Social Comparison-Based Thoughts in Groups: Their Associations With Interpersonal Trust and Learning Outcomes

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This study relates thoughts derived from 4 types of social comparison to trust and individual learning. Our study (N = 362 students) showed that upward identification (i.e., believing one is just as good as a better performing teammate) was positively related to trust and individual learning. Upward contrast (i.e., believing one is worse than a better performing group member) was negatively related to learning, as were downward-identifying thoughts (i.e., believing one will perform as badly as a poorly performing teammate). Downward contrast (i.e., thinking one can do much better than the poor performer) was negatively related to trust. We concluded that social comparison-based thoughts are important to consider when designing teamwork because of their constructive and destructive consequences.

Many tasks in today’s society are performed in groups, and teamwork is common in both organizational and educational systems (e.g., Molleman, Nauta, & Jehn, 2004; West, Borrill, & Unsworth, 1998). An underexposed facet of teamwork is that team members have many opportunities to compare themselves with teammates. To a certain degree, such comparisons are functional and motivating. For example, individuals who watch well-performing teammates can learn from them how to improve their own performance (e.g., Aspinwall, 1997), and individuals who notice that they are performing better than other group members may derive satisfaction from their superior performance.

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But social comparisons also have the potential of being destructive. Watching a high flyer can induce feelings of low self-esteem or jealousy, with low motivation or conflicts becoming possible negative consequences (e.g., Forsyth, 2000). In a similar vein, noticing other team members engaging in free-rider behaviors (i.e., social loafing) may induce feelings of annoyance and frustration (e.g., Karau & Williams, 1993). In the present article, we examine social comparison within groups and, more specifically, the constructive and destructive thoughts that may stem from social comparison and their impact on trust and learning outcomes.

Social Comparison in the Context of Teams

Despite social comparison being a social phenomenon, most research on social comparison has been restricted to the implications of social comparison for the individual or for intergroup relations. For example, individual implications of social comparison pertain to satisfying individual needs, defending and enhancing the self, and reducing or increasing anxiety (Molleman, Pruyn, & Van Knippenberg, 1986; Suls & Wheeler, 2000); while intergroup implications pertain to prejudice, intergroup competition, and social identity (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991). Little research has examined the implications of social comparison for processes within groups. The lack of interest in intragroup comparison is particularly notable because social comparison theory was founded originally in the study of group processes (Festinger, 1954; Forsyth, 2000).

While Festinger (1954) assumed that individuals are motivated to actively search for social comparison for reasons of self-evaluation (i.e., in order to reduce uncertainty about one’s own attitudes and abilities), Brickman and Bulman (1977) suggested that under certain conditions, individuals are motivated to actively avoid social comparison (e.g., when comparison with a high performer is too threatening for one’s self-esteem). We argue, however, that when people work closely together in a group, they can hardly avoid social comparisons because they are continuously confronted with the attitudes, abilities, looks, performance, and personalities of other people. The major reason is that members of work groups are more or less interdependent (Van der Vegt, Emans, & Van de Vliert, 1998).

Interdependence urges group members to interact and to adjust their individual efforts mutually. This is likely to increase the salience of similarities and dissimilarities between them (e.g., Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, when people work in a group, they inevitably face the attitudes, abilities, behavior, and performance of teammates, which makes it nearly impossible not to compare their own qualities with those of others.
Social Comparison-Based Thoughts and Their Consequences

Individuals can compare themselves with persons who are performing better than they are (i.e., upward comparison), as well as with persons who are performing worse than they are (i.e., downward comparison). Upward comparison can induce identifying thoughts such as “I can do that as well,” or contrasting thoughts such as “I can never perform like that.” Likewise, downward comparison can induce identifying thoughts such as “That may happen to me, too,” or contrasting thoughts such as “I do that much better” (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Buunk, Ybema, Van der Zee, Schaufeli, & Gibbons, 2001; Buunk, Zurriaga, Gonzalez-Roma, & Subirats, 2003; Buunk, Zurriaga, Peiró, Nauta, & Gosalvez, 2005; Mettee & Smith, 1977; Smith, 2000). Such thoughts reflect how constructively one thinks and feels about oneself and the comparison target after social comparison (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen, & Dakof, 1990; Diener & Fujita, 1997).

