We engage in social comparisons every day, comparing our outcomes, accomplishments, and even emotions with those of others. Jan Crusius and Thomas Mussweiler examine the implications of social comparisons in bargaining behavior. They suggest new avenues for research in bargaining, and help us to better understand why we negotiate the way that we do.

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settle the dispute with the child last night? Whenever people are trying to make sense of their social environment, when they determine what they want to do, what they are able to do, or when they are trying to figure out how successful they were in doing something, they are likely to have engaged in comparisons (Corcoran, Crusius, and Mussweiler, 2011).

Comparisons are crucial in shaping thoughts, emotion, motivation, and, ultimately, behavior—before, during, and after negotiations. We advocate a social cognitive perspective on negotiation. Social cognition research is aimed at understanding and predicting human behavior by analyzing how people process social information, and how the ensuing cognitions, affect, and motivation produce behavior (Crusius, van Horen and Mussweiler, 2012; Kunda, 1999; Sorrentino and Higgins, 1986). Negotiation is an ideal field to apply social cognitive research to understand how these psychological processes affect interactions between people. At the same time, negotiation research has emerged as an ideal means to answer core questions posed by social cognitive theories and to understand how the processing of social information affects tangible outcomes (Galinsky, 2009).

Social comparison is ubiquitous in human thinking, and mounting evidence suggests that it is a central process in social cognition (Mussweiler, Rüter, and Epstude, 2006). For example, when forming judgments about another person, people spontaneously compare the person to themselves (Dunning and Hayes, 1996) or to other social standards (Mussweiler, 2003). In a similar vein, when thinking about themselves, people engage in spontaneous comparisons with others (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler and Rüter, 2003). Comparisons are also pivotal in many other core processes such as decision making (Kahneman and Miller, 1986) attitudes (Eiser, 1990; Sherif and Hovland, 1961), person perception (Herr, 1986; Higgins and Lurie, 1983; Mussweiler and Damisch, 2008), stereotyping (Biernat, 2003; Corcoran, Hundhammer, and Mussweiler, 2009), affect (Epstude and Mussweiler, 2009; Higgins, 1987), and automatic goal pursuit (Crusius and Mussweiler, in press). In all of these domains, it has been suggested—and demonstrated—that people’s reactions are shaped by the comparisons they make.

Because of the interpersonal nature of negotiations, these processes are likely to play an important role in shaping negotiation outcomes. To pick out one from many examples, it is vital to assess the ability, goals and aspirations, and other characteristics of one’s opponents. Assessments of these characteristics will determine which goals people set for themselves and which strategies they will pursue. For instance, negotiators who expect their opponent to be highly competitive can become less competitive themselves, presumably, because they are motivated to avoid the danger of reaching an impasse (Diekmann, Tenbrunsel, and Galinsky, 2003). Whether people perceive their negotiation partner to be cooperative or competitive is likely to be determined by social comparisons.
WHY DO PEOPLE COMPARE?

Why are social comparisons so ubiquitous? One reason to engage in comparison is to gain information. Festinger (1954)—whose work initiated psychological research on social comparisons—believed that information is the prime motive for comparing with others. He reasoned that, if objective information about one’s performance is missing, people will seek to evaluate their ability accurately by comparing with others. Building on Festinger, other researchers have argued and shown that the need for valuable information might also lead to a particular type of comparison. People are often inclined to compare with others who perform better in the domain of interest in order to gain knowledge on how to advance their own abilities (Taylor and Lobel, 1989).

Negotiators are also likely to engage in social comparisons for informational reasons. The subjects and outcomes of negotiations are often important and self-relevant, negotiators often have little information and thus face considerable uncertainty (Neale and Fragale, 2006). People also often lack effective negotiation skills (Thompson, 2009), and objective standards of how to negotiate and how to evaluate the outcome of a negotiation are often absent (e.g., Blount, Thomas-Hunt, and Neale, 1996).

