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TO FOSTER CHANGE

By

Damon C. Tichenor Jr.
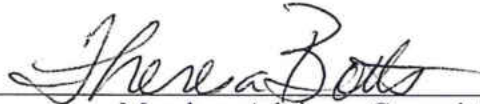
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TO FOSTER CHANGE

By

Damon C. Tichenor Jr.

Bachelor of Arts
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky
2013

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father and mother
Damon Craig Tichenor Sr. and Martha Ann Tichenor
for keeping me focused on the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The current study intended to investigate the effects of increased similarity to upward, lateral, and downward comparison targets on changes to participants' psychological well-being and self-aspect valence. Based on previous literature, hypotheses were proposed in regard to the effect of increased similarity to each direction of comparison. A sample of students in introductory psychology classes from Eastern Kentucky University were employed to test these hypotheses. All of the participants completed measures that captured their self-aspect valence and centrality, perception of comparison targets, and psychological well-being. The results of this study confirmed some of the hypotheses. The results showed that for upward comparisons, increased similarity to the upward target was associated with increased psychological well-being and self-aspect valence at Time 2. The effects for self-aspect valence were moderated by increased closeness and positive valence of upward target. For lateral comparisons, increased similarity to the lateral target was not associated with changes in self-aspect valence or psychological well-being at Time 2. For downward comparisons, increased similarity to the downward target was associated with a marginal decrease in self-aspect valence at Time 2. These findings provided evidence that an individual becoming more similar to people perceived to be better than they are can improve their psychological well-being and the way they feel about themselves.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." –Leo Tolstoy

"It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be."- Isaac Asimov

A major focal point for the application of psychology is the process of change; more specifically, changing of the self and the ways with which we view ourselves. Much of the research regarding self-change early on dealt with people altering themselves in order to achieve a more positive response from their environment or their peers. It was determined that the overall concept of the self, termed self-concept, was established by multiple minor aspects of the self, termed self-aspects. In order to create a change in one's overall self-concept, the alteration of self-aspects through certain elements that the individual finds reinforcing is required. One of these elements is the social comparison element, which involves comparing oneself with targets in the environment that provide information on how to improve their own position and avoid descending to a position beneath them. As this research advanced many theories developed to explain these changes of the self, including the self-evaluation model and social identity theory. The purpose of the current study is to examine the perceptions of comparison targets and how it influences self-concept change.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the Self-Concept

Ideally the basis of therapeutic intervention with an individual involves altering that person's self-concept. Ill formed self-concepts can lead to self-imposed limitations on one's behavioral possibilities (Bergner & Holmes, 2000), resulting in reduced self-esteem as well as identities that may not be fully representative of the individual. The self-concept is defined as a cognitive structure devoted to oneself, that consists of multiple dimensions organized hierarchically in memory (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Oysermann & Markus, 1993). Prior to the 1950's, much of the approach to psychology was not to understand the composition of the self, but rather to explore the genetic differences that comprised an individual's personality. Even as research advanced into the 1970's and 1980's and the self-theory was reframed to account for various experiences and environmental expectations (Markus & Wurf, 1987), it still did not encompass the entirety of what constitutes a self-concept.

When investigating change in regard to the self-concept, there has been a great deal of research to explain the methodology of how it occurs. This process involves a complex development of various, seemingly minor self-aspects that drive an individual to perform and internalize their actions. Many self-aspects have been observed individually such as experiences, relationships, social roles, and identities, and only by combining them can an overall definition of self-concept be reached (Gore & Cross, 2014). Change involving the self-concept is organized into 3 separate elements which represent the

primary cause of the change, including the reward element, the cognitive accessibility element, and the social comparison element (Gore & Cross, 2014). The basis of this study will focus on the social comparison element, but it is to be noted that no one element works in complete isolation to create overall self-concept change.

Main Elements of Self-Concept Change

In order to investigate self-concept change, one must understand the 3 main elements that are involved in its process. One component is the reward element, which is activated when change involves the maximizing of rewards and minimization of punishment, either due to the environmental constraints or individual desire (Gore & Cross, 2014). The idea behind this drive for change is that when one adopts a new self-aspect they expect it to be more beneficial for them than self-aspects that they already possess. A separate component, known as the cognitive accessibility element, is activated when the exposure to a stimuli increases, causing it to be more easily brought to memory and relevant to the individual. It then makes the stimuli more likely to be internalized into the overall self-concept (Gore & Cross, 2014). A major component of the cognitive accessibility element includes a structure defined as the self-schema. Self-schemata are "cognitive generalizations about the self that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences" (Markus, 1977). The third component known as the social comparison element involves comparing oneself to others in both similarities and differences. By activating this element individuals can figure out the best way to behave in social situations; comparing themselves with similar others, and they can grasp their position in the environment by comparing themselves with different others (Gore & Cross, 2014).

The Social Comparison Element

The social comparison element is perhaps the most influential when discussing self-concept change. Individuals ascertain their position in the world and the best way with which to navigate it by comparing themselves with others in their environment. These comparisons can strengthen the self-aspects of a person, or influence them to incorporate new ones. Activation of the social comparison element occurs in various ways. When a college student first meets a classmate they may find that they both enjoy a certain television show. This gives the student an established similarity with the classmate and basis to compare their own aspects with the target other. Similarly, an individual recently included in a group may begin to view aspects that the group holds important meaningful to themselves in order to feel more identifiable with the group. While these are examples of ways that social comparisons can be engaged in, more examples will be provided in the literature that follows.

Some self-aspects develop through self-evaluation, a method where individuals gauge themselves based on standards that they either believe themselves to be meeting or failing to achieve. In the self-evaluation maintenance model (SEM) this is done by psychologically comparing oneself with the use of either a comparison process or a reflection process (Tesser, 1988). The reflection process uses others as perceived representations of the self, resulting in a more psychological distant target as opposed to viewing them as standards for evaluation of one's self. Anyone that an individual interacts with can be used as a comparison target, whether that is a stranger passing by on the sidewalk, a good friend, or a superior such as a teacher or parent. These targets are determined by the perceptions of the individual. What this means is that anyone can be

viewed as a comparison target, depending on how the person performing the comparison interprets the targets performance. Groups can also be used as comparison targets, though they usually incorporate one's own group affiliations as the basis for these comparisons. These comparisons will be emphasized further in the study as they have a very influential effect on an individuals' self-concept change.

Relationship between the Type of Comparison, Self-Change, and Affective Responses

Much research has been done investigating social comparisons and methods with which comparison targets are chosen. There are 3 types of comparisons that individuals engage in: upward, downward, and lateral. These comparisons influence certain responses in a person such as their motivation to change and the way they view themselves as a result of the comparison. Upward comparisons involve an individual comparing themselves to others who they perceive as performing better than they do on a particular dimension (Festinger, 1954; see also Collins, 1996). Upward comparisons are incredibly powerful impetuses for change depending on how close the relevance of the task is to the individual's self-identity. Downward comparisons involve an individual comparing themselves to others who they perceive as performing worse than they do on a particular dimension (Festinger, 1954). Downward comparisons are engaged in more often than upward comparisons due to a natural inclination to protect our own social identity and enhance our self-esteem (see also Friend & Gilbert, 1973). Lateral comparisons involve an individual comparing themselves with someone that they perceive as performing on a similar level. This typically occurs between individuals with

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whom a person shares only a few certain commonalities with that are not distinctive nor are they deeply self-defining.

To investigate the effects of social comparison laboratory settings can sometimes create situations that constrain its participants into a method of behavior that they normally would not exhibit in natural settings. It was for this reason that Wheeler and Miyake (1992) performed a study that incorporated naturalistic experimental tendencies by allowing its participants to self-document comparisons as they occurred over a 2 week time period. They included 94 undergraduate students as participants and they were asked to fill out the Rochester Social Comparison Record (RSCR) each time a comparison was made. This record asks the participants to fill out the comparison dimension, such as an academic or personality comparison, relationship to the target, mood before and after the comparison, as well as similarity to the target in terms of performing better or worse. Wheeler and Miyake (1992) presumed that the directionality of a comparison target is based on the pre-comparison affect of the participant, and that this directionality of comparison led to certain affectual responses. These responses being that a downward comparison would result in more positive affect and that an upward comparison would result in more negative affect.

In order to familiarize participants with the types of social comparisons, they were provided examples of each type and when to document examples that they experienced. The researchers required almost daily check-in's with participants to ensure that they were responding correctly given the somewhat open-ended format that the RSCR provided. Results showed that when participants' affect prior to comparisons was more positive, they were likely to engage in downward comparisons. Regarding the

directionality of target it appeared that no matter the closeness or performance, the participant felt more positive affect after performing a downward comparison, a slight increase in positive affect after a lateral comparison, and more negative affect after an upward comparison. This study is a good example of the effects that affect has on social comparisons as they occur to an individual, as well as how social comparisons evoke affectual responses depending on the perceptions of the target.

