters. The summary in this chapter is selective, focusing only on those aspects of the theory that have received the most attention.

FESTINGER'S SOCIAL COMPARISON THEORY

Festinger's social comparison theory developed from a broad range of conceptual and empirical advances that began in the late nineteenth century. These developments suggested that the social environment is an important factor in determining individuals' concept of self and their behavior. The writings of James (1890), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934) argued that people's self-concept is dependent on how others view and react to them. Cooley referred to this idea as the "looking-glass self." Other psychological and sociological discussion considered the normative and comparative functions of the social environment. The normative function refers to the setting and enforcing of standards of conduct and belief. The comparative function refers to the notion that the social group serves as a standard or comparison point against which people measure themselves. Empirical work soon followed that documented these observations. Notable examples included Sherif's work on conformity (1936), demonstrating the powerful influence of others in making even the simplest judgments, and Newcomb's Bennington study (1943) showing the impact of one's social group on resulting opinions and values. Both of these classic studies illustrated the normative and comparative functions of the social group, but in this research it is difficult to separate out the effects of each function. The comparative function, which is the focus of comparison theory, can be seen clearly and dramatically in the work of Hyman. In 1942, Hyman coined the term *reference group* to explain the data he collected concerning how individuals understand their own subjective socio-economic statuses. Hyman said that individuals' reported status was a function not of their actual attributes such as education and income but rather of what social groups they employed as standards (their *reference groups*). What was most interesting was that individuals frequently used as their reference groups, groups of which they were not even members.

These and other developments set the stage for Festinger's theory. Nevertheless, social comparison theory marked an important departure from previous work. First, it attempted to provide a full-scale, logically developed theory of self-evaluation. Second, unlike the previous theories, it provided testable experimental hypotheses and was tied to experimental data. That Festinger attempted to outline a theory with hypotheses, corollaries, and derivations so early in the history of experimental social psychology is perhaps proof of his brilliance and his boldness. The experimental emphasis is understandable, however, since his most direct sources of inspiration came from experimental work initiated in the 1930s and 1940s by his teacher Kurt Lewin. Two programs of research were especially important: the first studied how individuals set goals or levels of aspiration, and the second was concerned with the dynamics of social communication.

The level of aspiration research involved placing subjects in an achievement situation, giving them some practice with a task, and then asking them, "How well would you like to do on the next trial?" This research showed that individuals are generally happier if their performance matches or exceeds their level of aspiration and unhappy if it does not. But what was more important for Festinger was that when standards of comparison (group norms) are available and when individuals find that they have performed comparably to the norms, they show greater stability in evaluating their ability and a more consistent aspiration level across trials (Gardner, 1939; Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944). But comparison with others can, in some cases, produce shifts in individuals' level of aspiration. For example, Festinger (1942) showed that subjects lowered their aspiration level if they scored above the group average and raised their aspiration level if they scored below the group average. The fact that individuals tried to achieve uniformity with their group and responded to discrepancies between their own performance and that of their reference group is important in social comparison theory, as we will see shortly.

The second research program examined the effects of informal communication in small groups. In this research, Lewin, Festinger, and their associates observed the variety and direction of interpersonal communication. Their results revealed that group members communicate with one another in order to attain uniformity or agreement on group-opinion issues. This uniformity served two purposes. First, a degree of uniformity was necessary to successfully coordinate behaviors to achieve group goals. Second, it was found that group members desired uniformity because it provided them with confidence in their beliefs when there were no simple objective tests of validation or correctness. Both functions were used to derive a series of hypotheses, articulated by Festinger in 1950, to explain the results of several studies on group communication and the rejection of opinion deviates. The fact that interpersonal information and uniformity are such potent determinants of behavior was another key for social comparison theory.

In 1954, Festinger (1954a) extended his earlier statement and changed the emphasis of his ideas. The earlier theory of social communication stressed the power of the group over the individual. Social comparison theory, in contrast, stressed how individuals use the group to fulfill their informational needs to evaluate their opinions and abilities. In other ways, the theories are quite similar. In fact, Festinger freely used the experimental evidence inspired by informal communication theory to support social comparison theory.

The basic tenet of social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954a) is that humans have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities (Hypothesis I). Festinger assumed that this drive had survival value, that without an accurate appraisal of one's abilities and opinions, one could not survive effectively. The theory stipulated that people first attempt to evaluate their opinions or abilities through objective, nonsocial means. If such means are unavailable, however, they evaluate themselves through comparisons with the opinions or abilities of other people (Hypothesis II).

Although it is not always clear when physical-objective standards are present or absent, Festinger (1954b) gave some informative examples:

> If an individual thinks the temperature outside is below freezing he could look at a thermometer or put a dish of water outside and wait to see if it freezes. . . . If he wants to know whether his ability is good enough to accomplish the single purpose, namely, can he shoot squirrels with an air rifle, it is possible for him . . . to try to do it and find out whether indeed he can. (p. 194)

In some cases, however, a "physical" test is not possible. There is no reality test available for opinions or beliefs about the existence of ESP or the inevitability of war. Similarly, with regard to ability, one cannot know if one possesses adequate ability to obtain a college degree before actually trying to do so. Since there are many occasions where the physical or objective standards are not available (and some cases where they never can be), Festinger proposed that people must employ other people as standards for comparison. If for some reason neither physical nor social comparisons are available, then individuals' evaluation of their ability or opinion should be unstable (Corollary IIA). This instability may be reflected in the individuals' behavior (erratic performance) or in their shifting self-reports about their opinions or abilities. This is an undesirable state of affairs according to the theory and continues until the individuals find a physical or social comparison that provides an adequate and appropriate means for self-appraisal.

The focal point of the theory concerns the choice of particular others when social comparison is necessary (Hypothesis III). Festinger (1954a) theorized that "given a range of possible persons for comparison, someone else close to one's ability or opinion will be chosen for comparison" (Corollary IIIA, p. 121). The rationale for this proposition is that "if the only comparison available is a very divergent one, the person will not be able to make a subjectively precise evaluation of his opinion or ability" (Corollary IIIB, p. 121).

This similarity hypothesis is probably the most widely cited aspect of the theory. The theory reasons that only similar others provide truly useful information. In the case of opinion evaluation, it is suggested that only if the individuals' opinion agrees with those held by others with whom they associate (assumed to be similar in important respects) do the individuals feel the opinion is correct. If there is a difference in opinion, the individuals should feel that theirs may be incorrect and their evaluation of their opinion should be unstable and imprecise (Festinger, 1954b, p. 196).

With regard to the evaluation of one's ability, the theory states that the individuals should compare themselves with others whose performances are relatively similar to their own. Festinger reasoned that if individuals' performance is greatly discrepant from that of other persons, then all the individuals know is that their own performance possibilities are unique. This is negative knowledge, however, since the individuals cannot know from this information precisely what they themselves can do. If, in contrast, similar-ability others are available for comparison, the individuals [know that their] own possibilities for action in the environment are identical or very similar to those of these other persons" (Festinger, 1954b, p. 197).

Radloff (1966) has expressed the case for similar-ability others in a somewhat different way by using the example of a person who is superior to all the people he knows. In this case, Radloff states:

> Even his shoddiest performance is superior to the best efforts of the person closest to him in ability. Imagine further that there are no objective standards by which to judge performance. The only way of judging quality is by comparison with the performance of others. Clearly such a person would have great difficulty knowing which of his efforts were better than others. (p. 8)

However, if persons of similar ability are available for comparison, then the individual might determine which of his efforts are better than others. (We should note that Festinger's notion that only similar others provide a precise basis for self-evaluation is open to argument. As Latané (1966) noted, a novice chess player might compare his ability with a chess master's to see what can be achieved and to see how far he is from excellence even though the chess master is highly dissimilar.)

What is meant by similarity in the previous paragraphs and in Hypothesis III and related corollaries is, of course, similarity on the dimension that is under evaluation. However, Festinger had another kind of similarity in mind also. In Hypothesis VIII, Festinger (1954a) proposed, "If persons who are very divergent from one's opinion or ability are perceived as different from oneself on attributes consistent with the divergence, the tendency to narrow the range of comparability becomes stronger" (p. 133). Festinger appears to be suggesting that other persons who are similar on attributes related to the ability or opinion to be evaluated will serve well for comparison. As has been noted, "We do not merely seek out someone with an opinion similar to ours but rather seek out someone who ought to have, by virtue of similarity to us on attributes related to the opinion issue, a similar opinion" (Wheeler, Shaver, Jones, Goethals, Cooper, Robinson, Gruder, & Butzine, 1969, p. 231). This aspect of Festinger's statement has frequently been overlooked (see Patchen, 1961, and Wilson, 1973, for notable exceptions) but becomes a critical aspect of Goethals and Darley's attributional approach to social comparison (Chapter 11 in this volume).

Since only similar others are seen as providing stable and accurate self-evaluation, persons should compare themselves with someone whose ability or opinions are similar to their own and should be attracted to situations where others are similar to them (Derivation C). In addition, since comparison with extremely divergent others produces imprecise and unstable evaluations (Corollary IIIB), such comparison situations should be avoided by the individuals.

Of course, there may be instances when comparison others are neither completely similar nor completely dissimilar. In these cases where others have moderately discrepant opinions or abilities, the theory posits that individuals display tendencies to change their own evaluation of the opinion or ability in question (Derivation D_1). In other words, the individuals move toward the comparison others in order to reduce the existing discrepancy and to achieve an

accurate and stable evaluation. Alternatively, the individuals may try to bring the comparison persons close to themselves (Derivation D_2). For opinion evaluation, the individuals may employ persuasion techniques; for ability evaluation, they may offer advice. Both strategies, changing either themselves or others, attempt to produce uniformity. It is through uniformity that the individuals are presumed to achieve a stable and precise evaluation.

Comparison theory stipulates that any factors that increase the drive to evaluate some ability or opinion increase the pressure toward uniformity. These factors were adopted from Festinger's informal communication theory (1950). The factors include the importance of the ability or opinion, its relevance to immediate behavior (Corollary to Derivation E), one's attractiveness to the group (Corollary VIIA), and the relevance of the group to the ability or opinion (Corollary VIIB). As one or more of these elements increase, individuals are more motivated to achieve uniformity with relevant others and to reject discrepant others. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, the tendency to reject very discrepant others becomes stronger if the others "are perceived as different from oneself on attributes consistent with the divergence" (Hypothesis VII, Festinger, 1954a, p. 133). In other words, once a reason for the discrepancy or dissimilarity is known, the tendency to cease comparison is increased.

Since the previous discussion focused on the degree of discrepancy between individuals and the possible comparison others, the reader may ask how it is possible to define a moderate discrepancy. Festinger was not explicit on this matter, although Pettigrew (1967) suggested that what Festinger presumably meant by a somewhat different referent individual is someone within what Sherif and Hovland called the "latitude of acceptance."

Thus far, we have treated the social evaluation of opinions and of abilities as synonymous in order to discuss the general formulation of the theory. However, Festinger (1954a) outlined two important differences between abilities and attitudes that have important implications for the comparison process. First, "there is a unidirectional drive upward in the case of abilities which is largely absent in opinions" (Hypothesis IV, p. 124). This drive, which may be culturally derived, refers to the value that is placed on doing better and better. However, since there is a simultaneous pressure toward uniformity, Festinger suggested that "the individual is oriented toward some point on the ability continuum slightly better than his own performance or the performance of those with whom he is comparing himself" (p. 126). This means that even if group uniformity is achieved, the unidirectional drive continues to operate and competition in the group continues. As a result, Festinger declared that with respect to the evaluation of abilities, social quiescence can never be reached. Since there is no unidirectional drive posited to operate for opinions, uniformity of opinion is possible and when achieved produces a state of social quiescence (see Harris, 1976, for a critical discussion of this derivation).

Festinger did not specify how this drive might affect comparison choice. Festinger only suggested that individuals would strive toward a point slightly better than their present performance and the performance of comparison others. Wheeler (1966) interpreted this to mean that individuals will try to compare

themselves with others of slightly superior ability, a choice that represents a compromise between the similarity force and the unidirectional drive upward. Latané (1966) noted that the unidirectional-drive notion does not specify whether individuals will compare themselves with someone slightly better off than they or someone slightly worse. In the case of individuals' choosing someone slightly worse, Latané's reasoning was that the individuals could look better by comparing themselves with someone who was worse. Such downward comparison might allow for satisfaction of the unidirectional drive without making it necessary to improve one's performance.

There is an important further consideration, however. By positing a drive to do better or at least to appear better than others, Festinger specified an ego-enhancement function of social comparison that goes beyond the informational function emphasized in his theory. The notion of self-enhancement as a distinct component of the comparison motive was considered only briefly at various points in the 1954 statement (Festinger, 1954a). It has, however, generated much of the subsequent work on social comparison processes (see Chapters 2, 5, and 7 of this volume).

A second element that distinguishes abilities and opinions is "non-social restraints which make it difficult or even impossible to change one's ability. These non-social restraints are largely absent for opinions" (Hypothesis V, Festinger, 1954a, p. 125). By this, Festinger meant that people can change their opinion when they want, but no matter how motivated individuals may be to improve their ability, other elements (e.g., physical liabilities) may make this impossible. The consequence of this difference between abilities and opinions is relatively straightforward. While individuals may change their opinions to achieve uniformity with others, they are unlikely to be able to achieve this with regard to some abilities.

The differences between opinions and abilities also suggested to Festinger that cessation of comparison in the case of discrepant others may differ as a function of whether an opinion or an ability difference is at issue. In brief, it was proposed that cessation of comparison for opinion discrepancy would be accompanied by hostility or derogation but that ability discrepancy would not (Corollary VIA). The reasoning behind this corollary was that opinion discrepancy implies that one's opinions are incorrect, whereas no negative implications necessarily accompany ability discrepancy. To support this corollary, Festinger cited work by himself, Stanley Schachter, and Kurt Back (1950) showing that people with discrepant views were rejected by the group and seen as unattractive. In a study by Hoffman, Festinger, and Lawrence (1954) that involved ability comparison, low scorers ceased comparing with a high scorer but showed no hostility toward him. Thus the available evidence supports the notion that opinion discrepancy engenders hostility while ability discrepancy does not.

Although Festinger (1954a) proposed and derived several other propositions in his statement, the preceding summary outlines the major points of the theory. The bulk of Festinger's remaining discussion attempted to specify the implications of the social comparison process for group formation and for social

structure. As the reader may have anticipated, the selection of comparison others and the consequences of comparison produce social groupings possessing a high degree of uniformity on the opinions and abilities important and relevant for the grouping. We should, therefore, find relative similarity in abilities and opinions among persons who associate with one another. In addition, the segmentation of groups produces status in society. According to Festinger, this segmentation functions to allow individuals to ignore differences between themselves and the members of another group and to compare themselves only with their own group.

Festinger noted, however, that perfect incomparability is probably never achieved. This, Festinger thought, may be especially true of minority group members. Without complete incomparability with other groups, minority group members may have less-secure self-evaluations, which will create stronger pressures toward uniformity within the group and less tolerance of differences in ability or opinion.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1950s TO THE MID-1960s

Throughout his theoretical statement, Festinger (1954a) cited relevant experimental evidence to support his arguments. Much of this evidence came from research on level of aspiration and on informal communication in groups. For example, Festinger supported the hypothesis that individuals change their own evaluation toward that of others who are somewhat different, by citing several level of aspiration studies (Chapman & Volkmann, 1939; Festinger, 1942). These demonstrated that individuals who find out that "others like themselves" have scores different from their own change their stated level of aspiration toward the performance of the others. In presenting the hypothesis concerning the relationship between the relevance of an opinion or an ability and the pressure toward uniformity, Festinger cited the now classic study by Schachter (1951), which demonstrated that the tendency to reject deviates was stronger in high-relevance conditions.

In reading through Festinger's statement, one notes that nearly every proposition, corollary, derivation, or hypothesis is accompanied by some citation to relevant supportive data. As Singer (1966) has noted, however, "Most of the data Festinger used to illustrate this theory were reinterpretations–plausible, but not unequivocal" (p. 104).

In the same issue of *Human Relations* in which Festinger's theory paper appeared, there were three articles that more directly tested various aspects of the theory. Hoffman, Festinger, and Lawrence (1954) reported a study in which half of the groups tested were told that the three persons in the group had been selected to take a test together because they were about equally intelligent (homogeneous condition). The other half of the groups were told that one of the three persons in the group was superior to the other two, but this was done in a way that precluded any subject's thinking he was the superior one (heterogeneous condition). The subjects worked on a three-person competitive

bargaining task in which they could form coalitions to win more points. Results indicated that subjects in the homogeneous condition continued to compete against the confederate who scored considerably better than they did. When the subjects thought one of them was clearly superior (heterogeneous condition), they competed considerably less with the confederate and tended to compete against each other. These results are consistent with the social comparison hypothesis stipulating that comparison (as through competition) ceases when a perceived difference with the other is consistent with a divergence in ability. Since no hostility was shown toward the superior other, the study also supported the contention that differences in ability do not result in hostility or derogation.