Sometimes social comparisons are even more important when objective information is available. For instance, according to the classic rational choice view of negotiation, negotiators should be motivated to maximize their profits, and thus, the objective result of a negotiation should be most important to them, while the outcome for their negotiation partner should be irrelevant. However, in line with the view that people seek to reduce inequality in their and their interaction partners’ outcomes (Adams, 1965; Bolton and Ockenfels, 2000; Fehr and Schmidt, 1999), the outcome for their negotiation partner can be central in determining the evaluation of one’s own performance. For example, negotiators have been shown to make decisions that are objectively undesirable, because they provide an opportunity to reach an equitable outcome, while having an aversion to objectively desirable outcomes that are burdened by an unfavorable social comparison (Loewenstein, Thompson, and Bazerman, 1989). People sometimes even prefer to make no profit at all rather than to be worse off than their interaction partner (Güth, Schmittberger, and Schwarze, 1982). Similarly, when judging the quality of more complex negotiation offers, people rely on comparisons more than rationality would demand (Bazerman, Schroth, Shah, Diekmann, and Tenbrunsel, 1994). Taken together, these findings attest to the power of social comparisons in determining important psychological outcomes in and outside negotiation contexts.

In addition to satisfying the need for information (even if it creates bias sometimes), people engage in social comparison for other reasons. For example, sometimes people do not try to gain accurate data about themselves but strive to gain and maintain a positive self-view. Strategic comparisons with people one outperforms—downward comparisons—may contribute to this goal (e.g., Taylor and
Lobel, 1989; Wills, 1981). Finding someone who was even less successful in bargain­
ing may ease the pain over one's own disappointing performance.

Another interesting example of comparisons undertaken for other self-serving
purposes in a negotiation context is provided by the findings of Babcock, Wang,
and Loewenstein (1996). These authors looked at teacher contract negotiations and
determined which comparison standards were used by teacher unions and which
were used by their employers. The data revealed a self-serving pattern: Teachers
perceived districts to be comparable in which their colleagues had higher sala­
ries, whereas school boards perceived districts to be comparable in which salaries
were relatively low. Furthermore, the higher the salary discrepancy of teachers’ and
school boards’ comparison standards, the more likely it was that salary negotia­
tions reached an impasse and resulted in a strike. In this setting, social compari­
sions were used as a bargaining tactic.

Social comparisons have mainly been portrayed as a strategic process to
reach goals and address needs like self-assessment, self-improvement, or self­
hancement (Taylor et al., 1996; Kruglanski and Mayeless, 1990; Suls, Martin,
and Wheeler, 2002; Wood and Taylor, 1991). However, not all social comparisons
seem to be carried out strategically. People engage in comparisons spontaneously
and often without intention. The human tendency to compare spontaneously is so
robust that people even use comparison standards they are not aware of. For exam­
ple, it has been demonstrated that people compare themselves with persons that
are presented subliminally (Mussweiler, Rüter, and Epstude 2004). Other research
shows that people have a proclivity to compare with others automatically, even if
these comparisons turn out to be uninformative. For example, when participants
were exposed to other people who had received additional training and thus were
superior in a difficult task, spontaneous comparisons negatively affected partici­
pants’ self-perceptions (Gilbert, Giesler, and Morris, 1995). Participants had to put
cognitive effort in correcting the biasing influence of a comparison that—at sec­
ond glance—they should not have engaged in (Gilbert, et al., 1995). Comparisons
are such a habitual part of human cognition that people often compare first and
(sometimes) correct later.

One reason that comparisons are omnipresent and appear to be highly autom­
atized might be that much of the information that people process is based on
dimensions that are inherently comparative. Judging another person to be friendly,
intelligent, or competitive implies that this person is friendlier, more intelligent, or
more competitive than others (Huttenlocher and Higgins, 1971). As a result, judg­
ments like these are critically shaped by the comparison standards that people use.
For example, coming to the conclusion that a trial judge is particularly harsh or
lenient depends on the harshness or leniency of other judges that people have in
mind (Higgins and Stangor, 1988). Furthermore, to be able to understand and com­
municate information that pertains to comparative dimensions when interacting
with others, people have to infer the implied standards of their interaction part­
ners. For example, to understand what a colleague means by expressing the opin­
on that one’s boss is a cooperative negotiator when it comes to salary negotiations,
it is crucial to know the implied standard. Social psychological research has consistently shown that people consider their communication partners' norms and standards while processing or exchanging social information (Schwarz, 1994; Schwarz, Bless, Bohner, Harlacher, and Kellenbenz, 1991). Thus, because much of the information people process and communicate is inherently relative in nature, comparisons are central to the negotiation task.