Motivation for social comparison is a defining feature behind the drive for an individual to change their self-concept. If change is strongly influenced by the social comparisons that one chooses, it is important to understand what factors are involved in choosing comparison targets. Helgeson and Mickelson (1995) performed two experiments to determine what motives individuals have for social comparison and the extent that they use each. In order to acquire the motive categorizations, these studies involved a combination of 20 graduate and undergraduate students who were instructed to imagine a hypothetical situation which included 2 conditions, they as the participant had either been diagnosed with cancer or had failed an exam. Next, the participants were asked why they or why anyone would compare, seek information, and choose to interact with upward, downward, and lateral comparison targets. After completion of this task the responses were compiled and 6 motives for social comparison were determined which included self-evaluation, self-enhancement, self-improvement, self-destruction, altruism, and common bond (Helgeson & Mickelson (1995). Three to five responses used to determine these motives were placed in a survey termed the social comparison questionnaire, and after factor analysis they arrived with 24 total items.

The test was administered to 231 (135 male, 96 female) undergraduate students following the creation of the motive categorizations. They completed the social comparison questionnaire and performed paired t-tests to determine the motives that were used most frequently. In order from greatest frequency to fewest were self-evaluation, self-improvement, common bond, self-enhancement, altruism, and self-destruction. Participants were shown to compare with upward targets when their motive involved self-improvement or self-destruction. Downward comparison targets were used when the participants' motive involved self-enhancement or altruism. Participants involved lateral comparison targets when their motivation was driven by self-evaluation or common bonds. These results provide strong evidence that the motive a person has for comparison relates highly with the comparison target that they choose.

Motivation for comparison certainly has an influence on the target chosen. Similarly, an individual's expectation for themselves based on these comparison targets can influence how a person reacts when engaging in social comparisons. Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk (2006) investigated this by performing an experiment testing whether an individual's effort-performance expectancy (E-P expectancy) had an effect on how that person responded to upward and downward comparison in terms of affect as well as behavioral intentions. Two different dimensions of E-P expectancy are described, termed simply high and low. A person with high E-P expectancy believes that any sort of improvement of performance comes as a result of their own effort, while a person with low E-P expectancy does not believe that an increase in their effort will result in an increase in performance. It was hypothesized that participants that had a stronger E-P expectancy would experience higher levels of positive affect and intent to work harder

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when presented with an upward comparison target. Those with a weaker E-P expectancy would experience higher levels of positive affect when presented with a downward comparison target; however this would not provide them with intent to work harder.

Van Yperen et. al. (2006) performed this experiment using 100 secondary education teachers as participants. Questionnaires were utilized to measure the teachers' perception of job strain, job satisfaction, motivation, and the part modified for experimental purposes which was an interview transcript from another teacher. E-P expectancy was determined on a single question asking if most jobs could be done well so long as the effort was put forth to do so, measured with a likert-scale 5 response style. The mock interview transcript was altered to create conditions of upward and downward comparison targets, with upward target conditions emphasizing their enjoyment of teaching and positive feedback from peers while downward target conditions included negative views of students and poor feedback from peers. Results showed that participants that had a stronger E-P expectancy experienced more positive affect following an upward comparison as was expected. However, there was not an effect between motivation and E-P expectancy. When participants had a weaker E-P expectancy they actually showed more positive affect when exposed to an upward comparison than when exposed to a downward comparison, although it was not as notable as the effect noticed in higher E-P expectancy participants. In order to further test E-P expectancy, Van Yperen et. al (2006) performed a second experiment that investigated whether motivation can be influenced when effort is more explicitly shown to improve performance.

The participants for this experiment included 162 secondary education teachers using the same questionnaires altering only the mock interview to create additional conditions of low-effort and high-effort conditions displayed by the teachers. For the low-effort conditions, the mock interviewee stated that they did not work very hard and in the high-effort conditions they stated that they worked very hard. What was found was that when participants high in E-P expectancy were in an upward comparison condition and the target displayed high effort they themselves stated that they had more control over their job performance. Likewise when participants are high in E-P expectancy, exposed to downward comparison conditions , and the target displays poor effort they too attribute that they had more control over their own job performance. When investigating the effect of low effort and high effort targets on the motivation of participants, it was found that the downward comparison target that showed low effort provided more motivation than did the downward comparison target that showed high effort. The upward comparison target that showed high effort provided more motivation than did the upward comparison target that showed low effort.

The results from both of these experiments provide evidence that when people hold their own effort accountable for their success, they experience more positive affect when upward social comparisons are made. Additionally, participants exposed to upward comparison targets responded with higher levels of positive affect than when they were exposed to downward comparisons. While this research does not provide definitive evidence for comparison directionality on motivation, it does give some insight into the relationship between the two. When the performance of a target is explicitly stated to be a result of the targets effort, it provides the participant more motivation to increase their

effort accordingly. An important facet of this research is that the participants were all measured on a dimension that was seemingly important to them because it involved their career. This could influence the results of assimilation of upward targets' aspects due to participants viewing these aspects as obtainable for themselves.

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in downward rather than upward comparison (Caricati, 2012). The reasoning behind this is that SIT emphasizes the fact that people choose their comparison targets in such a way that they bolster their own position while separating themselves from the target that they perceive to be lower. This theory not only applies to individuals, it also posits that comparisons can be made between in-groups and outgroups (see also Brewer & Weber, 1994). A study performed by Caricati (2012) investigated this further by considering the in-group as an intermediate status group that uses other groups to base comparisons from upward to downward depending on how it affects their overall social identity. The main effect in question was whether or not the in-group would use both upward and downward comparison to achieve a more positive social identity. This involved manipulation of the status of the in-group, relating to the ability with which they could navigate the social stratification system presented to them in the experiment. Social stratification was then defined as the ability for the group to change its position in comparison to other described groups. Caricati (2012) measured not only how strong the certain types of comparison were used by the in-group, but also the motives of evaluation and enhancement that inspired the type of comparison used.

This study included 76 psychology students (85.5% of which were female) and these participants were always designated as part of an in-group of psychology. The task

stated it was comparing the intelligence of students in the psychology department with that of students in other departments from previous years, and psychology was always in the middle to allow for instances of upward and downward comparison. Results showed that when stratification was stable, participants spent an equal amount of time comparing upward and downward among the other groups. However when the stratification was unstable and the group had the ability to change their position, the group members compared themselves more with the condition that enabled them to enhance themselves.

Therefore, when the upward stratification was unstable it presented the members of the group an opportunity to increase their own position and as a result engaged in more upward comparison. The opposite effect was noticed when downward stratification was unstable. This study provides an excellent example of how people and members of groups use the opportunities available to them to determine the type of comparisons they use, decided by what will better enhance or preserve their self-identity. Because the groups were able to use specific targets as a reference for ways to enhance their position, it provides evidence for the use of particularistic comparison. This is a type of comparison defined as focusing on a specific member of a group to use for a reference on how to explicitly improve by Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland (1988). Due to my study requiring participants to provide explicit comparison targets and completing questionnaires that will include evidence for their choices I believe that particularistic comparisons will present evidence for their self-concept change through alteration of specific self-aspects relating to the target.

Along the lines of in-group research, Isobe & Ura (2006) performed a study that investigated which factors protect people with low trait self-esteem, from threats

following interpersonal upward comparison with in-group members. They state that individuals who are high in trait self-esteem are generally more likely to show self-serving biases and engage in downward comparison (Isobe & Ura, 2006, Wheeler & Miyake, 1992, Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990). When someone is a member of a group, their self-perception transfers from a personal to a social identity which is "a shift toward the perception of the self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of the self as a unique person" (Turner, 1987. Pg. 50). This should create less of a threat from an upward comparison made with an in-group member as the identity of the individual shifts to inspire the reflection process as described by Tesser in his self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory. There were 102 total participants (95 female/ 7 male) and measuring of affect and state self-esteem, both of which were done using likert scales.

Participants in this study were asked to perform a space perception test, and the phrasing of it was such that it made the task relevant to the participant as well as placing them in comparative conditions (either lateral or upward). Results of this study found that in order for participants to avoid reductions in their self-esteem, intergroup upward comparison had to be present. There was also a significant effect between shared categories of intergroup upward comparisons and amount of positive affect reduction, such that when a participant shared more categories with an intergroup upward comparison target they experienced more of a reduction of self-esteem than when they shared fewer. This effect was more prominent in people high in trait self-esteem than in low trait self-esteem, likely due to the fact that those lower in self-esteem are not as likely to engage this process and are more willing to attribute it to their own shortcomings. This

study provides evidence for the ways that the comparison target can evoke affectual responses and alter self-esteem, especially if we expand the definition of what is considered an in-group.

Looking at the research investigating the effect of directionality on comparison targets and their affectual responses, there is a clear relationship between these interactions. When one observes another individual in any environment, they inherently begin to compare themselves in order to better understand their own position and ways with which to improve it. Upward comparisons frequently result in a reduction of self-esteem especially in those who already are low in this trait to begin with. While change can be inspired through upward comparisons, it is more likely that an individual will choose alternatively to engage in a downward comparison with a lower individual or a lateral comparison with a more equal individual. Downward and lateral comparisons are better equipped to preserve a person's self-esteem and examples from the previous studies illustrate this very well.