In the second article, Dreyer (1954), using a level of aspiration paradigm, found some support for the contention that individuals cannot make a precise self-evaluation when only divergent comparison others are available. In this experiment, subjects were given feedback that they had performed better, worse, or about the same as their reference groups and were then asked, "How well do you feel you did?" The results revealed that the subjects were more satisfied with their performances when they had performed comparable to their reference group, a finding consistent with social comparison theory predictions.

The third study that accompanied Festinger's theoretical statement was by Festinger, Torrey, and Willerman (1954), and it tested the hypothesis that stronger attraction to a group should induce stronger pressure toward uniformity. The authors reported some marginal support for this hypothesis in an ability setting.

Singer (1966) noted that the theoretical paper and the three empirical papers marked an auspicious beginning for a theoretical advance. It was clear, however, that more research testing the theory's basic tenets was needed. Unfortunately, progress was slow, perhaps in part because Festinger himself turned to the theory of cognitive dissonance (1957), which was to be the focus of his and his students' and associates' attention for several years.

A major development for social comparison processes occurred in 1959 with the publication of Stanley Schachter's *Psychology of Affiliation.* This book reported a series of experiments that showed that fear induces affiliation in humans (at least among subjects who were firstborns or only children). Schachter's experiments suggested that the fear-affiliation relationship is partly predicated upon the comparison motive, that is, individuals desired to affiliate with others in a similar state, who also expected to be shocked, in order to evaluate their own emotional state. As Schachter (1959) said, "Misery doesn't love any kind of company, it loves only miserable company" (p. 24). These results were important because they supported the comparison hypothesis that individuals prefer to compare themselves with similar others. They also had another consequence, since they suggested that Festinger's basic statement could be extended to emotions as well as opinions and abilities.

As a result of Schachter's ground-breaking efforts, considerable research attention was given to the psychology of affiliation and the role of the comparison motive in evaluating emotional states. The 1960s saw numerous

efforts following up and refining Schachter's original work, and these efforts continue to the present. A comprehensive critical review of the fear-affiliation literature can be found in Chapter 3 in this volume. While this work on the comparison of emotional states had a general salutary effect and maintained interest in social comparison processes, studies of the comparison process as it affects opinion and ability evaluation tended to take a back seat. In addition, because Schachter's principal dependent measure was affiliation choice, subsequent researchers adopted this as their primary measure and gave less attention to evaluation accuracy and evaluation stability as dependent measures.

Schachter himself, however, examined the social and cognitive determinants of emotional states. In their classic study, Schachter and Singer (1962) demonstrated that when individuals are physiologically aroused without any apparent reason, they take on the emotion of those they are with. According to Schachter and Singer, the unexpected arousal produces an ambiguous state that the individuals need to label. Other people may be one source of information about a label for the individuals' physiological state. While these results are clearly consistent with social comparison theory, they also go further by suggesting that bodily states may in some instances induce the comparison motive.

This study is pivotal for another reason: it suggested the importance of attribution processes and partly inspired the recent interest in self-perception theory (Bem, 1967; Kelley, 1967). It is perhaps unfortunate that Schachter and Singer's work is usually linked to attribution theory and research when it really followed logically from Schachter's work on comparison and affiliation. Although we are anticipating the argument of Chapter 11, the fact that Schachter and Singer's study was inspired by interest in social comparison and became an important development in the study of attribution processes suggests that attribution and social comparison are similar processes. Goethals and Darley, in fact, use attribution theory as a framework for a reinterpretation and extension of social comparison theory.

One major advance and extension proposed in the early and mid-1960s was J. Stacy Adams's theory of inequity in social exchange (1965). This theory represents a synthesis of cognitive dissonance theory, Homan's concept of distributive justice, and social comparison theory. According to Adams, comparison is not restricted to attitudes and abilities but also includes an individual's "inputs" (effort, qualifications, etc.) and "outcomes" (pay, rewards, etc.). Specifically, the theory states that two (or more) individuals compare the ratios of their inputs and outcomes from a similar situation to determine whether they have been treated fairly or justly. For example, employee A compares his salary (outcome) with respect to the time, effort, and qualifications he puts into his work (input) with a similar ratio for employee B in a similar situation. Inequity results when these ratios are perceived as unequal:

$$\frac{\text{Outcome A}}{\text{Input A}} \neq \frac{\text{outcome B}}{\text{input B}}$$

Adams posited that the perception of inequity generates tension, which promotes either behavior change to equalize the ratios or a cessation of comparison. Much research has accumulated since Adams proposed his theory, and the research supports the theory's propositions (see Berkowitz & Walster, 1976).

In a representative study, Adams and Rosenbaum (1962) recruited college students to proofread page proofs. One group of subjects was led to believe that they were well qualified to receive the standard proofreading rate of 30 cents a page. Questioning about this pay rate indicated that subjects felt the situation to be fair and equitable. Another group of subjects was led to believe that they were unqualified but would be paid at the standard rate anyway. Questioning indicated that these subjects felt they had received an undeserved privilege. Adams and Rosenbaum then examined the actual quantity and quality of work performed by subjects in the two groups and found that those subjects who felt benefited by inequity put in twice the amount of work as the subjects who felt qualified. In other words, the subjects in the inequity condition tried to earn their pay and so restore equity. Other research shows that subjects who perceive negative inequity (feel underpaid compared to others) put in less effort and do lower-quality work as a result.

This work on equity suggests that comparison is as important in evaluating "objective" stimuli such as pay as it is in evaluating one's abilities or opinions. In addition, equity theory and therefore comparison processes have also been implicated in reactions to harmdoers, in reactions to victims, and in helping behavior, among other phenomena. Berkowitz and Walster (1976) offer a collection of papers discussing these developments. Austin in Chapter 12 of the present volume reviews equity theory and its relevance to comparison processes.

Another major development in the mid-1960s was the publication of a special supplemental volume to the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by Bibb Latané, devoted to "Studies on Social Comparison." The research reported there represented the work of a group of students and associates of Stanley Schachter's at the University of Minnesota and at Columbia University. This empirical research attempted to test some of the basic tenets of comparison theory. For this reason, we consider these efforts in some detail.

Gordon (1966) tested the hypothesis that subjects who are uncertain of the correctness of their opinions choose to compare themselves with people who hold similar opinions. In addition, Gordon proposed an influence hypothesis, stipulating that persons who are certain of the correctness of their opinion (and thus not in need of comparison) will attempt to influence others who hold dissimilar views. Gordon's subjects were led to believe that they were either correct or incorrect in their judgments of two case studies. The subjects were asked to consider a third case study and received information that the other group members had opinions slightly discrepant or highly discrepant with their own. Subsequently, subjects indicated whether or not they wished to discuss the third case study in a second session. Gordon's results indicated that, consistent with the comparison hypothesis, uncertain subjects (based on feedback on the two prior case studies) preferred to affiliate with others who held similar views.

In contrast, subjects who believed they were correct on past trials and therefore had less need to evaluate their opinions, preferred to associate with the discrepant group, presumably in order to influence them.

Hakmiller (1966a) also examined the hypothesis that individuals compare themselves with similar others when they are uncertain but, in this case, in regard to ability. Hakmiller had his subjects, in groups of four, receive feedback that they were correct or incorrect on a bogus social reasoning test. Over a series of four trials, each subject was led to believe that one other, two others, or three others concurred with him. Subjects then indicated whose response they would like to see on a second set of problems. Presumably, subjects in the one-concurrer condition had less certainty in their judgements and therefore had a greater need for social comparison, particularly with a similar other. In contrast, when two others agreed with the subject, he had less need for evaluation and comparison choices were random.

In three experiments, Radloff (1966) tested the comparison hypothesis that the absence of similar comparison others leads to inaccurate and unstable self-evaluations. Radloff reasoned that subjects of extremely high or low ability should be less accurate and less stable in evaluating their performances than should average subjects who have a larger number of similar others available for comparison. Radloff had his subjects perform a pursuit rotor task and asked them to judge their performance from trial to trial. Radloff reported, consistent with his hypothesis, that nonaverage subjects were less accurate and more unstable in their estimates of their performance. Of greater interest, however, was the finding that when nonaverage subjects learned that others performed at a comparable level (nonaverage), stability and accuracy became as good for them as for average performers. This finding is strong evidence for social comparison theory. We might note that another aspect of this experiment makes it of special interest. It is the only study in the literature that specifically considered the effects of comparison on the accuracy and stability of performance.

Three other papers in the same supplement examined individuals' choices of comparison others in evaluating personality traits. Reasoning from the unidirectional drive hypothesis, Wheeler (1966) proposed that individuals would compare themselves to someone they believe to be slightly superior in ability and that this tendency would be stronger when the individuals are motivated to do well. To test these hypotheses, Wheeler administered a bogus personality test for the purpose of selecting students for a seminar-type course that was described in highly desirable terms (high motivation) or in highly undesirable terms (low motivation). Subsequently, subjects were given a bogus score and the rank order of the other members of the testing group. The results indicated that subjects chose for comparison the score of someone who ranked above or adjacent to them. Also, this tendency to make upward comparisons was stronger under conditions of high motivation. Both results were consistent with Wheeler's hypotheses, but Wheeler noted that the results might seem paradoxical, since upward comparison forces individuals to evaluate themselves as inferior. Upward comparison, however, was most likely when the subjects assumed that they had a score quite close to that of the individual directly above them.

Thornton and Arrowood (1966) also employed the rank-order paradigm and examined comparison choices as a function of the positivity/negativity of the trait being evaluated. Subjects were administered a bogus personality test described as measuring either a positive or a negative trait, and then they received a bogus score. They then indicated which score in the rank ordering they wished to see. The choice data revealed that subjects chose someone better than themselves more frequently when the trait tested was described as positive.

Thornton and Arrowood argued that the results were best interpreted in terms of two motives that operate in social comparison, self-evaluation and self-enhancement. They proposed that the first motive is best served by easily interpretable information—that is, by comparing oneself with someone who exemplifies the trait (a positive instance) rather than by comparing oneself with someone who has a low score (a negative instance). The self-enhancement motive, however, is best served by asking, "How far am I from the best-off other?" Employing this reasoning, Thornton and Arrowood proposed that for a positively valued trait, the positive instance and the best-off other lie at the same end of the rank order, the high scorer. For the negative trait, the positive instance is the high score, but the most desirable score is the low score. Thornton and Arrowood argued that since the positive instance and the best-off other are represented by the same point on the positive trait continuum but not on the negative trait continuum, the choice of a better-off other is stronger for positive traits.

A second study by Hakmiller (1966b) also implicated the importance of the evaluation and enhancement motives. In this experiment, subjects who had previously taken the MMPI were told they could expect a low score on a "hostility to one's parents" measure. This trait was described by the experimenter in positive (low-threat) or negative (high-threat) terms. Subsequently, the subjects received a much higher score than expected and were given the opportunity to see someone else's score in the rank ordering. Hakmiller's results revealed that the highly threatened subjects demonstrated a stronger tendency to compare with the worst-off person in the group, while the low-threat subjects chose to compare with others of superior status. These findings were interpreted by Hakmiller as supporting the self-enhancement component of social comparison since by comparing themselves with someone worse off, the threatened subjects could reduce the threat to their own self-esteem.

These three studies by Wheeler, Thornton and Arrowood, and Hakmiller extended comparison theory to the evaluation of personality dimensions. They also suggested the importance of the unidirectional drive and of self-enhancement as factors in determining comparison choice. Of special note is that fact that similar others are not always chosen for comparison, a finding contrary to one of Festinger's basic hypotheses. The inconsistencies were attributed by various investigators "to the fact that the conditions under which predictions derived from Festinger's theory will hold have not been sufficiently specified" (Gruder,

1971, p. 473). In Chapter 2 of the present volume, Gruder reviews this and subsequent research on the rank-order paradigm.

Three other papers in the supplement followed up Schachter's research on the psychology of affiliation. Darley and Aronson (1966) investigated whether fear reduction or the comparison motive was the most important determinant of the fear-affiliation relationship. To distinguish between these two components, Darley and Aronson gave subjects the choice of waiting alone, waiting with a slightly more fearful other, or waiting with a considerably calmer other. These researchers reasoned that since the second associate was more similar to the subject, the social comparison motive would be best served by affiliating with her. On the other hand, the associate in the third condition was calmer and should provide fear reduction. Darley and Aronson reported that their subjects showed a clear preference for the more similar other, suggesting the greater importance of the comparison motive. As further evidence, Darley and Aronson ran an additional condition in which subjects had the choice of waiting with someone who was equally nervous or waiting with someone who was more nervous. The results showed that subjects chose to wait with the equally nervous other, which is again consistent with social comparison theory.

In another study examining the effects of emotional arousal and affiliation, Latané and Wheeler (1966) interviewed Naval personnel who had participated in clean-up operations at an airplane crash site. Some of those interviewed about a week after the crash had been involved in traffic control around the site; others had searched for and put together pieces of human bodies. All subjects were administered the Lykken Activity Preference Inventory (Lykken, 1957), which measures emotional responsiveness. The results of the interviews indicated that the men who were classified on the Lykken instrument as highly emotional and who had participated in the body search indicated little desire to talk to others in the week following the crash and also had written fewer letters home. The nonemotional men, however, showed a greater desire to talk and had written more letters home than did the emotional men. These results suggest that particularly intense emotional arousal may in some cases lead to decreased affiliation. It is conceivable that the intensity of the arousal made the arousal state unambiguous and therefore the individual required no further evaluation through social comparison. It is also possible that this intense situation embarrassed some of the individuals involved. Sarnoff and Zimbardo (1961) have reported that embarrassment may lead to decreased affiliation.

In another study, Latané, Eckman, and Joy (1966) hypothesized that people who are present in an ambiguous stressful situation may become attractive because they provide evaluative information through social comparison. In this study, subjects worked in dyads and either shared or did not share electric shock. Attraction ratings taken after the manipulation showed that firstborn subjects liked their partners more in the shared-shock condition. Although Latané et al. noted that a fear-reduction hypothesis could explain their data, post-experimental data indicated that shared-shock subjects reported the shock as more disturbing and unpleasant, so it appears unlikely that their partners were attractive because they served a pain- or fear-reducing function. Consistent with a social comparison interpretation are the facts that (1) the effect held for firstborns, the individuals who show the fear-affiliation relationship most strongly (Schachter, 1959), and (2) there were data showing that subjects in the shared-shock condition were more accurate at estimating their partner's degree of disturbance than were subjects in the other conditions, which would be expected if the social comparison motive was induced in this situation and if individuals in a similar situation were present.

All together, the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology Supplement* presented the results of ten original experiments that supported and/or extended Festinger's social comparison theory. This support was by no means unqualified. The authors realized that some of the studies were subject to alternative explanations and asked for further research to clarify the issues. Much of the subsequent research on social comparison was directly or indirectly inspired by the efforts recorded in that valuable document.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1966, AND THE PRESENT VOLUME

Since 1966, social psychologists have given increasingly more attention to the study of social comparison processes and self-evaluation. This increase is reflected partly in the number of published articles and dissertations on this topic. However, as Wheeler (1974) has observed, "Investigators in the area of social comparison have not carried on the systematic limited-variations-on-a-theme-research. . . . Nor are they particularly wedded to Festinger's 1954 theory. The spirit of the work is best characterized as a search for situations that may lead to new insights" (p. 326). Perhaps this is the reason why many of the recent developments in the social comparison area have come from research on related topics such as interpersonal attraction, prosocial behavior, decision making in groups, and equity behavior.

A key development in the late 1960s was the publication of Thomas Pettigrew's wide-ranging essay on social evaluation theory (1967). This essay considered the convergences among a number of psychological and sociological theories that have comparison as a major component and suggested the application of comparison processes to social problems. This essay has generated enthusiasm among social scientists that a general formulation of social evaluation may be possible that draws on psychological and sociological work. Finally, we might add to these developments the study of attribution processes, an important current pursuit for experimental social psychologists. Although the relationships between social comparison processes and attribution processes have not always been fully appreciated, as I mentioned earlier, both processes focus on "the factors motivating the individual to obtain causally relevant information" (Jones, Kanouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins, & Weiner, 1971, p. x). The two theories are concerned, although in different ways, with the processes and consequences of

self-evaluation. Apparently, the study of self-evaluation is becoming one of the major and crucial interests in social psychology.

The present volume reports the results of a variety of theoretical and empirical endeavors in the study of social comparison and self-evaluation. Some of the contributions are critical reviews of specific research areas, other contributions suggest new theoretical approaches, and still others report original data relevant to the social comparison process.

All of the contributors share the assumption that comparison is a primary component in social behavior, but they are not in full agreement on the validity of specific points of Festinger's theory. Many contributors are in fact highly critical of the theory or of some of the research interpreted as empirical support for the theory. All of the contributors consider it important to define the theory's boundary conditions.

This book covers a broad range of theoretical and empirical issues. The chapters in the first half of the book consider basic issues in the theory or classic phenomena associated with the theory (e.g., fear and affiliation). The chapters in the second half are more concerned with the relationship between social comparison and other social phenomena.

In Chapter 2, Gruder summarizes the research literature on the choice of comparison others for evaluating oneself on ability or personality traits. Gruder focuses on research using the rank-order paradigm that suggests the joint influence of self-evaluation and self-enhancement. Cottrell and Epley (Chapter 3) offer a critical discussion of the fear-affiliation literature and the evidence for socially mediated fear reduction. Cottrell and Epley are particularly concerned with whether the comparison interpretation of the fear-affiliation relationship is supported by the existing evidence.

