

Society for Interpersonal Theory and Research

Spring 2021 Newsletter

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A Message from the SITAR President



Gentiana Sadikaj
SITAR President
McGill University

Dear SITAR colleagues,

As the president of SITAR, I am asked to write this column for the newsletter. The first thought that crosses my mind is the wish that this newsletter reaches you in good health and wellbeing. We recently marked a full year since COVID-19 dramatically altered how we live and work. Our society, like the entire world, had to deal with and adapt to the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The organizing committee was compelled to cancel SITAR's annual meeting scheduled to be held in Seattle last May. At that time, the Executive Committee (EC) hoped to hold the meeting in the following spring.

However, as we approached the end of 2020, it became clearer that the uncertainty related to the public health situation would make it challenging to carry on with convening an in-person meeting in Seattle this May. Moreover, despite the progress made in controlling the pandemic over the past few months, the EC determined that re-scheduling the meeting this coming fall posed other organizational and financial challenges.

In light of these deliberations, the EC made the difficult decision to cancel the contract signed with the Seattle venue and incur some financial damage. Instead, the EC has opted to hold a virtual meeting on June 18/19. While the last details are still being ironed out, the plan is to meet over two consecutive afternoons to share with other colleagues recent and ongoing interpersonal research and to continue with our society's wonderful tradition of spotlighting student research. In addition, we will hear from a keynote speaker, join a workshop, and attend a poster session. I look forward to this opportunity to re-establish the communal ties and collaborative research endeavors our society has been known and valued for.

I hope to see you in June!

Gentiana Sadikaj

In Memoriam: Leonard M. Horowitz

Ken Locke, Daniel Leising, Fabian Ramseyer, and Lumina Albert

Brief Biography

Len Horowitz was the co-founder and inaugural President of the Society for Interpersonal Theory and Research. An invaluable presence at almost every SITAR meeting, Len was awarded our Society's first lifetime achievement award in 2014. Len also served as President of the Society for Psychotherapy Research, and was awarded that society's Distinguished Career Award in 2010.

In 1960 Len joined the faculty of Stanford University's Psychology Department, where he remained throughout his career. Beginning in the 1970s, Len focused on applying his early training and experience in measurement, psycholinguistics, and experimental methodology to elucidating psychological disorders as well as interpersonal and psychotherapeutic dynamics. Len's many achievements include: developing the *Inventory of Interpersonal Problems*, a measure of recurring difficulties that people may experience in their everyday interpersonal encounters and relationships; formalizing methods for generating reliable psychodynamic case formulations; and demonstrating the centrality of agency and communion for understanding how interactions can become mutually frustrating and thus how to avoid such outcomes. In his writings and his professional outreach and service, Len endeavored to connect his empirical work both to broad theoretical concerns and to the everyday challenges of practicing diagnosticians and psychotherapists.

Len Horowitz died on November 11, 2019.

Further Reading:

- For a deeper understanding of Len's approach to psychopathology, see: Horowitz, L. M. (2004). *Interpersonal foundations of psychopathology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- For more biographical information about Len's complex and expansive career, see: Leising, D., & Locke, K. D. (2019). Leonard M. Horowitz. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*. New York: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1759-1.

Ken Locke's Memories

My sister recently discovered that our late mother had saved many of the letters we had sent her over the years. In one letter from me—dated April 21, 1985, when I was a 21-year-old first-year graduate student in cognitive psychology—I wrote the following: *"I'm not sure if I mentioned my abnormal psychology class in my last letter. I find it fascinating. The professor, Len Horowitz, focuses on the interpersonal origins of abnormal behavior. That is, how certain definable patterns of interaction can cause and maintain abnormal behavior. I find this an interesting approach because it is so divergent from my way of*

thinking. I tend to posit intrapersonal causes for everything. That is why cognitive psychology seemed so natural to me. Regardless of how relevant an interpersonal approach is to the various forms of abnormal behavior, when I try to apply the theories (of what patterns of interaction are more stable and more likely to develop) to everyday life, they work! It is amazing how learning some theory can open your eyes... ”. Reading this I felt chagrined that I subjected my dear mother to such pedantic prating, yet simultaneously delighted to realize how within weeks of joining Len’s course I was already enchanted with interpersonal theory and with Len himself.

In that course Len introduced topics the way a playwright sets a scene and introduces dramatis personae. I can picture him, turning to his right and gesturing with both hands, saying something like “Let us imagine Person A is vulnerable to feeling distressed when others seem ignore or dismiss him”. Then, turning to his left and again gesturing with both hands, “Imagine Person B, his roommate, is preoccupied with work and wants to avoid a long conversation...” Having conjured in our minds an uncluttered yet evocative “prototype” of some individual or interaction, Len would then invite us to join him in considering that person or interaction from the perspective of specific models or studies or instruments.

I not only found the material “fascinating”, but also found Len charming. Unlike certain notorious members of Stanford’s faculty during that time, Len seemed utterly uninterested in competing or showing off or winning devotees. What Len could contribute to any conversation was invariably keener and wiser than anything we students could; nevertheless, when we spoke up, he always listened attentively and respectfully and responded kindly and thoughtfully. One year after completing Len’s “abnormal psychology” course, I formally asked to switch subfields and asked Len to be my major professor; and, fortunately for me, he agreed. Once again, Len, *thank you*.

Daniel Leising’s Memories

In 2005, I was at a turning-point in my life. Academic psychology became more and more and frustrating to me and began to look like a dead end. When I asked myself whether there were any dreams that I had left, I realized that there actually was one: I wanted to go to Stanford University and work with this one professor that I had met at conferences a few times - Len Horowitz. Why Len? Well, Len seemed to incorporate something very rare: A fondness for psychodynamic thinking and therapy, coupled with amazing intellectual capacity and ambition. Len had a solid background in experimental psychology, yet he used that grounding in his thinking and talking about something that experimental psychology seemed to have largely given up on: psychodynamics, which one could tell was very close to his heart. Len knew how profoundly psychodynamic therapy may change people’s lives for the better. So, imagine the thrill it gave me when I was finally awarded a scholarship to go to Stanford and work with Len for a year.

That year in California was a life-changing experience in many ways for my family and me, but I won’t talk about that here. What I will talk about is how much of a positive example to live by Len provided me with. Len very much valued the gifts, ambitions, and

ideals of younger people in particular. It seemed to give him genuine joy to be able to support fledgling young academics like me. When we were not talking about research, we had remarkably open and personal conversations about all sorts of things, ranging from the silly (e.g., Len's "nom de café": Andrew - an alias that Len used at Starbucks because the baristas always misheard his actual name) to the dead-serious (e.g., the emotional heritage resulting from Germany's nazi past). Len was also a perfectionist. To be honest, to sit next to him in front of his monitor and watch him obsess over individual sentences in a manuscript he was writing drove me crazy at first. I simply couldn't understand how in the world the wording of a single sentence in a paper comprising hundreds of sentences may be that important. In the meantime, I have come to understand: That was Len's way of thinking carefully about what he actually wanted to say to his readers. If you take your writing seriously, figuring that out does take a lot of effort, focus, time, revising and revisiting - much more than many people are willing or able to invest. Thank you for teaching me that, Len, and for everything else. We will miss you.

