

**Society for  
Interpersonal  
Theory and  
Research**

# SITAR Newsletter

**Volume 3, Issue 3**

**June 2003**

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## **President's Message** **Lynn Alden**

Welcome to the seventh year of SITAR. After six years of meetings and interactions, we are now well established as an organization. Our recent Vancouver conference demonstrated the unique research and methodological contributions that emerge from the interpersonal conceptual framework. Although our meetings are always interesting, I found this year's papers to be particularly thought provoking. Presentations included a wide variety of topics, including discussions of conceptual issues, new approaches to the assessment of interpersonal

transactions, and the application of interpersonal theory to therapeutic change. I hope that the speakers will be willing to share their ideas with the SITAR membership by publishing shortened versions in our newsletter. I always leave the meeting with a dozen new ideas for future



research directions. In addition to enjoying the stimulating intellectual climate, I particularly value our collegial interactions.

This year's conference was dedicated to Jerry S. Wiggins, and the combination of research achievement and collegial support embodied his ongoing legacy. Special thanks go to Krista Trobst and Lindsay Ayearst, who made hotel and catering arrangements for the conference. Everything went like clockwork. Your efforts were much appreciated.

I hope that those of you who were not able to come to Vancouver will be able to join us at next year's meeting. The Executive Council is conducting a survey of member preferences

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## **We Need Your Input on Several Business Items**

The business meeting in Vancouver, held May 17, 2003, did not have a quorum of members. Because of this we were not permitted to conduct official business, and now must do so via mail. Please take a few moments to read each of the business articles in this Newsletter, as well as the hand-outs from the business meeting that are included with this mailing. In particular, we need you to review the President's Report that covers activities of the Society during the previous year, the financial report from the Executive Officer, and the minutes from last year's business meeting. We also need your nominations for SITAR

Vice President, and your thoughts about where to hold next year's Annual Meeting.

The Executive Council welcomes your questions and comments on all business matters, which may be directed to Steve Strack, Executive Officer, or Lynn Alden, President.

*For official purposes, we need you to approve the minutes of the business meeting in writing. This may be accomplished by returning the enclosed SITAR Business Reply Form, or e-mailing your response to the Executive Officer:*  
[snstrack@aol.com](mailto:snstrack@aol.com)

## **Have You Renewed Your Membership for 2003-2004?**

If a membership renewal form is included with your copy of the Newsletter, it means that you need to send dues for the 2003-2004 membership year, which runs from July 1 through June 30. Take a moment right now to complete the renewal form and send your dues payment of US \$25.00 to Steve Strack, SITAR, P.O. Box 608, South Pasadena, CA 91031-0608.

# The Interpersonal Nexus of Personality Disorders

by Aaron Pincus

The study of personality disorders (PDs) has entered the post DSM-III/IV era. In recent years, a number of leading personality disorder investigators have made increasingly explicit and critical assessments of the DSM system of classifying and diagnosing PDs based on both psychometric and theoretical grounds (e.g., Bornstein, 2003; Cloninger, 2000; Endler & Kocovski, 2002; Livesley, 2001; Millon, 2001; Westen & Shedler, 2000; Widiger, 2000). Many suggest it may be time to significantly rethink the nature and classification of PDs.

I've reviewed the recent literature and can see two trends in PD classification. While not mutually exclusive in terms of membership or concerns, the "Causal-Theoretical Approach" tends to emphasize theory, open concepts, the nature of pathology, definition of PD, and views classification in the context of explanation. In contrast, the "Empirical-Practical Approach" tends to emphasize methods, operational definitions, phenomenology, description of individual differences in PDs, and views classification in the context of the practical task of diagnosis. One major convergence of these two approaches is the conclusion that the DSM system is inadequate. I agree with Parker, et al (2002) who noted that the DSM criteria sets mix and confuse elements of personality dysfunction (which could serve to define and explain PD) with descriptors of personality style (which could serve to describe and distinguish individual differences in PD phenomenology).

While a variety of revision strategies have been suggested, I prefer those that suggest we reconsider classification of PDs with a two-step approach. The *first step* is to provide a definition of PD and the *second step* is to systematically describe individual differences in the phenomenology of PDs. Causal-Theoretical approaches best inform

*Editor's note.* Portions of this paper were presented at SITAR's Sixth Annual Meeting, Vancouver, BC, Canada, May 16, 2003.