In addition, a social cognition view offers a novel explanation for the importance of comparisons in human thinking. A core principle of social cognition is that people have to deal efficiently with the limited cognitive resources they possess, making them into to “cognitive misers” (Taylor, 1981). According to Mussweiler and Epstude (2009, see also Corcoran and Mussweiler, 2010), comparative thinking allows them to process information more efficiently than absolute thinking. A reason for the efficiency advantage of comparative thinking may be that social comparisons (as well as nonsocial comparisons) limit the amount of information that has to be considered in order to come to a conclusion.

Imagine, for example, that you are evaluating the offer for an apartment that you are considering buying. To do this in an absolute mode, it would be necessary to retrieve all available information about the property in order to evaluate all of its different characteristics. Evidently, this could easily become an arduous task, because potentially, you would have to consider an enormous amount of detailed information, about its size, its floor plan, the architectural value and integrity of the building, the neighborhood, maintenance cost, security, storage space, and commute. But if you compare the apartment to other apartments that you have been offered or to apartments of friends and relatives, the task might be significantly less demanding. In this case, you could focus on the information that is relevant to the comparison of different apartments. For instance, if all considered apartments are located in the same neighborhood, commuting costs are not relevant for the comparison and can be dropped from your consideration.

To scrutinize this reasoning, Mussweiler and Epstude (2009) induced participants to process information in a more comparative manner or in a more absolute manner by means of a procedural priming task. To elicit a comparative mode of thinking, some participants were asked to compare a pair of pictures. To elicit a more absolute mode of thinking, other participants were asked to describe these pictures. Then, all participants proceeded with the critical judgment task, in which they evaluated an apartment, assessed the skills of another person, or evaluated offers of different consumer products. Participants who were induced to think comparatively were faster and had more residual processing capacity, which indicates that comparisons are conducive to efficient judgments. This seemed to be the case because participants based their decision on less information about the target of their judgment while retrieving more information about relevant comparison standards; they thus spontaneously activated comparisons.

While these studies were not undertaken in a negotiation setting, a prediction based on these results might be that efficiency advantages of comparative thinking could be an important variable influencing the course and the outcome
of negotiations. Social and nonsocial comparisons undertaken in the realm of negotiations are likely to induce a focus on information that is highly relevant, while freeing up much needed cognitive resources. An example of how comparative thinking can contribute to successful negotiations can be found in studies demonstrating the advantages of making multiple equivalent simultaneous offers (MESOs) during negotiations (Leonardelli, Galinsky, Gu, and Medvec, 2010). In these studies, MESOs resulted in superior economic outcomes for the offerer and in more Pareto-efficient agreements, in general, in part because MESOs allowed recipients more insight into the offerer's priorities. From the current perspective, making MESOs is likely to induce comparative thinking and thereby facilitate the decision making of all negotiation parties.

There seem to be a multitude of reasons why comparisons play such an important role in human thinking. Traditionally much emphasis has been placed on the fact that people compare strategically to accomplish certain goals such as gaining accurate information about the self, maintaining a positive self-evaluation, or searching for clues on how to improve. Additionally, relating information to relevant comparison standards might be a logical prerequisite of much information processing as well as a prerequisite of successful communication. Finally, comparisons might be a highly efficient cognitive means to make efficient judgments and decisions, while saving scarce cognitive resources. To judge ourselves, other people, and the central issues in interactions with them should be less taxing and more efficient when engaging in comparative thinking than in absolute thinking.

**WITH WHOM DO PEOPLE COMPARE?**

A central endeavor of research on social comparison is to understand which standards people use when engaging in comparisons and what effects particular standards have on psychological outcomes. Again, the classic view of social comparison portrays standard selection as driven by strategic considerations. If looking for valid information about their own performance, people should engage in comparisons with similar others (Festinger, 1954) or, more specifically, with others who are most diagnostic for a comparison on the critical dimension (Goethals and Darley, 1977). In contrast, if seeking to be inspired, people should be motivated to compare with (slightly) superior others (Bandura, 1986), and people trying to bolster their self-evaluation should look for downward comparison standards (e.g., Taylor and Lobel, 1989).

Evidently, looking for the right comparison standard is often difficult and effortful. For example, when looking for a standard that is highly diagnostic, multiple potential standards would have to be considered and carefully chosen according to different dimensions and different criteria (Goethals and Darley, 1977; Wood and Taylor, 1991). However, in many situations, it is unlikely that people can afford
the time and the cognitive resources to engage in effortful cognitions. Thus, it is to be expected that who or what is selected for comparison often depends on how easy the selection is.