In the present study, we examine the relationships between such thoughts and group functioning. It is rather common among group researchers to distinguish between the socioemotional and the task side of group functioning (e.g., Hackman, 1988; Shea & Guzzo, 1987). One of the core concepts that pertain to the socioemotional side of group work is interpersonal trust (Jones & George, 1998). Trust is an important condition for effective group functioning. If group members do not trust each other, they communicate less, work less well together, and drift easily into conflict (e.g., Kramer, 1999). Therefore, we focus on trust as an important socioemotional outcome of group work.

Central to the task side of team functioning is successful fulfillment of the task and achievement of goals and objectives (Hackman, 1988). Important outcomes of educational groups are the attainment of learning goals, such as increased knowledge in the specific domains of an educational course. The present study focuses on educational groups and, therefore, on the relationship between thoughts that come from the social comparison of performance and the attainment of learning goals.

We propose that the relation between social comparison-based thoughts on the one hand and trust and the attainment of learning goals on the other hand depends on the nature of social comparison-based thoughts. When these thoughts consist of upward identification, one will perceive control over improving one’s performance, which will enhance motivation to actually work on performance (Smith, 2000). Upward-identifying thoughts, there-
fore, will be accompanied by high motivation to work hard and will be linked to high goal attainment. Moreover, one will feel inspired by a better performing group member, who reveals information that has instrumental relevance about how to improve one’s own performance, thus serving as a model for learning (Berger, 1977; Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Collins, 1996; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Miller & Suls, 1977; Seta, 1982; Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

Upward identification also implies that one will have constructive thoughts directed at the comparison other, such as admiration for the performance of the other and appreciation for the opportunities the other provides to improve one’s own functioning (Smith, 2000). Such an attitude will induce frequent and open communication and, hence, will be accompanied by a high level of interpersonal trust (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 1998). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Upward identification will be positively related to interpersonal trust.

**Hypothesis 1b.** Upward identification will be positively related to learning outcomes.

Upward-contrasting thoughts imply thinking that one will not be able to perform as well as one’s teammate and that one has no personal control over improving one’s behavior (Smith, 2000). This will reduce motivation to work hard and, hence, will impede learning (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). As people contrast themselves with the better performer, it is likely that destructive thoughts toward the other will emerge, such as resentment or jealousy (Smith, 2000; Smith & Insko, 1987; Tesser, 1988), which may hinder the development of cooperative and trusting relationships. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2a.** Upward contrast will be negatively related to interpersonal trust.

**Hypothesis 2b.** Upward contrast will be negatively related to learning outcomes.

As a result of downward-identifying thoughts, one may feel pity or sorrow and may experience a lack of respect for the other, but also sympathy for the other and the expectation that the similarity enables opportunities to share in the misfortune (Smith, 2000). The thoughts about the other likely will be mixed. Therefore, we do not hypothesize a relationship between downward identification and interpersonal feelings such as trust. However, downward identification implies that one will expect not to be able to realize a good
performance, and such expectations will inhibit motivation to perform well (Miller & Norman, 1979). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3.** Downward identification will be negatively related to learning outcomes.

Downward contrast implies constructive thoughts about oneself (e.g., pride, high self-esteem, good mood), but such thoughts reflect self-enhancement, rather than self-improvement (Brown & Gallagher, 1992; Collins, 1996; Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995; Hakmiller, 1966; Kulik & Gump, 1997; Smith, 2000; Wills, 1981). That is, while thoughts reflecting downward contrast will help one to feel better temporarily, it will not inspire one to put more effort into teamwork and to set higher goals. Therefore, we do not hypothesize a relationship between downward contrast and learning outcomes. However, downward-contrasting thoughts reflect destructive thoughts directed at the other (e.g., annoyance, contempt; Smith, 2000). Especially in a team context, thoughts of being better than a worse-performing group member might be associated with feelings of inequity or injustice because one thinks one is contributing more to group activities than is the worse-performing member (cf. Forsyth, 2000; Karau & Williams, 1993). One will get annoyed at the other because of the other’s lack of effort or competence. This, in turn, will impede frequent and open communication and, hence, interpersonal trust. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 4.** Downward contrast will be negatively related to interpersonal trust.