Fabian Ramseyer's Memories

At my first international meeting of the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR) in 2005, I first talked with Len about the interpersonal aspects of the research on nonverbal behavior I was conducting at the time. His genuine interest and sharp comments immediately caught my interest. When I then approached Len at a later (2009) SPR meeting, I was amazed by the amount of time and thought he gave to my interest in spending a year as a post-doc under his supervision. A year later, when the plans for this post-doc were already well advanced, SPR met in California, and after the conference, Len helped me plan my stay which took place later that year. With this warm support of his, I got the first very practical impression of his wonderful generosity and dedication to helping other people. During my stay, Len bequeathed me with numerous gifts, and one very precious of these was his presence in personal exchanges: Len offered me so much time and possibilities for scientific and further intellectual exchange, and I am still very much nurtured from the many discussions he shared with me. Thanks to Len's active scientific pursuit, these exchanges could be regularly taken up over the following years in meetings at conferences or in other forms of exchange.

Both Len and his wife Sue also made a lasting impression on my extended family, who were generously made to feel at home at their residence. Their natural talent to warmly connect to my family was simply great.

The way Len treated other persons, and his general approach to many different aspects of academic as well as personal life, made a lasting impression on me: Len had such a benevolent way of dealing with other people, but this kindness was not clouded by any vagueness. To the contrary, Len always had a very distinguished and clear opinion of his own, but he managed to stay true to his philosophies and at the same time create an atmosphere that opened up many interpersonal possibilities. I look back at the many things Len generously shared with me, and the subtle things I was able to witness in his presence, and I know that I will keep aspiring to this ability.

Lumina Albert's Memories

Len is undoubtedly the one single person that completely transformed the trajectory of my life. Living at Stanford was not easy – yes, it was a beautiful place but it could also be a destructive and aggressive environment. Reflecting back on those days, I know I survived the environment only because of the refreshing and warm presence of Len in my life as an advisor and mentor. He would meet with me every week for an hour on Tuesday afternoons. Most of those meeting times were spent discussing research topics on interpersonal relationships or involved his giving me kind and wise counsel on life choices and decision. When I was working on my first journal publication, I sought his help with edits. He kindly volunteered to help bring it to a publishable state. He read and re-read the paper for countless hours suggesting edits and explaining why those edits made sense. I was deeply touched by his actions: Here was this incredibly busy and amazingly accomplished Stanford professor, investing in me and empowering me to become a better writer and researcher. Not once did I see any signs of impatience or irritation although he was giving so much to me with no expectations at all. I felt so fortunate and deeply blessed!

After my doctoral research, I then asked him about doing post-doctoral work with him. He immediately said 'yes'. As I searched for funding far and wide, he was with me through the journey. He worked with me on writing my post-doctoral proposal- word by word, sentence after sentence, with the meticulous writing style is so characteristic of him, until the proposal was beautifully worded and strongly persuasive. This proposal won my post-doctoral research opportunity with him! Again, I was fortunate to continue to grow and gain my research expertise with this amazing man as my post-doctoral advisor.

I remember the time when I informed him that my husband and I were going to have our first baby. He had this almost transcendental gaze on his face, while he congratulated me and discussed how my life would now be joyfully changed because of this beautiful new blessing of a little child. He loved his wife and family so deeply, and his deep affection for his family made him shine as an amazing role model, even as I built my family and made life decisions as a wife and mother.

Finally, the time came for us to move away from Stanford. As I was moving to Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, I met with him and discussed my future plans and career path. I was anxious and unsure about what the path ahead held in store for me and my family. I informed him that my position was a teaching appointment and I did have a promise from the institution that this would change to a tenure -track position in two years. However, I wanted 'certainty' in life. He smiled so sweetly and gently remarked: "Lumina, a lot will change in two years; people move and situations change...don't be too anxious about the future". He encouraged me to take the position at CSU and gave me sound advice on next steps. Twelve years later, as Len had accurately stated, much has changed in my life, but Professor Len Horowitz remains the man who completely and positively transformed my life. If it not had been for him, I would not be here living my dream life at CSU! In many ways, I am who I am because of the person I became through Len's

mentorship and investment. Thank you, Len! You are deeply loved and will always be remembered!

2021 Conference announcement



Thane Erickson
Seattle Pacific University

As many of you know, the pandemic required us to “press pause” on our planned SITAR meeting scheduled last Spring for Seattle. We still hope to host a meeting in Seattle when possible, although we do not yet know when situational factors will make that possible.

We sent out a brief survey in January to gauge the thoughts of SITAR members and recent attendees about meeting, to help inform plans for the future. The initial responses ($N = 32$) suggest that concerns about travel during the pandemic are at the forefront of our minds.

Specifically, most respondents endorsed not being likely to attend an in-person meeting in May, 2021. Almost half projected being able to meet in person in October of 2021, whereas postponing in-person gathering *another* year to around May of 2022 led most respondents to endorse likelihood of attending. Open-ended responses almost uniformly named availability of vaccines as a key factor, although several also noted that the pandemic has restricted access to travel funds.

Response	In-person meeting May 2021 (%)	In-person meeting Oct 2021 (%)	In-person meeting May 2022 (%)	Virtual meeting May 2021 (%)
Definitely not.	58.1	25.8	0.0	0.0
Not sure, but likely not.	32.3	25.8	12.9	9.7
Not sure, but likely yes.	6.5	45.2	61.3	58.1
Definitely yes.	3.2	3.2	25.8	32.3

Interestingly, most (~90%) indicated interest in a *virtual* SITAR meeting for this spring. As a result, the Executive Council took up this option for discussion, culminating in a plan to host a *virtual SITAR meeting in June, 2021!* We will publish a date and put out a call for submissions shortly.

Lastly, we are also considering *other ways* to foster communion and collaboration between SITAR members, and inquired about respondents’ interest in periodic (e.g., quarterly) online SITAR “special interest group” meetings on methodology/statistics or interpersonal-clinical topics. Most (90%) respondents indicated potential or definite interest, so we will look forward to following up about such offerings.

In short, we miss gathering with the SITAR community and are looking forward to virtual opportunities for us to connect until we are literally able to “circle-up” together again in person!

2019 Leonard M. Horowitz Poster Award Winner: Sydney Waring

Investigating Relationship-Specific Variations in Perceived Unconditional Acceptance and Body Image

Sydney V. Waring, M.A.
Allison C. Kelly, Ph.D., C.Psych



INTRODUCTION

The way an individual views themselves (e.g., their self-worth) and themselves in relation to others (e.g., their attachment style) can differ across their relationships.^{1,2}

It is now well known that body image, or the attitudes one has towards their body, can also be impacted by interpersonal factors, such as family members and peers.³ However, the majority of body image research has studied the between-person relationships between interpersonal factors and body image.