One possibility to save cognitive resources might be to skip the standard selection step in comparison completely by relying on a standard that one uses routinely, instead of finding the most diagnostic standard. Such a routine develops if a particular standard is used frequently in a particular judgmental domain and is thereby associated with it. In line with this reasoning, Mussweiler and Rüter (2003) found that when participants engaged in self-evaluative judgments they spontaneously activated naturally occurring routine standards (e.g., their best friend). For example, in one study, participants had to decide as fast as possible whether a string of letters spelled out a name in a reaction time task. Participants were faster in identifying the name of their best friend in this task if they had previously engaged in self-evaluative judgments. This indicates that they had thought of their friend while forming the judgments. Another study showed that such routine standards are even preferred over strategically more suitable (i.e., more diagnostic) alternative standards. Taken together, this research suggests that comparisons with routine standards may have an efficiency advantage because they omit arduous standard selection procedures and because the comparison process becomes more efficient itself.

Which routine standards will be used in negotiations? Mussweiler and Rüter's (2003; Corcoran and Mussweiler, 2009) reasoning suggests that when entering negotiations people have little experience with, they will fall back on routine standards they have used in other, unrelated judgmental domains. If, however, people negotiate repeatedly in a particular domain or with the same partners, they may form specific routine standards over time. In both cases, these routine standards may often provide information in an efficient way. At the same time, their use may lead to suboptimal decision making if they are preferred over more diagnostic comparison standards.

In many situations, however, people will neither be in a position to engage in meticulous standard selection nor will they always be able to rely on routine standards. Often, a particular comparison standard will simply be imposed on them—a colleague receiving a promotion they aimed for, a toddler with much negotiation leverage, or a worse-off participant sitting next to them in the laboratory. People consider comparison standards that are prescribed by context or conversation. They do so even if they perceive them only fleetingly (Mussweiler et al., 2004) or when they carry misleading implications (Gilbert et al., 1995). In recent years, research has looked more closely at the consequences of comparison standards that are imposed on people in a particular situation.

An important conceptual distinction in the realm of negotiations is that social comparison standards can be internal, involving another negotiation party, or external, involving standards outside the negotiation. For example, buyers can compare with the seller, or they can compare with another buyer. Little research has addressed this distinction systematically. An exception is Novemsky
and Schweitzer’s (2004) work on negotiator satisfaction. In line with comparison research in other domains, downward comparisons increased negotiator satisfaction when undertaken externally, that is, participants were more satisfied when learning that another negotiator in the same role gained an inferior surplus than they did. Interestingly however, internal downward comparisons, that is, learning that their opponent had an inferior surplus than themselves, reduced negotiator satisfaction. This occurred presumably because the internal comparison induced negotiators to focus their attention on the missed opportunity to claim even more surplus (Novemsky and Schweitzer, 2004). On the one hand this result shows that social comparison can dramatically influence negotiator satisfaction—indepen-dent of actual performance (see also, Galinsky, Seiden, Kim, and Medvec, 2002; Loewenstein, Thompson, and Bazerman, 1989; Thompson, Valley, and Kramer, 1995). On the other hand, this example illustrates that social comparisons undertaken in the context of negotiation can have qualitatively different outcomes, depending on whether people compare internally or externally.

Several factors may influence with whom people compare in a negotiation. For one, the selection of comparison standards may be driven by the same goals that motivate social comparison itself: the need for accurate self-knowledge, the interest in information on how to improve, or self-enhancement. However, in light of their constrained cognitive resources, people may omit a careful standard selection process and rely instead on a routine comparison standard. Finally, it may be important to take the differential effects of internal or external comparison standards into account.

**How does comparison affect judgments and behavior? Cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes**

Satisfaction is just one of the many negotiation outcomes that may be affected by social comparisons. An enormous body of evidence from social psychological studies attests that social comparisons have rich cognitive, motivational, and affective consequences (Mussweiler, 2003; Suls and Wheeler, 2000). Less clear, but all the more disputed is the direction of these effects (Mussweiler and Strack, 2000a). When will social comparisons with superior others improve self-evaluation, spur motivation, and lead to improved performance? When will such comparison devalue self-assessment and undermine motivation and performance? Both assimilation and contrast to upward (as well as downward) comparisons have been demonstrated repeatedly and the direction of these effects has been associated with a host of different moderators. For example, contrast (rather than assimilation) is more likely if the comparison standard is extreme on the comparative dimension
(Morse and Gergen, 1970), psychologically distant (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997), belongs to a different social category (Mussweiler and Bodenhausen, 2002), or if one competes (rather than cooperates) with the standard (Toma, Yzerbyt, and Corneille, 2010). How can these influences of social comparison on cognition, motivation, and affect be explained?