In regard to change, upward comparisons have the strongest influence on a person's drive to change. They provide evidence for how a person can improve and in many cases the explicit steps one needs to take to arrive at the change. Lateral comparisons can aid individuals in their overall self-concept change by providing examples of specific aspects to internalize from their targets. These aspects are typically the ones that the individual perceives as beneficial to the lateral targets' success. Downward comparisons can influence the drive to change by exemplifying aspects that an individual views as a hindrance to success. Because of this impression, the individual

performing the comparison will alter their own self-aspects to avoid the negative position they view the target as having.

Relationship between the Proximity of Target and Drive to Change

While the type of comparison an individual performs is highly influential on their willingness to change, so too is the perceived proximity of their target. Tesser's (1988) SEM elaborates on the effects that the psychological distance of a comparison target has on the individual performing the comparison. The extent that a person observes a targets behavior and this observation influences change involves processes labeled as reflection and comparison. Reflection processes generally occur when a comparison target is performing an action that the individual perceives as personally unimportant. Reflection and comparison processes are usually accompanied by assimilation and contrast effects. An assimilation effect can be defined as the way an individual incorporates aspects or emotions that they observe from social comparison into their own self-concept. Contrast effects on the other hand can be defined as the way an individual differentiates themselves from a comparison target when they are being outperformed by the target (see also Tesser & Campbell, 1982).

When individuals engage in reflection processes, they typically experience assimilation effects as their closeness to the target increases and they internalize the observations (McFarland, Beuhler, & MacKay, 2001). Comparison processes typically occur when a target is performing well on a dimension that the individual perceives as self-defining. When individuals engage in comparison processes, they typically are

accompanied by heightened contrast effects as their closeness to the target increases, so as to distance themselves from the target psychologically (McFarland, et al., 2001).

Many studies have been performed to examine the effects of the psychological proximity of the target comparison on the drive for an individual to change. McFarland et al. (2001) investigated the effects of extremely close others on assimilation and contrast effects described by Tesser. Their experiments challenge the effects of the SEM, as they propose that as closeness to another increases and the attributes being compared are incredibly self-defining for the individual than the assimilation effect is more likely to be evident than contrast effects. If comparison targets are a central part of the person's sense of self, they too can experience assimilation effects on personally important dimensions (McFarland, et al., 2001). This was the main purpose of the study, although it is necessary to state that they used identity relationships (Lerner & Meindl, 1981) to categorize participants into identity, unit, or non-unit relationships. A unit relationship involves shared attitudes, interactions, and similarity while non-unit relationships involve competitive attitudes and lack of similarity. An identity relationship is the effect most relevant to this paper's interest, and it is defined as a relationship characterized by a high level of dependency, mutual concern, and a feeling that the other is psychologically indistinguishable from the self (Lerner & Meindl, 1981).

In Mcfarland et al.'s (2001) first experiment, the conditions of relationships were modified into 3 categories of identity, unit, or non-unit relationships and the comparison target either performed strongly or poorly to create upward and downward comparison conditions. Participants were 104 psychology undergraduates (64 female/ 39 male/ 1 unspecified) and a multiple choice social perceptiveness test was used. Descriptions of

the relationship types were provided and participants gave names of people who fulfilled each of the types that they were told they would later interview depending on the category that they received through random assignment. After returning for a second session with the responses from their respective relationship categories, they were given feedback about the comparison target which was the person who took the test and provided ratings of their own current mood and self-evaluations of ability. Results showed that participants experienced a significant assimilation effect for those who shared an identity relationship with the target, not in the unit or non-unit condition however. Participants even responded that the successful target's performance was better than their own as a result of an upward comparison, but only when the target was a part of an identity relationship for the participant did they report positive mood reactions.

McFarland et al. (2001) performed a second experiment to examine the effect of psychological proximity on affective responses. It continues to use the identity relationship dimensions to measure closeness and also continue to measure affect alongside these measures. Participants were asked to imagine receiving feedback about a comparison target in one of the relationship dimensions on a test that measured an important ability. Following this instruction, they were asked if the feelings affected were their own or for the target, measuring self-oriented or other-oriented feelings (McFarland, et al., 2001). Likert scales were used to measure self and other-oriented effect on 9 different dimensions, and the rating questionnaires used in the first experiment were included as well. Results showed that when an identity relationship was shared between participants, other-oriented feelings were more contrasted against and self-oriented feelings as well as positivity was reported when the target performed well.

The final experiment performed by McFarland et al. (2001) expanded upon the first 2 by exploring whether the type of feedback, either explicit or implicit, affected their likelihood of assimilation. It maintained the relationship conditions from the prior experiments and altered whether learning the results of their own performance and the comparison target, which was defined as explicit feedback, or just learning the comparison targets performance, which was defined as implicit feedback, caused an increase in assimilation. The most assimilation effects were noticed when people compared themselves with extremely close others but were not given feedback about their own results (implicit feedback). Alternatively, the most comparative effects were noticed when people compared themselves with distant others and were told their own scores as well as the scores of their target (explicit feedback). In all of the relationship conditions it appeared that when the feedback was implicit, it elicited more assimilation from the participant. By using individuals that were actually close to the participants, these experiments were able to better determine the effects of psychological proximity as opposed to arbitrarily placing subjects into conditions that made them a special group and theoretically closer.

While Festinger (1954) states that self-other similarity is important, he only defines similarity as aspects that an individual shares with their comparison target. Similarly, Tesser (1988) defines similarity loosely and states that as the number of shared characteristics increases with a comparison target so too does the psychological similarity with that target. Stapel & Marx (2007) performed two experiments to further categorize similarity and interpret its role in social comparison. Two types of similarity are proposed, distinctive similarity and non-distinctive similarity. Distinctive similarity is

defined as the comparison target and self are similar in a relatively distinctive, unique manner while non-distinctive similarity is defined as the comparison target and self are similar in a relatively non-distinctive, common manner (Stapel & Marx, 2007). This distinction between types of similarity is essential, as these experiments aim to include the role of uniqueness with the theory that importance of dimension to the participant leads to assimilation and contrast effects as stated by SEM.

The first experiment performed by Stapel and Marx (2007) was interested in the effect that dimension importance and similarity distinctiveness had on self-evaluation in upward and downward comparative situations. It involved 139 psychology students who were required to complete questionnaires, a Remote Associates Task (RAT), and an impression formation task based on an image chosen by the participant. The conditions of importance were determined by the wording of the RAT, with participants in the important condition being told that the task was relevant to their intelligence and instead being told that it was just an interesting task with little merit in the unimportant condition. This task's difficulty was altered to place participants in certain directionality comparisons. Difficult questions were used on some to create an upward comparison in which the confederate performed better than the participant, and easy questions were used on others to create a downward comparison in which the confederate performed worse than the participant.

After completion and scoring of the RAT, participants were shown 4 drawings and told to choose the one they found the most appealing. The impression formation task was used as way to create the conditions of similarity between the participant and the confederate. In the distinctive similarity condition the participants were told that the

confederate chose the same picture as them, that this choice was unique, and only 1 out of 100 students usually select it. For non-distinctive similarity, the participants were told that the confederate chose the same picture as them, but this choice was common and 85 out of 100 students usually select it. Additionally there was a dissimilar condition, and participants who were placed in this were told that the confederate was a medical doctor and that their choice differed from his. Participants were then asked to complete questionnaires that determined their self-evaluations, feelings of uniqueness, and comparison target evaluations that included their similarity with the target.

This experiment revealed that similarity has a deterministic effect on self-evaluations. When the participant was in the dissimilar condition and had no similarity with the confederate, they experienced no self-evaluation when using them as a comparison target. Distinctive similarity and non-distinctive similarity participants responded more negatively in their self-evaluations when performing an upward comparison on a personally important dimension, providing evidence for a contrast effect. However, the distinctive condition participants who performed an upward comparison on an unimportant dimension responded more positively than when they performed a downward comparison, showing more of an assimilation effect. The non-distinctive condition did not notice an effect when the dimension was personally unimportant. These results are important because they provide evidence of the specific self-evaluative effects caused from upward and downward comparison targets based on the dimension of importance. Similarly, this experiment exhibits the extent that distinctive similarity plays a role in these effects.

Stapel and Marx (2007) performed a second experiment to investigate whether the distinctiveness of the similarity, or amount of similarities played more of a role in the saliency of a comparison target. 97 female undergraduates were used for this study involving the same image task as the previous experiment, the same comparison target dimensions of upward and downward, and the same importance dimensions. The 2 similarity conditions were labeled as distinctive dissimilar and non-distinctive similar. The distinctive dissimilar conditions were told that their picture choice was unique and the same as the confederate, but they had no other similarities with them. In the non-distinctive similar conditions the participants had many similarities with the confederate including picture choice, but this picture choice was said to be commonly chosen.