Step 1 and Empirical-Practical approaches best inform Step 2. DSM-IV moved in this direction by providing general criteria for PD in a similar format to criteria sets for specific PDs. However, these general criteria are not systematically incorporated into clinical diagnostic practice, no empirical research has evaluated them, and they are not theoretically linked together.

Livesley (2001) provided a solid starting point for Step 1 by suggesting two broad definitional elements can be found in the clinical literature:

## Chronic Interpersonal Dysfunction:

characterized by pervasive abnormalities in social functioning. PDs fail to develop adaptive relational functioning, demonstrate marked impairments in prosocial and cooperative relational capacity, and exhibit instability and poor integration of their mental representations of others and relationships. These deficits often give rise to deleterious vicious circles, self-fulfilling prophecies, or maladaptive transaction cycles.

## Problems with self or identity:

characterized by unstable and poorly integrated mental representations of self and others reflected in the subjective experience of chronic emptiness, contradictory self-perceptions, contradictory behavior that cannot be integrated in an emotionally meaningful way, and shallow, flat, impoverished perceptions of others. Difficulties maintaining self-cohesion, goal-directedness, and a sense of well-being and vitality are common. Cognitive schemas, core beliefs, expectancies, and thoughts about the self are dysfunctional, distressing, or both.

However, Livesley feels that no theory is currently available to coordinate these *causal-theoretical* features and the *empirical-practical* approaches. My view is interpersonal theory is in a unique position to provide a *nexus* between the

two approaches because it provides a basis for definition of PD (for Step 1) and model for description of PD phenomenology (for Step 2). In the remaining space, I'll focus more on the interpersonal definition of PD (i.e., Step 1) than on the phenomenological description of PD (Step 2).

The interpersonal nexus of PDs can provide a theoretical definition of PD by utilizing the "interpersonal situation" (Pincus & Ansell, 2003; Sullivan, 1953) as an integrative concept, accounting for developmental and moti-

vational factors influencing self concept and patterns of relating, and accounting for the fluctuating severity of PD symptomatology. The interpersonal nexus of PDs can also provide structural/

dimensional models, operational definitions of reciprocal interpersonal processes, and operational definitions of intraindividual variability in interpersonal behavior that can be assessed through multiple methods, providing a basis for phenomenological description based on dimensions that are continuous with normal functioning.

**The Interpersonal Situation:** Pincus & Ansell (2003) make it clear that interpersonal functioning occurs both between people and inside people and can incorporate important constructs such as cognitive interpersonal schemas, object relations, internal working models, and a host of other important relational constructs. Interpersonal theory does suggest the most important phenomena are relational ones, but it does not suggest that such phenomena are limited to contemporaneous, observable, behavior. A contemporary definition of the interpersonal situation is, "The experience of a pattern of relating self with other associated with varying levels of anxiety (or security) in which learning takes place that influences the development of self-concept and social behavior" (Pincus & Ansell, 2003, p. 210). Defined this way, interpersonal situations occur both

"The study of personality disorders (PDs) has entered the post DSM-III/IV era...[I]t may be time to...rethink the nature and classification of PDs."



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## Nominations for Vice President Due June 30, 2003

Our custom is to have nominations for vice president be made orally at the annual business meeting. Because we did not have a quorum this year in Vancouver, nominations are being sought from the membership via mail. Please make a nomination by June 30, 2003 using the enclosed SITAR Business Reply Form, which may be mailed or faxed. You may also e-mail your nomination to the Executive Officer: [snstrack@aol.com](mailto:snstrack@aol.com)

To refresh your memory, here are the duties, term of office, and selection process for the vice president, as dictated in the By Laws.

**Duties:** The Vice President shall: (1)

serve as a member of the Executive Council; (2) serve as a member of the Program Committee for the Annual Scientific Meeting.

**Term of office:** The person selected as SITAR's Vice President will serve in various roles over 4 years. To begin, the Vice President shall serve from the time ballots are officially counted until the end of the Convention's session at the next Annual Meeting, at which time he or she will assume the office of President-Elect. After serving for one year as President-Elect, he or she will assume the office of President. Following this, he or she will serve for one year as Past President.

**Selection process:** Candidates for Vice President must be paid-up members of the Society and must agree to be nominated. A slate of 1-4 candidates will be created from the nominations received. A mail ballot will be circulated that includes a statement by each candidate of not more than 500 words, specifying his or her qualifications for office and proposed policies for the Society. Ballots must be returned to the Executive Officer within 60 days. Ballots will be counted by the Executive Officer and his/her designee.