The selective accessibility model (Mussweiler, 2003) offers an integrative perspective on the variable cognitive and cognitively driven effects of social comparison. This model proposes that these seemingly disparate findings can be related to one common cognitive mechanism—a change in accessible knowledge. More specifically, it is assumed that whether social comparison causes assimilation or contrast depends on the comparison focus. To carry out any comparative judgment, people have to retrieve judgment-relevant knowledge about the standard and the target of the comparison. This mental activity is best understood as an active search for judgment-relevant information in the form of a hypothesis test. Rather than engaging in a complete test of all possible hypotheses, people will—for efficiency reasons—focus on a single testable hypothesis and search for information that is consistent with it (Trope and Liberman, 1996). In the domain of comparison, two basic hypotheses can be distinguished. Judges can either test the hypothesis that the target (e.g., the self) is similar to the comparison standard, or they can test the hypothesis that the target is dissimilar from the standard. If individuals adopt a similarity focus during comparison and focus on information attesting that the target and standard are similar to each other, then assimilation occurs. For example, when comparing themselves with an upward standard, people would think about the things they have in common with the superior other, which would lead to a more favorable self-evaluation. If, however, individuals adopt a difference focus and scrutinize information attesting that self and standard differ from each other, then contrast results. In the case of an upward comparison standard, this would lead to a less favorable self-evaluation.

The importance of the initial hypothesis is illustrated by a study in which the comparative focus was directly manipulated prior to a social comparison (Mussweiler, 2001). Participants were asked to list either the similarities or differences of two drawings. This activity should induce a procedural priming effect that carries over to subsequent tasks (Smith, 1994). Subsequent self-evaluations in a social comparison task critically depended on whether participants were induced to focus on similarities or differences. Those participants who listed similarities and were induced to engage in similarity testing assimilated self-evaluations toward the standard. Those participants who listed differences, and were thus induced to engage in dissimilarity testing, contrasted self-evaluations away from the standard (Mussweiler, 2001).

From this perspective, factors influencing which hypothesis is tested during comparison will critically affect the direction of the resulting judgment. This explains why variables as diverse as evaluative extremity, psychological distance, shared or nonshared category membership, competition versus cooperation, and even trivial information such as a shared birthday (Brown, Novick, Lord, and
Richards, 1992) can lead to assimilation or contrast. All these variables are likely to affect whether judges adopt a focus on differences or similarities (Mussweiler, 2003).

What is the relevance of selective knowledge activation in comparisons in the context of negotiations? A first illustration may be the consequences of the nonsocial comparisons that produce anchoring effects—the assimilation of a numeric standard toward a previously considered comparison standard (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). For example, in a judicial setting, the initial sentencing demand of the prosecution has a strong influence on the final decision of a judge (Englich and Mussweiler, 2001). Similarly, letting potential buyers of a car consider high (or low) anchors affects their estimate of the car’s value (Mussweiler, Strack, and Pfeiffer, 2000). Finally, making the first offer in a negotiation acts as a strong anchor for the final negotiated outcome (Galinsky and Mussweiler, 2001; for a recent review see Galinsky, Ku, and Mussweiler, 2009). Further evidence shows that the selective activation of anchor-consistent knowledge contributes to these effects. For example, setting a high price anchor before the evaluation of a car makes information consistent with a high price more accessible (Mussweiler and Strack, 2000b).

Much like these nonsocial comparisons, social comparisons are also likely to shape negotiation outcomes. Abundant research demonstrates that the influence of social comparison depends on a multitude of factors that influence whether judges engage in similarity or dissimilarity testing comparisons. Applying these insights to the domain of negotiation allows new predictions that can be tested. For example, recent research has shown that initial perceptions of similarity are a key factor in motivating cooperation in prisoner dilemma games (Fischer, 2009), presumably because individuals use similarity cues to predict the behavior of their opponent.