Results showed that when the confederate was distinctively dissimilar the participants displayed more of a contrast effect to the upward target when the dimension of comparison was important. However, when the comparison dimension was unimportant to the participant they displayed more of an assimilation effect to the distinctively dissimilar and upward target. When the confederate was non-distinctively similar the participants presented more of a contrast effect when dealing with important comparison dimensions, but when the dimension was unimportant there were no self-evaluative effects noticed. The outcome of this study is similar to that of the first, providing evidence that the distinctiveness of similarities are the determinants for whether contrast or assimilation effects occur.

The proximity of a social comparison target has a profound effect on the individual engaging in the comparison process. To an extent, psychological closeness can be a hindrance on one's own desire to change and ability to maintain their self-esteem.

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According to SEM, when a target is an upward comparison, comparison processes are activated to attempt to deflect the negative affect associated with being outperformed on a self-relevant dimension. This effect can be overcome if the target happens to be an extremely close other, because the target can be seen as an extension of the perceiver and instead assimilation effects are noticed. However, when a target is a downward comparison, reflection processes are activated to attempt to internalize the aspects that the individual does not want to replicate.

Rationale

These findings (proximity and drive to change) are important to note for the research I will present as the participants will be asked to select certain comparison targets from different psychological proximities, specify certain self-identifying measures, and these responses will then be examined to see how these variables interact with one another. An issue facing many studies investigating the self-concept and change as a result of social comparison is that the findings most commonly involve hypothetical targets and situations only for a single trial. This restricts the ability to determine if an individual experiences actual affectual consequences from an interaction with a certain type of comparison target or if the results are simply reactionary. A beneficial addition to this research would involve retesting participants over a certain span of time to see if they alter the comparison targets with which they identify themselves with or if their perception of previously chosen targets changes. This research could also be improved by using targets already relevant to participants. Wheeler and Miyake (1992) found this method advantageous for understanding how directionality influences affect. By allowing participants to think of targets they already use in everyday situations, the results can be

more accurately attributed to actual responses evoked from comparison targets in the real world. Similarly, the use of these targets may provide more insight into the assimilation and contrast of self-aspects. When comparisons are made with targets based off of actual experiences rather than hypothetical ones, participants' responses are more representative of the processes they engaged in to achieve that position.

Hypotheses

The current study intends to investigate the effects of directionality of comparisons (upward, downward, and lateral) on the psychological proximity (also defined as similarity) participants feel towards their target. Based on findings from studies utilizing the self-evaluation model (Tesser, 1988) and the studies following it, I predicted that an increased similarity to upward comparison targets will be associated with increases in psychological well-being and self-aspect valence. These increases in psychological well-being will be evidenced by higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of perceived stress and depression. These changes will be stronger when the target is close and more positive. I predicted that an increased similarity to a lateral comparison target will be associated with a lack of change in psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence changes. A lateral comparison will result in increased psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence when their target is positive, and decreased psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence when their target is negative. I hypothesized that increased similarity to downward comparison targets will be associated with decreases in measures of psychological well-being, as well as decreases in self-aspect valence. These effects will be stronger when the target is close and more negative.

Chapter III

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 284 undergraduate students from introductory psychology
courses at Eastern Kentucky University and were given outside activity course credit for
their participation in the study. Participants were recruited online via the EKU SONA
system. Participants were required to complete two separate administrations of the tests,
over a course of four weeks. 277 Participants completed the Time 1 administration (75%
female, 25% male) and 201 participants completed the Time 2 administration (75%
female, 25% male). 96% of the sample for the current study was college aged.

Materials

Twenty Statements Test. Participants were presented with a "Who am I?" self-
report (Appendices A & B) and asked to present 20 statements that described the way
they viewed themselves. This test is inspired by Kuhn and McPartland (1954) and their
original twenty statements test. The instructions for Time 1 asked participants to respond
in an open ended fashion, so as to prevent a social desirability response bias and allow for
a more realistic set of self-aspects for each participant. It also instructed participants to
rate each of their statements in terms of how positively or negatively they viewed them.
Ratings were performed using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 =
Very negative, to 5 = *Very positive*. Lastly, it instructed participants to rate each of their
statements in terms of how central they viewed these self-aspects to their current self-
concept. Ratings were performed using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging

from 1 = *Not at all*, to 5 = *Almost completely*. Time 2 instructions informed participants to look at their previous list from the Time 1 twenty statements test and revise their previous ratings if they felt they had changed. Responses were compared from Time 1 and Time 2 to determine how these self-aspects changed over time.

Social Comparison Survey. Following the twenty statements test, participants were given the Social Comparisons survey (Appendices B & C). This survey instructed participants to state specific individuals from their introductory psychology classes that they viewed as comparison targets. They were instructed to list an upward, lateral, and downward comparison target and each target category included 3 questions. These questions were as follows, "How close would you consider this person to yourself?", "How similar would you consider this person to yourself?", and "How do you view this person's overall attributes?". These items were rated by participants using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Not close at all,* to 5 = *Extremely close* for example. See Appendices B and C for each response option. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of closeness, similarity, and positivity of attributes respectively. Time 2 administration of the Social Comparisons survey provided participants with their selections from Time 1 and asked them to restate their comparison targets for each condition. They were then asked to perform the same ratings for each target and correlations were performed to see the changes in psychological proximity, similarity of target to the participant, and perception of the target to the participant.

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured using a 10-item questionnaire based off of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Example items from this

questionnaire include, "I feel that I have a number of good qualities", and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." These items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree,* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. Results showed a *M* = 3.65, *SD* = .81 and a Cronbach's α of .90 for Time 1. For Time 2 results showed a *M* = 3.84, *SD* = .76 and a Cronbach's α of .89.

Life Satisfaction. Life satisfaction was measured using a 5-item questionnaire based off of the Diener Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, 1985). Example items from this questionnaire include, "In most ways my life is close to my ideal", and "I am satisfied with my life." These items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree,* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction. A reliability analysis was conducted on the 5 item Diener Scale as well. Results showed a *M* = 3.36, *SD* = .87 Cronbach's α of .83 for Time 1. For Time 2 results showed a *M* = 3.53, *SD* = .89 and a Cronbach's α of .86.

Purpose in Life. Purpose was measured using a 14-item questionnaire based off of the Psychological Well-Being scale (Ryff, 1989). Example items from this questionnaire include, "I feel good when I think of what I've done in the past and what I hope to do in the future", and "My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me." These items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree,* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of purpose in life. A reliability analysis was

also conducted on the 14 item Ryff scale. Results showed a $M = 3.85$, $SD = .62$ Cronbach's α of .85 for Time 1. For Time 2 results showed a $M = 3.93$, $SD = .59$ and a Cronbach's α of .85.

Perceived Stress. Perceived Stress was measured using a 14-item questionnaire based off of Cohen, Karmack, Mermelstein (1983). Questions were phrased differently than the other measures, as these questions asked participants how often they felt a certain way in the last 2 weeks. Example items from this questionnaire include, "… been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?" and, "… dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?". These items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Never,* to 5 = *Very often*. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived stress. A reliability analysis was conducted on the Perceived Stress Scale with results showing a $M = 3.02$, $SD = .51$ and a Chronbach's α of .82 for Time 1. Time 2 results showed a $M = 2.87$, $SD = .48$ and a Cronbach's α of .81.

Depression. Depression was measured using a 20-item questionnaire based off of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Scale of Depression (Radloff, 1977). Questions were phrased similarly to the perceived stress scale and asked how often participants felt a certain way in the last 2 weeks. Example items from this questionnaire include, "I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me" and, "I felt that I was as good as other people." These items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Never,* to 5 = *Very often*. Mean ratings were obtained for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of depression symptoms. A reliability analysis of the

Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale was conducted. Results showed a *M* = 2.41, *SD* = .71 and a Chronbach's α of .92 for Time 1. Time 2 results showed a *M* = 2.26, *SD* = .68 and a Cronbach's α of .92, indicating good internal consistency.

Psychological Well-Being Index. Overall psychological well-being was measured by creating an index of the summary scores of the measures of self-esteem, life satisfaction, purpose in life, perceived stress, and depression. A composite score was calculated by adding together the means of the Rosenberg, Diener, and Ryff scales, while subtracting the means of the Perceived stress and CES-Depression scales each for Time 1 and for Time 2. The total for these composite scores were then standardized to create a Psychological Well-Being Index. This allowed for comparison of psychological well-being and self-aspect valence on a standardized measure of well-being instead of using individualized analyses for each separate measure of psychological well-being. The Time 1 Psychological Well-Being Index had an *M* = 0.00, *SD* = 1.00. The Time 2 Psychological Well-Being Index had an *M* =0.00, *SD* = 1.00.