## President's Message (continued from p. 1)

for next year's conference location. Please let us know what venue works best for you.

Let me remind people that papers for the Annual Meeting do not have to be based on final products. Indeed, some of our more stimulating discussions arose from presentations that identified unresolved problems in the field. Come to present work in progress or to bounce ideas off other interpersonal researchers.

One issue that we will continue to discuss over the next year is the future growth of our society. Our membership has been stable for several years. Now we must consider whether we want to attract new members and, if so, who we want to join us.

The Executive Council is in an ongoing discussion about whether to hold our upcoming meetings in conjunction with other like-minded organizations. We had already planned to meet in Montreal in 2005 just before the meeting of the *Society for Psychotherapy Research* (SPR). Those of you who were at the Snowbird conference will remember that a number of SPR members joined us for that meeting. The Montreal meeting will allow us to explore shared interests with the psychotherapy community. Among the options we are considering is to meet with the *International Association for Relationship Research* (IARR), which

would offer the opportunity to interact with researchers who study personal relationships, another group that might share similar interests. A plan under consideration for future years is to meet in Italy to facilitate interactions with the Italian interpersonal group, a number of whom recently joined SITAR. Let us know your thoughts on these and other opportunities.

A second goal that I would like us to pursue is to increase awareness of the value of the interpersonal perspective. The Executive Council will be considering ways to accomplish this. One possibility would be to work together to develop symposia at various professional meetings, including the *American Psychological Association*, *American Psychological Society*, and *Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy*. What meetings do you attend? Are you willing to organize a paper session?

Another idea under consideration is to approach a publisher with an outline for an edited volume that would draw together contemporary interpersonal research. Some organizations publish conference proceedings. Although our membership is likely too small to do this on a yearly basis, it may be that several years of papers could be combined into a nice volume. I welcome

other ideas about ways to raise the profile of interpersonal models in general and the conceptual approach represented by SITAR in particular.

Finally, I invite everyone to post the titles of their recent publications on our e-mail listserv at the address [sitar-1@lists.vcu.edu](mailto:sitar-1@lists.vcu.edu). There is no need to limit our exchanges to the Annual Meeting; we can continue to share our ideas throughout the year. One positive result might be the development of new research collaborations with other SITAR members.

I want to thank everyone who worked so hard over the past year to make SITAR a unique organization. Kudos to Past-

President Chris Wagner and members of the Executive Council. Special thanks and appreciation to Steve Strack, who is the linchpin that holds us together. His tireless work on the Newsletter, conference organization, minding the till, and overall positive energy, contribute immeasurably to our success. To end, I am very pleased to be SITAR President this year, and I look forward to working with you all on these ideas and any others that you may have.



# President's Panel: The Future of Interpersonal Theory and Research (IPT)

One of the highlights of the Sixth Annual Meeting in Vancouver was the President's Panel on the future of IPT, featuring four current and past SITAR chief executives, Len Horowitz, Aaron Pincus, Chris Wagner, and Michael Gurtman. The panel began with each president offering his thoughts on where we should be headed in the near and distant future so that the field of IPT remains vital and responsive to the needs of researchers and clinicians. The floor was then opened for discussion so that members could respond and offer their own ideas. The discussion was lively and showed that conference attendees come from many different research and clinical settings, and have diverse points of view.

What follows is a representative summary of ideas presented by the panel. It does not cover all of the thoughts offered, or comments made by audience members during the hour-long program.

Len Horowitz commented that our interpersonal theories must be sharpened so that behavior can be predicted more precisely. A nice addition to IPT would be an accounting of "interpersonal motivation," or the intended purpose of behavior, which presumably is always motivated in an interpersonal context. He also believes that we should make postulates and predictions from IPT that are different from other theoretical perspectives; for example, that highlight the essential nature of the relationship.

Aaron Pincus's ideas are well represented in the article appearing on page 2 of this Newsletter. He believes that we should be "more integrative" in our theorizing, not only with the hope of explaining interpersonal behavior more precisely, but also spelling out the place of IPT in general psychology.

Chris Wagner asked that we consider our future direction from a number of

different perspectives: Shall the focus of IPT be on diversity or specificity? Do we want interpersonal, interactional, or relational models of behavior? Should we have more instruments, or fewer instruments that we use more often? Should research goals be more complex or more simple (the latter presumably leading to greater clarity)? Do we focus on the center of the interpersonal circle or the outward elements?