In many situations, a similarity focus—even if elicited by trivial information such as a shared birthday—may increase joint outcomes. In other situations, however, an informational focus on similarities may have adverse consequences on negotiation outcomes. For example, in order to expand the pie in multi-issue negotiations by finding mutually beneficial tradeoffs, negotiation opponents have to identify their diverging priorities. Such a “logrolling” (Froman and Cohen, 1970) solution is strongly facilitated by the ability to take the perspective of one’s opponent (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, and White, 2008). However, counterintuitively, a focus on similarities decreases perspective taking by making an over-imputation of one’s own perspective onto others more likely (Todd, Hanko, Galinsky, and Mussweiler, 2010). That is why—even though it should foster cooperative behavior—a focus on similarities may harm mutual success in multi-issue negotiations.

Social comparisons also have motivational consequences that seem relevant to negotiation contexts. Social comparisons with upward and downward standards may also influence negotiation behavior by affecting basic motivational orientations. According to an influential model of human self-regulation (Higgins, 1997), individuals can either be in a promotion focus or in a prevention focus while
pursuing important goals. People in a promotion focus are oriented toward realizing gains and are concerned with aspirations and desired end states. In contrast, people in a prevention focus are oriented toward avoiding failures and are concerned with security and responsibility. These regulatory foci have been shown to be a fundamental predictor of a wide array of judgmental and behavioral outcomes (for an overview see, e.g., Higgins and Spiegel, 2004). Several studies suggest that social comparison can affect these motivational tendencies and interacts with them. For example, Lockwood (2002) has shown that downward comparisons can induce a prevention focus, particularly if individuals see parallels between themselves and a downward comparison standard and perceive themselves to be vulnerable in the comparative domain. Furthermore, it is likely that inspiring upward comparisons (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997) can result in a promotion focus.

How do these motivational orientations affect negotiation? Consistent with regulatory focus theory, Galinsky, Leonardelli, Okhuysen, and Mussweiler, (2005) found that promotion-focused negotiators in dyadic interactions were more strongly geared toward reaching their target price (a gain) relative to prevention-focused negotiators trying to avoid an impasse. As a result, promotion negotiators made more demanding first offers, allowing them to claim more value in a distributive negotiation. Furthermore, when both parties of a multi-issue negotiation were in a promotion focus, their mutual goal of maximizing (instead of satisficing) their outcomes increased the likelihood of achieving Pareto optimality.

Nevertheless, the conclusion that promotion-focused negotiators will always have an advantage may be premature. Specifically, when a prevention focus matches the goals dictated by the negotiators’ role, it may be associated with favorable outcomes. For example, trying to prevent loss by achieving minimal prices as a buyer (in contrast to aiming for maximum prices as a seller) may lead to more demanding opening offers in terms of the prevention goal (Appelt, Zou, Arora, and Higgins, 2009). Similarly, if a prevention (vs. promotion) focus is compatible with the negotiation issue that is oriented toward prevention (e.g., negotiating an insurance budget vs. negotiating an advertisement budget), it may also lead to favorable negotiation outcomes (Werth, Mayer, and Mussweiler, 2006).

Finally, in addition to their cognitive and motivational outcomes, social comparisons also have affective consequences that may also play out in the context of negotiations. Emotions evoked by social comparisons are likely to be an important determinant of negotiation behavior. Social comparisons are a powerful elicitor of specific emotions (Smith, 2000). For example, Tesser and Collins's (1988) participants reported envy, frustration, anger, contempt, fear, less happiness, and less pride as a result of upward comparison relative to downward comparison. How may these comparative emotions affect negotiation?

Envy—the prototypical social-comparative emotion (Smith, 2000)—is an interesting case in point. According to a widely adopted definition, “envy occurs when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it” (Parrott and Smith, 1993, 906). This definition suggests that envy may involve two distinct components: the desire
for the advantage of the other, on the one hand, and a begrudging feeling toward the other. Recent evidence suggests that this distinction reflects two experientially separable subtypes of envy that are experientially associated with different motivations. While benign envy is associated with a motivation to improve oneself, malicious envy is associated with the motivation to pull the other person down (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters, 2009).