Procedure

Participants completed the "Who am I?" self-report to gauge self-aspects relevant to their self-concept. They then completed the social comparison scale which required participants to name a comparison target that they perceived as being better than themselves, similar to themselves, and worse than themselves while rating them on a likert-scale on the dimensions of similarity, closeness and view of them overall. Lastly, participants were asked to fill out a well-being questionnaire that was meant to convey their levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, purpose in life, perceived stress, and

depression which fulfilled the affectual measures that were of interest. Comparisons were made between these two administrations to examine the changes noticed after the time between testing sessions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Hypothesis Analysis

To examine how increases in similarity to an upward target relate to increases in psychological well-being, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. For Upward Social Comparisons, Time 1 Well-Being was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Upward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Upward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Psychological Well-Being Index as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Upward Social Comparison Similarity significantly predicted increased Psychological Well-Being at Time 2 ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$) (see Table 1). The stability coefficient between Time 1 and Time 2 Upward Social Comparison was also significant ($\beta = .80$, $p < .01$) .This confirmed my hypothesis that an increased similarity to an upward comparison target would be associated with an increase in psychological well-being.

To examine how increases in similarity to an upward target relate to increases in self-aspect valence, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. For Upward Social Comparison, Time 1 Self-Aspect Valence was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Upward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Upward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Upward Social Comparison Similarity significantly predicted increased Self-Aspect Valence at Time 2 ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$) (See Table 2). The stability coefficient between Time 1 and Time 2 Upward Social

Comparison was also significant ($\beta = .77$, $p < .01$). This confirmed my hypothesis that an increased similarity to an upward comparison target would be associated with an increase in self-aspect valence.

To test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of an upward comparison target moderates the association between similarity and psychological well-being, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Upward Social Comparison Similarity, Time 2 centered Upward Social Comparison Closeness and Time 2 centered Upward Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Psychological Well-Being scores as the dependent variable. This effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction effect between Upward Social Comparison Valence and Similarity ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) (See Table 1). This aligned with my hypotheses.

In order to test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of an upward comparison target moderates the association between similarity and self-aspect valence, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Upward Social Comparison Similarity, Time 2 centered Upward Social Comparison Closeness, Time 2 Upward Social Comparison Similarity and Time 2 centered Upward Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence scores as the dependent variable. The results revealed a significant interaction effect ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$) (See Table 1). This confirmed my hypothesis that a stronger increase in self-aspect valence would occur when the upward social comparison target was close and viewed positively.

Table 1

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Upward Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and

Valence for Predicting Psychological Well-Being.

Variables	B	$SE\ B$	β
Step 1			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
Step 2			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
T1 Upward Similarity	0.00	0.04	0.00
Step 3			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.77	0.04	0.78**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.07	0.05	-0.07
T2 Upward Similarity	0.14	0.05	0.14**
Step 4			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.77	0.04	0.78**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.05	0.05	-0.05
T2 Upward Similarity	0.12	0.06	0.13*
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	-0.03	0.04	-0.04
T2 Centered Upward Valence	0.07	0.05	0.07
Step 5			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.04	0.79**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.05	0.05	-0.05
T2 Upward Similarity	0.07	0.06	0.07
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	0.02	0.05	0.02
T2 Centered Upward Valence	0.12	0.05	0.11*
T2 Upward Closeness X Similarity	-0.07	0.04	-0.10
T2 Upward Valence X Similarity	0.22	0.06	0.22**

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
T2 Upward Closeness X Valence	-0.11	0.05	-0.14*
Step 6			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.77	0.04	0.78**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.05	0.05	-0.05
T2 Upward Similarity	0.05	0.06	0.05
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	0.02	0.05	0.02
T2 Centered Upward Valence	0.09	0.06	0.08
T2 Upward Closeness X Similarity	-0.08	0.04	-0.11*
T2 Upward Valence X Similarity	0.24	0.06	0.24**
T2 Upward Closeness X Valence	-0.13	0.05	-0.16**
T2 Upward Valence X Closeness X Similarity	0.04	0.04	0.06

Note. $R^2 = .64$ ($p < .01$) for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 3 ($p < .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 3=5 ($p < .01$)

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. +$p < .10$

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Upward Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and

Valence for Predicting Self-Valence.

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.78	0.05	0.77**
Step 2			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.78	0.05	0.77**
T1 Upward Similarity	0.00	0.02	0.00
Step 3			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.78	0.05	0.77**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.04	0.03	-0.08
T2 Upward Similarity	0.07	0.03	0.14**
Step 4			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.78	0.05	0.77**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.05	0.03	-0.10
T2 Upward Similarity	0.05	0.03	0.11
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	0.04	0.02	0.10
T2 Centered Upward Valence	-0.01	0.03	-0.02
Step 5			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.76	0.05	0.75**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.06	0.03	-0.12
T2 Upward Similarity	0.05	0.03	0.11
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	0.05	0.03	0.13
T2 Centered Upward Valence	-0.02	0.03	-0.04
T2 Upward Closeness X Similarity	-0.03	0.02	-0.08
T2 Upward Valence X Similarity	-0.02	0.03	-0.05

Table 2 (continued)

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
T2 Upward Closeness X Valence	0.07	0.02	0.16**
Step 6			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.76	0.05	0.75**
T1 Upward Similarity	-0.06	0.03	-0.11*
T2 Upward Similarity	0.04	0.04	0.07
T2 Centered Upward Closeness	0.05	0.03	0.13*
T2 Centered Upward Valence	-0.04	0.03	-0.07
T2 Upward Closeness X Similarity	-0.04	0.02	-0.11
T2 Upward Valence X Similarity	-0.01	0.04	-0.02
T2 Upward Closeness X Valence	0.06	0.03	0.13*
T2 Upward Valence X Closeness X Similarity	0.03	0.02	0.09

Note. $R^2 = .77$ ($p < .01$) for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 3 ($p < .05$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 5 ($p < .05$)

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. +$p < .10$

To test the hypothesis that increases in similarity to a lateral target are unrelated to changes in psychological well-being and self-aspect valence, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. For Lateral Social Comparisons, Time 1 Well-Being was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Psychological Well-Being Index as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity did not significantly predict increases in Psychological Well-Being at Time 2 ($\beta = -.07$, ns) (See Table 3). In regard to Self-Aspect Valence, Time 1 Self-Aspect Valence was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity did not significantly predict increases in Self-Aspect Valence at Time 2 ($\beta = .07$, ns) (See Table 4).This confirmed my hypotheses that increased similarity to a lateral comparison target would not be associated with well-being or self-aspect changes. However, it disconfirmed my hypothesis that an increase of well-being and self-aspect valence would occur if the target was positive and a decrease would occur if the target was negative.

To test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of a lateral comparison target moderates the association between similarity and well-being, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Lateral Social Comparison Similarity, Time 2 centered Lateral Social Comparison Closeness and Time 2 centered Lateral Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Psychological Well-Being scores as the dependent variable. The results did not reveal a

significant interaction effect for valence or closeness. This did not align with my hypotheses.

To test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of a lateral comparison target moderates the association between similarity and self-aspect valence, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Lateral Social Comparison Similarity, Time 2 centered Lateral Social Comparison Closeness, Time 2 Lateral Social Comparison Similarity and Time 2 centered Upward Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence scores as the dependent variable. The results did not reveal a significant interaction effect of similarity or closeness on self-aspect valence.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Lateral Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and Valence for Predicting Psychological Well-Being.

Variables	B	$SE\ B$	β
Step 1			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
Step 2			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
T1 Lateral Similarity	-0.02	0.04	- 0.02
Step 3			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.01	0.05	0.01
T2 Lateral Similarity	-0.06	0.05	-0.07
Step 4			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.05	0.02
T2 Lateral Similarity	-0.08	0.06	-0.09
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.03	0.04	-0.05
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.08	0.06	0.08
Step 5			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.04	0.79**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.05	0.02
T2 Lateral Similarity	-0.08	0.07	-0.09
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.03	0.05	-0.04
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.11	0.06	0.10
T2 Lateral Closeness X Similarity	-0.04	0.04	-0.06
T2 Lateral Valence X Similarity	0.09	0.06	0.10

Table 3 (continued)

Variables	B	SE B	β
T2 Lateral Closeness X Valence	-0.01	0.05	-0.01
Step 6			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.04	0.79**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.05	0.02
T2 Lateral Similarity	-0.10	0.07	-0.11
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.04	0.05	-0.05
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.07	0.07	0.06
T2 Lateral Closeness X Similarity	-0.04	0.04	-0.06
T2 Lateral Valence X Similarity	0.10	0.06	0.11
T2 Lateral Closeness X Valence	-0.02	0.06	-0.02
T2 Lateral Valence X Closeness X Similarity	0.03	0.03	0.07

Note. $R^2 = .64$ ($p < .01$) for Step 1.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. +$p < .10$

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Lateral Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and Valence for Predicting Self-Valence.