To summarize, we hypothesize that upward identification will be positively associated with interpersonal trust (Hypothesis 1a), while upward contrast (Hypothesis 2a) and downward contrast (Hypothesis 4) will be negatively associated with interpersonal trust. Upward identification (Hypothesis 1b) will be positively associated with learning outcomes, whereas upward contrast (Hypothesis 2b) and downward identification (Hypothesis 3) will be negatively related to learning outcomes.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

Questionnaires were distributed to 652 freshman undergraduate students of the business school at the University of Groningen. The students all participated in a so-called *problem-directed course*, which means that they
collaborated in small groups on educational assignments and were coached by tutors. The course lasted for 13 weeks.

During the 13-week period, the groups met several times per week. Each group consisted of 4 students. They had to employ theoretical knowledge received during the first two major courses, which had been run at the same time: Organizational Design and Organizational Analyses. The course aimed to improve students’ social, writing, and research skills and required several oral presentations and written papers. For one assignment, each group had to conduct an in-depth analysis of a case study. Students analyzed and described the dynamics of the organizational environment and the impact of these dynamics on intra-organizational problems. In another assignment, they observed, measured, and described a workplace setting at the micro level (e.g., waiting and processing time, and time for consumption in a fast-food restaurant).

The groups worked rather autonomously, and the tutor coached them in a nondirective way. Halfway through the course, students completed questionnaires (distributed by tutors) about social comparison, interpersonal trust, and perceived learning outcomes. The students completed the questionnaires during their free time, and returned them to various secretaries at the business school. There were 362 (55.5%; 230 males, 132 females) students who completed and returned their questionnaires. This rather low response rate may be a result of the fact that students also had to participate in other surveys. Study participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 24 years ($M = 18.6$ years).

**Measures**

*Social comparison-based thoughts.* The validity of the four types of social comparison-based thoughts that we distinguish in the present study has been supported by a series of recent studies (Buunk, Ybema et al., 2001; Buunk et al., 2003, 2005). These studies have shown that the four types of thoughts relate differently to other constructs, such as different dimensions of burnout (Buunk, Ybema et al., 2001), relative deprivation (Buunk et al., 2003), and personality traits and the perceived social climate at work (Buunk et al., 2005), indicating construct validity. Moreover, these studies have demonstrated that the consequences of social comparison depend not only on its upward or downward direction, but also on its contrasting or identifying nature, which supports the idea of distinguishing the four types of thoughts resulting from social comparison.

Furthermore, these studies (Buunk, Ybema et al., 2001; Buunk et al., 2003, 2005) have been conducted in different countries among different groups of respondents (e.g., nurses, students, general physicians), demon-
strating external validity of these concepts as well. In all of these studies, however, each type of social comparison-based thought has been measured by a one-item scale. To strengthen the measurement of these thoughts, we developed a two-item scale for each type of thought. Moreover, the previous studies focused especially on (un)pleasant feeling resulting from upward or downward social comparison, which is why we want to focus on thoughts about one’s own abilities resulting from such comparisons. Furthermore, where the previous studies referred to comparison persons in a more general sense (i.e., colleagues), we wanted to refer exclusively to teammates.

We measured the social comparison-based thoughts (i.e., upward and downward identification and contrast) as follows. Students were asked to compare themselves upwardly by the following sentence (translated from Dutch): “There must have been situations in which you experienced someone performing very well in your group. In such a situation, how often do you think . . . ?” Following this introduction, there were two items on identifying thoughts: “I can do that as well” and “That’s the way I’m going to do it, too”; and two items on contrasting thoughts: “I can never perform like that” and “I can’t attain that.” The correlation (r) for the first two items was .19 (p < .001) and for the last two items was .64 (p < .001).

Likewise, students were asked to compare themselves downwardly using the following sentence: “There must have been situations in which you experienced someone performing very badly in your group. In such a situation, how often do you think . . . ?” Following this introduction, there were two items on identifying thoughts: “That can happen to me, too” and “Presently, I will do the same” (r = .43, p < .001); and two items on contrasting thoughts: “I can do that much better” and “I’m glad that I’m not doing so badly” (r = .34, p < .001). Responses on all of the items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (often). Correlation between the two upward identification items was rather low, while the other items showed correlations that are quite common for items belonging to the same scale (Nunnally, 1967).

