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Context: From the Body to the Social
World*

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KEYNOTE LECTURE

Social Motivation in the Egosystem and the Ecosystem.

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People are social animals who need other people to survive and thrive ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)). Social relationships afford opportunities for to obtain satisfaction of our own needs and desires, and they afford opportunities to contribute to the satisfaction of others' needs and desires. We propose that these two functions of interpersonal relationships are energized by different motivational systems--egcosystem and ecosystem. At the core of each system is a set of interpersonal goals. Egosystem motivation characterized by self-image goals energizes efforts to promote one's own well-being by projecting an image of oneself as deserving of inclusion, status, care, and support. Ecosystem motivation characterized by compassionate goals energizes efforts to promote the well-being of other people and things one cares about by understanding their needs and responding appropriately.

Although both motivational systems are important in human social relations, they foster distinct goals, mindsets, and affect, and have different short- and long-term consequences for individuals and groups, interaction partners, and the broader social context.

Although people are more likely to have egcosystem motivation in some contexts (e.g., highly competitive workplaces) and more likely to have ecosystem motivation

in others (e.g., interactions with loved ones), we propose that people can approach any context or relationship motivated either to seek inclusion and status or to build supportive relationships and support the well-being of people and things they care about, or both. Furthermore, nearly any behavior can be energized by either egosystem or ecosystem motivation, or both. For example, people can give support energized by either system, and they can withhold support energized by either system. Which system energizes a particular behavior can have important personal and interpersonal consequences, independent of the behavior itself.

In contrast to many social motivation frameworks (e.g., communal vs. exchange motivation in relationships, self-protection vs. connection motives), which posit two orientations that are opposite ends of a single continuum, egosystem and ecosystem are distinct motivational paradigms, not opposite ends of the same continuum. This means that one, both, or neither system can be activated at a particular time. Accordingly, each system has distinct activators, and the two systems can interact if both are activated simultaneously. These two motivational systems have different costs and benefits in the short-term and over time; whereas egosystem motivation tends to have more short-term benefits and longer-term costs, ecosystem motivation can have short-term costs but longer-term benefits. Thus, they have different implications for human thriving.

Useful Readings

Crocker, J., & Canevello, A. (2018). Egosystem and ecosystem: Motivational systems for the self. A. Elliot (ed), [*Advances in Motivation Science. Volume Five*](#) New York: Elsevier; pp. 41-86

Crocker, J., Canevello, A., & Brown, A. (2017). [Social motivation: Costs and benefits of selfishness and otherishness](#). *Annual Review of Psychology*, **68**, 299-325.

Crocker, J., & Canevello, A. (2008). [Creating and undermining social support in communal relationships: The role of compassionate and self-image goals](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **95**: 555-575.



Prof Jennifer Crocker is Professor of Psychology and Ohio Eminent Scholar in Social Psychology at the Ohio State University. She received her PhD from Harvard University and her BA from Michigan State University. She studies how selfish and “otherish” social motivations shape psychological experience and behavior, including social support and responsiveness and their consequences for positive and negative

mood, self-esteem, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and relationship quality. Dr. Crocker has served as Chair of the Executive Committee of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology (SESP), as President of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), as President of the International Society for Self and Identity (ISSI), as Secretary-Treasurer and President of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), and is currently President of the Foundation for Personality and Social Psychology in 2018 and Chief Editorial Advisor for APA Journals. She received the Gordon Allport Award from SPSSI, the Distinguished Lifetime Career Award from ISSI, the Scientific Impact Award from SESP, and the Donald T. Campbell Award for distinguished scholarly achievement and ongoing sustained excellence in research in social psychology from SPSP, and a Distinguished Service Award from SPSSI. In 2017-2018 she was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.