Variables	B	$SE\ B$	β
Step 1			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.77	0.05	0.76**
Step 2			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.77	0.05	0.75**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.04	0.02	0.08
Step 3			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.76	0.05	0.75**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.01	0.03	0.03
T2 Lateral Similarity	0.04	0.03	0.07
Step 4			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.77	0.05	0.75**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.03	0.04
T2 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.04	0.05
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.02	0.03	-0.04
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.05	0.04	0.08
Step 5			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.77	0.05	0.75**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.03	0.05
T2 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.04	0.04
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.01	0.03	-0.03
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.04	0.04	0.08
T2 Lateral Closeness X Similarity	-0.01	0.02	-0.03
T2 Lateral Valence X Similarity	-0.01	0.04	-0.02

Table 4 (continued)

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
T2 Lateral Closeness X Valence	0.01	0.03	0.02
Step 6			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.77	0.05	0.75**
T1 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.03	0.05
T2 Lateral Similarity	0.02	0.04	0.04
T2 Centered Lateral Closeness	-0.01	0.03	-0.03
T2 Centered Lateral Valence	0.05	0.04	0.08
T2 Lateral Closeness X Similarity	-0.01	0.02	-0.03
T2 Lateral Valence X Similarity	-0.01	0.04	-0.02
T2 Lateral Closeness X Valence	0.01	0.03	0.02
T2 Lateral Valence X Closeness X Similarity	0.00	0.02	0.00

Note. $R^2 = .57$ ($p < .01$) for Step 1.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. +$p < .10$

To examine how increases in similarity to a downward target relate to decreases in psychological well-being, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. For Downward Social Comparison, Time 1 Self-Aspect Valence was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Downward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Downward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Psychological Well-Being Index as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Downward Social Comparison Similarity did not significantly predict decreases in Psychological Well-Being at Time 2 ($\beta = .02$, ns) (See Table 5). This disconfirmed my hypothesis that an increase of similarity with a downward comparison target would be associated with a decrease in well-being.

To examine how increases in similarity to a downward target relate to decreases in self-aspect valence, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. For Downward Social Comparison, Time 1 Self-Aspect Valence was entered in Block 1, Time 1 Downward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 2, and Time 2 Downward Social Comparison Similarity was entered in Block 3 with Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence as the dependent variable. The results revealed that Time 2 Downward Social Comparison Similarity marginally predicted a decreased Self-Aspect Valence at Time 2 ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .10$) (See Table 6). This partially confirmed my hypothesis that an increased similarity to a downward comparison target would be associated with a decrease in self-aspect valence.

To test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of a downward comparison target moderates the association between similarity and psychological well-being, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Downward Social Comparison

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Similarity, Time 2 centered Downward Social Comparison Closeness and Time 2 centered Downward Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Psychological Well-Being scores as the dependent variable. The results did not reveal a significant interaction effect for valence or closeness. This did not align with my hypotheses, as I believed that the effects of similarity on the decreases in psychological well-being would be stronger when the target was closer and viewed negatively.

To test the hypothesis that closeness and valence of a downward comparison target moderates the association between similarity and self-aspect valence, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted with Downward Social Comparison Similarity, Time 2 centered Downward Social Comparison Closeness, Time 2 Downward Social Comparison Similarity and Time 2 centered Downward Social Comparison Valence and their interaction term as the independent variables, and Time 2 Self-Aspect Valence scores as the dependent variable. The results did not reveal a significant interaction effect of similarity and self-aspect valence. This disconfirmed my hypothesis that a stronger decrease in self-aspect valence would occur when the downward social comparison target was close and viewed negatively.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Downward Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and

Valence for Predicting Psychological Well-Being.

Variables	B	$SE\ B$	β
Step 1			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
Step 2			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80
T1 Downward Similarity	-0.01	0.05	-0.01
Step 3			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.79	0.04	0.80**
T1 Downward Similarity	-0.02	0.06	-0.02
T2 Downward Similarity	0.02	0.06	0.02
Step 4			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.04	0.79**
T1 Downward Similarity	-0.04	0.06	-0.03
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.02	0.07	-0.02
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	-0.01	0.05	-0.01
T2 Centered Downward Valence	0.12	0.05	0.12*
Step 5			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.05	0.79**
T1 Downward Similarity	-0.04	0.06	-0.03
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.01	0.07	-0.01
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	-0.04	0.05	-0.04
T2 Centered Downward Valence	0.10	0.05	0.10
T2 Downward Closeness X Similarity	0.09	0.06	0.10
T2 Downward Valence X Similarity	-0.03	0.07	-0.03

Table 5 (continued)

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
T2 Downward Closeness X Valence	-0.03	0.06	-0.04
Step 6			
T1 Psychological Well-Being Index	0.78	0.05	0.79**
T1 Downward Similarity	-0.04	0.06	-0.03
T2 Downward Similarity	0.00	0.07	0.00
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	-0.03	0.05	-0.04
T2 Centered Downward Valence	0.11	0.06	0.11
T2 Downward Closeness X Similarity	0.10	0.07	0.11
T2 Downward Valence X Similarity	-0.03	0.07	-0.03
T2 Downward Closeness X Valence	-0.03	0.07	-0.04
T2 Downward Valence X Closeness X Similarity	-0.02	0.06	-0.03

Note. R^2 = .64 (p < .01) for Step 1; ΔR^2 = .01 for Step 4 (p < .05).

*p < .05, **p < .01. +p < .10

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Downward Comparison Similarity, Closeness, and Valence for Predicting Self-Valence.

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.79	0.05	0.77**
Step 2			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.79	0.05	0.77**
T1 Downward Similarity	0.05	0.03	0.08
Step 3			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.79	0.05	0.77**
T1 Downward Similarity	0.08	0.03	0.13*
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.06	0.03	-0.09[+]
Step 4			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.80	0.05	0.78**
T1 Downward Similarity	0.08	0.03	0.14*
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.04	0.04	-0.07
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	0.00	0.03	-0.01
T2 Centered Downward Valence	-0.02	0.03	-0.04
Step 5			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.80	0.05	0.78**
T1 Downward Similarity	0.08	0.03	0.14*
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.06	0.04	-0.09
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	-0.01	0.03	-0.03
T2 Centered Downward Valence	-0.02	0.03	-0.04
T2 Downward Closeness X Similarity	0.03	0.03	0.06
T2 Downward Valence X Similarity	0.00	0.04	-0.01

Table 6 (continued)

Variables	*B*	*SE B*	β
T2 Downward Closeness X Valence	0.02	0.04	0.04
Step 6			
T1 20 Statement Self-Valence	0.80	0.05	0.78**
T1 Downward Similarity	0.08	0.03	0.14*
T2 Downward Similarity	-0.05	0.04	-0.09
T2 Centered Downward Closeness	-0.01	0.03	-0.03
T2 Centered Downward Valence	-0.02	0.04	-0.03
T2 Downward Closeness X Similarity	0.03	0.04	-0.01
T2 Downward Valence X Similarity	0.00	0.04	-0.01
T2 Downward Closeness X Valence	0.02	0.04	0.04
T2 Downward Valence X Closeness X Similarity	-0.01	0.03	-0.04

Note. R^2 = .77 (*p* < .01) for Step 1.

p < .05, **p* < .01. +*p* < .10

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

One of the most influential elements in the process of self-concept change is the social comparison element. It is the only element that has the ability to influence change in the self-concept without influence from the reward or cognitive accessibility element. By engaging in social comparisons an individual can discover the self-aspects that already exist within themselves and understand different self-aspects that they may want to incorporate into their self-concept. As similarity to these targets increases, one may notice a change in the way they view their own self-aspects or re-evaluate how self-defining these aspects are.

The process of change in perception of one's self-aspects occurs over time as one begins to interpret the information they receive from their social environment. Self-Evaluation Maintenance theory (Tesser, 1988) captures this process well. When individuals observe aspects in others that they find beneficial in some way, they begin to internalize and incorporate these aspects into the self-concept, an effect known as an assimilation effect. When individuals observe aspects in others that they find detrimental in some way, they attempt to remove these self-aspects from their own self-concept, an effect known as a contrast effect.

Both Festinger (1954) and Tesser (1988) attempted to describe the likelihood of assimilation and contrast effects in relation to the perceived similarity of the target to the person performing the comparison. Their concept of "similarity" was defined in terms that did not capture the real essence of the construct in question however. For Festinger

and Tesser, increased similarity was achieved by sharing an increased number of aspects with a comparison target. It was for this reason that McFarland et. al., (2001) performed experiments to investigate how increased similarity influenced the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects. The crucial difference was the utilization of identity relationships (Lerner & Meindl, 1981) to determine the amount of shared attitudes, interactions, and similarity between the target and the individual performing the comparison. Their results showed that as the similarity to an upward target increased the likelihood of assimilation effects were increased, leading to more of an incorporation of aspects from their target and an increased valence perception of self-aspects. Other limitations include the lack of real comparison targets (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992) and lack of repeated trials to investigate if lasting change is occurring rather than reactionary effects.

By requiring participants to report their own valence and centrality, as well as their perceptions of comparison targets at multiple intervals, the current study serves as an attempt to respond to some of the shortcomings present in the current self-concept change research. Based on findings from Tesser's (1988) SEM theory and the studies that followed it, I predicted that an increased similarity to upward comparison targets would be associated with increases in psychological well-being and self-aspect valence. I predicted that an increased similarity to a lateral comparison target would be associated with a lack of change in psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence changes. I also predicted that increased similarity to downward comparison targets would be associated with decreases in measures of psychological well-being, as well as decreases in self-aspect valence. Additionally, I predicted interactions for each of these

effects. I predicted that these changes for upward comparison conditions would be stronger when the target is close and more positive. I also predicted that a lateral comparison would result in increased psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence when their target is positive and decreased psychological well-being measures and self-aspect valence when their target is negative. Finally, I predicted that these changes for downward comparison conditions would be stronger when the target is close and more negative.