Between-persons research demonstrates that greater perceived unconditional acceptance from close others predicts better trait body image,³ however, this assumes that an individual's feelings about their body and feelings of being unconditionally accepted are relatively stable across relationships.

The present study tested the hypotheses that:

H1a) A woman's perceptions of unconditional acceptance and **H1b)** her body image will vary across her relationships.

H2) A woman will report better body image when she is with people whom she perceives as more unconditionally accepting.

METHODS

Participants

- 42 female undergraduate students (Mean age = 20.36, SD = 2.06).

Procedure

- Egocentric network analysis design.⁴
- In lab, participants (i.e., egos) completed demographics and study measures for 10 different individuals (i.e., alters) who were randomly selected from their social network.



Study Measures:

- Unconditional Acceptance: 3 items adapted from Perceived Responsiveness Scale (e.g., "Alter X accepts me, shortcomings and all").⁵
- Body Appreciation: 3 items adapted from Body Appreciation Scale (e.g., "When I am with Alter X, I feel comfortable in my body").⁶
- Intuitive Eating: 3 items adapted from Intuitive Eating Scale (e.g., "When I am with Alter X, I allow myself to eat what food I desire at the moment").⁷
- Appearance Orientation: 3 items adapted from Multi-Dimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (e.g., "If I know I am going to be seeing Alter X, I usually spend a lot of time getting ready").⁸

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Analysis: Primary hypotheses were examined in R 3.5.1.⁹ Models were estimated with an unstructured covariance matrix using the lmer function from the lme4 package.¹⁰ Body image was modeled as a function of perceived unconditional acceptance from alters (level 1) and average unconditional acceptance across alters (level 2). For all analyses, 2-level multilevel models were used and a random slope for the level 1 predictor was included in addition to a random intercept. In all analyses, the level 1 predictor was group-mean centered and the level 2 predictor was grand-mean centered.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intra-class correlations for all study variables

	Mean (SD)	α (Between)	α (Within)	ICC (% between-persons variance)
Unconditional Acceptance	7.81/9 (0.84)	.996	.940	.156
Intuitive Eating	3.97/5 (0.65)	.775	.835	.393
Body Appreciation	4.09/5 (0.77)	.983	.866	.577
Appearance Orientation	2.32/5 (0.53)	.802	.775	.148

Note: Means were calculated using participants' personal means across all 10 alters.

Omega values were calculated using multilevel CFA in Mplus.¹¹

- The ICC's for the models demonstrated substantial variation in unconditional acceptance (84.4%) from alters (H1a) and body-related variables (42.3% – 85.2%; H1b) across a given ego's relationships (see Table 1).
- At the within-persons level, across all dependent variables, an ego reported better body appreciation and intuitive eating, and less appearance orientation, when she was with alters whom she perceived as more unconditionally accepting than was typical for her social network (H2; see Table 2).
- Between-persons, egos who on average felt more unconditionally accepted across all their alters also tended to have better average body appreciation.

Table 2. Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for within-person and between-person effects of unconditional acceptance on dependent variables

Dependent Variable	Within-person		Between-person	
	Estimate (SE)	t-value	Estimate (SE)	t-value
Intuitive Eating	0.16 (0.04)	4.74***	0.18 (0.12)	1.48
Body Appreciation	0.22 (0.04)	5.86***	0.45 (0.11)	4.05***
Appearance Orientation	-0.12 (0.05)	-2.29*	-0.13 (0.10)	-1.33

Note: Alter sex and ego BMI were included as covariates in all analyses but were removed if non-significant.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Traditionally, unconditional acceptance and body image have been measured at the dispositional level with little reference to specific social relationships (i.e., body image) and/or with the assumption of stability across relationships (i.e., unconditional acceptance). However, the current results indicate that both sets of variables demonstrate significant relationship-specific variation, suggesting that unconditional acceptance and body image may be more social, and/or more dynamic in nature than has previously been thought. As well, similar to findings in between-persons research on body image, the current study also found that a given woman feels better about her body image when she is with a someone who is more unconditionally accepting than is typical for her social network.

However, the current study was designed to capture variability within each participants' social network, which may have primed participants to notice such differences. Future research could attempt to replicate these results using more naturalistic methods, which may reduce demand characteristics. As well, the correlational nature of the current study precludes any causal conclusions about the relationship between unconditional acceptance from others and body image. In addition, as this study was the first study to demonstrate that body image may vary across relationships, these results should be replicated, ideally with study designs that also allow for inferences of causality. In addition, all of the measures of the current study are self-report measures from the perspective of the ego. In future research, including measures from the perspective of the alters, as well as behavioural measures, will be important to further bolster the current results.

Despite these limitations, if replicated, the current study may have important implications. If a woman's body image can vary across her relationships, and if this variation is related to specific aspects of her relationships with others, there may be an opportunity to improve the way a woman feels about her body by intervening at the level of her relationships. Relatedly, perhaps by enhancing a woman's awareness of how her body image is impacted by her social relationships, she may be able to act strategically when interacting with other people in her life in order to enhance her own body image.

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2019 Wiggins Award Winner: Elizabeth Edershile



Elizabeth Edershile
University of Pittsburgh

(This is an abridged version of a manuscript currently under in press at Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: <https://psyarxiv.com/8gkpm/>)

Recent empirical evidence does indirectly support theories regarding fluctuations between grandiosity and vulnerability in narcissism (e.g., Gore & Widiger 2016; Hyatt et al., 2017). Some researchers have investigated dynamic fluctuations within narcissism more directly, most often at the daily level. These studies have examined dynamic associations between narcissism, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and/or affect (Giacomin & Jordan, 2016; Akhtar & Thomson, 1982; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Bosson et al., 2008; Geukes et al., 2016). Broadly, these results suggest there are specific patterns of variability with regard to narcissism, though this has not been examined at the momentary level with grandiosity and vulnerability.

Current Study. The present study is a naturalistic exploratory study designed to examine patterns of fluctuation within and across grandiosity and vulnerability in daily life using ambulatory assessment (i.e., ecological momentary assessment) of state narcissism. In the present study, fluctuation in state narcissism is articulated in three different quantitative indices of variability: gross variability (i.e., individual standard deviation; *iSD*), instability (i.e., mean square of successive differences; *iMSSD*), and inertia (i.e., autoregressive effects). Additionally, we estimate the lagged effect of state grandiosity on vulnerability and vice versa. Dispositional measures of narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability are used as predictors of these different articulations of fluctuations in narcissistic states to determine whether those higher in dispositional narcissism vary more or less across time compared to those lower in dispositional narcissism.

Methods

Participants. The sample was comprised of community members ($N=261$). The majority were female (67.6%) and the age range was 20 to 39 ($M = 27.56$, $SD = 4.70$). The majority of participants identified as White (88.4%; 7.1% identified as Asian; 5.1% as Black).

Procedure. Participants completed a battery of self-report measures via the computer and then began the ambulatory assessment portion. Participants could complete up to 70 assessments ($M = 54.15$; $SD = 13.75$) with a maximum of seven per day over ten days between 9:00 and 21:00 each day. Surveys were designed to appear at random times throughout the day with the stipulation that they had to be 90 minutes apart. Compliance

rates were high for the ambulatory assessment portion (77%; 13,104 out of 16,940 total possible).

