The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 13, Issue 2, April- June, 2025
DIP: 18.01.218.20251302, DOI: 10.25215/1302.218
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Social Comparison, Tolerance of Ambiguity and Quiet Ego Among Young Adults

Krisha Celly[1]*, Dr. Annie Khanam Singh[2]

ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, amplified by the pervasive influence of social media, individuals often become increasingly self-focused and prone to social comparisons as a means of self-evaluation, and navigating their environment. In such a context, two psychological constructs—tolerance of ambiguity (the capacity to remain comfortable with uncertainty) and quiet ego (a balanced self-identity that emphasizes growth over self-promotion)—emerge as crucial for adaptive functioning. This study explores the association between social comparison orientation (SCO) & its dimensions (ability-based and opinion-based social comparison – SCO-A and SCO-O, respectively), with tolerance of ambiguity (TOA) and quiet ego (QE), in young adults, who are most prone to social comparisons. The sample comprised of 140 Indian young adults, who were administered the Iowa- Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure – INCOM (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), Ambiguity Tolerance - AT-20 Scale (MacDonald, 1970), and the Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2015). The statistical method of Pearson correlation was utilized. The findings show a significant, and negative relation between SCO and TOA, and a significant, positive but low relation between TOA and QE. However, the study found an insignificant, negative and low relation between SCO and QE. The limitations and implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: *Social Comparison, Tolerance of Ambiguity, Quiet Ego, Young Adults*

Social comparisons have become an increasingly automated and invisible force shaping how we see and treat ourselves, how we see and treat others, and how we navigate the nature and demands of this VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world, plagued by the scathing influence and interconnectivity of social media.

Leon Festinger (1954) introduced the construct of social comparison, proposing that individuals have an inherent drive to evaluate their own opinions and abilities. In the absence of objective means of evaluation, people turn to others for comparison in order to gain accurate self-assessments. He stated that individuals are motivated to compare themselves with others to reduce uncertainty and learn how to behave appropriately in a given context. Furthermore, he distinguished between two major types of comparison:

[1]Student, M.A. Clinical Psychology, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Assistant Professor - II, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India
*Corresponding Author

Received: May 13, 2025; Revision Received: May 23, 2025; Accepted: May 26, 2025

comparison of opinions and comparison of abilities. Both are crucial for self-evaluation, but comparisons of abilities are particularly significant for determining personal competence and success (Festinger, 1954).

Over time, researchers have expanded Festinger's original theory, identifying two primary types of social comparison: upward and downward. Upward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to others they perceive as better off or more successful, whereas downward social comparison involves comparisons with others who are perceived as worse off (Wills, 1981). Individuals high in achievement motivation or self-improvement orientation are more likely to engage in upward comparisons (Collins, 1996). When it comes to downward social comparisons, it is frequently used by individuals trying to protect self-esteem or regulate emotions (Wills, 1981).

When it comes to evaluating the emotional impact of social comparison, research shows that this impact is not solely determined by the direction of the comparison, but is significantly influenced by individual factors, such as perceived control and self-esteem (Buunk et al., 1990). For instance, People with high self-esteem may use upward comparisons constructively to set goals and boost motivation (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). However, those with low self-esteem might experience negative emotional effects, such as envy or discouragement (Vogel et al., 2014).

Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) and its Impact

An important extension of social comparison theory is the concept of Social Comparison Orientation (SCO), developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999). SCO refers to individual differences in the desire to compare oneself to others. While Festinger (1954) proposed that social comparison is a universal and inherent process, Gibbons and Buunk (1999) emphasized that the *frequency, intensity, and relevance* of social comparisons can vary significantly between individuals. People high in SCO are more likely to engage in frequent and deliberate comparisons in order to evaluate themselves, while those low in SCO may rely more on internal or objective standards.

Gibbons and Buunk (1999) identified two primary dimensions of SCO: ability-based social comparison (SCO-A), which refers to the tendency to compare oneself with others in terms of skills, performance, or outcomes—domains typically associated with achievement and competence, and opinion-based social comparison (SCO-O), which pertains to comparisons regarding beliefs, values, and attitudes.

While the direction and characteristics of social comparison do matter in determining its psychological/emotional effects, recent research has emphasized the overall maladaptive effects of engaging in increased social comparisons.