To find further support for the distinction we made in social comparison-based thoughts, we conducted a confirmative factor analysis for the eight items (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The results of this analysis show a reasonable fit for our model, χ²(14, N = 357) = 101.03, p < .001; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .93; comparative fit index (CFI) = .86; standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = .10. The fit, however, could be improved substantially by deleting one of the upward identification items; that is, the first item mentioned previously (i.e., “I can do that as well”; GFI = .96; CFI = .89; SRMR = .07). Deletion of the other upward identification item resulted in a poorer fit, χ²diff = 16.23. Moreover, the content of this item sounds somewhat more instrumental and refers more explicitly to modeling the better performing teammate.
Trust. Trust was measured with seven items, which were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (totally not applicable) to 5 (totally applicable). The scale was highly reliable (Cronbach’s α = .90), and the items are listed in the Appendix.

 Individual learning outcomes. Individual learning outcomes were measured by asking participants to what degree they found they had attained 12 specific learning goals. In advance, supervisors of the course had specified the learning goals as elements of the course objective. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (totally not attained) to 5 (fully attained). Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was .81, and the items are listed in the Appendix.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables in the current study. The means of social comparison-based thoughts demonstrate reasonably high absolute values on upward identification and downward contrast (both have values above the scale midpoint), and reasonably low absolute values on upward contrast and downward identification.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>1. Upward</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Downward</td>
<td>2.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Downward</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>5. Trust</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<td>-0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Learning</td>
<td>3.60</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-0.23</td>
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*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
identification (both have values below the scale midpoint). This means that both upward identification and downward contrast (which imply positive thoughts directed to oneself) are much more likely than upward contrast and downward identification (which imply negative thoughts directed to oneself).

Upward identification and downward contrast were correlated positively ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), as were upward contrast and downward identification ($r = .45$, $p < .001$). Upward identification was correlated positively with downward identification ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), as were downward identification and downward contrast ($r = .16$, $p < .01$). Previous studies have reported similar correlations among the four scales of social comparison thoughts (Buunk et al., 2003, 2005). Trust had a high absolute mean value ($M = 3.82$), and, on average, participants seemed to be fairly positive about goal attainment ($M = 3.60$).

Hypothesis Tests

To test our hypotheses, we conducted multiple regression analyses with trust and learning outcomes as the dependent variables and the four forms of social comparison thoughts as predictors. For two reasons, we performed these analyses at the individual level. First, the social comparison-based thoughts are measured at the individual level, and the wording of items clearly refers to that level. Therefore, it is appropriate to test our hypotheses at that level (Chan, 1998). Second, the intra-class correlations (ICCs) of the four social comparison-based thoughts ranged from .00 to .09, which also justifies analysis at the individual level (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Trust. We hypothesized that upward identification (Hypothesis 1a) would be related positively to interpersonal trust, whereas upward contrast (Hypothesis 2a) and downward contrast (Hypothesis 4) would be related negatively to trust. Table 2 shows that trust was predicted significantly by upward identification and downward contrast. Although the direction of the weight indicates that upward-contrasting social comparison thoughts are accompanied by less trust, this weight does not reach statistical significance. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. The other weights indicate that downward-contrasting social comparison thoughts were negatively related to interpersonal trust, which is in line with Hypothesis 3. In accordance with Hypothesis 1a, upward identification was associated with higher levels of interpersonal trust.

Learning outcomes. We hypothesized that thoughts reflecting upward identification would be positively related to individual learning outcomes (Hypothesis 1b), whereas thoughts reflecting upward contrast (Hypothesis 2b) and downward identification (Hypothesis 3) both would be negatively
related to such outcomes. Table 2 shows that, indeed, these three types of social comparison thoughts were significant predictors of perceived individual learning outcomes. Looking at the regression weights, in accordance with our hypotheses, upward identification was positively related to learning outcomes (Hypothesis 1b), and upward contrast (Hypothesis 2b) and downward identification (Hypothesis 3) both were negatively related to learning outcomes. To sum up, we found support for Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2b, 3, and 4. Hypothesis 2a was not confirmed.