Results of the current study found support for some of the proposed hypotheses. In terms of increased similarity to upward comparison targets, a significant relationship was found between increases in psychological well-being and increases in self-aspect valence. This aligns with much of the prior research involving upward comparisons (McFarland et. al., 2001) which states that as similarity increases to a comparison target, assimilation is likely to occur. This effect was more pronounced in self-aspect valence increase than with increases in psychological well-being. What this means is that as one feels an increased similarity to an upward comparison target over time, they are more likely to experience an increase in self-esteem with a decrease in stress and depression. Additionally, as one feels an increased similarity to an upward comparison target over time, they are more likely to experience an increase in the positivity with which they view their self-aspects. This was one of the most pronounced effects noticed in the current study, and these findings make a great deal of sense. If one begins to feel an increased similarity with someone that is perceived to be better than they are on some dimension, then they feel better about the self-aspects they currently possess and are a part of the existing self-concept.

With respect to increased similarity to lateral social comparisons, there was no relationship in terms of changes regarding psychological well-being or self-aspect valence. This partially confirmed the proposed hypotheses; however the expected influences of positivity and negativity from the lateral comparison target were not evident which refuted my hypothesis as I believed that the effects of similarity on the increases in psychological well-being would be stronger when the target was closer and viewed positively and would decrease psychological well-being when the target was closer and viewed negatively. These results align well with the prior research as it suggests that these types of comparisons occur among individuals who share a few commonalities (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). An interesting result of the current study was that participants who noticed an increased similarity with their lateral social comparisons did report an increased centrality of self-aspects with increased similarity with comparison targets. This was an unexpected outcome. As these participants engaged in their comparisons with these targets, they likely internalized some of the aspects that they perceived as granting them success, in other words assimilating these aspects. At the same time, these participants likely found self-aspects that they were unsure about present in their self-concept. By making these comparisons with their lateral targets, participants were able to understand themselves better and solidify the self-aspects that define them.

In terms of increased similarity with downward comparison targets, there were no significance noted regarding psychological well-being and only a marginally significant effect regarding a decrease in self-aspect valence. This disconfirmed my hypotheses that as similarity increased to downward comparison targets participants would experience

decreased psychological well-being but it does align with the prior research stating that as one becomes more similar with downward comparison targets, they are more likely to experience contrast effects and distance themselves from this target (McFarland et. al., 2001). The hypothesis that increased similarity with these targets would relate to decreases in self-aspect valence was marginally significant, such that self-aspect valence was more negative after increased similarity to downward comparison targets. As participants became more similar to their downward targets, they likely viewed their own self-aspects more negatively because they reflected aspects that participants did not find favorable.

With respect to interactions between the variables of closeness, similarity, and valence, only in upward comparison and lateral conditions did the results show evidence of a significant effect. Participants that felt increased similarity to their upward comparison targets experienced an increase in psychological well-being that was moderated by the interaction of similarity and valence from their social comparison ratings. The increased similarity and increased positive perception of their upward target likely caused them to feel better about themselves as a result of becoming closer to someone they found to perform better than they did on a certain dimension. Participants in the upward comparison condition also noticed increased self-aspect valence as similarity to their upward target increased, which was moderated by the interaction of closeness and valence. As these participants experienced increased closeness and positivity of valence with their upward targets, they reported feeling better about their own self-aspects.

While not included in the original hypotheses, participants in the lateral comparison conditions provided an unexpected finding regarding centrality. Lateral comparison conditions experienced an increased centrality as a result of the three-way interaction between similarity, closeness, and valence with their lateral comparison targets. As these participants noticed an increased similarity toward their lateral targets, they become more aware of their own self-concept thus making the aspects reported more central to them. Through social comparisons, these participants were able to better understand their selves by analyzing what constitutes the selves of those they perceive as performing similarly.

Implications

Normally a single trial method is used to investigate self-concept change, however the current study utilizes a longitudinal approach. By doing so a more complete picture of the factors that play a role in the process of self-concept change is presented. The results of the current study expand upon findings utilizing SEM (Tesser, 1988) as well as studies that followed by providing insight into the affectual and psychological well-being consequences of engaging in social comparisons. In normal laboratory settings, it is difficult to investigate the long-term effects of engaging in social comparisons and typically only a reactionary response is acquired from these experiments. Because the alteration of self-aspects occurs over time, this repeated trial method of investigation is necessary to understand the process of change in the self-concept as opposed to only capturing the result of the change.

For individuals engaging in upward comparisons, the results in the current study showed that an increased similarity to upward targets resulted in increased psychological well-being and increased self-aspect valence. Thus, the results in the current study suggest that as people become more similar to their upward comparison targets they begin to feel more confident in their own abilities and perceive less stress and depression overall. Similarly, they begin to view their own self-aspects more positively. This shows that as people become more similar with someone who they perceive to perform better than themselves, they feel better about how they perform individually. This is an excellent insight into how upward social comparisons can be performed without the expectation that people engaging in them will be acting to preserve their own self-concept rather than working to improve it. The utility of these findings can be found in educational settings ranging from middle school all the way into higher education. Children who are taught that comparing themselves to upward targets can influence them to become more like these targets could improve their psychological well-being as well as their own view of themselves.

For individuals engaging in lateral comparisons, the results of the current study showed that an increased similarity, closeness, and valence of lateral targets resulted in an increased self-aspect centrality for the participant. These findings expand upon the current knowledge of how social comparisons with those perceived to be on a similar level effect the self-concept. It provides evidence that as people gain an understanding of their social environment they begin to better understand their own self-concept. Their own self-aspects are reinforced into the overall self-concept through increased connections to similar others.

In regard to downward comparisons, the results of the current study showed that an increased similarity with downward comparison targets is not related to a decrease in psychological well-being but is related to a marginal decrease in self-aspect valence. These findings hardly support the prior research, as it is often suggested that by engaging in downward comparisons people do so to preserve their own self-esteem (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). While self-esteem did not decrease as hypothesized with increased similarity with downward comparison targets, it did not increase either. Self-aspect valence however, did decrease as similarity to downward targets increased. Presumably, this is a result of people finding themselves more similar to someone with whom they consider to have undesirable self-aspects. Their self-esteem remains intact because their similarity may be increasing towards this target but this does not make them feel that they are exactly like this target. While not causing them any distress in terms of their self-esteem or psychological well-being, they are less positive in their own self-aspect valence because they are becoming more alike an individual that they perceive as performing below them in some way.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study features some limitations that should be mentioned. First, while improving upon previous research by having participants respond at two different intervals this still is a relatively short amount of time to observe self-concept change. Typically change involving the self-concept takes place through major life shifts such as entering college, becoming a parent or acquiring a new job. These shifts involve a re-evaluation of the current self-aspects and only through time will the individual find which self-aspects remain beneficial as well as which new ones to incorporate and abandon.

Future research should measure participants repeatedly over a longer course of time to examine the effects of each directionality comparison on psychological well-being and self-aspect valence. This would help to solidify and expand upon the current findings.

Another limitation of the current study is the lack of information related to lateral comparisons. Findings from the current study provide excellent insight into how lateral social comparisons help to solidify an individual's current self-aspects. However, much of the prior research in social comparisons involves downward and upward targets and tends to neglect those targets that are perceived to be on a similar level as the individual. Future research should investigate how lateral social comparisons affect those engaging in the comparison. This will enable the relationships not explained by upward and downward social comparisons to be better understood, and provide evidence as to the affectual and psychological well-being consequences of engaging in them.

A final limitation of the current study was the lack of findings regarding centrality measures. This could be the result of participants not fully understanding what the centrality measure was trying to capture. It could also be the result of requiring participants to respond to the same twenty statements they provided from the first administration. Future research should allow participants to revise their twenty statements describing relevant self-aspects and include or delete aspects as they pertain to them following the first administration. Perhaps by allowing these alterations, researchers could capture the self-aspects that participants find more central to their self-concept and provide insight into how these self-aspects are included and extinguished over time. Additionally, future research should investigate the impact of peer comparisons in terms

of whether downward comparisons are more likely to involve people within or outside of their ingroup.

Conclusion

The ability to change the self-concept is a necessary skill in order to alter one's perception of their abilities and improve overall psychological health. Although it is not emphasized, in order to acclimate to new situations and demands one must be able to change the way they define themselves. The current study suggests that by becoming more similar to people perceived to be better than they are, people can improve the way their well-being and the way they feel about themselves. By becoming more similar to individuals that are on a level close to their own, people can gain an understanding of who they are and what they find important.

