

Relationship between schadenfreude and social comparison

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Background

Schadenfreude refers to experiencing the happiness when seeing another person suffer (Smith, 2014)

Schadenfreude is associated with envy (Feather, 1989) and inferiority (Leach et al., 2008)
→be predicted to the superior person

Downward comparison targets are regarded as safe or lower-status targets

There is little research on the relationship between downward comparison and schadenfreude

→**This study examined the differences in emotions that occur when targets of lower and upper comparisons learn better than the person who feels schadenfreude**

Hypothesis : Schadenfreude is more evoked in upward comparisons than in downward comparison

Propose: To explore Schadenfreude focusing on social comparison

Methods

Participants: 198 Japanese students (124 men; age: mean=19.0, standard deviation=1.20)

Questionnaire:

emotions after test ($\alpha > .73$)

- 1 competitiveness 4 items
- 2 approach behavior 6 items
- 3 normal behavior 3 items
- 4 depression 3 items
- 5 feeling threatened 3 items

emotions after the target's

experience of unhappiness ($\alpha > .73$)

- 1 schadenfreude 5 items
- 2 positive emotion 8 items
- 3 contempt 5 items

Progress:

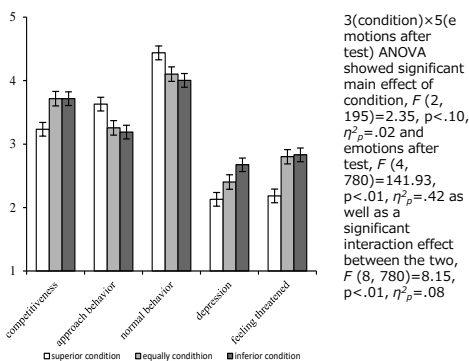
- superior condition → superior person than me
- equal condition → equally capable person
- inferior condition → inferior person



The participants were presented with scenes of being outperformed on the test by the person and scenes in which the person cheated on tests and dropped their credits.

Results

Two-factor analysis of variance: emotions after test



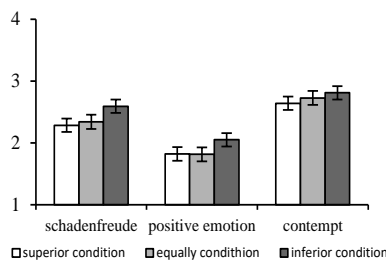
Superior condition

- approach behavior ($p_s < .035$), normal behavior ($p_s < .014$) was higher than other conditions

Inferior condition

- competitiveness ($p_s < .005$), depression ($p_s < .001$), feeling threatened ($p_s < .001$) is higher than other conditions

Two-factor analysis of variance: emotions after target's experience of unhappiness



• Level of schadenfreude did not differ significantly between conditions

The hypothesis was not supported

Multiple regression analysis predicting schadenfreude

	superior condition	equally condition	inferior condition
gender	-.126	.138	-.036
age	.105	-.008	-.043
competitiveness	.041	.150	.111
depression	-.126	-.227	-.164 +
feeling threatened	.145	.198	-.221 *
approach behavior	-.086	-.174	-.038
normal behavior	-.114	.015	-.047
positive emotion	.558 **	.640 **	.807 **
contempt	.066	-.013	.071
R^2	.526 **	.481 **	.697 **

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$, VIFs < 2.64

inferior condition

• Depression and feeling threatened negatively predicted schadenfreude

Conclusions

- Schadenfreude did not differ significantly between conditions
→ **Schadenfreude is evoked in all conditions**
- Positive emotions positively predicted to schadenfreude → **Schadenfreude involves pleasures**
- Depression and feeling threatened negatively predicted to schadenfreude
→ **Anxiety regarding one's position diminishes schadenfreude**