In Chapter 4, Metee and Smith consider the arguments and theoretical basis for the comparison proposition that only similar others can furnish stable and accurate evaluation information. Mettee and Smith argue that a case can be made for the influence of dissimilar others as well. The authors outline a theoretical framework to explain when similar others or dissimilar others will be important and also review findings relevant to their arguments.

In Chapter 5, Miller and Suls report the results of a series of studies examining the influence of ability and attitude similarity on affiliation preferences. This research suggests that features of the affiliation setting (e.g., evaluated-nonevaluated, competitive-cooperative, large group-small group) are influential in determining whether attitude or ability similarity is an important consideration in choosing an interaction partner.

Castore and DeNinno (Chapter 6) consider whether the selection of comparison others is affected by overall attitudinal similarity or by specific attitudinal similarity on task- or situation-relevant issues. Although social comparison theory appears to suggest that similarity is perceived along task-relevant or situation-relevant dimensions, Castore and DeNinno report evidence that the selection of comparison others is effected by overall similarity, not task-relevant similarity. It would seem that individuals prefer others who are generally similar, regardless of their appropriateness in any particular situation.

In Chapter 7, Brickman and Bulman propose that in many instances people have the desire to avoid social comparison and prefer to compare themselves with dissimilar rather than similar others. These authors report the results of several experiments that support this contention. Brickman and Bulman argue that this desire to avoid social comparison derives from the social costs involved when people compare themselves on valued dimensions.

In the second half of the book, the relationships between comparison processes and other social behaviors are considered. Allen and Wilder (Chapter 8) summarize the literature on conformity and consider its relation to social comparison and self-evaluation theory. In Chapter 9, Berger first considers how modeling phenomena touch on the comparison process and then turns to the specific problem of the effects of modeling and comparison on observer perseverance. Jellison and Arkin (Chapter 10) discuss a self-presentation–social comparison analysis of the decision-shift phenomenon. In developing this approach, these authors suggest a reinterpretation of the social comparison process and its functions. In Chapter 11, Goethals and Darley discuss the links between attribution and social comparison processes, showing how the attributional perspective may shed more light on comparison. Austin (Chapter 12) outlines critical issues in equity theory and expounds on the relationships between equity and social comparison. In Chapter 13, Cook, Crosby, and Hennigan critically review the theoretical and empirical status of the concept of relative deprivation. In the concluding chapter, Ladd Wheeler and Miron Zuckerman review all of the contributions and suggest where these developments may lead.

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2 Choice of Comparison Persons in Evaluating Oneself

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INTRODUCTION

Perusal of the chapters in this book reveals that research on social comparison processes has developed, broadly speaking, in two directions. Tests of the theory as it was originally presented by Leon Festinger (1954) comprise one direction, and implications of the theory for various categories of social behavior comprise the other. The present chapter reviews some of the research in the first category, specifically studies of the characteristics of other persons who are selected as standards for comparison in evaluating onself.

Festinger presented what was, for social psychology, a formally stated theory that has served the important function of generating research. However, many would argue that social comparison theory has probably been cited post hoc when convenient at least as much as it has been used a priori as a predictor. Moreover, the theory may be less formal than it originally appeared to be—at least one apparent internal inconsistency has been identified by formalizing the theory in functional terms (Harris, 1974). Social comparison theory is broad, and this breadth has been the source of both strength and weakness. Although it has been a useful theory, it has not been sufficiently tested to allow a reasonably complete assessment of it—for instance, it has not been tested to the point where it is possible to rewrite it. Perhaps the chapters in this volume will provide the information necessary for this task.

The basic assumption of social comparison theory is that persons have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities (Hypothesis I, Festinger, 1954, p. 117). Festinger hypothesized that persons prefer objective criteria, what he termed *physical reality,* as standards for self-evaluation. For example, if a person wants to find out how fast he or she can run a mile, the person can run a mile and record the elapsed time with a stop watch. Festinger recognized, of course, that physical reality is often not available: How does a person determine how well he or she plays the guitar? How does a person know if his or her recommendations for controlling economic inflation would be effective or not? How does a person know if nuclear fusion breeder reactors or meditation or health foods are beneficial or detrimental to a better life? Festinger argued that in the absence of

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adequate physical reality, persons will seek out *social reality*, that is, other persons, as a source of information (Hypothesis II, Festinger, 1954, p. 118). Festinger called the search for information from social reality the process of social comparison.

As mentioned, research that was designed to identify the determinants of social comparison choices will be reviewed in this chapter. This research is most relevant to Festinger's Hypothesis III, its Corollaries IIIA and IIIB, and Derivations A and B from Hypotheses I, II, and III. Hypotheses I and II have already been described, and the others are reproduced here for reference (Festinger, 1954):

> *Hypothesis III*: The tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one's own increases. (p. 120)
>
> *Corollary IIIA*: Given a range of possible persons for comparison, someone close to one's own ability or opinion will be chosen for comparison. (p. 121)
>
> *Corollary IIIB*: If the only comparison is a very divergent one, the person will not be able to make a subjectively precise evaluation of his opinion or ability. (p. 121)
>
> *Derivation A (from Hypotheses I, II, III)*: Subjective evaluations of opinions or of abilities are stable when comparison is available with others who are judged to be close to one's opinions or abilities. (p. 122)
>
> *Derivation B (from Hypotheses I, II, III)*: The availability of comparison with others whose opinions or abilities are somewhat different from one's own will produce tendencies to change one's evaluation of the opinion or ability in question. (p. 122)

We will first consider motivational issues raised by these components of the theory. These issues suggest an organizational framework for presentation of research on the choice of comparison persons in evaluating oneself.

MOTIVATIONAL ISSUES

Reinforcement via Uncertainty Reduction

Festinger's Hypothesis I (1954) has been treated more as an axiom than as a hypothesis. A postulate that there is a drive to evaluate oneself seems somewhat unsatisfying, perhaps because teleological or other motivational attributions are lacking. Jones and Gerard (1967, p. 312) focused on the usefulness of self-evaluation to the person. In effect, they began reasoning from the postulate that persons are uncertain about aspects of themselves. In other words, persons lack information about themselves, information that is useful, and indeed necessary, in everyday living. A high school student needs information about his or her intelligence, emotional maturity, career goals, and so on, in order to make a decision about whether to go on to college. A political candidate must have a

good idea of the feasibility, the potential for success, the popularity, and so forth, of the solutions he or she proposes for the constituency's problems. The existence of uncertainty about one's abilities or opinions, then, constitutes an obstacle to effective functioning. The person is motivated to reduce such uncertainty because its existence is aversive and its elimination will, therefore, be rewarding.

This interpretation of the motivation underlying social comparison implies that comparisons should be preferred to the extent that they reduce uncertainty in general, or provide useful information in a specific situation. Findings obtained by Jones and Regan (1974) and by Wilson (1973) are particularly relevant to this interpretation. In one experiment, Jones and Regan gave subjects the opportunity to see comparative norms that they could use to evaluate their own scores on a trait measure. Subjects wanted to see this comparison information only when it would be useful to them in making a decision; they did not want to see it when they had already made the decision. In a second experiment, these investigators demonstrated that Festinger's prediction that individuals will prefer to compare themselves with someone who is similar in ability held where the other had experiences relevant to the individuals' subsequent actions but not where the other did not have such experiences. Wilson gave subjects a score that ostensibly represented their problem-solving ability. Subjects who were led to believe that their score was close to the group mean were more certain about their ability and said the information was more helpful in evaluating their score than subjects who were led to believe that their score was far from the mean. It is not surprising that other evidence (see the section "Satisfaction of Self-Evaluation and Self-Enhancement," later in this chapter) reveals that uncertainty reduction and usefulness of the comparison information not only produce main effects, but also effects that can be moderated by other variables.

Two Functions of Social Comparison

Festinger's theory contains the notion that in addition to being motivated to evaluate an attribute of the self, persons have a preference for what that evaluation should reveal. Students want not only to discover how well they did on the exam, but also to find out that they did well. These two goals are explicit in the notion of a unidirectional drive upward for abilities (Hypothesis IV, Festinger, 1954, p. 124), and implicit with respect to opinions. However, it seems reasonable that this desire for a favorable evaluation is not restricted to abilities and other attributes for which the positively valued direction is culturally specified, a priori. With respect to opinions, emotions, or other self-attributes, it can be expected that persons will desire to possess the appropriate direction and degree of the attribute, once appropriateness is determined by engaging in social comparison.

Thus it has been inferred from Festinger's statement of social comparison theory and from later work that two motivations underlie how a person engages

in social comparison. Thornton and Arrowood (1966) called these *self-evaluation* and *self-enhancement,* while Singer (1966) called them *evaluation* and *validation of the self.* A similar distinction has been drawn in other social-psychological contexts, and is perhaps best represented by Jones and Gerard's constructs of information dependence and effect dependence (1967). *Information dependence* refers to a person's reliance on others for knowledge about the environment; *effect dependence* refers to socially mediated reinforcement, or the consequences ("effects") one person's behavior has for another. Information dependence and effect dependence seem to represent a rather general distinction, while self-evaluation and self-enhancement represent a specific distinction relevant to social comparison processes. As Jones and Gerard point out, there are at least three other similar distinctions that are of intermediate generality: Kelley's comparison and normative functions of reference groups (1952); Deutsch and Gerard's informational and normative social influence (1955); and Thibaut and Strickland's task and group sets (1956).

CONFLICT BETWEEN SELF-EVALUATION AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT

It is not always obvious how both the self-evaluation and self-enhancement functions of social comparison can be served. In fact, as Singer (1966) and Pepitone (1968) have pointed out, the attempt to serve both functions simultaneously may produce a conflict for the person. As an example, a people who have questions about their strong fear of flying are motivated to compare their own feelings with other persons' feelings in order to discover whether their own fear is inordinately high, just average, low, etc. However, by engaging in such comparison, these people run the risk of finding out that their own fear is so great as to exacerbate the problem and to produce a serious blow to their self-esteem. In other words, the pursuit of self-evaluation via social comparison can actively countervail against the pursuit of self-enhancement. Are comparison persons chosen in a way that satisfies (or suffices for) both motives simultaneously? Is one motive predominant—do choices of comparison persons serve one motive primarily and the other secondarily? What situational and personality variables influence the process of motive satisfaction? These are some of the questions addressed by the research reviewed below.

First, we will review research that has revealed conditions under which persons try to satisfy one or the other of these motives, and then we will turn to research that has probed situations in which persons try to satisfy both.

Preference for Self-Evaluation

Stanley Schachter (1959) conducted an important and influential research program on the determinants of affiliation—why persons choose to be with others rather than to be alone. He made subjects afraid to varying degrees and measured their desire to be with others.

Presumably, self-evaluation would involve determining how afraid one actually was and whether this level of fear was appropriate to the situation. Self-enhancement would involve demonstrating that one was not too afraid, that one did not lack courage, etc.; this motive would be served by fear reduction. The bulk of the evidence from Schachter's original studies and evidence from several follow-up studies (Becker, 1967; Miller & Zimbardo, 1966; Wrightsman, 1960; Zimbardo & Formica, 1963) implied that fearful subjects were motivated primarily to assess their fear (self-evaluation) rather than to reduce it (self-enhancement). (See the detailed account of this and related research in Chapter 3 of this volume.)

Preference for Self-Enhancement

Feasibility

Following the line of research begun by Schachter, Darley and Aronson (1966) found that subjects attempted to evaluate their feelings only when self-enhancement was not possible; their affiliative choices were directed to self-enhancement when it was feasible to satisfy this motive. Evidence from an experiment by Willerman, Lewit, and Tellegen (1960) appears to be consistent with Darley and Aronson's interpretation of their own results. Willerman et al. found that subjects who were high in fear of failure had a greater preference for a self-enhancing alternative (i.e., they avoided self-evaluation) when self-enhancement appeared feasible than when it did not.

Specific Threat to Self-Esteem

There is also evidence that suggests a second condition under which the preference for self-evaluation is likely to be subordinated to the desire for self-enhancement: a specific threat to self-esteem. Sarnoff and Zimbardo (1961) hypothesized and found that subjects whom they made *anxious* (as opposed to afraid) preferred isolation to affiliation. They interpreted this as a preference in the subjects for self-enhancement rather than self-evaluation because being alone in their situation would protect the self from threatening impulses. Teichman (1973) was able to replicate this finding, but she also showed that it did not occur when the anxiety-arousing threat was not specific. That is, when she aroused general anxiety, subjects preferred affiliation, a tendency she attributed to the uncertainty about the threat. (This research, too, is reviewed in more detail in Chapter 3 in this volume.)

Thus, where there is a specific threat to self-esteem, and where avoidance of this threat is feasible, persons tend to seek this self-enhancing alternative, even at the expense of obtaining valid information about the self.

Evidence from the Rank-Order Choice Experimental Paradigm

There is evidence from a different experimental paradigm that can be interpreted as consistent with this hypothesis. Hypothesis III of Festinger's theory of social comparison processes (1954) states that persons prefer similar

others for social comparison. Hakmiller (1966) hypothesized that persons might actually prefer to compare themselves with dissimilar others when their self-esteem was threatened. He argued that the motivation to preserve self-esteem under these conditions would lead the person to make a "defensive comparison." To test his hypothesis, Hakmiller had subjects complete a bogus personality inventory that ostensibly measured a trait ("hostility toward one's own parents") that was described to some subjects as a highly undesirable and threatening trait and to others as a positive trait. Subjects were informed that their score was the second lowest in a group of six subjects. Thus subjects had five comparison others, and where possessing the trait was threatening, four were worse off with higher scores and one was better off with a lower score. Under these conditions, where possession of a great deal of the trait constituted a threat to self-esteem, 54 percent of the subjects chose to compare with the worst-off other, as Hakmiller predicted. The suggested interpretation of these data was that subjects were responding to the threat to their selves by comparing defensively, that is, by trying to demonstrate that they were different from a person who surely possessed this most unflattering characteristic.

Hakmiller recognized, however, that his threat manipulation may have been confounded with the degree of the subjects' involvement in the experimental situation. His finding could have been the consequence of subjects in the low-threat condition not being interested in the task and decisions, and hence making their choices arbitrarily (Wheeler, Shaver, Jones, Goethals, Cooper, Robinson, Gruder, & Butzine, 1969).

Friend and Gilbert (1973) pointed out that Hakmiller had also confounded the manipulation of threat with creation of a "positive instance." That is, in the course of making the personality characteristic threatening to the subject, the experimenter implied that the highest score was a clear example of the characteristic. Friend and Gilbert, therefore, defined the personality characteristic independently of the manipulation of its threatening nature. They found that threatened subjects were more likely to engage in defensive comparison by avoiding comparison with better-off others, in general, and with the best-off other, in particular. This pattern was restricted to subjects who had been identified as chronically high in fear of negative evaluation, as identified by a measure developed by Watson and Friend (1969); there was no effect of threat for subjects low in this fear. Although these investigators claimed that threatened subjects also sought comparison with worse-off others, as Hakmiller's subjects did, the evidence supporting this claim was weak, at best. Thus this evidence does indicate that when self-esteem is clearly and specifically threatened, subjects respond by attempting to protect their self-esteem rather than by trying to evaluate the nature and extent of their feelings.

It seems reasonable that the strengths of the motivations for self-enhancement and self-evaluation are likely to differ for persons with different amounts of a trait or an ability. Thus they would be expected to resolve the conflict between these motivations differently from persons possessing more or less ability than they. For example, if in the course of learning the range of a trait or ability in a

reference group, persons discover they are relatively lacking in it, they might well be more concerned with self-enhancement than with further self-evaluation.

Several studies have in fact found that the relative level of a subject's ability influences the processes and consequences of social comparison. For instance, Samuel (1973) found that the level of the subjects' ability interacted with others' global similarity and ability similarity to determine the subjects' desire to compare with them. Subjects who were told that their performance on the ability test had been inferior—in distinction to subjects who were told that their performance had been superior or average, or who had been given no information—showed little preference among "superior," "average," "inferior," and "similar" comparison persons when these persons were members of a globally similar comparison group. However, when the comparison group was globally dissimilar, inferior subjects were more discriminating: they preferred an "average" comparison person and shunned an "inferior" one, relative to other subjects' preferences. In the globally similar condition, inferior subjects tended to show the reverse pattern of preferences for "average" and "inferior" comparison persons. Inferior subjects in both the globally similar and dissimilar conditions preferred comparison with a "similar" person and shunned comparison with a "superior" person, relative to other subjects. This is, needless to say, a complex pattern of data, but it can be interpreted as consistent with the hypothesis that when threatened, persons avoid comparisons that might confirm the threat.

Brickman and Berman (1971) found that the quality of the subjects' own performance interacted with their expectancy for how well they would perform and the amount of information they had about their own and others' scores in determining the extent of the subjects' actual search for additional social comparison information.[1] They found that subjects who were given full information (own score and grade) and were disappointed (high expectancy and low performance) searched most to interpret their scores. Although the main effect for performance was due primarily to this one cell, low-performance subjects searched more than high-performance subjects in every cell.