Measures. The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory—Short Form (FFNI-SF; Sherman et al., 2015) was used to examine dispositional narcissism at baseline. For the ambulatory assessment portion, participants completed the Narcissistic Grandiosity Scale (NGS; Rosenthal et al., 2007) and the Narcissistic Vulnerability Scale (Crowe et al., 2018). These are adjective-based scales designed to assess grandiosity and vulnerability at the state or trait level.

Results

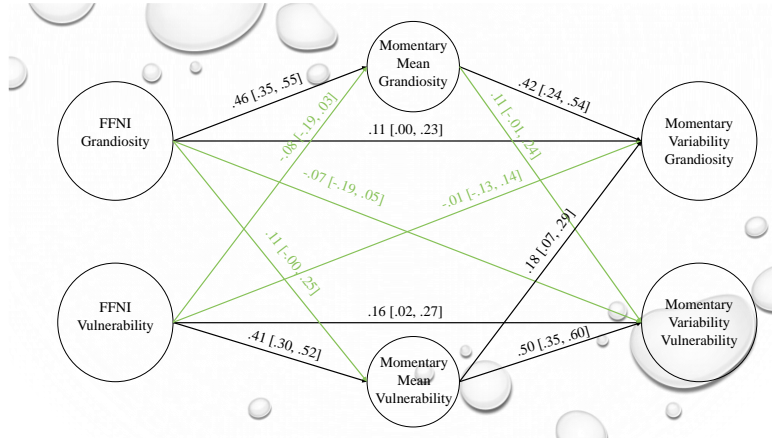
Gross Variability

Correlations

Between-person correlations among dispositional narcissism scales, momentary assessed means, and gross variability.							
		Grandiosity			Vulnerability		
		Momentary Mean	Variability	FFNI-G	Momentary Mean	Variability	FFNI-V
Grandiosity	Momentary Mean	-					
	Variability	.52 [.41, .60]	-				
	FFNI-G	.46 [.36, .56]	.34 [.21, .44]	-			
Vulnerability	Momentary Mean	.20 [.07, .33]	.30 [.16, .41]	.16 [.02, .30]	-		
	Variability	.18 [.09, .32]	.39 [.24, .48]	.09 [-.04, .21]	.59 [.46, .67]	-	
	FFNI-V	.09 [-.05, .22]	.09 [-.05, .22]	.12 [-.04, .24]	.43 [.31, .53]	.37 [.22, .47]	-

Dispositional scales were associated with variability in their matched domain (e.g., dispositional grandiosity and variability in grandiosity). Momentary grandiosity variables (i.e., momentary mean and variability) were associated with variability in vulnerability and the reverse pattern was true as well (momentary vulnerability variables with variability in vulnerability).

Controlling for the momentary mean



Patterns of associations maintained within domains, such that dispositional grandiosity was associated with variability in grandiosity and dispositional vulnerability was associated with variability in vulnerability. No significant cross-associations emerged.

Instability

Zero order and regression paths of instability at the between-person level.				
	Squared Difference			
	Grandiosity		Vulnerability	
	r	β	r	β
FFNI-G	.27 [.16, .39]	.26 [.12, .36]	.18 [.06, .32]	.14 [-.00, .26]
FFNI-V	.20 [.09, .30]	.16 [.03, .29]	.38 [.24, .48]	.37 [.23, .48]

Dispositional grandiosity was associated with larger successive difference scores in grandiosity states. The same was true with dispositional vulnerability and difference scores in vulnerability. Modest effects emerged for cross-domain variability.

Results of inertia and cross-lagged effects for the two-factor FFNI.				
	$\phi_{G \rightarrow G}$	$\phi_{V \rightarrow V}$	$\phi_{V \rightarrow G}$	$\phi_{G \rightarrow V}$
FFNI Grandiosity	.02 [-.08, .14]	-.08 [-.18, .02]	-.05 [-.20, .08]	.04 [-.13, .19]
FFNI Vulnerability	-.08 [-.19, .03]	.20 [.08, .30]	-.06 [-.26, .08]	.02 [-.11, .19]

Inertia and cross-lagged paths

Few significant associations emerged with cross-lagged and inertia effects. In particular, only vulnerability was associated with “getting stuck” in states of vulnerability.

Conclusion

Though clinical theory suggests that narcissistic individuals may fluctuate *between* states of grandiosity and vulnerability, empirical evidence does not yet support this fully. Individuals do fluctuate within states for which they exhibit higher levels (e.g., dispositional grandiosity and variability in grandiosity). This may be indicative of regulatory patterns in which the grandiose or vulnerable individual is engaging in attempts to regulate the self. Future research may want to examine fluctuation patterns under different timeframes. Further, it will be important to understand situational contexts surrounding fluctuations in grandiosity and vulnerability.

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The Clinical Angle: Agency and Communion in the Time of Pandemic.

Tilda Cvrkel & Thane Erickson



Tilda Cvrkel
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For most clients – and clinicians – 2020 was an agonizing year. The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and state-sanctioned, systemic racism provided the backdrop to our clinical work. As we begin 2021, we find ourselves still in the thick of both. This period has brought increased anxiety, depression, and isolation (Salari et al., 2020), and further deepened social inequalities (Clouston et al., 2021). As clinicians with an interpersonal bent, we suggest that the metaconcepts of *agency* and *communion* help us understand, and perhaps address, some of the challenges of the moment. First described by Bakan (1966), agency encompasses differentiation, autonomy, and power, whereas communion reflects connection, intimacy, and group cohesion (Dawood et al., 2018; Horowitz et al., 2006; Wiggins, 1991). Our attempts to provide free integrative cognitive behavioral group therapy *online* during this past summer revealed the unique current

clinical and ethical challenges to fundamental needs for agency and communion as well as ways we might help foster them in those we serve.

The pandemic has clearly created *challenges to communion*. The most striking impact to communion in the therapy room is that most of us no longer *use* a therapy room. Many of us have pivoted to teletherapy, meeting our clients in boxes on screens instead of couches in offices (Pierce et al., 2021). Telehealth creates opportunity for us to support clients in a deeply destabilizing time, providing a steady presence when most of life is not. But the format produces unique interpersonal difficulties, restricting many of the tools we use to establish alliance and connection. For instance, we now typically see clients only from the shoulders up, prohibiting reading of body movements and the mutual interpersonal regulation that more easily occurs in person. And goodness knows there are technical difficulties, such as a Zoom connection glitching during a particularly intimate disclosure. We sometimes found it hard to discern the *interpersonal styles* and *impacts* of group members who walked around their apartments while on camera or turned off their camera (e.g., such behaviors can indicate dominant or cold social acts or merely difficulties with the online format). Genuine communion involves a dyad or group in sync with one another, a union of shared goals and experience. This is not always possible with the partially disembodied nature of telehealth. In the best of cases, it can be hard for clients to shift into “therapy” mode in their home space given the demands of kids, pets, and partners. Like many clinicians, we have conducted teletherapy sessions with clients in cars, sidewalks, or a children’s playhouse, the only quiet spaces they could find.