### Discussion

In the present article, we examined the relationships between social comparison-based thoughts and interpersonal trust and learning outcomes. Our study showed that upward identification was positively related to both interpersonal trust and individual learning outcomes. Apparently, upward identification leads to respect for the other, and this is accompanied by trustful feelings. Upward identification also reflects optimistic feelings that one has control over improving one’s functioning, which seems to provide motivation to improve one’s performance, whereas the other might serve as a model that provides instrumental information. This is in accordance with former research. For example, the study by Blanton et al. (1999) demonstrated that upward comparison leads to better academic performance (also see Lockwood & Kunda, 1997).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Beta</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward contrast</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Downward identification</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downward contrast</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.09***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (Beta) coefficients are reported. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.*
Upward contrast was negatively related to learning outcomes. Thinking that one will not be able to become as good as one’s teammate and has no control over improving one’s behavior may inhibit motivation to contribute to team activities, which may obstruct learning. When people contrast themselves with the better other, we expected that this would feed destructive thoughts toward the other (e.g., feeling jealous) and that, therefore, upward contrasts would be related negatively to interpersonal trust. However, our data do not support this. Probably, upward contrast is associated primarily with self-directed inferences and not with other-directed ones (e.g., distrust). Upward contrast emphasizes one’s own inability, which may inhibit effort and raise feelings of helplessness.

Another explanation for not finding a significant negative relationship between upward contrast and other-directed negative thoughts may be the team context that is salient in this study. Besides individual learning outcomes, the participants had to fulfill several assignments as a team. Therefore, there was also a certain level of outcome interdependence. It is likely that after upward contrasting social comparison, one realizes that the better-off other will be needed to realize a good team performance and may give one a free ride. This probably will inhibit negative thoughts about the other. Indeed, it has been previously shown that in a setting in which people must cooperate, one is most attracted to superior others (Miller & Suls, 1977).

We found a significant negative relationship between downward identification and individual learning outcomes. Downward identification implies that one expects not to be capable to reach a good performance, and such expectations are likely to inhibit motivation, therefore hindering individual learning. We did not hypothesize a relationship between downward identification and positive or negative thoughts toward the other. As we argued in the introduction, thoughts after downward identification may be mixed. On the one hand, one may feel a lack of respect; but on the other hand, it may bring about expectations that there will be opportunities to share in misfortune. Indeed, we did not find a relationship between downward identification and trust.

The present study showed that downward contrast was negatively related to interpersonal trust. Downward-contrasting thoughts reflect destructive thoughts directed at the other (e.g., anger, disrespect; Smith, 2000). We supposed that, especially in a team context, such feelings might be strong because they may be associated with inequity or injustice, as one thinks that one contributes more to group performance than does the other (cf. Forsyth, 2000). The relationship between social comparison thoughts resulting from downward contrast and interpersonal trust was indeed the strongest one among the relations that we considered (see Table 2).
With respect to learning outcomes, we supposed that downward contrast would result in self-enhancement, rather than self-improvement. Buunk, Zurriaga, Peiró, and Belmonte (2006) demonstrated that downward-contrasting thoughts result in short-term relief only, instead of motivating people to improve themselves. Downward contrast may result in positive feelings about oneself, but it will not inspire one to imitate worse-performing group members and to learn from them. Indeed, as we expected, we did not find a relationship between downward contrast and learning.

Overall, this study suggests that contrasting thoughts are not helpful for teamwork. Upward-contrasting thoughts may hamper individual learning, and especially downward-contrasting thoughts may be accompanied by low interpersonal trust. Furthermore, downward identification also proved to be negatively related to individual learning. In fact, the only unequivocal positive type of social comparison seems to be upward identification. This process may imply a positive attitude toward that other and may motivate one to learn from the other. Especially in a team context, such effects are important because they likely contribute to a healthy, cooperative atmosphere. Upward identification probably stimulates constructive communication as well as hard work, and it is likely to be reciprocated by the other group members (cf. Buunk & Schaufeli, 1999; Buunk et al., 2005; Gouldner, 1960).