Prior work has focused on the malicious side of envy, showing that envy in response to unfavorable social comparisons can have strong detrimental effects on interpersonal attitudes, for example, by promoting schadenfreude or reducing sympathy or the intent to cooperate (for a review, see Smith and Kim, 2007). Evidence for the behavioral consequences of envy, however, is less common. Envy seems to be an understudied emotion. An interesting exception is work by Moran and Schweitzer (2008), who showed that envy can prompt deceptive behavior when negotiating with a person who triggered the unfavorable social comparison. Additional data suggested that this tendency occurred because envy increased the subjective benefits while reducing the psychological costs of deception.

The increase in deception and other socially detrimental effects of envy may also reflect the side effects of the “benign” side of envy. As many scholars have speculated, a primary function of envy is to motivate people to improve themselves (e.g., Aristotle, trans. 1929; Hill and Buss, 2008; Rawls, 1971). This increased motivation to do better may result in more competitive—and possibly questionable—behavioral strategies, but it does not necessarily reflect the hostility associated with malicious envy. In any case, much theorizing about envy attributes vast interpersonal, societal, and economic consequences to upward motivations elicited by envy (e.g., Barnett, 1953; Foster, 1972; Schoeck, 1969). Again, the scarcity of empirical findings is surprising, and clearly more work needs to be done.

Recently we have argued that—because envy is a painful, self-threatening, socially sanctioned emotion—it is crucial to take people’s spontaneous tendency to control their emotional response to upward social comparisons into account (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012). Social comparisons are carried out spontaneously, without effort and intention. This suggests that envy is likely to be an automatic reaction when one becomes aware of the superior fortunes of others. However, because people are motivated to suppress or alter an initial envious reaction, the behavioral effects of an envy-inducing situation should emerge primarily in situations in which people are not able to exert self-control effectively. Research has shown that self-control is constrained by many factors that limit cognitive capacity, such as fatigue, low blood sugar, time pressure, alcohol intoxication, or cognitive load (for an overview, see Hofmann, Friese, and Strack, 2009). Particularly when self-control is constrained, an envy-eliciting situation will increase the motivation to gain the advantage of the other.

To test this reasoning in a line of several experiments, we invited participants to a taste test that involved differentially desirable foods. In the crucial experimental conditions, participants were assigned to taste a food (e.g., a small chewy
candy, a biscuit, sauerkraut juice) while another participant was present, who was better off, because he or she was assigned to tasted a more desirable food (e.g., an attractive chocolate, or a luxurious ice cream, or a fruit smoothie). Additionally, the self-control capacity of some participants was limited because of alcohol intoxication or cognitive load. As predicted, when their self-control capacity was limited, participants with a better-off partner reported higher levels of envy, indicated a higher willingness to pay for the superior product, were more likely to spontaneously purchase it, and showed evidence of a higher impulsive tendency to approach the superior product. Interestingly, when worse-off participants were in full command of their self-regulatory capacity, this approach tendency was reduced below the baseline. Presumably, they coped with their unwanted emotional reaction by cognitively devaluing the originally desirable alternative—a sour grapes effect.

These findings support the notion that a spontaneous and basic upward motivational tendency can be an important part of the effects of an envy-eliciting situation, which will predictably affect behavior in some situations. In light of the multitude of cognitive demands posed by many negotiations, this component of envious responding may often be an important driver of behavior in negotiations.

Social comparison can cause a multitude of cognitive, motivational, and affective effects in negotiations. To understand these effects, it is crucial to understand how comparative judgments are formed. Several psychological mechanisms are likely to contribute to the effect of social comparisons on negotiation outcomes, such as the selection of comparison standards, selective accessibility, and basic motivational orientations of promotion and prevention. Furthermore, the example of envy demonstrates how social comparison may affect negotiation by eliciting powerful specific emotions that influence subsequent deceptive or other behaviors.

**CONCLUSION**

Why people compare, with whom they compare, and which psychological processes underlie social comparison effects in negotiations may be better understood when relating these questions to core social-cognitive principles such as cognitive efficiency, knowledge activation, and selective attention. In other words, we believe that trying to comprehend how people make sense of themselves and others in their social environment may not only suggest novel avenues for research in negotiation but may also pave the way for a more complete and integrated perspective on negotiation behavior.
REFERENCES


1For a more elaborate exposition of the selective accessibility model, see Mussweiler (2003). For other theoretical perspectives on the emergence of assimilative and contrastive social judgments, refer to Stapel and Suls (2007).