Teletherapy also raises ethical *challenges to agency* in this sphere. The therapeutic relationship is built on a consensual expectation of confidentiality out of respect for the agency and autonomy of our clients. Teletherapy complicates that. Though we use HIPAA-compliant teletherapy portals, anything transmitted online is less secure than our closed-door offices. More immediately, many of the interpersonal struggles our clients face concern the people with whom they share living space. This has become more pressing with stay-at-home orders and social distancing. We have clients who live with abusive partners, for example, and LGBTQ clients forced back into non-affirming parental homes. Therapy should provide a lifeline for people in heightened interpersonal stress, but the realities of sharing limited space means fewer safe or private spaces for clients to speak honestly about their concerns. This puts our clients at risk should an unintended audience overhear our sessions. In a group context, there are additional challenges (Weinberg, 2020). When group members participate in their homes and private spaces, clients can't know who is within earshot of other group-member's computers, further increasing the risk of unintentional and nonconsensual disclosure.

Despite such clinical challenges, centering on the tension between agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; Horowitz, 2006) helps us appreciate and navigate the background conditions of our clinical work. As the world experiences the COVID-19 pandemic, so too must we face the realities of racism and social injustice. As with the coronavirus, the harms of injustice are not equally distributed. While there is beauty in common experience and realizing that we're not alone in our struggles, uninvited or inappropriate attempts at agency or communion can generate frustration, anger, or disgust (Hopwood et al., 2011). Attempts to create unwelcome communion or deny people rightful agency can also be a source of ethical harm. This is no different in the therapy room, and we are obligated to think about how to navigate power and agency imbalances in our spaces.

We live in Seattle, and our city held massive protests against racist police brutality—which we viewed as *agentic* strivings in a *communal* form—nearly every day of the summer. We ran several transdiagnostic anxiety disorder therapy groups during these months, each group diverse in age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and political leanings. Group members felt differently about the protests, and we were challenged to build group cohesion or “*we-ness*” (i.e., communion) amidst this social backdrop. Although imperfectly, we strove to maintain a creative tension between agency and communion.

With regard to *agency*, we noticed twin temptations to discuss political differences as well as to ignore divisive topics to prevent a rupture in the group. Neither of those felt like the right choice. For some members of our group, this was a merely intellectual discussion. To them, Black Lives Matter (BLM) is one possible position among many—something to debate like tax rates. For other members, BLM is a call for the most basic of human rights. There are very different stakes in this game. Genuine communion requires taking on the stakes of others, and that is not always possible in time-limited engagements. Permitting intellectual debate over BLM would involve asking for very different levels of cost and vulnerability from different members, without the consent of the people asked to bear the highest cost. As clinicians, we have ethical obligations not to allow our therapy to reproduce and perpetuate social harms. Honoring group members meant pulling back on

communion and pushing forward on agency at times. And so we did, spending time talking about the city's events with clients individually before coming together as a group. When clients needed to process experiences that put them in marginalized or non-consensually vulnerable positions within the group, we used breakout rooms to facilitate such processing prior to returning to group tasks. Drawing upon the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (Benjamin, 2011), this strategy could be framed as clinicians *granting* and clients *taking autonomy* in place of group *dominance* versus *submission* exchanges. Other strategies to empower included modeling and normalizing explicit disclosure of identities and pronouns for those who chose to share. Also, we used *in vivo* and imaginal exposures targeted to increase agency and self-efficacy. Members high in social anxiety helped run the group and decide on break length. And as each individual practiced during sessions in order to gain mastery over their deepest fears, they were cheered on by the group, a uniquely communal process to support individual agency.

To foster *communion* in our online groups we adopted strategies such as eliciting disclosures about shared fears. As clinicians, we somewhat exaggerated our nonverbal expressions and gestures to invite active engagement, and monitored the chat function to incorporate chat comments into the larger dialogue. The format of seeing into each others' living spaces further fostered connection, as we introduced our canine and feline family members to each other. We laughed together at unexpected "Zoom-bombing" by clients' children. Moreover, as an exposure-based therapy, we incorporated as many shared exposures as we possibly could. *In vivo* exposures that would normally only be witnessed by the clinician, or done as homework between sessions, now happened in group. When one group member worked on a difficult exposure around wearing unpreferred clothing, other group members spontaneously changed into matching outfits as support. When one member practiced receiving compliments from the group, the group insisted this become a regular event every session, picking a different "love bomb" target each week.

Being mindful of the dance between agency and communion serves us well, even online during difficult times. More importantly, it allows us to better serve our clients.

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Expanding the Circle: One virus, two worlds



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Michigan State University

2020 was a hellish year. From the coronavirus pandemic, to confronting the insidious presence of white supremacy in the US, to a turbulent, polarizing, and violent election cycle; it is difficult to remember another year in my lifetime that was marked by such raw, confusing, and painful experiences. As we start on the first leg of 2021, we continue to be flogged with reminders of how far we are from resolving the divisions and systemic inequities in our country that 2020 unveiled. As much as we wished to wake up in January to find out 2020 was just a transient nightmare, we are rather finding it to be an unescapable reality. While many hope that recent shifts in political power will help to facilitate the systemic changes that are needed to recover as a society, there is also fear that our ideological divisions as a country are insurmountable.

While it is difficult to represent the array of different perspectives that currently exist in the US, one theme that has run throughout these tensions is the differing interpretation of freedom with regard to self versus other. Whether it be coronavirus, white supremacy, the presidential election, or some mixture, individuals generally fall on one of two sides—believing that the government should prioritize their *own* rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness versus *others'* (all peoples') rights to these virtues.

With regard to the coronavirus pandemic, the focus of this article, this division is maybe best epitomized by compliance with mask wearing and social distancing recommendations. Those who have a more self-focused understanding of freedom experience mask wearing and social distancing recommendations as infringing on their civil rights (e.g., it should be my right to risk my health), where those who are more other focused see the refusal to wear masks and social distance as infringing on others' civil rights (e.g., its people's right to not have others threaten their health). Certainly, this is a simplification, and there are many aspects of lived experience that contribute to any one person's opinion. However, as I believe any relationally oriented psychologist would agree, it does seem that the only way to repair the ruptures we currently face as a society is to navigate differing needs for agency and communion.

With this in mind, our lab at Michigan State University (MSU) became interested in exploring whether individual's self-other orientations were associated with their behavioral responses to coronavirus. In particular, we wanted to examine the degree to which

interpersonal styles and tendencies to mentalize self and other were associated with individual's compliance with CDC and state-level recommendations for preventing the spread of coronavirus.

Our sample included 517 undergraduate students recruited from introductory courses in psychology at MSU as part of a larger study. The average age of participants was 19.45 years old ($SD = 1.22$) and ranged from 18 to 23. The sample predominately identified as cis-gender female (68%) and heterosexual (88%). The sample was 66% White, 11% Black, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Bi-racial, 4% Non-white Hispanic, and 3% from other racial categories. All data for this study was collected between March 30th and April 26th, 2020.