Our use of small educational groups added a degree of naturalness to our study. The groups were formed for a specific purpose and had definite termination points. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that our findings are generalizable to other temporal groups that have to do similar types of tasks. However, one may question to what extent our findings are valid for groups that have a complete other duty or that have a permanent status. It is likely, for instance, that if the group task is highly structured and, therefore, demands less communication and collaboration, social comparison processes may play a less prominent role. It is also likely that the role of social comparison-based thoughts depends on the stage that a work group has reached. In a newly formed group, members will be highly uncertain about the abilities of others. In that stage, social comparison processes may be focused on reducing this uncertainty. Contrasting and identifying thoughts might come up after a certain time when team members have obtained somewhat more stable perceptions of each other. We think that it is a challenge for future research to study the impact of task type and time on the occurrence of social comparison-based thoughts and their consequences.

A few limitations of this study must be noted. A first limitation of our study is that we measured only four social comparison-based thoughts, whereas there may be many other thoughts from social comparison that deserve attention (for a review, see Collins, 1996; Smith, 2000). Moreover,
because social comparison often is accompanied by emotions (e.g., uncertainty, jealousy, admiration), it is relevant not only to map cognitions after social comparison, but emotions as well (cf. Smith, 2000). In addition, we only used two items to measure each of the four types of social comparison thoughts. In future research, multi-item measures of upward and downward identification and contrast should be developed to enhance the reliability of the measures. Our study can be seen as one of the first attempts to examine how individual cognitions derived from social comparison are associated with group functioning and individual performance outcomes.

A second limitation of the present study is that we cannot draw definite conclusions about causality of the demonstrated relationships between social comparison-based thoughts on the one hand and trust and learning outcomes on the other. It is possible that low individual trust in one’s group members causes one to contrast oneself more with one’s teammates. Likewise, individual learning could have been a cause of upward identification, rather than vice versa. Therefore, it would be desirable to repeat our study in a more controlled experimental setting.

We introduced the present article by proposing that social comparison processes may be disadvantageous as well as advantageous for teamwork. Indeed, this study demonstrates that constructive and destructive social comparison processes are both at work in groups. The “sunny side” of social comparison in groups is that upward identification occurs frequently and is positively related with interpersonal trust and learning. Moreover, although both upward contrast and downward identification seem to impair learning, they appeared to occur rather infrequently. These results suggest that a team is a good environment for training purposes. The “dark side,” however, is that downward contrast also occurred frequently, despite its negative association with interpersonal trust. Therefore, when designing teamwork, it is important to consider the conditions that foster constructive social comparison processes and that inhibit destructive ones.

To conclude, our study was one of the first attempts to study social comparison-based thoughts in groups and how these thoughts are related to group functioning and outcomes. It appears that social comparison processes indeed are important to consider when work is designed to be performed in groups, rather than by individuals. Those processes have both advantages (e.g., learning from watching better-performing group members) and disadvantages (e.g., distrust, which is associated with downward contrast). By studying these kinds of group-related social comparison issues, we have brought back the study of social comparison where it was founded: within the domain of intragroup processes. Besides theoretical relevance, this may prove to be of much practical relevance. Since people are working in groups
more and more, it is of great importance to know the positive and negative effects of social comparison in conditions where people cannot escape from social comparison.

References


(Eds.), *Health, coping, and well-being: Perspectives from social comparison theory* (pp. 359–388). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.


Appendix

Trust Items

1. We trust each other.
2. Each team member keeps his or her promises.
3. We respect each other.
4. We are honest toward each other.
5. We rely on each other.
6. We repose confidence in each other’s expertise.
7. We may trust that all our group members stick to all our agreements.

Learning Items

To what extent did you reach each of the following course objectives?

1. being able to typify organizations, their structures, and their boundary relations
2. being able to model organizations in different ways
3. being able to describe transformation processes
4. being able to apply knowledge received during courses that run at the same time when describing organizational settings
5. being able to apply basic statistics
6. being able to accomplish assignments by group work
7. being able to write down the assignment results
8. being able to present the assignment results orally
9. being able to reflect over one’s own behavior
10. being able to reflect over the behavior of teammates
11. being able to design elementary organizational research
12. knowing the steps of organizational research