

Project:

Psychology Relativity – Comparison Processes in Judgement, Behaviour, and Affect

The proposed research will examine the role comparison processes play in human judgment, behaviour and affect. Psychological research has established that comparisons play a fundamental role in these domains. While emphasizing the importance of comparisons, however, previous theories simultaneously limit their scope by also emphasizing the deliberate and strategic nature of comparisons. Deviating from this classic notion, recent evidence, demonstrates that comparisons occur so natural and spontaneous that they are engaged even if they are unlikely to yield valuable information, if processing resources are scarce and even if target and standard are not consciously perceived. This suggests that comparisons may play a more fundamental role than is often assumed. We will investigate this essential relativity of human judgment, behaviour, and affect. Specifically, we will examine (a) why comparisons play such a fundamental role and (b) how and by what mechanisms they shape judgment, behaviour and affect. In doing so we seek to establish that many core phenomena of psychological research are produced by the two fundamental comparison mechanisms of similarity and dissimilarity testing (Mussweiler, 2003, Psychological Review). Specifically, we will examine how these mechanisms contribute to knowledge accessibility effects, stereotyping, automatic behaviour, stereotype threat and emotional contagion. To do so we will use a variety of established and newly developed experimental methods from social cognition research and will supplement them with methods from cognitive neuroscience (EEG, fMRI). The proposed research will simultaneously solve a number of concrete theoretical and empirical enigma and establish a simple and parsimonious process model which allows to integrate a multitude of diverse psychological phenomena. In this respect, the proposed research will shed new light on the essential relativity of human judgment, behaviour, and affect.

Comments:

Clearly excellent candidate who has won many awards in his field. Well qualified to do this particular project. Has excellent and team building skills at cross-national level and also can bring together scholars at all levels of academia.

Mussweiler wants to tease out implicit comparisons people make and puts forward as a new synthesising theory in psychology. He uses this idea to unify several fields in psychology and thus make an important contributoin to his discipline.

The candidate knows how to strenghten his position by drawing upon outside experts and outside advice, so he is able to build a field of expertise.

Nationality: German

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Current institution: Universität Würzburg

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