All participants completed the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Short Circumplex (IIP-SC), and several measures of mentalization. For the sake of brevity, I will only discuss the results from the Mentalization Scale (MentS), which conceptualizes mentalization in terms of three factors, 1) Self mentalization—one's ability to reflect on the connection between one's internal experiences and their behavior, 2) Other mentalization—one's ability to reflect on the connection between others' internal experiences and their behavior, and 3) Motivation—one's values and motivation for attending to the internal experiences of self and other. Additionally, participants completed two items from a larger questionnaire that was developed to examine participant's concern about coronavirus and the degree that they were engaging behaviors recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (e.g., "shelter-at-home"; social-distancing; hand washing) to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. The first item asked participants to indicate any CDC recommended behavior that they were engaging in. The list of behaviors included, 1) using social distancing (e.g., staying 6-feet apart), 2) not gathering in groups larger than 10 individuals, 3) not leaving the house except for essential work, activities, 4) hand-washing frequently, and 5) only using online/ phone/text communication with anyone living outside their household. The second item asked participants to rate the overall degree (i.e., how much) their behavior changed due to concern about coronavirus.

Results indicated that elevation and style of interpersonal problems were associated with individuals' tendency to engage in CDC recommended behavior. In particular, elevation on the IIP-SC was associated with less likelihood to follow recommendations to gather in groups of 10 individuals or less, and practice handwashing several times per day. Individuals with more dominant interpersonal styles also tended to report ignoring CDC recommendations, including staying home except for essential activities, handwashing multiple times per day, and using online/phone/text communication with those outside their household. However, individuals with interpersonally warm styles tended to report following CDC regulations around social distancing, limiting gathering to 10 people or less, staying home except for essential activities, and using online/phone/text communication with those living outside their household. Interpersonal warmth was also the only IIP-SC parameter that was associated with ratings of overall behavior change. Those with warmer styles indicated a greater degree of behavior change in response to coronavirus.

A somewhat similar pattern of results was found when examining the association between mentalization and behavioral responses to coronavirus. Self-mentalization was not associated with following any of the CDC recommendations. However, both other-mentalization and motivation to mentalize were associated with following all of the CDC recommendations. Additionally, both other-mentalization and motivation to mentalize were associated with a greater change in behavior overall in response to coronavirus, whereas self-mentalization was not associated with degree of behavior change.

These initial results are consistent the notion that individual's self-other orientations affect whether they engage in behavior to prevent the spread of coronavirus. However, it is important to acknowledge that the generalizability of these results is limited due to the homogeneity of the sample that we examined. Additionally, I regret that we did not assess mask-wearing behavior in our measure given how much it has become a symbol of the divisions in surrounding coronavirus. Admittedly, when we developed the measure back in March 2020 we had no idea what the pandemic would bring. We were mostly aware that college students were continuing to visibly gather in bars and at house parties, despite the university suspending all in-person activities.

Even with these limitations, it is interesting to consider how these findings help us to understand, and potentially intervene on, the divisions that exist in the US around coronavirus. For those who are interested in motivating "anti-maskers" to change their ways, an initial read of these results may suggest that getting "anti-maskers" to mentalize others may be an avenue for change. However, this appears to be the direction that mask wearing advocates have taken already and there are many still ignoring mask wearing recommendations. Take for example the American Hospital Association (AHA) encourages individuals to post messages to their social media such as "#WearAMask for your friends, family, neighbors and teachers...", or the CDC who encourages sharing messages such as "Wondering how you can help you friends stay safe this summer? #WearAMask...". However, complementarity may help explain why this strategy has not been fully effective for changing mask-wearing behavior. If interpersonal dominance is associated with ignoring coronavirus prevention behaviors, restrictions encouraging mask-wearing will be experienced as anti-complementary by such individuals. Further the emotional disruption that comes from anti-complementary exchanges may foster defensiveness and impair mentalization. This in turn may make it even more difficult motivate "anti-maskers" to wear masks.

Given the potential agency needs of "anti-maskers", I wonder whether it would be more fruitful to 1) develop advocacy for mask-wearing that aligns with a dominant- or self-orientation, and/or 2) find ways for such individuals to have their agency needs met outside of mask-wearing. While it is likely that there is no single solution, these may be starting points for addressing the differing needs for agency and communion that likely underlie the divisions in coronavirus prevention behaviors in the United States.

Announcement from the Graduate Student Advisory Committee



Gentiana Sadikaj

McGill University



Thane Erickson

Seattle Pacific University

New year's greetings to you!

We particularly want to give a shout-out to graduate students right now. You have been “interpersonally flexible” and resilient despite a host of challenges and stressors in 2020 and (already) 2021.

At this time of year, the Graduate Student Advisory Committee (GSAC) of SITAR normally solicits donations for the student travel grants program prior to our annual in-person meeting. However, we now know that we will not be able to meet in person this spring, and instead plan to host a virtual meeting in 2021.

Nonetheless, we can not only look forward to the time when we can meet together in person, but also start preparing now for that day. We want to be ready to support graduate students to attend, disseminate their findings, and forge productive relationships.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the graduate student fund so that we can continue our legacy of bringing graduate students into the SITAR community!

Click on the “donate” button at the bottom of the SITAR Awards page:

<https://sitar society.org/awards/>

Thank you once again for your generosity!

The Graduate Student Corner: Some (Inter)personal Reflections



Evan Good
Michigan State University

My Board gaming Hobby

As I approach my final year of graduate school, it is remarkable to think back on the past five years and reflect on my personal and professional growth. Graduate school has been hard; by far the most difficult experience I've consensually agreed to. One of the most difficult lessons I had to learn was how to have a social life amidst the demands of school. During the first several years of graduate school I found myself having little time or energy for socializing. When I did socialize, it was often with other graduate students and the time was largely spent commiserating—an experience that did very little for me in terms of self-care. However, things started to change for me when I revived my old hobby in board games.

I started collecting board games in middle school, when my father began purchasing me “euro-games” like The Settlers of Catan,

Carcassonne, and Puerto Rico. While these games, particularly Settlers of Catan, have become relatively mainstream in the United States these days, 15 years ago they were novel to my family and friends. Unlike games like Monopoly, Risk, or the Game of Life, these games were refreshingly deeply strategic, often presenting multiple avenues for victory. They included mechanics that were more complicated than the child-focused American games. They were made by adults, for adults. The ceiling for mastery was massive, and with each play came novel experiences and interactions with other players.

While my board gaming interests diminished some in my late-teens-early-twenties, I experienced a revival in my third year of graduate school I was invited to begin a Dungeons and Dragons (DnD) campaign with some students. Playing DnD was unlike any other grad student hangout I had been apart of at Michigan State University. Rather than complaining about workload or the most recent student grievance, we were more focused on saving a town from a goblin mob. When we finished playing we had done something, if only in our imaginations, and from that point forward we had something to discuss in the psych building other than school. Slowly, overtime, I began to invite my DnD friend to play board games, and DnD nights started turning into game nights. As more students became interested in joining, I found myself playing games with more and more people, including many non-graduate students that I would likely have never met without board games.