Michael Gurtman's crystal ball tells him that IPT should be more integrative since it is tied to psychology as a whole. He believes that research is heading toward interpersonal motives and that "cognition is out." He thinks we should use novel data sets and do more "data mining." We want us to use more complex multivariate statistics in our studies, and to pay attention to advances in technology that will give us better tools for measuring interpersonal phenomena.

## Scenes From SITAR's Sixth Annual Meeting in Vancouver, May 16-17, 2003



ABOVE: Michael Gurtman hands the President's gavel and plaque to Lynn Alden.

BELOW: Terry Tracey, Aaron Pincus, and Steve Strack share a communal moment.



BELOW: Keynote speaker Kim Bartholomew is congratulated by Len Horowitz.



ABOVE: Fraternizing at the poster session with past president Chris Wagner (far right), are (from left) Lindsay Ayearst, Patricia Cardona, Anthony Ruocco, and Charles Taylor.



RIGHT: Debbiesue Lee, Ryan Adams, and Cynthia Glidden-Tracey relax before the next paper session.



## Pincus (continued from p. 2)

between proximal interactants and within the minds of those interactants. They occur in both perceptions of contemporaneous events and memories of past experiences. This view endorses interpersonal theory as an integrative nexus. For example, I wouldn't suggest cognitive functioning associated with relational experience is somehow derivative of it. I would simply say that when we look at cognition, our best bet may be to look at it in relation to interpersonal functioning.

**Development and Motivation:** Interpersonal learning involves the internalization of relational patterns associated with developmentally emergent motives and traumas. I would suggest that such developmental achievements and traumas have varying and multiple implications for self-regulation, affect-regulation, and field-regulation (see Pincus & Ansell, 2003 for an extended discussion).

**Fluctuating Symptomology:** I've been treating PDs and supervising their treatment for about 12 years now. They do not typically walk around like robots constantly emitting the same behaviors over and over again regardless of the situation. Many can be perfectly appropriate with clinic staff, some can maintain employment, etc. There is considerable evidence that the severity of PD symptomology fluctuates and that's good, otherwise why would we even consider treating them. However, when it becomes necessary for them to regulate their sense of self, their emotions, or the behavior of others, we often see an increase in symptomology.

Briefly jumping to methods for description for Step 2, interpersonal theory provides the required descriptive specificity via a) empirically supported dimensions of individual differences (i.e., Agency and Communion) that can be assessed via self-report, narrative analysis, and observational coding, b) structural models (e.g., the interpersonal circle, SASB), c) reciprocal processes to describe interpersonal functioning at a variety of levels (e.g., complementarity, opposition, similarity, antithesis, introjection), and d) patterns to describe intraindividual variation in

interpersonal behavior (e.g., flux, pulse, and spin—Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2003). Future work on how to best utilize these operationally defined constructs to describe individual differences in PD phenomenology is needed. At our recent meeting, Steve Strack asked me which DSM categories of PD I would retain in this approach. I might not retain any. It may be enough to begin treatment planning to know the patient meets criteria for defining PD and has, for example, a hostile-dominant or a friendly-submissive interpersonal style.

So, do I have a definition in mind? Yes, here's a provisional interpersonal definition of PD for Step 1:

A. Strongly internalized relational patterns associated with developmental achievements and traumatic learning that pervade self-concept and perception of others (via schemas, self-talk, imagery, object relations).

B. Interferes with accurate encoding of new interpersonal experiences (input).

C. Generates inflexible, extreme, and/or non-normative interpersonal behavior leading to vicious circles, self-fulfilling prophecies, and maladaptive transaction cycles (output).

D. Such disturbances typically develop in a toxic environment at odds with normative developmental experiences, leading to internalization self-, affect-, and field-regulatory strategies that generate self-defeating and non-normative interpersonal behavior.

E. Lack of insight may be due to distortion of interpersonal input, dominance of internal field regulation motives, or priority of self- or affect-regulation motives.

PDs are notorious for lacking awareness of the impact of their behavior.

This may be due to a variety of reasons, all of which may be considered variants of what Sullivan referred to as "parataxic distortions." First, distorted input leads to behaviors that make sense to the PD but not to others. Second, the major priority may be to regulate the behavior of an internalized other rather than external field regulation. Third, the priority motive may be regulation of the self (esteem, identity) or affect rather than the behavior of an external other (however such self- and affect-regulation strategies can be largely interpersonal in nature).