Higher levels of social comparison behaviours have been linked to increased symptoms of depression and psychological distress (McCarthy & Morina, 2020), as well as undermine life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Wayment & Taylor, 1995). Social comparisons, particularly in appearance-related domains (often fueled by social media), are strongly associated with body dissatisfaction and maladaptive eating behaviors (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Social comparisons can foster emotions such as envy and jealousy, which may in turn lead to interpersonal tension, reduced empathy, or overly competitive behaviours (Smith et al., 1988).

Gerber et al. (2018), in their comprehensive meta-analysis, spanning over six decades of research, revealed that upward social comparisons are more common, largely due to a natural desire for self-improvement and evaluation. However, due to highly curated and idealized portrayals of others, it often leads to unfavourable self-assessments, including feelings of inadequacy, envy, or discouragement, especially if the comparison feels unavoidable or persistent. McComb et al. (2023) conducted a recent meta-analytic review focused specifically, on online social comparison, corroborating the above findings, and emphasizing that those high in SCO, experience lower self-esteem, increased depressive symptoms, and heightened anxiety.

Tolerance of Ambiguity (TOA)

In an increasingly complex and unpredictable world, the ability to cope with uncertainty has become vital. One such construct that has garnered considerable scholarly attention is Tolerance of Ambiguity (TOA)—a personality variable that refers to an individual's comfort or discomfort in response to ambiguous, uncertain, or inconsistent information.

First introduced by Else Frenkel-Brunswik (1949), who described TOA as a cognitive style indicating the degree to which an individual perceives ambiguous situations as desirable or threatening. According to her, people with low ambiguity tolerance are likely to experience discomfort, anxiety, or defensiveness in uncertain contexts, whereas those with high tolerance are more flexible, open-minded, and adaptive in their thinking (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949). Her work emphasized the psychological rigidity often associated with low ambiguity tolerance and its links to prejudice and cognitive closure.

Building on these early ideas, Budner (1962) offered a more operationalized definition of TOA, conceptualizing it as the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as either sources of threat or opportunity. He suggested that individuals with low ambiguity tolerance are more likely to respond with avoidance, anxiety, or denial when faced with such situations, whereas those with higher tolerance demonstrate resilience and openness.

Mac Donald (1970) agreed with this conceptualization but also distinguished ambiguity tolerance from rigidity, emphasizing that while both traits may co-occur, they are theoretically and empirically distinct. Rigidity refers to a fixed response style and resistance to change, whereas ambiguity intolerance reflects discomfort with uncertainty but may still allow for flexible adaptation. This nuanced view supports the idea that someone can be intolerant of ambiguity yet remain adaptable in other ways.

Impact of Tolerance of Ambiguity (TOA)

Over the years, research has emphasized the overall effects of high and low TOA. Individuals with lower ambiguity tolerance tend to engage in rigid, dichotomous thinking, interpreting situations in strict "right or wrong" terms, which can lead to oversimplified interpretations of nuanced issues and reduced psychological flexibility (Moulding et al., 2016). They often show poor performance in creative tasks and have difficulty adapting to new ideas or dynamic environments (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; de Vries, 2018). Low TA has historical links with authoritarian personality traits, including intolerance and crude stereotyping (Adorno et al., 1950; Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949). These individuals are more likely to judge others quickly and impose rigid moral or social expectations, leading to strained relationships (de Vries, 2021).

TOA has been associated with a greater capacity for navigating circumstances are that complex, novel, or lack clarity or clear solutions (Furnham & Marks, 2013). High TOA promotes greater emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and flexibility in problem-solving (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949).

People with high TOA also demonstrate better adaptability in cross-cultural contexts, greater receptivity to unconventional information systems in uncertain environments, and are more inclined to try novel experiences or products. Furthermore, it has been associated with enhanced decision-making flexibility and managerial performance in complex settings (Furnham & Marks, 2013).

Tolerance of Ambiguity (TOA) and Social Behavior

An intriguing line of research connects ambiguity tolerance with the need for social comparison, particularly in ambiguous or anxiety-inducing situations.