While the coronavirus certainly introduced barriers for playing board games with others, I was lucky to live with several other students during the past year. In our household, board games became a weekly, and sometimes nightly, occurrence; a favorite distraction from morbid and uncertain reality that we were living in. With this in mind, the purpose of this article is to share some thoughts on the benefits of starting aboard game hobby in graduate school—both in terms of a source of self-care in graduate school, and source of self-care throughout the pandemic. I also end the article with some recommendations for board games to try—many of our favorites to play on game night. Given that this is meant for individuals who may not be familiar with board games, my recommendations are based on games that are relatively accessible and affordable. However, I decided to not include games like Settlers of Catan, Ticket to Ride, or Codenames, as these have become more popular in recent years and many students may already be familiar with them.

5 Benefits of board games:

1. Escape stress without turning off your brain:

As much as I love watching Netflix or (insert your favorite streaming service), sometimes I need more from my self-care than to turn my brain off. There is no doubt that I need an escape from my stress and responsibilities, however, sedating myself with TV shows often does not help me to replenish my emotional and cognitive wells. I fare much better when I have something else for my mind to engage with other than school. Consider an athlete. When an athlete is not performing, they do not go and lay in bed until they have to perform again. They are actively engaged in recovery, which often means engaging the muscles that have worked the hardest via stretching, heat-ice, electrical stimulation, diet, etc.

Like with an athlete's recovery, I find that board games allow me to engage my mental muscles that are most tired, but in a way that replenishes them. One of my favorite parts of board games is the strategy, that they often require the player to comprehend and think across several inter-working systems. While the systems may be more related to agrarian economies than contemporary psychological science, playing board games is nonetheless a good stretching exercise for all the difficult cognitive work we do. Additionally, board games give us rewards for practicing our analytical thinking that we often do not get in our daily life as students. Given that the graduate student experience is often marked by an endless workload, a lacking sense of control/autonomy, and self-consciousness about one's competency, board games provides a forum to have goals that are obtainable and experience control in how to meet those goals.

2. Great source of communion:

It is rather obvious that board games invite social experiences. That is certainly one of the reasons I started playing so much in graduate school. Depending on the game, social interactions may even be a major component of the game, the reason the game is fun. I list some game recommendations below that are specifically rewarding in terms of the social interactions they produce.

However, one of the more understated social aspects of playing board games is what happens before and after the game is played. No matter the game that we play at our game nights, sharing food is always a component. Some evenings that is what I look forward to the most. No matter how much planning we do, its inevitable that our group will spend the first hour enjoying some food, drinks, and casual conversation. The same is true for once the game finishes. It is hard to get friends out of the door after a game, and the more likely scenario is that we continue discussing events from the game for some time and begin planning our next game night. In many ways, it is in these moments that I feel closest to my gaming group. Unlike other graduate students, I don not feel like we are spending time together out of convenience or boredom, but rather that we share a common interest—and life—outside of graduate school.

Finally, board games also help to facilitate communion via the rich community of board gamers that exists online and across the country. One of my favorite things to do on a Saturday morning is go to our local board game and comic book shop. As much as I enjoy browsing, I almost always strike up a random conversation with store owners or customers about games. On one occasion I even shared numbers with another couple who were interested in starting a board game group sometime in the future. I also have enjoyed going to board games cafes in different cities around the US. Prior to entering these spaces, I was not aware how diverse the board gaming community is. However, one of my favorite experiences I had in the past several years was going to a board game café in San Francisco with my partner, and playing board games will drinking a beer or two with random strangers.

3. Affordable

When you consider the price of ordering food from Grubhub, board games are rather affordable. Most games cost anywhere from \$20-\$50. However, unlike your Grubhub order, most board games will give you hours and hours of entertainment, and you'll be excited about sharing it with others. For those who are very budget conscious, it is also fairly easy to find used games, either online or via in-person sellers. Board game exchanges is also something that is quite popular online.

4. Pandemic proof (somewhat)

While the pandemic has certainly impacted my social life immensely, I am fortunate to have a small pod of graduate students who feel comfortable meeting once per week or so to play games. We are careful to only interact in-person with our pod, and have been able to meet to play board games safely over the past year. If you are someone who has the opportunity to do this, it is probably the most ideal way to play board games. However, if this is not something that is possible for you, there are a few options for playing games with others remotely.

One potential option is to play games in a virtual space, such as that offered by Tabletop Simulator. Tabletop simulator is a relatively affordable software, that allows to play board games or do other table top activities with your friends virtually. Tabletop simulator can be

purchased from Steam. Although the controls can be a little difficult to learn, I've played several games with friends this way. In such cases, we would also Zoom or video-chat while playing to get some of the player interaction that we all love. One other benefit of Tabletop Simulator has a massive user-created library of games, which means that you can download different board games (for free) that you want to play with your friends, even if you or your friends do own the game physically.

A final option might be to play games via iOS or Android apps. While this is maybe my least desired option given that it pretty much eliminates player conversation (except maybe if there is a chat room), it is probably the easiest way to play games with friends remotely. However, this method does require that all players have purchased the same game app for their phone or device, and there are only a limited number of games that have been ported to smartphones. However, if you do not have friends that want to play board games with you, you can often play games with random people online. Playing a game on a smartphone app is also a good, affordable way to try out a new game you are interested in, but maybe don't want to spend \$50 on without ever playing.

5. Something for everyone

There are estimated to be close to 90,000 different board games. While the number of different games you can purchase is much less, there is no shortage of different themes, mechanics, and play experiences that you can get from games. I think that many people outside the hobby, think of board games as rolling dice and along a track depending on your die roll (the basic premise of most of the games we grew up playing). However, actually a very few proportion of games, particularly those with any acclaim, use this mechanic.

There are many people who have told me that they don't like board games. While it possible, I often assume they just haven't played the right one. My partner was an example of this. When we started dating, she was not very interested in playing games. However, after coercing her into a few game nights, she flipped. In fact, she, like many other people who once said they didn't like games, remarked "that they didn't realize what board games really were". Interestingly, since she started to play board games she has also found out that many of her friends from high school and college have board gaming hobbies, a topic that she had never discussed with them before.

Recommendations:

Light social games: These are some of the games we play the most. They are easy to learn, quick to play, and often can be played with larger groups. These games are great for waiting around for the last member of your group to show up or unwind after tense strategy game. They also are great to break-out when you have a group that does not have the attention span to learn complex rules.

The Crew: Quest for Planet Nine is a cooperative game where players coordinate laying cards from their hands in a specific order, without speaking to one another. Each

round different rules are generated which greatly affect what cards are laid and in what order. While that description may sound vague, it is partly because the rules of the game are rather simple and uninteresting. What makes the game fun is trying to read each other's mind, and the fulfillment that comes from a round when everyone is on the same page.