Although it is difficult to interpret comparisons between studies, it is nonetheless noteworthy that both Samuel (1973) and Brickman and Berman (1971) found that the social comparison behavior of inferior performers was affected by other variables. Samuel found that inferior performers wanted to compare with persons who were labeled "similar" or who were slightly better off, and avoided comparison with persons who were, like the subject, labeled "inferior" and with persons who were much better off. Brickman and Berman found that inferior performers engaged in more social comparison, particularly when they had just failed unexpectedly. These findings can be interpreted as a tendency for self-enhancement, in part because those subjects who suffered the greatest loss in self-esteem were the ones who showed the significant effects. The

[1] Note that this study differed from most of those considered earlier in that the subjects' actual expectations and performances were used, and in that the extent, rather than the object of, social comparison choices was studied (i.e., the rank-order choice paradigm was not used).

social comparison behavior of Samuel's subjects, at least, can be characterized as "cautious" with respect to implications for their self-esteem: they avoided comparisons that were potentially threatening to their self-esteem. Comparing with "superior" others would, by contrast, almost guarantee an unfavorable evaluation, while comparing with others labeled "inferior" carried the danger that subjects would be forced to confirm their similarity to these others, whose performance had received the same unflattering label as their own.

Evidence from Projection of Threat Experimental Paradigm

Although Bramel (1962, 1963), Pepitone (1964), and Steiner (1968) were not studying affiliation or social comparison directly, they too found evidence for self-enhancement when self-esteem was subject to a specific threat and the threat could be avoided. The reasoning that guided this research was that by attributing ("projecting") greater levels of undesirable personality traits to another than to oneself, one maintains or protects one's own relative standing. Bramel (1962) found evidence supporting his hypothesis that defensive projection is a direct function of the cognitive dissonance aroused by learning that one possesses an undesirable trait. Subjects were given either favorable or unfavorable information about themselves, designed to influence their self-concepts. Then when all subjects were led to believe that they became homosexually aroused, this information was dissonant for the favorable group but not for the unfavorable group. As expected, subjects in the favorable group, who experienced dissonance, attributed the same degree of homosexual arousal to another as to themselves, while subjects in the unfavorable group attributed less arousal to another than to themselves. This difference in arousal was especially apparent when the subject evaluated the other positively, in general. In a subsequent study (Bramel, 1963), college students attributed homosexual motivation to another student more when they believed that they themselves had such motivation than when they did not. However, college students' attributions regarding a criminal did not differ as a function of whether they experienced dissonance by receiving self-threatening information. Bramel interpreted these results in terms of social comparison theory: by attributing an undesirable trait to others with whom the subjects would be likely to compare themselves, the subjects were generating evidence that they did not deviate from the others on this trait—that is, that there was a uniform social reality.

Using basically the same procedure as Bramel, Pepitone (1964) expected that subjects would attribute more of undesirable traits to another subject than to themselves when this would be self-enhancing, namely, when subjects were made to have high self-esteem and were told that they had an undesirable trait ("latent homosexuality"), or where they were made to have low self-esteem and were told that they had a desirable trait ("basic virility"). Although Pepitone did not find the expected pattern of results for the projection of sexuality (homosexuality and virility), he did find it for two other unfavorable traits, shame and diffuse anger.

Steiner (1968) suggested that Pepitone (1964) may not have obtained

complete support for his hypothesis because his after-only design did not enable measurement of *change* in evaluation (which was what he actually predicted), and/or because the desirable and undesirable trait treatments might not have been of psychologically equal magnitude. To remedy the first problem, Steiner matched subjects on initial levels of self-esteem, and to remedy the second, he attempted to raise self-esteem in one condition and to lower it to an equal extent in another. Steiner found, consistent with his predictions and with Pepitone's findings, that subjects whose self-esteem was diminished projected the evaluation they received of themselves onto an average fellow student more than did subjects whose self-esteem was enhanced. Subjects whose self-esteem was diminished also changed their self-evaluation less in response to the bogus evaluation they received than did subjects whose self-esteem was enhanced. Presumably, subjects in the diminished self-esteem group avoided changing their self-evaluation in response to the undesirable feedback because this would constitute reduction rather than enhancement of self-esteem. Pepitone's and Steiner's results provided evidence that persons will interpret information about themselves and others so as to maximize self-esteem, even where a less flattering interpretation is just as valid given the evaluative information.

SATISFACTION OF SELF-EVALUATION AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT

Thus far, we have considered some of the factors that influence the resolution of the potential conflict between self-evaluation and self-enhancement in favor of the satisfaction of one or the other of these two motivations. Of course, a person may try to resolve the conflict between these motivations by attempting to satisfy both motivations. The research reviewed next is relevant to the way in which such attempts seem to proceed. Seen in another way, this research has revealed determinants of social comparison choices where no one motivation predominates. The majority of studies considered in this section focused on the trait or ability being evaluated, while some investigated the effects of introducing additional comparison dimensions.

Festinger (1954) was as concerned with explaining changes in group members' opinions and abilities subsequent to engaging in social comparison as he was with explaining the processes of comparison per se.

> *Derivation D (from Hypotheses I, II, III)*: The existence of a discrepancy in a group with respect to opinions or abilities will lead to action on the part of that group to reduce the discrepancy. (p. 124)

In addition, Festinger maintained that in Western culture, persons are motivated to improve their abilities (Hypothesis IV). Thus, when group members discover discrepancies in ability among themselves, they will be motivated to reduce these discrepancies and, simultaneously, each member will be motivated to improve his or her own ability. This will be recognized as the problem of self-evaluation and

self-enhancement. Festinger proposed that a member could achieve both goals if he improved to the point where he was *slightly better* than the other members of the group. But from the perspective of the group as a whole, this hypothetical state of equilibrium is impossible to attain, since not everyone can be slightly better than everyone else! Even if all members who are inferior in ability improve, making all members similar in ability, there will be variability remaining, with some members being superior to others. In other words, an implication of Festinger's notion that each group member strives to be slightly better than the other members is, in Lewin's term, a kind of "quasi-stationary equilibrium." As Festinger put it, "With respect to the evaluation of abilities, a state of social quiescence is never reached" (1954, p. 125).

Wheeler (1966) interpreted this reasoning as a prediction that persons will choose to compare themselves with others who are similar to but slightly better than themselves in attempting to evaluate their level of an ability by social comparison. The logic is that persons choose to compare themselves with a similar other in order to evaluate their ability accurately, and with a better-off other in hopes of being able to confirm their similarity to this superior other. Wheeler noted, though, that comparison with a better-off other might actually have a result opposite to that desired: if the persons are indeed *not* similar to the superior other with whom they chose to compare their ability, self-evaluation would be served only at the expense of self-enhancement.

Wheeler found evidence consistent with Festinger's expectation that subjects would prefer to compare themselves with similar others who were better off than they were. Subjects were told they ranked fourth in a group of seven on a measure of a positively valued personality trait. In addition to their own score, they were told the scores of the highest and lowest scorers. Half the subjects chose to learn the score of the third-ranking subject—the next highest-scoring subject. An additional third of the subjects wanted to learn the score of the second-ranking subject. Moreover, there was a positive correlation between assumed similarity and choice.

Focus on Evaluated Trait or Ability

Thornton and Arrowood (1966) tested the generality of Wheeler's finding and probed the notion of assuming similarity to better-off others. As in Wheeler's study, subjects were told that they scored at the median in a group of seven. However, half were led to believe either that their score was *close* to better-off others and far from worse-off others, or *far* from better-off others and close to worse-off others. For half of each of these groups, the personality trait was *desirable*, so better-off others had higher scores than the subject; for the other half of each of these groups, the trait was *undesirable*, so better-off others had lower scores. Based on Festinger's theory and Wheeler's findings, Thornton and Arrowood expected their subjects to compare themselves with better-off others when they were close to these others, but not when they were far from them. Only in the close conditions would assuming similarity to better-off others be

likely to be confirmed. They did not expect the desirability of the trait to have any effects—close subjects should prefer better-off others regardless of the desirability of the trait.

Although trait desirability was not expected to affect comparison choices, a greater proportion of subjects in the desirable conditions than in the undesirable conditions compared themselves with better-off others. Thornton and Arrowood appealed to the two functions that social comparison is thought to serve—self-evaluation and self-enhancement—in order to account for this unexpected effect of trait desirability. Comparing oneself with better-off others in the desirable conditions presumably would satisfy both motivations, because a higher scorer constitutes, at once, an attractive standard with which the subject wanted to assume similarity (self-enhancement) and a "positive instance" or defining example of the trait (self-evaluation).[2] Comparing oneself with better-off others in the undesirable conditions, however, satisfies only the motivation for self-evaluation. These assumptions provided a post hoc explanation of why subjects in the desirable conditions preferred higher-scoring comparison others more than subjects in the undesirable conditions did.

Thornton and Arrowood's second finding seemed to disconfirm directly the prediction based on Festinger's theory and Wheeler's findings. A greater proportion of subjects who were told that they were far from the better-off others than those who were told that they were close selected the better-off others for social comparison. As Thornton and Arrowood suggested, this finding could have been due to a weak far-close manipulation. Indeed, as Wheeler et al. (1969) subsequently noted, the subjects' own scores were *above* the reported mean in all conditions, and this was inconsistent for those subjects who were also told that their score was among the four *lowest*. This procedural flaw may have, in effect, eliminated the critical difference between the far and close conditions, making it just as likely for far subjects as for close subjects to believe that an assumption of similarity to better-off others would be confirmed through social comparison.

Wheeler et al. (1969) attempted to synthesize the findings of Hakmiller (1966) and Thornton and Arrowood (1966) and to specify when persons will prefer to compare with similar others as Festinger predicted they would. Wheeler et al. reasoned that persons would compare themselves with similar others only when they first knew, and thus could compare their scores with, the extreme scores (cf. Pettigrew, 1967, p. 246). Therefore, subjects in their experiment were either told the extreme scores (*range*) or not told them (*no range*). In addition, as in Thornton and Arrowood's study, the trait that ostensibly was being assessed was either *desirable* or *undesirable*. This 2 X 2 design was replicated with different dependent variables: about half the subjects were given a choice of which other groups member's *score* they would like to learn, and the other half

[2] From a more conservative standpoint, it would seem that the highest scorer is closest to being a "positive instance" in the sense in which this term is used in the study of concept formation. However, it also seems reasonable that any other who receives a *higher* score than the subject is more of a "positive instance" than the subject himself.

were given a choice of which other *person* they would like to work with on a subsequent task.

As expected, Wheeler et al. found that when the subjects had been told the range of scores in their group, they most preferred to compare their score with the score of a similar other. Moreover, as Thornton and Arrowood had predicted in their study, subjects in the range conditions preferred to compare themselves with the most similar better-off other. Given a second choice, these same subjects chose to learn the score of the most similar worse-off other. When the subejcts had not been told the range, they most preferred to compare their score with the score of the highest-scoring other, regardless of whether the trait was desirable or undesirable. On their second choice, these subjects predominantly chose to learn the score of the lowest-scoring other. A final result of interest was that when subjects chose another person to interact with, their choices were more evenly distributed over the alternatives. Choices in the person replication reflected preferences to compare oneself with the two most desirable others, with the two most similar others, and with the two most extreme scorers.

Wheeler et al. interpreted their results as specifying one condition under which Festinger's prediction that persons prefer to compare themselves with similar others will hold. When subjects knew the range of the group on the dimension being evaluated, they preferred comparison others who were close to them on the dimension. When subjects did not know the range, they attempted to identify this range by choosing to learn the highest and lowest scores. This pattern was altered substantially when comparison involved face-to-face interaction while subjects were engaged in a joint task; undoubtedly, under these circumstances motivations other than those associated with social comparison came into play to determine choices. Indeed, Wilson and Benner (1971) obtained a similar result, finding that 78 percent of subjects who were asked to choose which other subject they wanted to *observe* chose the highest scorer, while only 48 percent of subjects who were asked to choose which other they wanted to *participate with* chose the highest scorer. They explained this difference as being a consequence of the private nature of the former choice and the public nature of the latter one. That is, they proposed that in the private conditions (similar to Wheeler et al.'s score treatment) the subjects' primary motivation was to gain information to reduce uncertainty about their score, while in the public conditions (similar to Wheeler et al.'s person treatment) this motivation was inhibited by the possibility of an unfavorable comparison. Moreover, Wilson and Benner found that in the public conditions, where subjects appeared to choose defensively, males who were made uncertain about their own scores were more likely to choose the highest scorer than males who were made certain. This could have occurred because the greater uncertainty enhanced these subjects' desire for information, and the uncertainty would also be associated with the additional information, thus mitigating the implications of an unfavorable comparison. Also in the public conditions, high self-esteem males were more likely than lows to choose the highest scorer. This effect was strongest in the certain conditions. Presumably, this occurred because highs are less threatened than lows by the possibility of an unfavorable comparison. This difference is emphasized when the information is certain, because an unfavorable comparison would be hard to deny.

Arrowood and Friend (1969) argued that Wheeler et al.'s results (1969) were also consistent with the position that subjects choose others so as to satisfy the self-evaluation motivation. Subjects chose the highest scorer in order to determine how much of the trait they had, and they chose in the desirable direction in order to determine how far they were from the better-off others.

Gruder (1971) and Gruder, Korth, Dichtel, and Glos (1975) continued this line of research to see if it was possible to integrate more satisfactorily the findings reviewed above. Using basically the same paradigm, they expanded the factorial designs on the assumption that comparison choices in these additional treatment combinations might shed light on the appropriateness of the alternative explanatory principles that had been proffered. Experiment I reported by Gruder (1971) replicated the results of Wheeler et al. (1969) where subjects chose scores. Experiment II involved a variation on the design of Experiment I: instead of the highest score being a positive instance of a desirable or undesirable trait, as was the case in earlier studies, the lowest score was a positive instance or the lowest and highest scores were both positive instances. These treatments allowed for the estimation of the independent effects of positive instance, desirability, and extreme score (highest or lowest). Subjects were not given the score range and, as in Experiment I, were given opportunities to learn others' scores. Where the lowest score only was the positive instance of the trait, subjects compared themselves predominantly with the best-off other. This is to be contrasted with the result where the highest score only was the positive instance in earlier experiments and subjects preferred the highest-scoring other. In the conditions where both extremes of the trait dimension were defined, subjects preferred to compare themselves with the highest-scoring other rather than the lowest-scoring other when high scores were desirable; they showed no clear preference between the highest-scoring and lowest-scoring others when low scores were desirable. The majority of subjects in all four conditions used their two comparison choices to learn the two most extreme scores.

The complex pattern of choices obtained in Experiment II and in the comparable no-range conditions of Experiment I could not be explained by any one of the hypotheses that had been offered previously. To account for these results, Gruder (1971) suggested that these hypotheses, instead of being mutually exclusive, might be complementary. That is, the data seemed to indicate that in satisfying the motivations underlying social comparison, it is important whether possessing the trait or ability is desirable, whether the comparison other represents a positive instance and, independent of these factors, whether the comparison other is the highest scorer.

With respect to the third factor, Wheeler et al. and Gruder found that subjects sought the range of scores almost invariably by choosing first the highest score and then the lowest score. Gruder suggested that the highest score may have been the primary choice in carrying out this range-seeking strategy because

subjects were more uncertain about it than about the lowest score. Learning the highest score, therefore, would provide more information (i.e., reduce more uncertainty) than learning the lowest score. Subjects may have been less uncertain about the location of the lowest score because zero is a frequent and "logical" lowest score on tests of various kinds, and the existence of such an end anchor may lead to greater confidence in estimates of what the lowest score is (Volkmann, 1951). Singer and Shockley (1965) demonstrated that subjects who were less certain about their level of an ability, by virtue of receiving no information, preferred to affiliate with others, while subjects who were more certain preferred not to affiliate. On the other hand, Brickman and Berman (1971) found that the amount of information provided subjects about an ability had no effect on the amount of their social comparison activity. In this study, the relationship between information and certainty was reversed: subjects who had been given no information were most certain about their estimates of the group's average, and subjects who had been given the most information were least certain.

Gruder et al. (1975) attempted to test the one previously untested component of the three-component hypothesis generated by the earlier results–uncertainty about the highest score. Specifically, subjects' uncertainty about the highest score was manipulated, along with whether the highest or lowest score was a positive instance and whether the personality trait was desirable or undesirable. The predictions were derived from the simple rule that the extreme score, which was characterized by two or three of the three attributes (i.e., desirability, positive instance, uncertain highest score), would be preferred for social comparison. Subjects were expected to be indifferent to the extreme scores that were characterized by equal numbers of these attributes. Uncertainty was manipulated differently in two experiments, and the results were the same in both, demonstrating two important facts. First, the highest score was chosen more when its location was uncertain then when its location was certain. Second, the complex hypothesis that integrated the three components was supported because the main effects and interactions predicted by this hypothesis occurred and were sufficient to explain the data.

Additional Comparison Dimensions

Festinger's Hypothesis III–persons prefer to compare themselves with *similar* others–seems to refer to similarity on the trait dimension being evaluated, and this was the focus of the research reviewed in the preceding section. As many have noted (Patchen, 1961; Wheeler et al., 1969; Wilson, 1973; Zanna, Goethals, & Hill, 1975), though, similarity along other dimensions is also important in determining comparison choices, particularly dimensions thought to be related to the one being evaluated. For example, a weekend tennis player may want to compare his or her tennis-playing skills with those of a person of the same sex, age, physical condition, general athletic prowess, etc., as much as with a person who progressed as far as the player did in a local elimination tournament.