Daniel Ellsberg (1961) demonstrated that individuals generally prefer known risks over ambiguous ones—a phenomenon called Ellsberg Paradox. His work highlighted that ambiguity aversion (a form of low TOA) influences real-world decision-making. The Ellsberg Paradox emphasizes the emotional discomfort and avoidance tendencies that arise when individuals confront situations lacking clear probabilities. Hence, when faced with such discomfort arising from uncertainty, individuals often look to others for interpretive cues to reduce ambiguity (Festinger, 1954).

Further explaining the link between ambiguity tolerance and social behaviour, the fear affiliation theory (Schachter, 1959) posits that people experiencing anxiety due to ambiguous or threatening circumstances tend to affiliate with others to seek emotional support and reduce the ambiguity. This aligns with the finding that while social comparisons were associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty (closely associated concept with ambiguity intolerance) was the most significant predictor of social comparison, along with anxiety, depression and self-concept clarity (Butzer & Kuiper, 2006).

Quiet Ego (QE)

Traditionally, the ego is understood as the component of the self, responsible for mediating between internal desires and external realities, often shaping how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others (Freud, 1961). In other words, an individual's sense of self or self-identity, which plays a crucial role in cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and social functioning (Baumeister, 1998). However, this self-construct can manifest in varying degrees of self-focus and interpersonal orientation.

An ego overly dominated by self-centeredness - characterized by excessive concern for personal needs, desires, and validation, has been empirically linked to increased anxiety, reduced well-being, and strained interpersonal relationships (Mor & Winquist, 2002). Egocentrism, a related construct, often impedes one’s capacity for empathy and perspective-taking, resulting in social disconnection and cognitive biases. Researchers introduced the concept of a ‘noisy ego’ (Wayment & Bauer, 2008) referring to a self that is preoccupied with personal concerns, defensive strategies, and constant validation-seeking behaviors.

In contrast, the concept of the “quiet ego” emerges as a more adaptive alternate to the traditional, problematic, noisy ego. The quiet ego (QE) does not imply the absence of self or

identity, but rather a balanced and integrated self-perspective that includes both self-awareness and concern for others. It is marked by a reduction in egocentric thought and an increase in mindfulness, compassion, and openness to growth (Wayment & Bauer, 2008).

The QE is comprised of four interrelated dimensions that support this more harmonious self-orientation. The first is detached awareness, which represents a mindful, non-defensive focus on the present moment. It aligns closely with the concept of mindfulness as described by Brown and Ryan (2003), and entails experiencing situations with clarity, without being clouded by preconceived notions or habitual reactivity. The second is inclusive identity, which involves perceiving the self as interconnected with others and extending one's identity beyond narrow self-interest. This dimension promotes empathy and cooperation while reducing egocentric and self-protective tendencies (Leary et al., 2008; Wayment et al., 2015).

Perspective-taking involves consciously shifting attention away from oneself to mentally engage with the experiences and emotions of others. This not only facilitates compassion but enhances the complexity and integration of thought—a hallmark of mature psychosocial development (Davis, 1983; Wayment et al., 2015). The fourth is the growth dimension of the quiet ego, which emphasizes long-term, humanistic development for both self and others. Growth is not only about self-development but also about fostering the potential of others, as seen in constructs like generativity and care (Wayment et al., 2015).

Impact of Quiet Ego (QE)

Research evidence shows that a "noisy ego" is marked by heightened self-focus, competitiveness, defensiveness, and the need for external validation (Wayment & Bauer, 2008). Campbell and Buffardi (2008) argue that a noisy ego often overlaps with narcissistic tendencies, particularly grandiosity and a sense of entitlement. Studies have shown that the noisy ego is associated with increased aggression, interpersonal conflict, and emotional instability (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Campbell et al., 2002).

Research indicates that people with higher QE scores are more likely to engage in altruistic behaviour, exhibit lower levels of narcissism, and display increased emotional intelligence (Wayment et al., 2015). Individuals with a quiet ego tend to display greater humility, authenticity, and compassion, as well as enhanced psychological flexibility (Wayment & Bauer, 2008).

