

Reviews

Conference Review “Motivation in Social Contexts: Theory and Practice”

Krakow, 30 June-2 July 2013

It was my distinct privilege this past summer to attend and participate in the conference, *Motivation in Social Contexts: Theory and Practice*. The conference was held in Krakow and co-sponsored by Gdansk University, the Jagiellonian University and the Society for the Study of Motivation (SSM). As SSM President for 2012-13, I coordinated with the central organizers, Malgorzata Kossowska and Hanna Brycz, in achieving certain purposes. However, my contributions were peripheral. Professors Brycz and Kossowska were the true creative and implemental forces behind the event. Their efforts brought plans to fruition and ensured near-perfect execution of logistics. The full scientific committee included the three of us plus Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Jan Blecharz, Katarzyna Jaśko, Aleksandra Tokarz, and Anna Maria Zawadzka. An organizational committee included a larger group with special credit going to Karolina Dukata, Paweł Jurek, and Joanna Garlicka.

The conference was a success by any standard. It was held in the lovely Auditorium Maximum near the city square and included numerous amenities that extended extra measures of comfort to those in attendance. I was especially grateful for the courteous assistance provided by student volunteers who seemed to appear magically whenever I had a concern or question. As suggested by the title, the conference's focus was on social motivational processes of both theoretical and practical significance. Keynote presentations, symposia and posters pertained to social motivation broadly construed and addressed specifically such timely topics as non-conscious goal pursuit, self-regulation, motivated cognition, gender relations, “bullying” and sport performance. Strategically-placed breaks (e.g., for coffee and lunch) encouraged informal discussion that advanced an overarching purpose of facilitating intellectual exchange – nationally, internationally and across disciplinary boundaries.

Day 1 began with an opening ceremony and remarkable two-hour keynote presentation by Bernard Weiner. The Weiner presentation extended a talk he gave in Washington DC this past May and concerned pivotal people, events and ideological patterns involved in the emergence of contemporary motivation science. It was followed by a special symposium that I had the pleasure of organizing with Michael Richter. The symposium focused on current issues of note – including presentations by Veronica Brandstätter, Emily Balcetis, Ruud Custer and Michael – and was followed by a keynote address by the 2011-12 SSM President, Richard Sorrentino. Sorrentino admonished the audience not to forget early lessons regarding the interactional influence of trait and situational variables on behavior, presenting illustrative evidence for the influence from his laboratory. After a late lunch and poster session, participants enjoyed symposia on self-regulation (Slawomir Śpiewak, Chair), social motives (Michał Bilewicz, Chair) and the meta-cognitive self (Hanna Brycz, Chair) presented in parallel. The day concluded with a keynote by Nicola Bauman concerned with central-executive function in the self and a second poster session.

Day 2 began with a keynote by the 2014-15 SSM President, Arie Kruglanski. Professor Kruglanski spoke eloquently about energization processes in motivated cognition discussed at length in an article he published recently in the *APA Psychological Review*. His talk was followed by three sets of symposium sessions – each set run in parallel, with the first two preceding lunch and the third following it. The first set of sessions included symposia concerned with possible inadvertent results of goal pursuit (Catalina Copetz and Edward Orehek, Co-Chairs), culture and gender equality (“I” – Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Chair) and motivation and cognition (Dariusz Doliński, Chair). The second set included symposia concerned with control and intergroup phenomena (Miroslaw Kofta and Michal Bilewicz, Co-Chairs), culture and gender equality (“II” – Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Chair) and social motives (Zbigniew Zaleski, Chair). The third set included symposia concerned with social influence (Magdalena Śmieja-Nęcka, Chair), movement across status lines (Clara Kulich and Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, Co-Chairs) and motivation in practice (Anna Maria Zawadzka, Chair). The afternoon ended with an engaging keynote address on bullying by Jaana Jouvonen and was followed by a splendid dinner on the square.

Day 3, the final day of the conference, began with a keynote by the distinguished Janusz Reykowski. With considerable force of intellect and wisdom, Professor Reykowski spoke on motivational processes functioning in context of the market system. His impressive presentation was followed by a series of morning and early afternoon keynotes. The first, by me, was concerned with effort underpinnings of gender differences in cardiovascular response. The second, by Adam Frączek, concerned motive underpinnings of interpersonal aggression. The third, by Theresa Vescio, concerned “sugar-coated” sex discrimination – more specifically, manners in which seemingly thoughtful acts toward women can have an undermining influence.

Lunch on Day 3 was followed by three further keynotes and a set of symposium sessions run in parallel. The first of the three keynotes, by Gershon Tenenbaum, concerned subjective aspects of physical effort and had the special benefit of introducing to the audience a sport science perspective with which many were likely to have been unfamiliar. The remaining keynotes placed a strong emphasis on application, as did the symposium sessions. One keynote – by Jan Biecharz – applied Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory to professional sport, whereas the other – by Maciej Śwież – considered motivational processes operating in organizations. One symposium session (Jan Biecharz, Chair) dealt with motivation processes in sport performance. The other (Ewa Szumowska, Chair) dealt with these processes in organizational contexts. Our day ended with a brief closing ceremony.

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Those who know me well are aware that I have mixed feelings about conferences. I attend them regularly and enjoy very much personal visits and selected presentations. But I have a low threshold for “conference overload”. Consequently, it is of some note that I enjoyed virtually every aspect of this meeting. I left with a smile and favorable sense about the present state of social-motivational science. Relevant investigators, scholars and practitioners are acquiring fresh insights and making appropriate use of seasoned ones. They also are developing an improved sense of community. Focused conferences like the present one can play a critical role in producing such outcomes. I hope they become increasingly common in the area of motivation and that future organizers will consider following specifically the highly successful Krakow model.

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