Wilson (1973) defined ability evaluation as a function of comparison along the primary dimension: "How good am I compared to others?" And he defined self-evaluation as a function of comparison along secondary, related dimensions: "How good am I compared to how good I should be?" He found, as predicted, that variations on the primary dimension (problem-solving ability), but not on a secondary dimension (similarity in educational level), affected measures of ability evaluation. However, measures of self-evaluation were affected additively by variations on both dimensions: subjects were most satisfied when their scores were similar to more advanced students' scores.

Zanna et al. (1975) also found that social comparison choices made to evaluate an ability were influenced by similarity on a related dimension. Ninety-seven percent of their subjects chose comparison groups of their own sex when evaluating what was described to them as a sex-related ability. By describing the opposite-sex group as possessing more of the ability, the investigators placed the desire to compare with the same-sex group in conflict with the desire to compare with the best-off group. All but two of the subjects in those conditions (indeed, the only two in *all* the conditions!) resolved this conflict by choosing the same-sex comparison group. As evidence that a conflict actually did exist, subjects in these conditions were significantly more likely than subjects for whom a conflict did not exist to compare with the opposite-sex group when given a second choice. The virtually uniform preference for same-sex comparison others is, of course, convincing evidence that similarity on a dimension closely related to the ability being evaluated influences comparison choices. In this instance, the related dimension, sex, was defined as very strongly correlated with the ability, a large sex difference existing in the normative data.

Morin and Jones (1972) found that blind juveniles preferred comparing themselves with blind persons to comparing themselves with less similar groups, or did not compare themselves at all; moreover, this trend was stronger on issues relevant to the blind than on irrelevant issues. In a naturalistic setting, on the other hand, Strauss (1967) found that blind persons preferred to compare themselves with blind persons to comparing themselves with less similar groups, or to not comparing themselves at all; moreover, this trend was stronger on issues dependence on sighted persons) may have mediated this effect.

Castore and DeNinno's subjects (1972) rated the desirability of potential work partners for a task that ostensibly required either attitude diversity or uniformity within work groups. Others' attitudes were presented as either generally similar or dissimilar to the subjects', and as similar or dissimilar on a task-relevant issue. These investigators found that task-relevant similarity did not affect subjects' ratings. Overall similarity produced the only effect, similar partners being preferred to dissimilar ones. They replicated these results in a second experiment. Wheeler et al. (1969) found that a measure similar to Castore and DeNinno's, choosing a work partner, yielded different results from the more typical social comparison measure, choosing to learn another's score. So perhaps this difference in dependent variables could account for why Castore and DeNinno failed to find an effect of similarity along a relevant dimension, where previously cited studies

found one. It must be remembered, though, that Jones and Regan (1974) used a partner-choice measure and *did* find an effect of task-relevant similarity in their second study.

Following Festinger, one might expect similarity on related dimensions to become less important, the less correlated the two dimensions are. Samuel (1973), however, found that subjects preferred comparison others whom they had judged as "globally" more similar to themselves (by virtue of being undergraduates at the same rather than a different university), despite the fact that they had little reason to believe that this dimension was related to the ability dimension (strategies for solving problems posed by the environment—unrelated to IQ). Recall that in two studies described earlier, Castore and DeNinno (1972) also found that subjects preferred as work partners others who were generally similar to themselves and that Morin and Jones (1972) found that blind subjects preferred blind comparison others. Thus it appears that similarity is an important determinant of comparison; moreover, at this time it appears that the strength of the relationship between the similarity dimension and the ability dimension is not critical.

Measuring Self-Enhancement and Self-Evaluation

All of the research considered in this chapter has focused on subjects' social comparison choices—choosing to affiliate or not, or with whom the subjects want to compare themselves. An inherent problem in this dependent variable is that it is difficult to identify the motivation that underlies the choice. Is self-evaluation being served? self-enhancement? both?

One way to deal with this problem is to assess these motivations separately with independent measures. To this end, Gruder and Dichtel (1975) made self-enhancement possible by giving subjects an opportunity to work on exercises that would virtually guarantee an improvement in their performance, and they made self-evaluation possible by giving subjects an opportunity to scrutinize others' performance scores and the score distribution. Before performing a skill task, subjects were led to expect a superior, average, or inferior performance, and following the task they were told that their performance was, in fact, superior, average, or inferior. These manipulations thus created nine experimental treatment conditions.

Expectancy, but not peformance feedback, affected subjects' desire for comparison information and for performance improvement.[3] Specifically, subjects who expected to perform poorly volunteered to spend more time working on the

[3] Perhaps expectancy had effects but performance did not because subjects perceived the expectancy manipulation as reflecting their "true ability," and the performance manipulation as reflecting less stable features of their behavior in the situation. Herrenkohl (1967), however, did find that performance feedback affected desire for social comparison: subjects who were told their performance on a test of intellectual ability was average desired information about others' scores more than did subjects who were told that they had either passed or failed.

improvement exercises than did subjects who expected to perform either average or well. This finding is consistent with the findings cited earlier (Brickman & Berman, 1971; Samuel, 1973) that demonstrated that self-enhancement can serve as the predominant motive for persons whose self-esteem is threatened. Subjects in the present study who were told that they were, in one sense, inferior volunteered to work to improve more so than did subjects who were told they were either average or superior.

The measure of the desire for self-evaluation revealed a different effect of the expectancy manipulation: subjects who had expected to give an average performance on the skill task wanted to spend less time in studying the other persons' scores in order to clarify their own. This finding is interpretable in terms of a derivation from social comparison theory that we have not yet considered. Persons who believe that they are average are, by definition, in the high-frequency range of the normal distribution, and thus should feel they have many comparison others available. Radloff (1966) found that these persons are more accurate and stable in evaluating their ability on a task, a prediction he derived from social comparison theory. And Wilson (1973) found that these persons are more certain of their ability. If average subjects in the experiment under discussion had not believed that their ability was discrepant from the abilities of a majority of the other subjects, they should have been able to make satisfactory self-evaluations. In other words, they would not have been as motivated to increase the accuracy of their self-evaluations as subjects who expected to perform either well or poorly. This explains, at least in part, why these subjects said they would spend less time scrutinizing others' performance scores. In sum, observation of different effects on the separate measures of self-evaluation and self-enhancement provides direct evidence that supports the hypothesis that these two motivations are, at least in part, independent determinants of social comparison. Moreover, these effects were interpretable in terms of Festinger's social comparison theory.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It seems that the conflict between self-enhancement and self-evaluation is a viable hypothesis regarding social comparison choices. We have made a start in gaining an understanding of when each of these motivations predominates in the processes of social comparison, and how they operate simultaneously when neither predominates. Although self-evaluation is an important goal for a person facing a new situation, self-enhancement appears to become more important when this situation presents a specific threat to self-esteem and, of course, when there is a way to defend the self, for example, by avoiding the threat.

When neither self-enhancement nor self-evaluation is dominant, the person's choices of comparison others reveals his or her strategy for resolving the conflict between the two. Persons want to find out how they stand—and that their standing is respectable. In order to do this, they want very much to learn about the highest-scoring other, apparently because he or she represents the most

uncertainty and is, therefore, important in interpreting the meaning of any other position on the dimension. They are also interested, for the same reason, in the other who best represents a definition of the dimension, the "positive instance." And they want to compare themselves with others who are better off than they are on the dimension, presumably to allow them to assess the extent to which they are similar to these fortunate others. Finally, persons prefer to compare themselves with others who are similar to themselves on dimensions other than the one being evaluated. However, contrary to what might be expected, the strength of the relationship between the evaluation dimension and the other dimension does not appear to moderate the influence of similarity on the other dimension.

The role of secondary comparison dimensions may be important in relating social comparison theory to other theories in social psychology. For instance, Pettigrew (1967) has suggested that social comparison processes may be studied as instances of broader principles of social evaluation and judgment. Other people are used as sources of criteria and standards for evaluation. But we do not, in every instance of self-evaluation, turn to real people, to social reality. Quite often, we can and do compare our experience with an internalized standard. A number of theories of social evaluation and judgment (e.g., Helson, 1964; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Upshaw, 1969) incorporate such constructs or processes. The notion is, then, that we can and do evaluate novel stimuli and make decisions without direct reference to either physical or social reality. Instead, our judgments and actions are mediated by cognitive standards that develop over repeated experiences with relevant physical and social reality. And, indeed, the formation of such internal standards may be the primary purpose of social comparison processes. Thus everyday comparisons may take as a reference internal standards, which themselves are based on firsthand experience.

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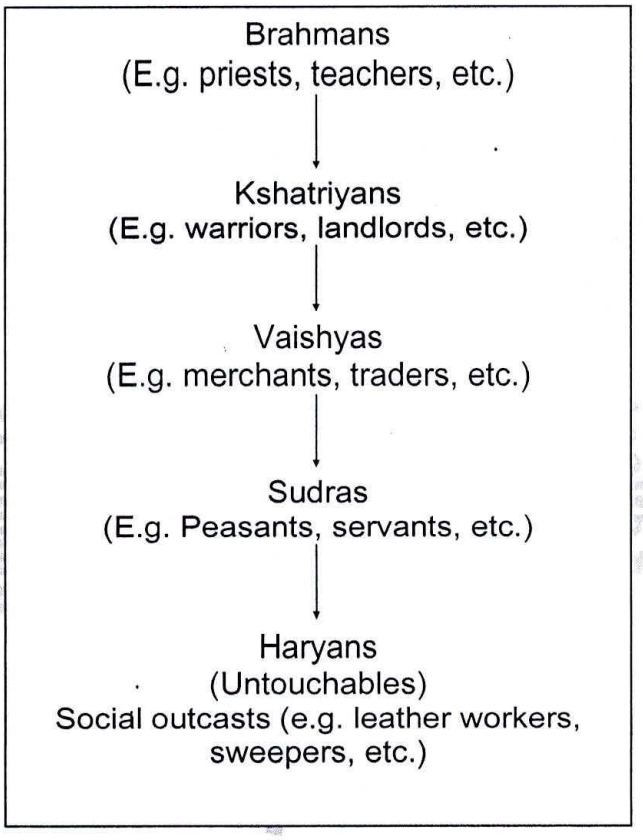
Figure 5.1. Castes of the Hindu Society of India



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PH-19.

Equity in health

Alma Ata Declaration emphasized health, as a fundamental human right, and a world-wide social goal. The population health is 'multi-dimensional' and Indicators are used to 'measure the health status of a community, but also to compare the health status of one country with that of another'[1]. 'Equity in health can be defined as the absence of systematic disparities in health and inequities are 'differences in health that are unnecessary, avoidable, unfair and unjust'[2]. Equity is an Ethical Concept and is placed under the larger frame of Social Justice.

WHO commission on Social determinants further specifies that "inequities in health, avoidable health inequalities, arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The' relationship between society and Health is challenging', for an economist the health can be a marker for keeping a way of keeping score of how well the society is doing in delivering well-being. In case of public health 'these inequalities are a manifestation of the social influences on health'[3]. The goal of studying social inequalities in health is to understand social determinants of health, and, increasingly, to explain the mechanisms or pathways that lead to the observed social differences in health outcomes[3,4]. The whole medical profession's approach to health is only one among others, and its partiality may impede finding solutions to pressing health problems. So people advocate for Social model of Health as opposed to medical model of health, based on Amarthya Sen's Capability approach [3].

During the mid ninghty's a network of researchers, policy makers and NGO activists collaborated on a process entitled the Global Health Equity Initiative, which evolved into developing an Equity Guage. Equity Gauge concept is an understanding that the determinants of health inequities are largely socio-political in nature, and just distribution of resources needed for health requires some degree of social and political mobilization.

- Assessment and Monitoring, to analyse, understand, measure, and document inequities
- Advocacy, to promote changes in policy, programs, and planning
- Community Empowerment to support the role of the poor and marginalized as active participants in change rather than passive recipients of aid or help. [5]

"Inadequate information on health inequities in many countries offers one explanation for a lack of action to combat these problems. Moreover, less information is routinely collected about the distribution of social and environmental risks for ill health than about biological risk factors". Obtaining quality information (available routine data, surveys and should be taken into account) and disaggregating by social "stratifi ers" (which include age, income, education, class, occupation, sex, ethnicity (or "race" in some jurisdictions), disability, and place of residence) to the smallest administrative unit possible and selecting indicators and targets are the recommended ways to use data for feed back into policy and action on social determinates of health[6].

People's health movement (phm)India(Jan Swasthaya Abhiyan) has been actively involved in the rights based approaches to health care and has been involved in community action for health and its state chapters are actively involved in rising the rights based issues concerned with health and health care. With my involvement and personal understanding in more emphasis have been laid on rights based approaches to health care, (revitalize PHC) in terms of data collection on health care facilities, services availability and utilization, and also advocacy for betterment of services. Similar approaches are now being considered for taking up the issue of malnutrition.

A lot of data is available for India for various levels

1. Census data- Available till district level
2. SRS- Census blocks based on fertility Indicators
3. NFHS- state Level

4. DLHS- District Level
5. Annual Health Survey- District Level
6. NSSO- District Level
7. Assessment reports by agencies and others

More can be done with data if guided by well defined indicators.

1. Appropriate Indicators to monitor.
2. Strengthening network. (Identification of appropriate indicators to
3. Advocate for action

Selection of appropriate Indicators o Monitor
More importantly fixing and defining the problem
Possibilities of including qualitative aspects into this ?!

1. Park, K. *Park's Textbook of Preventive and Social Medicine,* Jabalpur, Banarsidas Bhanot. 2011
2. Braveman,P., Gruskin, S., Defining Equity in Health. Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health,2003;57:254–258
3. Anand, S., Peter, F., Sen, A., (ed) Public Health Ethics and Equity. NewYork, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp 37-62.
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may never know each other. However, gradually, a meaningful social grouping can grow out of a category. Examples of a social category include: all female students in higher learning institutions in Ethiopia; all female engineers in Ethiopia; all students from rural background, HIV positive persons, etc.

Table 4.1. Summary of types of groups

	Type of group	Basic features	Examples
1.	Primary social groups	Face-to-face interaction; informal an personal interaction; Small size; An end in itself Common values, norms and belie system; Feeling of unity	A family; a peer group; a dormitory of students; etc
2.	Secondary social groups	Relatively large group size; impersonal and formal social interaction; a means to an end; bureaucratic structure;	An anti-AIDS club; a university; a hospital; etc

3.	Aggregates	A quasi social group; mere physical proximity/ togetherness; lack of unifying features; not functionally integrated	A group of people standing on queues; a group people taking a taxi or a bus; people walking a in busy city street; a group of patients sitting or standing in a waiting room of a hospital, etc
4.	Category	Quasi social group; dispersed collectivity; members belonging to similar socioeconomic background	All women aged 60 an above; all HIV patients in the world; all rural people in Ethiopia; etc
5.	Dyads	A two-person, primary social group;	Husband and wife; a two –person peer group; etc

identical with the dominant groups. Assimilation involves the acceptance or the internalizing of the larger or dominant group's culture, values and life styles by the smaller or minority group. Assimilation could imposed or voluntary. In this age of globalization there are westernization processes, whereby peoples of the Third World are taking up the values, notions and practices of the Industrialized West.

Box 5.1. Modes of social processes

- ***Competition***
- ***Cooperation***
- ***Conflict***
- ***Accommodation***
- ***Assimilation***

5.3. Social Stratification

5.3.1. Definition

Social stratification is one of the outcomes of the continuous occurring of social processes. Every society is segmented in to different hierarchies. In virtually all

societies, some people are regarded as more important than others (more worthy of respect than others), either within the society as a whole or in a certain situations.

Social stratification is the segmentation of society into different hierarchical arrangement or strata. It refers to the differences and inequalities in the socioeconomic life of people in a given society. It represents the ranking of individuals or social positions and statuses in the social structure. The term is borrowed from geology where it is used to explain the hierarchical arrangement of rocks and mineral in the earth's surface. When applied to the world of people, it refers to hierarchical arrangement of people into different classes or *strata* which is the division of a population into two or more layers, each of which is relatively homogenous, between which there are differences in privileges, restrictions, rewards and obligations (Macionis, 1997; Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Calhoun *et al* 1994).

5.3.2. The Importance of Studying Social Stratification

The study of social stratification is particularly important for sociologists. Some of the reasons for this may include (Giddens, 1995):

- To investigate the class membership of individuals in society with the aim of understanding the type of life people live. That is, knowing what type of life individuals in a given social group or stratum live is very important for sociological analysis.
- To explore the bases for the assignment of individuals into various hierarchies of the social structure. What are the bases for stratifying individuals into a specific stratum?
- To understand the relationship between individuals assigned into different hierarchies. What kind of interaction and relationship exist between individuals located into different strata?
- To investigate the relationship between individuals or groups belonging to the same

hierarchy. What kinds of relationship exist between people in the same stratum?

- To understand what type of social system gives rise to what or which types of hierarchies. That is, the type of social stratification varies across cultures, times and types of social systems.