People with higher QE scores tend to experience less aggression, anger, hostility, and expressive suppression, and more adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (Wayment et al., 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Comparison

When it comes to the psychological impact of social comparison, it was found that individuals with a strong SCO-A orientation experienced decreased psychological well-being due to upward contrastive emotions like envy and depression, but their well-being improved when they felt downward assimilative emotions such as sympathy and worry. Conversely, those with a strong SCO-O orientation saw an increase in psychological well-being through upward assimilative emotions like inspiration and optimism, and a reduction in negative emotions. These results suggest that the impact of social comparison is

contingent upon the nature of comparison orientation and the emotion it elicits (Park & Baek, 2018).

Social comparison orientation (SCO), specifically, ability-based social comparison (SCO-A) has been positively associated with trait competitiveness as well as greater overall risk-taking. On the other hand, opinion-based social comparison (SCO-opinion) didn't show a consistent association with risk-taking (Liu et al., 2021).

Certain studies have also shown that the impact of social comparison, may depend more on certain personal characteristics as stated before by Bunk et al. (1990). It has been found that social comparison shared a significant and positive association with life satisfaction, specifically with participants who had a more positive perception of themselves (Chhetri & Bhargava, 2024). It has also been found that higher social comparison orientation, on social networking platforms, was linked to lower psychological well-being, mediated by both self-esteem and perceived social support, especially when considered in sequence (Lee, 2020).

While the direction of social comparison, and these personal characteristics do play a role in certain studies, others highlight the direct positive and negative effects of social comparison orientation, overall, as mentioned beforehand as well. Low social comparison has been associated with higher levels of hardiness and life satisfaction (Civitci & Civitci, 2015). High social comparison has been significantly and positively related with avoidance goal orientation, negative rumination, and malicious envy (Sun et al., 2025).

Ambiguity Tolerance

Ambiguity tolerance has been associated with lots of positive effects. Ambiguity tolerance, along with psychological flexibility, and cognitive stability were found to be significant positive predictors of resilience (Syyed Mirzaei et al., 2022). It has also shown a significant, and positive association with growth mindset and competence beliefs (Sadeghi et.al., 2024). In geriatric individuals with hypertension, it was found that higher levels of depression, perfectionism, and worry were significantly associated with increased blood pressure, while greater ambiguity tolerance correlated with lower blood pressure (Masood et al., 2024).

It was also found that individuals that showed higher ambiguity tolerance were more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as contributing to a public good game, even when faced with uncertainty regarding others' trustworthiness (Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018). Additionally, low ambiguity tolerance has shown a predictive association with disbelief in climate change, as well as conservative political orientation (Jessani & Harris, 2018).

However, the relation between ambiguity tolerance and well-being has been inconsistent. While on one hand, ambiguity tolerance had been found to have a significant and positive predictive association with happiness, as well as creativity, and that creativity successfully mediated this association. (Zuo, 2024). On the other hand, some studies show no significant association between ambiguity tolerance and overall well-being ((Sharma & Teotia, 2024).

Quiet Ego

When it comes to the benefits associated with quiet ego, it has been found that quiet ego is a significant predictor of resilience (Goswami et al., 2024). Individuals exhibiting a quiet ego orientation have found to be more likely to pursue compassionate interpersonal goals over self-image goals. These traits were linked to higher life satisfaction and lower perceived

stress, with self-compassion and self-control partially mediating these effects (Wayment et al., 2016).

Quiet ego has also shown a significant positive association with self-concept clarity. Additionally, it indirectly predicted higher psychological well-being and self-esteem through its positive association with SCC, suggesting that individuals with a quiet ego tend to have a clearer self-concept, which in turn enhances their well-being and self-esteem (Liu et al., 2022).

Quiet ego, like ambiguity tolerance, has also been associated with positive effects on social behaviour. High quiet ego has been associated with warmer feelings towards minority groups, like the Muslim community in the United States, even after the researchers controlled for variables like race, political conservatism, and religiosity. Furthermore, it was revealed that the relation between quiet ego and positive attitudes towards Muslims was mediated by reduced levels of right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and inner motivation to express prejudice (Al-kire et al., 2022).

Social Comparison Orientation, Tolerance of Ambiguity and Quiet Ego

When it comes to the direct association between social comparison and ambiguity tolerance, social comparison had been found to have a significant negative association with tolerance for ambiguity, but only for ability-based traits, not opinion-based, across both the Indian and the US context (Elembilassery et al., 2024).