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APPENDIX A:

"Who am I?" Twenty Statements Test Time 1

Who Am I? Time 1

For the list below, please write twenty statements in the first column that answer the question "Who Am I?" in the blanks. Just give twenty answers to this question. Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Use whatever information you think helps to describe yourself. For example, you may want to describe yourself in terms of your personality, your physical attributes, as a friend or family member, or as the member of an organization. You may find it useful to describe yourself in comparison to other people, or compared to what you expect to be like in the present, or compared to what you were like in the past. Feel free to use or disregard any of these suggestions, and please include any other information that is important to include when answering the question "Who Am I?" Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or "importance," and please DO NOT repeat any responses in the first column.

In the second column (*Rating*), rate the way that you view these descriptions of yourself in terms of positive or negative. Rate these feelings using the following scale:
   1 = Very negative, 2 = Somewhat negative, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat positive, 5 = Very positive

In the third column (*Centrality*), rate how central each aspect is to who you are right now. Rate these feelings using the following scale:
         1 = Not at all, 2 = Very little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Very much, 5 = Almost completely

Self Statement	Rating	Centrality
1. I am…		
2. I am…		
3. I am…		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		

Please let the experimenter know when you are finished.

APPENDIX B:

"Who am I?" Twenty Statements Test Time 2

Who Am I? Time 2

In the first column listed below are the 20 statements you provided at the first session.

In the second column (*Rating*), rate the way that you now view these descriptions of yourself in terms of positive or negative. Rate these feelings using the following scale:

  1 = Very negative, 2 = Somewhat negative, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat positive, 5 = Very positive

In the third column (*Centrality*), rate how central each aspect is to who you are right now. Rate these feelings using the following scale:

        1 = Not at all, 2 = Very little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Very much, 5 = Almost completely

Self Statement	Rating	Centrality
1. I am		
2. I am		
3. I am		
4. I am		
5. I am		
6. I am		
7. I am		
8. I am		
9. I am		
10. I am		
11. I am		
12. I am		
13. I am		
14. I am		
15. I am		
16. I am		
17. I am		
18. I am		
19. I am		
20. I am		

Please let the experimenter know when you are finished.

APPENDIX C:

Social Comparisons Time 1

Social Comparisons Time 1

BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS (e.g., Everyone knows somebody who is doing better than they are and doing worse than they are, as well as people who are at a similar level. In the space below, please list people who are above, below, and at the same level as you. Please also rate those individuals using the scales provided)

1. Write the name of someone you know who you believe is better than you are (someone you look up to).

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

2. Write the name of someone you know who you believe is the same as you.

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

3. Write the name of someone you know who is worse than you are.

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

APPENDIX D:

Social Comparisons Time 2

Social Comparisons Time 2
BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS (e.g., Everyone knows somebody who is doing better than they are and doing worse than they are, as well as people who are at a similar level. In the space below, please list people who are above, below, and at the same level as you. Please also rate those individuals using the scales provided)

4. Write the name of the person from Time 1 you listed as better than yourself.

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

5. Write the name of the person from Time 1 you listed as the same as yourself.

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

6. Write the name of the person from Time 1 you listed as worse than yourself.

   _____

- How close would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not close at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely close

- How similar would you consider this person to yourself?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all similar	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely similar

- How do you view this person's overall attributes?

1	2	3	4	5
Very negative	Slightly negative	Neutral	Slightly positive	Very positive

APPENDIX E:

Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire

Please use the scale below to rate the following statements

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neutral	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree

Rosenberg Scale
1. _____ I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. _____ I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. _____ All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure.
4. _____ I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. _____ I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. _____ I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. _____ On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. _____ I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. _____ I certainly feel useless at times.
10. _____ At times, I think I am no good at all.

Diener Scale
11. _____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
12. _____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
13. _____ I am satisfied with my life.
14. _____ So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
15. _____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Ryff Scale (MIL)

16. _____ I feel good when I think of what I've done in the past and what I hope to do in the future.
17. _____ I live life one day at a time, and don't really think about the future.
18. _____ I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.
19. _____ I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.
20. _____ My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.
21. _____ I don't have a good sense of what it is I am trying to accomplish in life.
22. _____ I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.
23. _____ I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.
24. _____ I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself.
25. _____ Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.
26. _____ I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.
27. _____ My aims in life have been more a source of satisfaction than frustration for me.
28. _____ I find it satisfying to think about what I have accomplished in life.
29. _____ In the final analysis, I'm not sure my life adds up to much.

PS Scale
The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last two weeks. In each case, you will be asked to indicate **how often** you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate. For each question, choose from the following alternatives:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very often

30. _____ … been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
31. _____ … felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
32. _____ … felt nervous and "stressed?"
33. _____ … dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?
34. _____ … felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
35. _____ … felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
36. _____ … felt that things were going your way?
37. _____ … found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?
38. _____ … been able to control irritations in your life?
39. _____ … felt that you were on top of things?
40. _____ … been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
41. _____ … found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
42. _____ … been able to control the way you spend your time?
43. _____ … felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

CES-D Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very often

In the past 2 weeks…
44. _____ I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me.
45. _____ I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.
46. _____ I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.
47. _____ I felt that I was as good as other people.
48. _____ I had trouble keeping my mind on things I was doing.
49. _____ I felt depressed.
50. _____ I felt that everything I did was an effort.
51. _____ I felt hopeful about the future.
52. _____ I thought my life had been a failure.
53. _____ I felt fearful.
54. _____ My sleep was restless.
55. _____ I was happy.
56. _____ I talked less than usual.
57. _____ I felt lonely.
58. _____ People were unfriendly.
59. _____ I enjoyed life.
60. _____ I had crying spells.
61. _____ I felt sad.
62. _____ I felt that people dislike me.
63. _____ I could not "get going."

PLEASE INFORM THE EXPERIMENTER THAT YOU ARE DONE WITH THIS SECTION

APPENDIX F:

Recruitment Statement

Recruitment Statement

"To Foster Change"

In this two-part study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your perceptions of yourself and your personal relationships, then to answer some questions about your personality and your feelings. At a follow-up session four weeks later, you will be asked to answer similar questions on these topics.

APPENDIX G:

Consent Statement

Consent Form

"To Foster Change"

Damon Craig Tichenor Jr.

Thank you for participating in our study! I am a graduate student in the Psychology Department here at Eastern Kentucky University. Today you will be asked to complete a self-report of your perceptions of yourself and your personal relationships. You will then be asked to fill out a survey of your personality, some people you know, and feelings about yourself. Your participation today should take about 30 minutes and you will receive 1.0 outside unit credit for participating in this session.

Please note that this is a two-part study and we need all participants to return for the second session. Your second session is scheduled four weeks from today (same time of day, same day of the week, same location). If you are unable to attend that second session, please let the researcher know right away. If you return for the second session, you will receive an additional 2.0 outside unit credits.

For both of the sessions, participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without giving prior notice and without penalty. Your responses are anonymous. If you would like to know the results of this study, you may contact me at damon_tichenor3@mymail.eku.edu.

If you wish to participate in this study, please tell the researcher that you are ready to continue.

APPENDIX H:

Debriefing Statement

Debriefing Form
"To Foster Change"

Thank you for participating in this study! The purpose of this study was to explore how your relationships affect your ability to change your self-aspects. People tend to compare themselves with individuals they encounter in their environment. These types of comparisons can be defined in terms of upward, downward, or lateral. An upward comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves with someone that they perceive as performing better than they do on a particular dimension. Lateral comparisons occur when an individual compares themselves with someone that they perceive as performing on a similar level as they do. A downward comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves with someone that they perceive as performing worse than they do on a particular dimension. This study tests the hypotheses that an increased similarity to upward comparison targets would be associated with increases in well-being, positive self-aspect perception, and additions of positive aspects when describing one's self. It also tested the hypotheses that an increased similarity with lateral comparison targets would be associated with self-aspect perception changes that reflect the aspects investigated from the target, and that if this target is positive there would be an increase in well-being but if this target is negative there would be a decrease in well-being. Finally, this study tested the hypotheses that increased similarity to a downward comparison target would be associated with decreases in well-being, negative self-aspect perception, and additions of negative aspects when describing one's self. This study employed a longitudinal correlational design, and we used Kuhn and McPartland's (1954) twenty statement test as well as Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem measure to operationalize our variables.

With this information, we hope to learn more about how people's relationships could be improved to fit their values and needs. We hope that participating in this study made you think about how your relationships and the quality of those relationships help motivate you to make changes to your self-aspects.

If you have any questions, please contact us. Damon Tichenor, the graduate member responsible for this project, can be reached at 536-2458, or damon_tichenor3@mymail.eku.edu. If necessary, you may also reach Jonathon Gore, the faculty member responsible for this project. Dr. Gore can be reached at Jonathon.gore@eku.edu. If you would like to learn more about the concepts of this study, you may want to read the following papers:

Gore, J., & Cross, S. (2014). Who am I becoming? A theoretical framework for understand self-concept change. *Self and Identity*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2014.933712

Helgeson, V., & Mickelson, K. (1995). Motives for Social Comparison. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21, 1200-1209.

IF YOU NEED THIS DEBRIEFING FORM SENT TO YOU OVER EMAIL, PLEASE
CONTACT DAMON TICHENOR (damon_tichenor3@mymail.eku.edu)