5.3.3. Theories of Social Stratification

There are various theories of social stratification concerning its importance, origin and value, of which two important theories are the following.

1. The functionalist theory of social stratification
2. The conflict theory of social stratification

According to the proponents of the functionalist theory, segments or hierarchies and social inequalities exist in all societies. Moreover, their main argument is that social stratification is functional and purposeful and also essential in any society. They contend that no society is classless or unstratified, and social stratification is universally necessary. Social stratification in short is

universal, functional, inevitable, and beneficial and something which can't be avoided.

The proponents of the conflict theory of social stratification also accept the fact that social inequality exists in every society. But they do not believe that social stratification is functional. According to conflict theorists, it is the way of oppressing one group of people by another (Calhoun *et al.*, 1994).

5.3.4. Forms of Social Stratification

Social Class

Social classes are groups of people who are stratified into different categories. In a more general sense, social class can be defined as a category or level of people found in similar positions in the social hierarchy. The criteria or the bases for dividing people in a given society into different social classes may include wealth, occupation, education, sex, family background, religion, income, among others. The societies in modern world have been divided usually into three; low class, middle class and upper class. Each of these three classes is usually divided in to sub-classes.

Social class is often characterized as an open and flexible system. Thus, we have societies which can be characterized as open system, as opposed to societies having closed system. This form of social class is common in industrialized, modern, heterogeneous and literate societies. Such system generally works in most contemporary societies of the world (Stockard, 1997).

Caste

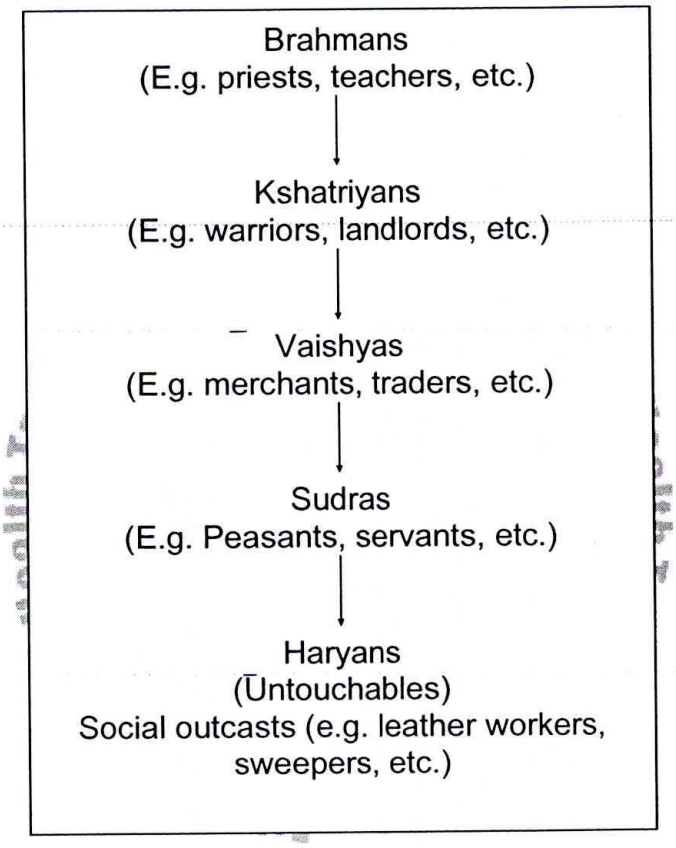
Another well-known form of social stratification is the caste system. The system is based on religious and other strongly rooted traditional belief that cannot be changed or are very difficult to change. This is the form of social stratification whereby classification of people into different strata is made on the basis of usually religious and other very strong conventions/ traditions that are difficult to change. Some of the features of caste system include:

- It is a very rigid and closed system.
- People belonging to the same stratum practice endogamy.
- Intermarriage between strata is not permitted.

- There are occupational differences between strata; i.e., each stratum is usually assigned a particular type of occupation.
- Food sharing, social drinking, friendships, etc., are permitted only within a stratum, not between strata.

This form of social stratification characterizes most traditional, agricultural societies. However, the best example of caste is the Hindu caste system of India. This has existed for some 3000 years and was only officially nullified in 1947. Hindu caste system divides the society into five major strata. These are Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sudras and Haryans (Indrani, 1998)

Figure 5.1. Castes of the Hindu Society of India



Adapted from Henslin and Nelson, 1995. Down-to-Earth Sociology. Canadian Edition. Ontario: Allyn and Bacon

In ancient Roman and Hebrew societies and other ancient and medieval civilizations, slaves, woman and children were often given lower and stigmatized positions in society. They were not, for example, considered when the population census was conducted.

In rural Ethiopian society, this form of stratification has existed for centuries and it still persists. Individuals in such traditional occupations as pottery, blacksmith, tannery, weaving, carpentry, and others such as so called slaves have been given lower places and are often denied free membership and social participation in various social affairs. Among the Wolayta, for example, such kinds of people are called by various names such as the *chinasha* (potters), *degella* (tanners), *wogachia* (blacksmiths), *shimagnia* (weavers) and *aylia* (slaves). These groups of people are not allowed to create marital and other important social bonds with the *gokka* (meaning the decent groups). Similar types of stratification may also be found among the Sidama, Kambata, Guraghe in the southern region of Ethiopia, and elsewhere in other regions throughout the country.

It is believed that such conditions have contributed to the slow socio-economic development of the country.

5.3.5. Consequences of Social Stratification on the Lives of Individuals

Social stratification has crucial implications for the health and well-being of people. Social stratification is directly related to the issue of inequality, power imbalance etc, and these directly or indirectly influence the life chances of individuals in the social strata. Health status of individuals is among one of these life chances which can be significantly affected by one's location in the stratification system.

The different stratification systems on the basis of age, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, etc, directly or indirectly promote unequal chances of living standards.

The key concepts in the relation between health and social stratification are the concepts of vulnerability, risk and hazard. **Vulnerability** is a sociological concept

which refers to the "characteristics of individuals and social groups [along the lines of gender, age, ethnicity, occupation etc;] that determine [their capacity] to protect themselves, withstand and recover from disasters, including health hazards based on their access to material and non-material resources" (*Personal communication: Dr Teketel Abebe, Department of Sociology and Social Administration, Addis Ababa University).*

5.4 Social Mobility

5.4.1. Definition of Social Mobility

Every society has different strata in it. The different individuals and groups who occupy a certain social position may not remain in that position permanently. Some may move from one position to another, from higher social class position to lower social class position, and vice versa. Social mobility implies a set of changes in opportunities, incomes, lifestyles, personal relationships, social status and ultimately class membership.

Social mobility is a type of movement but it is not physical movement over geographical space although social mobility could involve, and be brought about by, physical mobility. It is movement in the social space, the shifting or changing of statuses or class positions. Social mobility is a social process that takes place among individual members or groups in a society, as they interact with each other. It is a process by which individuals or groups move from one status to another; or from one class or stratum to another.

Social mobility describes the volume and quality of movement among strata. That is the kind of movement that people make between the different social classes. Our unit of analysis in social mobility may be an individual, or a social group or a nation.

5.4.2. Types of Social Mobility

Sociologists have identified different types of social mobility. The following is a brief discussion of the different types of social mobility (Team of Exeprts, 2000).

Vertical Social Mobility

Vertical social mobility is a type of social mobility that individuals experience when they move from their social status to other higher or lower social status. It is a radical social change in an individual's position. It is a movement between different social classes and it involves a change in social position of an individual, a family or a group. It may be upward or downward.

Horizontal Social Mobility

Horizontal social mobility is also called lateral social mobility. It is movement within a social class or a social position where the individual slightly improves and/or declines in his social position with in his/ her class level. Unlike vertical social mobility, it doesn't involve drastic changes.

Inter-generational Social Mobility

This type of social mobility involves the movement up or down, between the social class of one or two generations of a family, or a social group. In this mobility, our focus of attention is a social group, like the family. Here we look at change in the status position of the family over two or more generations, i.e., the social position of the grandfather, the father and the son.

If a child, for example, whose father was an upper class person as a result of his wealth becomes only a laborer in his own time, then he has experienced a downward intergenerational social mobility.

Intra-generational mobility

This concerns individual changes in positions during one's lifetime. It may also refer to the change that occurs in social groups or a country's socioeconomic position over a specified period of time. In other words, through achievement or other means one can move up from being a poor primary school teacher to a high court judge. Unlike the Inter-generational social mobility, intra-

generational social mobility is with in one generation. But like inter-generational social mobility, it may be an upward or downward social mobility. Unlike the inter-generational social mobility, our focus here is on a specific individual or group. Here, we observe change in the social position of an individual or a group over the life cycle of the individual himself or the group either upward or in some cases downward. For example, a person in his/her lifetime may rise up from a lower position such as shoeshining, and climb up the social ladder until he or she becomes a member of privileged social and economic position. Or, others may happen to lose their once prestigious socio-economic position and as a result move down until they end up in destitution.

5.4.3. Avenues of Social Mobility

The avenues of social mobility are the doors through which a person moves upward in the social hierarchy. The major avenue to social mobility in most modern societies is access to appropriate modern education. Change of profession/ occupation and geographical mobility are also avenues. There are also some sudden

or short cut avenues to social mobility. These include windfall gains in terms of inheritance, gambling, theft or financial corruption, winning a lottery game, etc. Such mobility is rare, bearing in mind that most inheritance is within the same social group.

The opportunities for upward social mobility are great in modern societies which have open systems. In such societies, there is freedom of vertical social mobility, and any member of a society may move up or down the social hierarchy. There are no legal and/or traditional restrictions that are put on social mobility on either direction. What count a lot are personal merits, competitions and efforts for achievement. On the other hand, in societies with closed system vertical, especially upward, is very difficult. In such societies, individuals born to a certain social position remain within that category for their lifetime. The most important determinants here are not individual's achievements, merits or personal effort, but what counts most are one's ancestry, racial background, family background, religion, sex, ethnicity, etc. (Henslin and Nelson, 1995)

5.4.4. Barriers to Upward Social Mobility

These are factors that make it difficult to individual families or groups to move from one status position to another. Such barriers may include various social, psychological, cultural, economic, political and other related factors. Lack of opportunity, motivation, commitment, interest, or positive attitude, etc., is very crucial psychosocial factors. Other most important barriers may include one's own physical condition, lack of access to an appropriate modern education; inequality in the distribution of inherited wealth; one's color or ethnic origin, religion, etc. These are the most obvious barriers to social mobility.

Box 5.2. Types of social mobility

- ***Vertical social mobility***
- ***Horizontal social mobility***
- ***Intra-generational social mobility***
- ***Inter-generational social mobility***

5.5. Social Change

5.5.1. Definition and Basic Characteristics of Social Change

Social change may be defined as the alteration or transformation at large scale level in the social structure, social institutions, social organization and patterns of social behavior in a given society or social system. Social change can also be defined as the alteration, rearrangement or total replacement of phenomena, activities, values or processes through time in a society in a succession of events. The alteration or rearrangement may involve simple or complex changes in the structure, form or shape of the social phenomena. Sometimes it may mean the complete wiping out of the phenomenon and their total replacement by new forms (Calhoun *et al*, 1994).

Some minor changes that take place in the lives of individuals and small, limited groups may not be regarded as social changes although these kinds of changes may be the manifestations or effects of

changes that are taking place at larger scale. Changes in the material and non- material contents of a culture also may not be regarded as social changes. However, it is very difficult to separate social changes from cultural change. Because the two are usually interdependent, social change may usually introduce cultural changes, and vice versa.

Some of the basic characteristics of social change are the following (Indrani, 1998; Team of Experts, 2000):

- Social change occurs all the time. Its process may be imperceptible and can be cumulative, i.e., one may not easily perceive the processes of social change, although it is always taking place.
- There is no society that is static and unchanging. All societies are susceptible to social change. In other words, social change is a universal phenomenon (it is every where and anywhere). It is spread both over time and space.

- Change occurs both at micro-level and macro-level. The point here is that while social change often refers to noticeable changes in social phenomena, we must not lose sight of the fact that small changes in minor relationships can also be significant.
- The influence of change in one area can have an impact on other related areas. That is, social change is contagious, like infectious diseases.
- Social change has a rate; it can be rapid or slow.

5.5.2. Theories of Social Change

Theories of social change have generally been concerned with the direction of change and the manner in which change occur. Sociologists want to explain the nature, direction, cause and effects of social change. Some of the theories of social change are the following (Calhoun *et al,* 1994; Rosenberg, 1987; Macionis, 1997).

Structural Functionalist Theory

This theory states that social change takes place as the diversification and division of labor increases in the social system of a given society. Structural functionalists focus on the cohesion, order and stability of social system. Change disrupts the orderly functioning of the system. Structural- functionalist theory focuses on the effect of social change on the structure of society, the function and dysfunction of change, stability and equilibrium of the social system. When change takes place, it affects the order and equilibrium of the social system and thus the system has to bring itself back to the equilibrium, to smooth functioning of the system.

Conflict Theory

This theory states that social change takes place due to the ever-present class conflicts in the social system for the better or worse. According to this theory, thus, social change is the result of social conflicts and is essential and beneficial. Every social system contains within itself the seeds of change as far as it is a system wherein exploitation of one group by another exists. Social

change continues to become inevitable until a classless society emerges, one in which conflicts cease to exist.

Cyclic Theory

This theory states that society undergoes change in circular manner. Social change takes a cyclic form, from worse to better, back again from better to worse. Social change is not always for the better. Societies may grow, advance, and reach peak stage of development, and then they may stagnate and finally collapse, with the potential for rising again.

Linear Theory

This theory states that change takes place in a linear manner. The direction of social change is from worse to better, simple to complex and backward to modern. In other words, according to linear theory, social change is evolutionary; it is always towards the better way until perfection is achieved.

Modernization Theory

This theory of social change may be regarded as an extension of linear, evolutionary theory. It states that the change that is being experienced by most Third World societies is by imitating or copying the values, experiences, and models of already modernized societies. It is by adopting; assimilating and internalizing those aspects of the industrialized societies which if copied would bring about an improved social, economic and political development to the society.

5.5.3. Factors That Facilitate and Hinder Positive Social Change

The various factors that promote or hinder social change may be generally categorized as socio-cultural, psychosocial, economic, natural, demographic, political, and so on. Natural factors may include climate changes, the discovering of natural resources such as, minerals, petroleum, etc., are those which are considered as having positive effects on society. Other natural factors are natural disasters such as earthquake, flood, famine, drought, and pestilence and so on. The

emergence of HIV /AIDS as pestilence is for example having great effects on the social arrangement and organization of societies.

Demographic factors-migration, urbanization, population growth, etc., are also important ones in bringing about socio-cultural change. Political factors such as planned change by government, change of state ideology, etc., are also important. Other factors such as war, scientific invention and discoveries, diffusion of non-material and material elements of culture through education and trade relations, etc., also promote social change.

Last but not the least psychosocial factors like beliefs, vested interests, sacred values, attitudes, resistance to change or to accept and entertain new things and intending to maintain the *status quo* are also very important forces.

5.6. Chapter Summary

In the organized social relationship of human groups, social processes take place. Social processes are repetitive forms of actions, patterns of social behaviors.

Social processes manifest themselves through various modes such as competition, conflict, cooperation, accommodation and assimilation. These processes take place on continuous basis at micro and macro levels. These modes of social processes are interrelated and each may yield the other, and they take place in cyclic manner.

Social stratification, social mobility and social change are the three important aspects of social processes. Social stratification refers to the classification of society into different social strata that involve inequalities or differences in lifestyle and living standards of people. They refer to power imbalance and unequal distribution of resources among people. The word stratification is originally used in geology to differentiate one rock type from the other. By the same token, that is, society in general is segmented. There are two forms of social stratification. These are social class and caste system. The former refers to a category of people belonging to the same stratum- having more or less similar socio-economic standards. The latter is a closed and rigid kind of social stratification. The position or ranks of

individuals in the stratum or groups is determined by age-old, traditional, religious values, norms and principles, which are strong and difficult to change.

Social mobility refers to the movement of individuals and groups in the social space. Physical mobility is not social mobility but may contribute to social mobility. Social mobility may be vertical or horizontal and intra-generational or intergenerational.

The other aspect of social processes is social change. The study of social change has been a major concern in the discipline of sociology. Sociologists are particularly interested in this dynamic aspect of social system. Social change refers to large-scale (significant) alterations in the organization and institution of a population (a society). A change which is limited to individuals or certain groups, families, etc, is not a social change although it is important. However, we cannot dissociate social and cultural changes for they are interdependent; social change may bring with it cultural change, and vice versa.

There are many theoretical explanations of social change. Of this, structural-functionalist theory focuses on social order, consensus and stability. It states that social change occurs due to growth, complexity in social structure-due to growth in social differentiation. Modernization theory focuses on the idea of modernization/Modernization is increasing ability to master environment. According to this theory, change occurs in Third World societies when they make effort to imitate advanced western societies in various respects. The conflict school of thought stands against the school of structural functionalism. According to the latter, conflict is the main factor behind social change and is useful and necessary for change.

which began in Great Britain during 18th century, gave rise to the emergence of a fourth type of society called the **Industrial Society.** An industrial society is one in which goods are produced by machines powered by fuels instead of by animal and human energy (*Ibid.*). Sociologists also have come up with a fifth emerging type of society called **post-industrial society.** This is a society based on information, services and high technology, rather than on raw materials and manufacturing. The highly industrialized which have now passed to the post-industrial level include the USA, Canada, Japan, and Western Europe.