When it comes to the direct relation between social comparison and quiet ego associated traits like mindfulness and self-compassion, it has been found that while mindfulness and self-compassion were associated with low social comparison, they were not associated with perceiving comparisons as less useful. They do not necessarily diminish the perceived value of these comparisons, potentially helping individuals gain insight without the emotional downsides (Borgdorf et al., 2024).

Additionally, mindfulness was found to be negatively associated with Upward Social Comparison (USC) and USC in turn linked to social media rumination. USC fully mediated the relationship between mindfulness and rumination. However, individuals with high trait mindfulness did not always exhibit less upward social comparison. Self-esteem moderated the link between mindfulness and USC—individuals with low or medium self-esteem benefitted more from mindfulness in terms of reducing upward comparisons, but not the link between USC and rumination (Gu et al., 2022).

Lastly, when it comes to the direct association between ambiguity tolerance and quiet ego traits such as mindfulness, a study that explored the effects of an eight-week mindfulness meditation program on leadership-related traits, found no prominent effects of the mindfulness intervention on the ambiguity tolerance in the group (Brendel et al., 2016).

Rationale

As evidenced earlier, increased social comparisons, despite direction and nature, overall is associated with maladaptive emotions and behavior including feelings of inadequacy, envy, and jealousy, low self-esteem, reduced empathy, competitiveness, interpersonal tensions, depression, and anxiety, among others. Theoretically, individuals are often motivated to affiliate and engage in comparison with others, to reduce the anxiety and discomfort that arises from facing ambiguous situations. Tolerance of ambiguity, thus becomes a desirable

ability to counter the need to engage in social comparisons overall. Tolerance of ambiguity has been positively associated with growth mindset, resilience, cognitive flexibility, greater emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, cultural empathy and better interpersonal relationships.

Social comparison has also been associated with narcissistic and competitive traits, showing theoretical association with noisy ego. Thus, quiet ego, also becomes an adaptive ability to counter the need and effects of SCO. Quiet ego, like ambiguity tolerance has been associated with greater psychological flexibility, resilience, better emotional regulation, cultural empathy, reduced prejudice and better interpersonal relationships. There is a dearth of empirical research exploring the theoretical association between these three constructs, despite their relevance in this world, as stated before. The present study attempts to address these gaps and concerns.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

To determine the prevalence of social comparison orientation (SCO), tolerance of ambiguity (TOA), and quiet ego (QE), as well as the association between SCO, as well as its types – ability-based social comparison (SCO-A) and opinion-based social comparison (SCO-O), with ambiguity tolerance (TOA) and quiet ego (QE), in young adults, residing in India.

Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant relation between social comparison orientation (SCO) and tolerance of ambiguity (TOA), among young adults.
- H2: There is a significant relation between ability-based social comparison (SCO-A) and ambiguity tolerance (TOA), among young adults.
- H3: There is a significant relation between opinion-based social comparison (SCO-O) and ambiguity tolerance (TOA), among young adults.
- H4: There is a significant relation between social comparison orientation (SCO) and quiet ego (QE), among young adults.
- H5: There is a significant relation between ability-based social comparison (SCO-A) and quiet ego (QE), among young adults.
- H6: There is a significant relation between opinion-based social comparison (SCO-O) and quiet ego (QE), among young adults.
- H7: There is a significant relation between ambiguity tolerance (TOA) and quiet ego (QE), among young adults.

Sample

The sample consisted of Indian young adults (N=140, male = 63, female = 77), aged 19-25 years, currently residing in India. The sampling methods of convenience sampling and snowball sampling were utilised.

Instruments

- **INCOM** (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999) measures the individual's tendency to frequently engage in social comparison orientation. It consists of 11 items, and a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. The scale has been examined in 22 questionnaires administered in the United States and the Netherlands, showing good internal consistency and construct validity.

- **AT-20 Scale** (MacDonald, 1970) measures ambiguity tolerance. It is a forced choice questionnaire containing 'True' and 'False' options, and consists of 20 items. The internal consistency of the AT-20 Scale was measured using the split-half method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.86. the AT-20 was administered to a sample of 24 male undergraduate students after a 6-month interval, resulting in a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.63. The scale also shows good construct validity.
- **Quiet Ego Scale** (Wayne, 2015) measures the concept of quiet ego in terms of four aspects, namely detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking and personal growth. It includes 14 items and a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. It has an acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .76 (Wayment, 2014).