This line of theorizing will be further developed in two upcoming chapters (Pincus, in press-a; Pincus, in press-b).

For further information about this article, contact Aaron Pincus: [alp6@psu.edu](mailto:alp6@psu.edu)

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"[W]hen we look at cognition, our best bet may be to look at it in relation to interpersonal functioning."



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## **SITAR: Mission, Aims, and Activities**

The Society is an international, multidisciplinary, scientific association devoted to interpersonal theory and research. By encouraging systematic theory and empirical research, it seeks to clarify the processes and mechanisms of interpersonal interactions that explain interpersonal and intrapersonal phenomena of normal and abnormal psychology.

The goals of the Society are (1) to encourage the development of this research, (2) to foster the communication, understanding, and application of research findings, and (3) to enhance the scientific and social value of this research.

The activities of the Society include: (1) regular meetings for the communication of current research ideas, methods, and findings; (2) discussion of work in progress; (3) maintenance of an inventory of data and data-gathering resources available for use by members of the Society; and (4) facilitation of collaborative research.

## **News and Announcements**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS WANTED**—SITAR needs people like you to help run the association. The *Membership Committee* works to assure a stable base of dues-paying members, invites new people to join, and helps to develop member services. The *Website Committee* oversees operation and development of our website and listserv. The *Newsletter Committee* coordinates publication and distribution of our newsletter three times each year.

Most committee activities can be done while you're at home or the office, and no previous experience is needed. Time commitment is variable and rarely exceeds 8 hours per month. What are you waiting for? Contact any member of the Executive Council for more information.

## **SITAR's Financial Outlook by Steve Strack, Executive Officer**

Take a moment to examine the enclosed financial report covering SITAR's income and expenditures for 2002. By noting the balance at the beginning (\$4360.74) and end of the year (\$5036.86) you will quickly see that our nest egg grew by a few hundred dollars during the year (a 16% increase). This was made possible by a steady supply of membership dues and a decrease in office expenses. As big as our conference income was for the year (\$5755), the cost of running the event actually exceeded our revenue by \$400.

When I took the helm as Executive Officer 3 years ago, my goal was to see SITAR become financially independent within 5 years. Independence in this case means having enough annual revenue and enough of a nest egg to make our organization fairly bulletproof in terms of finances. My best estimate is that we need approximately \$10000 in assets and about \$1000 in net annual income to reach this goal. Right now we are about half way there in terms of a nest egg, and about 2/3rds of the way there in terms of net income. To achieve financial independence in the

next 2 years we need to increase net income by one third and increase our nest egg by half. We can achieve this goal by increasing the number of members and/or the amount of dues, and by fundraising.

The Executive Council is working on the first item. As a member, you can help us reach our financial goal by (a) recommending new members, (b) suggesting fundraising activities, and (c) making a tax-deductible donation.

SITAR's financial future is far from certain. We have managed to keep our operating expenses at a bare minimum through donations of time and office supplies. But this can't go on forever. We need to be able to pay our own way. This means buying our own computer, telephone line, FAX machine, P.O. Box, etc. Right now we can't afford these expenses. Help us reach our goal by getting your colleagues to join the society, volunteer for fundraising activities, and/or make a donation of your money, time, or goods. Together we can make it happen.

## **Where Should We Meet in 2004?**

In the interest of attracting more people to our 2004 Annual Meeting, we are asking for your feedback about two possible venues. Terry Tracey is able to host our meeting in the Phoenix/Tempe area, May 21-22, and Krista Trobst is able to host us again in Toronto during the same time.

Terry contacted the Tempe Mission Palms Hotel and Conference Center. They can accommodate us for a meeting fee of about US\$250 per person, while rooms will be approximately US\$150 per night. Phoenix/Tempe is an attractive resort location but has a drawback in terms of heat (around 90F in May). The Western Psychological Association is also holding a meeting there in April, and members may not want to travel to two conferences in the same city just one month apart.

Toronto worked out very well for us in 2002. We can return to the Intercontinental Hotel for a meeting fee of about \$200 per person, while rooms will run about US\$125. SARS may be an issue for some people, and APA is scheduled to meet there in August.

Let us know what you think by marking the enclosed SITAR Business Reply Form. You may mail or FAX the form to us, or you can send your feedback via e-mail to the Executive Officer: [snstrack@aol.com](mailto:snstrack@aol.com)