Wavelength is another game that will have you reading minds. Wavelength is a team game with basically no maximum number of players. In each round of the game, a card with a continuum is drawn (e.g., attractive to unattractive) and a chosen player gives a clue (e.g., tattoos). Each team must then guess where the clue-giver would place the clue along the dimension. In the example, one team may think that the clue-giver finds tattoos more attractive than the other team, thus leading them to guess a position on the continuum closer to attractive. The team that guesses closest to the clue-giver's true feelings gets a point and a new round begins. The best part of Wavelength is generally the conversations that follow each round. In most cases players forget about keeping score, and the game is really just a catalyst for interesting debates.

Cockroach Poker is for people who enjoy bluffing, and all of the social dynamics that comes with it. Unlike most games, cockroach poker does not have winners, just a loser. In cockroach poker, players hand each other face down cards and try to convince each other that the cards are specific suits. Like the other games in this section, the fun part of the game is the player interaction that comes from this deception game. Cockroach poker is one of my favorites because I can take it to any group, whether it's my parents or other graduate students, teach it in a few minutes, and know that they will be some funny moments that come from the gameplay. Have no winners is also somewhat unique and makes the game more about not being the worst, than being the best. The game is lighthearted enough that everyone feels like a winner in the end though!

Cooperative Games: One common deterrent that some people have to playing board games is the competitiveness. It can be overwhelming enough to learn a new game, let alone have to compete with a player who experiences playing. Since losing generally feels bad, there is little momentum to learn a new game if you are likely to lose. Cooperative games are a great solution because they often have many of the elements of competitive strategy games, only instead of playing against each other, all players compete against the game. In many ways this leads to a very different type of gaming experience, that cultivates a lot of player dialogue and teamwork. Particularly after a heated competitive game, our gaming group will sometimes play a cooperative game just to facilitate some communion and lighten the mood.

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective is a game where you work as a group to assist Sherlock Holmes in solving murders around Victorian London. When starting a mystery, the group is given a description of a murder, a map of London, and a newspaper (provided by the game). As a group, the team decides locations on the map to look for clues, either based on the description of the murder, interesting leads from the newspaper, or leads they have found from looking into other clues. Once the group travels to a place on the map, a corresponding passage is read which tells the group what they found there and may inspire other leads. The game ends when the players feel confident that they have

solved the murder. The group then tries to answer questions about the murder, and the amount of questions they answer correctly dictates the groups final score. My favorite part about this game is how open-world and thematically rich it is. It also makes for some great player interaction. It took us three separate evenings to solve the first murder in the game, and in between each gaming session, our group would converse about clues, and which ones we wanted to check in on again. I even found myself dreaming about the game.

Pandemic and Pandemic Legacy are a family of games in which the players work together as members of the CDC to cure a worldwide pandemic. With this theme alone, this was a game we played a lot of the past year. The original Pandemic is fairly mainstream, similar to Settlers or Catan or Ticket to Ride. Pandemic Legacy is an alteration of this basic game. Legacy games are a type of game that builds on itself from game to game, usually following a narrative. So in Pandemic Legacy, rather than resetting the game each time you play, you start from where the last game ended. This means, for example, if Atlanta was rioting at the end of game one, game two starts with Atlanta rioting. One of the most fun parts of this game is seeing how the story changes and the game mechanics shift based on what has happened in game. I will not give away spoilers for the plot, but it basically means that the choices you make at one point in time may cause a different sequence of events to occur down the road, and the sequence of events that your group experiences may be nothing like what another group experiences.

Dungeons and Dragons is the daddy of all games. It does not require a board, so its not technically a board game, but it certainly captures the best elements of cooperative games. It has a fairly large learning curve, but that is more about the number of options one has in choosing their role and play strategy, rather than it being hard. I think most people do not think DnD is for them, either because it sounds dorky or feels intimidating. My experience has been that most people love it once they give it a chance, and that there are a TON of resources that make getting started easier than you would think. Probably one of the biggest barriers with DnD is that it's a time commitment, and it can be hard to find people dedicated to playing weekly or bi-weekly. If you think you would like to try DnD, I 100% encourage you to look into it. However, if you do not think it is for you or would struggle to form a reliable DnD group, playing cooperative board games may be easier to get started with.

Strategy games: As much as I love social and cooperative games, competitive strategy games are my favorite. I really enjoy the number crunching and systems learning that comes with them. That is not something that everyone loves though, and admittedly, some of my favorite games are ones that take hours to learn and whole afternoons or evenings to play. As this is not something I would encourage a burgeoning board gamer to do, in this section I list some games that have many of the mechanisms included in heavy strategy games, but are much easier to learn and quicker to play. I think these are great gateway games to heavier games, though they are certainly more complicated than some of the games above.

Isle of Cats is a game about saving magical cats from a doomsday scenario. The game would remind you somewhat of Tetris, as the main mechanic is drafting oddly

shaped cat cutouts and fitting them as neatly as possible on your player board. The player who covers the most space on their boat and has similar colored cats touching generally scores the most points. I really enjoy this game because it requires complex visio-spatial reasoning, whereas many games rely on more verbal reasoning. The other appealing aspect of this game is the artwork, and quality of the game components. Along with being fun, it is just enjoyable to look at.

The Quacks of Quedlinburg is my partner's favorite game. It is one that we play often when our group is looking for some strategy, but not all the number crunching that comes with other strategy games. At its heart, Quacks is a press your luck game. Each player draws random ingredients from a pouch to try and the highest selling potion, however, each time the player pulls an ingredient out they increase their chance of the potion exploding (and being worthless). After each player makes potion, they can use the money they earned from selling the potion to add more ingredient to their bag, increasing the value of future potions. The game is played over several rounds with the person who earned the most from potion of the game winning. I think the best part about Quacks is that it is fun to lose—something that one can't say about most games. Because the press your luck aspect of the game is so exhilarating players end up having more fun drawing from their ingredient bag, than focusing on who is winning.

Wingspan is one of my favorite games that came out in the past year or so. It is critically acclaimed and won Game of the Year in 2019. In Wingspan, each player is a bird enthusiast who is seeking to attract the best birds in their wildlife preserve. As the player brings birds into their habitat, the habitat grows and allows the player to bring in more birds, more efficiently. The winner is the player with the highest scoring habitat, based on the number of eggs that were laid in the habitat, the number of birds, the types of birds, and so much more. Wingspan is one of my favorites of several reasons. First, there are so many different ways to win, that no two games are ever the same. In fact, the game rewards you for playing dynamically, and it is unlikely that using a strategy from a previous game will pay off the same in future games. Secondly, like Isle of Cats, this game is just so beautiful and well made. It is such a joy to bring this game to the table and share with others. Finally, Wingspan encapsulates many of the aspects of the board gaming community that I have come to value. One of those aspects is the inclusivity of the community. Wingspan is quite unique in that it was designed and illustrated by women. Particularly in a field that has been dominated by men, it is inspiring to see diverse representation in board game design and consumption.