2.2. The Concept of Culture

2.2.1. Definition

Before going any further, it may be important to note that common people often misuse the concept of culture. Some misconceptions about the to term culture include:

1. Many people in the western world use the term culture in the sense that some people are more "cultured" than others. This basically emanates

from the idea associated with the root word of the term culture, "kulture" in German, which refers to "civilization". Thus, when one is said to be "cultured", he or she is said to be civilized. For sociologists and anthropologists, "culture includes much more than refinement, taste, sophistication, education and appreciation of the fine arts. Not only college graduates but also all people are 'cultured'" Kottak (2002: 272).

2. A second commonly used misconception is that which equates "culture" with things which are colorful, customs, cloths, foods, dancing, music, etc. As Kottak (*op. cit* p.525) argues, "... many [people] have come to think of culture in terms of colorful customs, music, dancing and adornments clothing, jewelry and hairstyles.... Taken to an extreme, such images portray culture as recreational and ultimately unserious rather than something that ordinary people live everyday of their lives not just when they have festivals" (*Ibid.* P. 525).

3. A third misconception about what culture is and what it constitutes is that which may be entertained by many common people here in Ethiopia. This misconception is similar to the second one, but it differs from it in that most people here think culture (as conceptualized in its local language for example, *bahil* in Amharic) is that which pertains to unique traditional material objects or non – material things of the past. According to this view, the cultural may not include things (material or non – material), which are modern, more ordinary, day-to – day, life aspects. Here, the simple, ordinary social, economic and other activities, ideas and affairs are regarded as not cultural or somewhat "less cultural" although not clearly stated.

The concept of culture is one of the most widely used notions in sociology. It refers to the whole ways of life of the members of a society. It includes what they dress, their marriage customs and family life, art, and patterns of work, religious ceremonies, leisure pursuits, and so forth. It also includes the material goods they produce:

bows and arrows, plows, factories and machines, computers, books, buildings, airplanes, etc (Calhoun, *et al*, 1994; Hensiln and Nelson, 1995).

The concept of culture has been defined by hundreds of times by sociologists and anthropologists, emphasizing different dimensions. However, most often scholars have focused on eh symbolic dimension of culture; that culture is essentially symbolic (*see below)*.

2.2.2. Basic Characteristics of Culture

1. *Culture is organic and supra-organic*: It is organic when we consider the fact that there is no culture without human society. It is supra organic, because it is far beyond any individual lifetime. Individuals come and go, but culture remains and persists Calhoun (*op cit)*.

2. *Culture is overt and covert*: It is generally divided into material and non-material cultures. Material culture consists of any tangible human made objects such as tools, automobiles, buildings, etc. Non-

material culture consists of any non-physical aspects like language, belief, ideas, knowledge, attitude, values, etc.

3. *Culture is explicit and implicit*: It is explicit when we consider those actions which can be explained and described easily by those who perform them. It is implicit when we consider those things we do, but are unable to explain them, yet we believe them to be so.

4. *Culture is ideal and manifest (actual)*: Ideal culture involves the way people ought to behave or what they ought to do. Manifest culture involves what people actually do.

5. *Culture is stable and yet changing*: Culture is stable when we consider what people hold valuable and are handing over to the next generation in order to maintain their norms and values. However, when culture comes into contact with other cultures, it can change. However, culture changes not only because of direct or indirect contact between cultures, but

also through innovation and adaptation to new circumstances.

6. *Culture is shared and learned*: Culture is the public property of a social group of people (shared). Individuals get cultural knowledge of the group through socialization. However, we should note that all things shared among people might not be cultural, as there are many biological attributes which people share among themselves (Kottak, 2002).

7. *Culture is symbolic:* It is based on the purposeful creation and usage of symbols; it is exclusive to humans. Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. Symbolic thought is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning Symbols are the central components of culture. Symbols refer to anything to which people attach meaning and which they use to communicate with others. More specifically, symbols are words, objects, gestures, sounds or images that represent

something else rather than themselves. Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. It is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolizes (Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Macionis, 1997).

Culture thus works in the symbolic domain emphasizing meaning, rather than the technical/practical rational side of human behavior. All actions have symbolic content as well as being action in and of themselves. Things, actions, behaviors, etc, always stand for something else than merely, the thing itself.

Box 2.1. Basic features of culture

- *Culture is organic and supraorganic*
- *Culture is implicit and explicit*
- *Culture is stable and changing*
- *Culture is overt and covert*
- *Culture is learned and shared*
- *Culture is symbolic*
- *Culture is ideal and manifest*

2.2.3. Elements of Culture

Culture includes within itself elements that make up the essence of a society or a social group. The major ones include: Symbols, values, norms, and language (*See Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Calhoun et al.* 1994).

Symbols

Symbols are the central components of culture. Symbols refer to anything to which people attach meaning and which they use to communicate with others. More specifically, symbols are words, objects, gestures, sounds or images that represent something else rather

than themselves. Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. It is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolizes.

Language

Language, specifically defined as a system of verbal and in many cases written symbols with rules about how those symbols can be strung together to convey more complex meanings, is the distinctive capacity and possession of humans; it is a key element of culture. Culture encompasses language, and through language, culture is communicated and transmitted. Without language it would be impossible to develop, elaborate and transmit culture to the future generation.

Values

Values are essential elements of non-material culture. They may be defined as general, abstract guidelines for our lives, decisions, goals, choices, and actions. They are shared ideas of a groups or a society as to what is

right or wrong, correct or incorrect, desirable or undesirable, acceptable or unacceptable, ethical or unethical, etc., regarding something. They are general road maps for our lives. Values are shared and are learned in group. They can be positive or negative. For example, honesty, truth – telling, respect for others, hospitality, helping those in need, etc are positive values. Examples of negative values include theft, indecency, disrespect, dishonesty, falsehood, frugality, etc. The Hippocratic Oath in medical profession dictates that practitioners should among other things, keep the secrets of patients, provide them whatever help they can, do no harm to patients willingly, etc. This is an example of positive value.

Values are dynamic, meaning they change over time. They are also static, meaning they tend to persist without any significant modification. Values are also diversified, meaning they vary from place to place and culture to culture. Some values are universal because there is bio- psychological unity among people everywhere and all times. In other words, they emanate from the basic similarity of mankind's origins, nature and

desires. For example, dislike for killing people, concepts and practices of disease management, cleanliness, personal hygiene, cosmetics, incest taboo, etc.

Norms

Norms are also essential elements of culture. They are implicit principles for social life, relationship and interaction. Norms are detailed and specific rules for specific situations. They tell us how to do something, what to do, what not to do, when to do it, why to do it, etc. Norms are derived from values. That means, for every specific norm, there is a general value that determines its content.

Individuals may not act according to the defined values and norms of the group. Therefore, violation of values and norms and deviating from the standard values and norms are often common. Social norms may be divided into two. These are **mores** and **folkways**

Mores: Are important and stronger social norms for existence, safety, well-being and continuity of the society or the group or society. Violation of, and

deviation from these kinds of norms, may result in serious reactions form the groups. The strongest norms are regarded as the formal ***laws*** of a society or a group. Formal laws are written and codified social norms. The other kinds of mores are called conventions. Conventions are established rules governing behavior; they are generally accepted ideals by the society. Conventions may also be regarded as written and signed agreements between nations to govern the behaviors of individuals, groups and nations.

Folkways: Are the ways of life developed by a group of people. They are detailed and minor instructions, traditions or rules for day-to-day life that help us function effectively and smoothly as members of a group. Here, violating such kinds of norms may not result in a serious punishment unlike violating mores. They are less morally binding. In other words, folkways are appropriate ways of behaving and doing things. Examples may include table etiquette, dressing rules, walking, talking, etc.

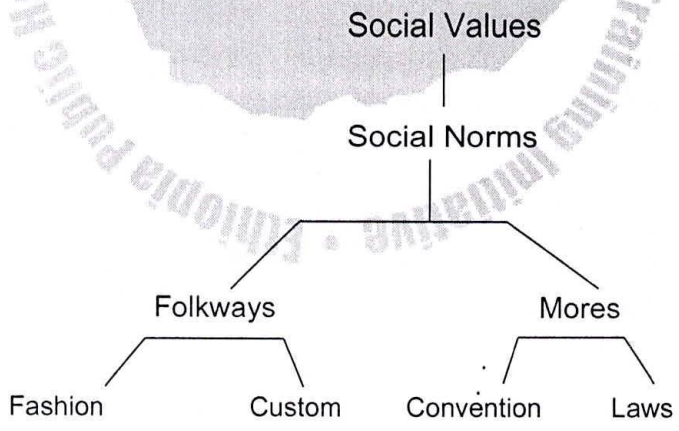
Conformity to folkways usually occurs automatically without any national analysis and is based upon custom passed from generation to generation. They are not enforced by law, but by informal social control. They are not held to be important or obligatory as mores, or moral standards, and their violation is not as such severely sanctioned. Although folkways are less binding, people have to behave according to accepted standards. Some exceptional behaviors are regarded eccentric behaviors.

Folkways are distinguished from laws and mores in that they are designed, maintained and enforced by public sentiment, or custom, whereas laws are institutionalized, designed, maintained and enforced by the political authority of the society. Folkways in turn may be divided into two sub types: **fashion** and **custom**.

Fashion: Is a form of behavior, type of folkways that is socially approved at a given time but subject to periodic change. Adherents combine both deviation and conformity to norm of a certain group.

Custom: Is a folkway or form of social behavior that, having persisted a long period of time, has become traditional and well established in a society and has received some degree of formal recognition. Custom is a pattern of action shared by most or all members of a society. Habit is a personality trait, where as the custom is a group trait. Fashion and customs can be differentiated in that while custom changes at slower rate, fashion changes at a faster rate.

Figure 2.1 A diagrammatic representation of social norms



Box 2.2. Elements of culture

- ***Values***
- ***Norms***
- ***Symbols***
- ***Language***
- ***Folkways***
- ***Mores***
- ***Customs***
- ***Fashion***
- ***Laws***

2.2.4. Culture Variability and Explanations

Cultural variability refers to the diversity of cultures across societies and places. As there are different societies, there are different cultures. The diversity of human culture is remarkable. Values and norms of behavior vary widely from culture to culture often contrasting in radical ways (Broom and Sleznki, 1973). For example, Jews do not eat pork, while Hindus eat pork but avoid beef. Cultural diversity or variability can be both between societies and within societies. If we

take the two societies, Ethiopia and India, there are great, sharp cultural diversities between the two societies. On the other hand, within both societies, there is remarkable cultural variability. Cultural variability between societies may result in divergent health and disease conditions. For example, variations in nutritional habits are closely linked to the types of diseases. The prevalence of tapeworm among raw-meat eating people may be a case in point.

We use the concept of **subculture** to denote the variability of culture within a certain society. Sub culture is a distinctive culture that is shared by a group within a society (Stockard, 1997). We call it sub culture, because groups (with their sub cultures) exist within and as a smaller part of the main, dominant culture. Examples of subculture could be the distinctive culture of university students, street children and prostitutes in Addis Ababa, the culture of medical professionals, etc.

Why cultures vary from society to society? Sociologists, anthropologists, cultural geographers and other social scientists have studied the causes for cultural variations

among (between) societies. Various arguments have been provided the variation, including geographical factors, racial determination, demographic factors, span of interest and mere historic chances. Those who argued for racial determination believe that cultural variation is genetically determined. Geographic factors include: climate, altitude, and so forth. Included in demographic factors are changes in population structure, population increase, etc., whereas by span of interest is meant cultures vary as people's interest in life also varies. Cultural variation is due to mere historical chances; a particular group of people may develop a culture as it is exposed to certain historical circumstances and opportunities.

However, no one explanation is sufficient by itself; anthropologists now reject particular deterministic explanation such as those based on race; rather cultural variations are accounted for by more holistic explanations.

2.2.5. Ethnocentrism, Cultural Relativism and Culture Shock

Ethnocentrism

We often tend to judge other cultures by comparison with our own. It is not logically possible and proper to underestimate or overestimate or judge other cultures on the basis of one's cultural standard. Ethnocentrism, in general, is an attitude of taking one's own culture and ways of life as the best and the center of all and on the other hand, regarding other ethnic groups and cultures as inferior, bad, full of errors, etc. It is the tendency to apply one's own cultural values in judging the behavior and beliefs of people raised in other cultures. It is a cultural universal. People everywhere think that familiar explanations, opinion, and customs as true, right, proper and moral. They regard different behavior as strange or savage (Macionis, 1997; Hensllin and Nelson, 1995).

Cultural Relativism

Every society has its own culture, which is more or less unique. Every culture contains its own unique pattern of behavior which may seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds. We cannot understand the

practices and beliefs separately from the wider culture of which they are part. A culture has to be studied in terms of its own meanings and values. Cultural relativism describes a situation where there is an attitude of respect for cultural differences rather than condemning other people's culture as uncivilized or backward (Stockard, 1997).

Respect for cultural differences involves:

- Appreciating cultural diversity;
- Accepting and respecting other cultures;
- Trying to understand every culture and its elements in terms of its own context and logic;
- Accepting that each body of custom has inherent dignity and meaning as the way of life of one group which has worked out to its environment, to the biological needs of its members, and to the group relationships;
- Knowing that a person's own culture is only one among many; and
- Recognizing that what is immoral, ethical, acceptable, etc, in one culture may not be so in another culture.

Cultural relativism may be regarded as the opposite of ethnocentrism. However, there is some problem with the argument that behavior in a particular culture should not be judged by the standards of another. This is because in its extremeness, it argues that there is no superior, international or universal morality.

To sum up the issues of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, the concepts involve difficult choices, dilemmas and contradictions regarding cultural exchanges and relationships between and within societies. The dilemmas and contradictions become clear when we see that the traditional anthropological position maintains that every cultural beliefs and practice, including for example the ones which are termed as "harmful traditional practices" in Ethiopia, are part and parcel of the general cultural system of a society and therefore they should not be judged and undermined by any outsider. On the other hand, the dilemma is taken to the extreme cultural relativism appears to entail a fallacy, in that it implies that there are no universal cultural or moral standard by which actions

and beliefs have to be judged. Yet still, even cultural anthropologists accept the idea that there are some cultural standards which are universally found everywhere, expressed for example in the world's major religions.

In any case there may be no ready made solutions to this dilemma; however, what we can at present maintain is that cultural diversity has to be respected and yet international standards of justice and human rights have to be taken into account.

Culture Shock

Culture shock is the psychological and social maladjustment at micro or macro level that is experienced for the first time when people encounter new cultural elements such as new things, new ideas, new concepts, seemingly strange beliefs and practices. No person is protected form culture shock. However, individuals vary in their capacity to adapt and overcome the influence of culture shock. Highly ethnocentric people are exposed widely to culture shock. On the other hand, cultural relativists may find it easy to adapt

to new situations and overcome culture shock (Henslin and Nelson, 1995).

2.2.6. Cultural Universals, Alternatives and Specialties

Cultural Universals

Although there are as many different and unique cultures as societies, there are some cultural practices that are universal. Amid the diversity of human cultural behavior, there are some common features that are found in virtually all societies. **Cultural universality** refers to those practices, beliefs, values, norms, material objects, etc., which are observed across all societies in the world, or across different social groups within a society.

For example, every culture has a grammatically complex language. All societies have some recognized form of family system in which there are values and norms associated with the care of children. The institution of marriage, religious rituals, and property rights are all cultural universals. All societies have some form of incest prohibition. Anthropologist have identified variety

of more cultural universals including the existence of art, dancing, bodily adornments, games, gift giving, joking and rules of hygiene. Cultural universals condition behavioral similarity among individuals in a given society or across societies. They do not allow differences in actions and behaviors, lifestyle, attitude, behaviors, etc (Broom and Selzenki, 1973).

Table 2.1. A list of some cultural universals

age grading	faith healing
joking	pregnancy usages
athletics	family
kin groups	property rites
bodily adornments	feasting
kin terminology	puberty customs
calendar	fire making
language	religious rituals
community organization	folklore
magic	residence rules
cooking	food taboos
marriage	sexual restrictions
cooperative labor	funeral rites

mealtimes	soul concepts
cosmology	games
medicine	status differentiation
courtship	gestures
modesty	trade
dancing	gift giving
mourning	tool making
decorative labor	greetings
music	visiting
division of labor	hair styles
mythology	weaning
dream interpretation	hospitality
numerals	weather control
education	housing
obstetrics	ethics
hygiene	personal names
ethnobotany	incest taboos
population policy	etiquette
inheritance rules	postnatal care

Source: Scupin, Raymond and Christopher R. DeCorse (1995). *Anthropology, a Global Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Cultural Alternatives and Specialties

There are many different options for doing the same thing. For example, care for a patient is a universal aspect of cultures; but the way people care for patients varies. There are many diverse ways of doing the same thing. This is called cultural alternative. In other words, cultural alternatives refer to two or more forms of behavior in a particular society which are acceptable in a given situation. These alternatives represent different reactions to the same situations or different techniques to achieve the same end. Cultural alternatives are (also) the types of choices that allow for differences in ideas, customs and lifestyles. Modern industrialized societies offer far more cultural alternatives than had many societies of the past.

On the other hand, cultural specialties refer to the specific skills, training, knowledge, etc. which is limited to a group or specific members of society. They are those elements of culture which are shared by the members of certain social groups but which are not shared by the total population. Cultural specialties cause

behavioral differences among people as opposed to cultural universals.

2.2.7. The Concepts of Culture Lag and Culture Lead

Culture is dynamic. When culture change occurs, the change is usually not evenly distributed across **material** and **non-material** dimensions of culture. The rate of change is not balanced. Material culture may change at a faster rate than non- material culture. The growth in science and technology in western, industrialized societies for example, does not seem to be matched by the necessary changes and appropriate adjustment of adaptive culture. That is non-material culture changes slowly. This condition is termed as **culture lag.** Associated with the rapid growth in material culture are usually crisis in the realm of amorality, social and cultural dilemmas, which in turn result in various social pathologiés such as extreme form of individualism, alienation, the state of normlessness, suicide, etc (Team of Experts, 2000).

On the other hand, in some less developed societies, the change of non-material culture may outpace the material culture. When this occurs, it is called ***culture lead***. Due to the effect of globalization and rapid assimilation processes, people in the Third World are accustomed to the ideology and cultures of the Western World, though their material culture is not changing keeping pace with non- material culture.

2.2.8. Global Culture and Cultural Imperialism

Before closing this chapter, it may be important to note few things on the issues of cultural exchange in today's globalizing world. One of the main aspects of globalization is that a relatively uniform world culture is taking shape today in the world. The global culture may entail all speaking the some language, share the same values and norms, and sustain common und of knowledge as of residents of the same community (Kottak 2002). Global culture may also be associated with **cultural imperialism,** the unequal cultural exchange in the global system whereby western material and non-material cultures have come to occupy

a dominating and imposing roles over the indigenous cultures of the Third World peoples.

The global culture is often promoted by:

- The global spread of capitalism
- Consumerism and the consumer culture
- The growth of transnational media, particularly electronic mass media such as BBC, CNN, etc.

The transnational media have often promoted the aggressive promotion that its value system is superior and preferable to those of other non–western cultures

2.3. Chapter Summary

The concepts of society and culture are central to sociology. A society is an autonomous grouping of people who inhabit a common territory, have a common culture (shared set of values, beliefs, customs and so forth) and are linked to one another through routinized social interactions and interdependent statuses and roles. Societies may be conceptualized as having different levels: at global, continental, regional, nation-

state and ethic group levels. Depending on various criteria, societies may be classified in to various categories, such as First World, Second World, Third World and Fourth World Societies (based on economic development and overall socio-economic status); and hunting and gathering, pastoral, agrarian, industrial and post industrial societies (based on temporal succession and major means of livelihood).

The term "culture" refers to the whole ways of life of the members of a society. It includes what they dress; their marriage customs and family life; art and patterns of work; religious ceremonies; leisure pursuits and so forth. Culture has various dimensions such as material and non-material, implicit and explicit, organic and supra organic, ideal and actual, dynamic and static and overt and covert. The essential elements of culture include symbols, language, values and norms. Other important aspects of culture such as culture variability; ethno-centrism, cultural relativism and culture shock; cultural universals, alternatives and specialties; and culture lag and lead are discussed.

Table 1.1. Summary of sociological theories

S. No.	Name of the theory	What does it state?	Key concepts	Its weaknesses
1.	Structural Functionalism	Sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability	Consensus, social order, structure and function in society.	Emphasis on stability and order while neglecting conflict and changes which so vital in any society
2.	Social conflict theory	Sees society in a framework of class conflicts and focuses on the struggle for scarce resources by different groups in a given society	Class conflict; alienation; competition; domination	For its overemphasis on inequality and division, for neglecting the fact of how shared values and interdependence generate unity among members of society; it is also criticized for its explicit political goals.
3.	Symbolic interactionism	Stresses the analysis of how our behaviors depend on how we define others and ourselves. It concentrates on process, rather than structure, and keeps the individual actor at the center.	Symbols; processes; interaction; meaning	Too much emphasis on micro-level analysis; neglect of larger social processes

4	Feminism	Feminist sociology focuses on the particular disadvantages, including oppression and exploitation faced by women in society	Women; gender; exploitation; male supremacy	Some extreme views such as radical feminism seem unrealistic
5.	Social Exchange theory	Focuses on the costs and benefits which people obtain in social interaction, including money, goods, and status. It is based on the principle that people always act to maximize benefit.	-	-
6.	Rational choice theory	Assumes that individuals will operate in rational way and will seek to benefit themselves in the life choices they make	--	--
7.	Structuralism	Denies any basis for humans being active, since human consciousness is no longer seen as the basis of meaning in language	Underlying structures; language	Views societies as static and do not help very much in explaining variation among societies; treats culture as a given order and fails to explain the adaptive dimensions of culture.

8.	Post-structuralism	Argues that humans cannot arrive anything they can confidently call the (universal) truth. There is no link between the words (language) ideas, and the real world	--	--
	Post-modernism	Argues power has become decentralized and fragmented in contemporary societies	Modernity; post-modernity; subjective reality	Denial of objective, sociological knowledge

1.2. The Significance of Learning Sociology

Generally, learning sociology provides us with what sociologists call the ***sociological imagination.*** Sociological imagination is a particular way of looking at the world around us through sociological lenses. It is a way of looking at our experiences in light of what is going on in the social world around us. This helps us to appreciate the social and non-biological forces that affect, influence and shape our lives as individuals, groups, and communities (Giddens, 1982). Sociological

1.1. Definition and Subject Matter of Sociology

1.1.1. What is Sociology?

Before attempting to define what **sociology** is, les us look at what the popular conceptions of the discipline seem. As may be the case with other sciences, sociology is often misconceived among the populace. Though many may rightly and grossly surmise that sociology is about people, some think that it is all about "helping the unfortunate and doing welfare work, while others think that sociology is the same as socialism and is a means of bringing revolution to our schools and colleges" (Nobbs, Hine and Flemming, 1978:1).

The first social scientist to use the term ***sociology*** was a Frenchman by the name of Auguste Comte who lived from 1798-1857. As coined by Comte, the term *sociology* is a combination of two words. The first part of the term is a Latin, *socius*- that may variously mean *society*, *association*, *togetherness* or *companionship*. The other word, *logos*, is of Greek origin. It literally means *to speak about* or *word*. However, the term is

generally understood as *study* or *science* (Indrani, 1998). Thus, the etymological, literal definition of *sociology* is that it is *the word or speaking about society.* A simple definition *here* is that it is the study of **society** and **culture.**

Box 1.1. A simple definition of sociology

Sociology is the study of society

Although the term "sociology" was first used by the French social philosopher august Comte, the discipline was more firmly established by such theorists as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber (Nobbs, Hine and Flemming, 1978).

Before going any further, let us note that the concepts "society and "culture" are central in sociology. While each concept shall be dealt with later in some detail, it appears to be appropriate here to help students differentiate between these two important concepts. Society generally refers to the social world with all its structures, institutions, organizations, etc around us, and specifically to a group of people who live within some

type of bounded territory and who share a common way of life. This common way of life shared by a group of people is termed as culture (Stockard, 1997).

Box 1.2. Distinguishing between society and culture

Society: a group of people who live within some type of bounded territory and who share a common way of life

Culture: is common way of life shared by a society or a group.

Now, turning to the definitional issues, it is important that in addition to this etymological definition of the term, we need to have other substantive definitions. Thus, sociology may be generally defined as a social science that studies such kinds of phenomena as:

- The structure and function of society as a system;
- The nature, complexity and contents of human social behavior;
- The fundamentals of human social life;

- Interaction of human beings with their external environment;
- The indispensability of social interactions for human development;
- How the social world affects us, etc.

A more formal definition of sociology may be that it is a social science which studies the processes and patterns of human individual and group interaction, the forms of organization of social groups, the relationship among them, and group influences on individual behavior, and *vice versa, and* the interaction between one social group and the other (Team of Experts, 2000).

Sociology is the scientific study of society, which is interested in the study of social relationship between people in group context. Sociology is interested in how we as human beings interact with each other (the pattern of social interaction); the laws and principles that govern social relationship and interactions; the /influence of the social world on the individuals, and *vice versa* (*Ibid.*). It deals with a factually observable subject matter, depends upon empirical research, and involves

attempts to formulate theories and generalizations that will make sense of facts (Giddens, 1982).

Regarding the detective and expository nature the science, Soroka (1992:34) states that "Sociology is a debunking science; that is, it looks for levels of reality other than those presented in official interpretations of society and people's common sense explanations of the social world. Sociologists are interested in understanding what is and do not make value judgments."

1.1.2. Brief Historical Overview

Sociology and other social sciences emerged from a common tradition of reflection of social phenomena; interest in the nature of human social behavior and society has probably always existed; however, most people in most past societies saw their culture as a fixed and god-given entity. This view gradually was replaced by more rational explanations beginning from the 17th century especially in Western Europe (Rosenberg, 1987). The sociological issues, questions and problems

had been raised and discussed by the forerunners starting from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers' and Hebrew prophets' times.

Sociology as an academic science was thus born in 19th century (its formal establishment year being 1837) in Great Britain and Western Europe, especially in France and Germany, and it greatly advanced through out 19th and 20th centuries.

The development of sociology and its current contexts have to be grasped in the contexts of the major changes that have created the modern world (Giddens, 1986). Further, sociology originated in 18th century philosophy, political economy and cultural history (Swingwood, 1991)

The major conditions, societal changes, upheavals and social ferments that gave rise to the emergence and development of sociology as an academic science include the Industrial Revolution which began in Great Britain, the French Political Revolution of 1789, the **Enlightenment** and advances in natural sciences and

technology. These revolutions had brought about significant societal changes and disorders in the way society lived in the aforementioned countries. Since sociology was born amidst the great socio-political and economic and technological changes of the western world, it is said to be the science of modern society.

The pioneering sociologists were very much concerned about the great changes that were taking place and they felt that the exciting sciences could not help understand, explain, analyze and interpret the fundamental laws that govern the social phenomena. Thus sociology was born out of these revolutionary contexts.

The founders or the pioneering sociologists are the following (Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Giddens, 1996; Macionis, 1997):

- **Auguste Comte, French Social Philosopher (1798- 1857)**

Comte was the first social philosopher to coin and use the term sociology (Nobbs, Hine and Flemming, 1978). He was also the first to regard himself as a sociologist.

He defined sociology as the scientific study of social dynamics and social static. He argued that sociology can and should study society and social phenomena following the pattern and procedures of the natural science. Comte believed that a theoretical science of society and the systematic investigation of human behavior were needed to improve society. He argued that the new science of society could and should make a critical contribution towards a new and improved human society. Comte defined sociology as the study of **social dynamic** and **social static**, the former signifying the changing, progressing and developmental dimensions of society, while the latter refers to the social order and those elements of society and social phenomena which tend to persist and relatively permanent, defying change.

- **Karl Marx (German, 1818-1883)**

Marx was a world-renowned social philosopher, sociologist and economic historian. He made remarkable contributions to the development of various social sciences including sociology. He contributed greatly to sociological ideas. He introduced key

concepts in sociology like **social class**, **social class conflict**, social oppression, **alienation**, etc. Marx, like Comte, argued that people should make active efforts to bring about societal reforms. According to Marx, economic forces are the keys to underestimating society and social change. He believed that the history of human society has been that of **class conflict**. He dreamed of, and worked hard towards realizing, a classless society, one in which there will be no exploitation and oppression of one class by another, and wherein all individuals will work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. Marx introduced one of the major perspectives in sociology, called **social conflict theory** (Macionis, 1997)

- **Harriet Martineau, British Sociologist (1802-1876)**

At a time when women were greatly stereotyped and denied access to influential socio-political and academic arena, it is interesting to ha a female academic to be numbered among the pioneering sociologists. Harriet was interested in social issues and studied both in the United States and England. She came across with the

writings of Comte and read them. She was an active advocate of the abolition of slavery and she wrote on many crosscutting issues such as racial and gender relations, and she traveled widely. She helped popularize the ideas and writings of Comte by translating them into English (Henslin and Nelson, 1995).

- **Herbert Spencer, British Social Philosopher, (1820-1903)**

Spencer was a prominent social philosopher of the 19th century. He was famous for the organic analogy of human society. He viewed society as an organic system, having its own structure and functioning in ways analogous to the biological system. Spencer's ideas of the evolution of human society from the lowest ("barbarism") to highest form ("civilized") according to fixed laws were famous. It was called "**Social Darwinism**", which is analogous to the biological evolutionary model. Social Darwinism is the attempt to apply by analogy the evolutionary theories of plant and animal development to the explanation of human society and social phenomena (Team of Experts, 2000).

- **Emile Durkheim, French Sociologist, (1858-1917)**

Durkehiem was the most influential scholar in the academic and theoretical development of sociology. He laid down some of the fundamental principles, methods, concepts and theories of sociology; he defined sociology as the study of **social facts**. According to him, there are social facts, which are distinct from biological and psychological facts. By social facts, he meant the patterns of behavior that characterize a social group in a given society. They should be studied objectively. The job of a sociologist, therefore, is to uncover social facts and then to explain them using other social facts. Some regard Durkheim as the first sociologist to apply statistical methods to the study of social phenomena (Macionis, 1997; Clahoun, *et al,* 1994).

- **Max Weber, German Sociologist (1864-1920)**

Weber was another prominent social scientist. According to him, sociology is the scientific study of human **social action**. Social action refers to any "action oriented to influence or influenced by another person or persons. It is not necessary for more than one person to

be physically present for action to be regarded as social action...." (Team of Experts, 2000). It is concerned with the interpretive understanding of human social action and the meaning people attach to their own actions and behaviors and those of others. Weber was a renowned scholar who like Marx, wrote in several academic fields. He agreed with much Marxian theses but did not accept his idea that economic forces are central to social change. Weber argues that we cannot understand human behavior by just looking at statistics. Every activity and behavior of people needs to be interpreted. He argued that a sociologist must aim at what are called **subjective meanings**, the ways in which people interpret their own behavior or the meanings people attach their own behavior (Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Rosneberg, 1987).

Box 1.3. Pioneering founders of sociology

August Comte, French, 1798-1857; key concepts: social static and social dynamic

Karl Marx, German, (1818-1883), key concepts: class conflict, alienation, historical materialism, etc

Emile Durkheim, French, 1858-1917; key concept: social fact

Max Weber, German, 1864=1920; key concepts: social action; subjective meanings

Herbert Spencer, British, 1820-1903; key concept: social Darwinism

Harriet Martineau, British, 1802-1876; active advocate of abolition of slavery and gender issues

1.1.3. Subject Matter, Scope and Concerns of Sociology

The scope of sociology is extremely wide ranging, from the analysis of passing encounter between individuals on the street up to the investigation of global social processes The discipline covers an extremely broad range that includes every aspect of human social

conditions; all types of human relationships and forms of social behavior (Indrani, 1998). Sociologists are primarily interested in human beings as they appear in social interaction and the effects of this interaction on human behavior. Such interaction can range from the first physical contacts of the new born baby with its mother to a philosophical discussion at an international conference, from a casual passing on the street to the most intimate of human relationships (*World Book Encyclopedia* 1994. Vol. 18, PP. 564-567). Sociologists are interested to know what processes lead to these interactions, what exactly occurs when they take place, and what their short run and long run consequences are.

The major systems or units of interaction that interest sociologists are social groups such as the family or peer groups; social relationships, such as social roles and dyadic relationships, and social organizations such as governments, corporations and school systems to such territorial organizations as communities and schools (Broom and Selzinki, 1973).

Sociologists are keen to understand, explain, and analyze the effect of social world, social environment and social interaction on our behavior, worldviews, lifestyle, personality, attitudes, decisions, etc., as creative, rational, intelligent members of society; and how we as such create the social reality.

1.1.4. Levels of Sociological Analysis and Fields of Specializations in Sociology

There are generally two levels of analysis in sociology, which may also be regarded as branches of sociology: **micro-sociology** and **macro- sociology** (Henslin and Nelson, 1995). Micro-sociology is interested in small-scale level of the structure and functioning of human social groups; whereas macro-sociology studies the large-scale aspects of society.

Macro-sociology focuses on the broad features of society. The goal of macro-sociology is to examine the large-scale social phenomena that determine how **social groups** are organized and positioned within the **social structure**. Micro-sociological level of analysis

focuses on **social interaction.** It analyzes interpersonal relationships, and on what people do and how they behave when they interact. This level of analysis is usually employed by **symbolic interactionist perspective.**

Some writers also add a third level of analysis called **meso-level** analysis, which analyzes human social phenomena in between the micro- and macro-levels. Reflecting their particular academic interest sociologists may prefer one form of analysis to the other; but all levels of analysis are useful and necessary for a fuller understanding of social life in society.

Box 1.4. Levels of analysis in sociology

Micro-sociology: Analyzing small scale social phenomena

Macro-sociology: analyzing large-scale social phenomena

Meso-sociology: analysis of social phenomena in between the micro- and macro- levels.