Procedure

The sample of the present study included Indian young adults, currently residing in India, aged between 19-25 years. Before administering the questionnaires, the participants were given an instruction and consent form, that informed them about the purpose of the study, and took their informed consent for voluntary participation in the study. The participants were administered the Iowa- Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure – INCOM (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999), Ambiguity Tolerance - AT-20 Scale (MacDonald, 1970), and the Quiet Ego Scale (Wayne, 2015). The participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics namely, mean and standard deviation were utilized to assess the prevalence of the variables, in the sample. Pearson Correlation was utilized to assess the relation between the variables. Afterwards, the results were analyzed and interpreted.

RESULT

Table No.1 Mean and Standard Deviation scores for Social Comparison, Tolerance of Ambiguity and Quiet Ego

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Comparison	140	1.64	4.55	3.31	.54
Tolerance of Ambiguity	140	.10	.70	.39	.14
Quiet Ego	140	1.43	4.71	3.48	.47
Valid N (listwise)	140				

Table No.2 Pearson Correlation Coefficients for SCO, SCO-A, SCO-O, Ambiguity Tolerance and Quiet Ego

		SCO	SCO-A	SCO-O	Ambiguity Tolerance	Quiet Ego
SCO	Pearson Correlation	1	.870**	.707**	-.413**	-.147
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.083
	N	140	140	140	140	140
SCO-A	Pearson Correlation	.870**	1	.265**	-.359**	-.194*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.002	.000	.022
	N	140	140	140	140	140
SCO-O	Pearson Correlation	.707**	.265**	1	-.293**	-.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002		.000	.916
	N	140	140	140	140	140
Ambiguity Tolerance	Pearson Correlation	-.413**	-.359**	-.293**	1	.175*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.039
	N	140	140	140	140	140

		SCO	SCO-A	SCO-O	Ambiguity Tolerance	Quiet Ego
	Pearson Correlation	-.147	-.194*	-.009	.175*	1
Quiet Ego	Sig. (2-tailed)	.083	.022	.916	.039	
	N	140	140	140	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

DISCUSSION

The primary objectives of the current study were firstly, to assess the prevalence of social comparison orientation (SCO), ambiguity tolerance (TOA), and quiet ego (QE). Secondly, to determine the association between SCO, as well as its types – ability-based social comparison (SCO-A) and opinion-based social comparison (SCO-O), with ambiguity tolerance (TOA) and quiet ego (QE), in young adults, residing in India.

The prevalence of SCO seems to be moderate to high, as the mean came out to be 3.31 (scale of 1-5). Similarly, the prevalence of QE seems to be moderate to high, as the mean came out to be 3.48 (scale of 1-5), slightly higher than social comparison. However, the prevalence of TOA seems to be relatively low as the mean came out to be 0.39 (scale of 0-1).

The first hypothesis (H1) stated that there will be a significant relation between SCO and TOA, among young adults. The Pearson Correlation coefficients show that $r = -.413$ ($p < 0.01$, significant at 0.01 level) indicating the presence of a significant, negative, and moderate relation between SCO and TOA. Hence, the first hypothesis is accepted.

In terms of its dimensions, second hypothesis (H2) and third hypothesis (H3) stated there will be a significant relation between SCO-A and TOA, and SCO-O and TOA, respectively. The Pearson correlation results show that for SCO-A and TOA, $r = -.359$ ($p < 0.01$, significant at 0.01 level), indicating a significant, negative, and moderate relation between them. On the other hand, for SCO-O and TOA, that $r = -.293$ ($p < 0.01$, significant at 0.01 level), indicating a significant, negative but low relation between them. Hence, both second and third hypotheses are accepted.

This finding is supported by not only the theoretical association between SCO and TOA, but also, through the study conducted by Elembilassery et al. (2024) who found a significant negative association between SCO and TOA, and found a stronger association between SCO-A and ambiguity tolerance, than SCO-O and ambiguity tolerance. The present study also shows a stronger association between SCO-A and TOA. This, overall, shows that individuals demonstrating high TOA, may depend less on social comparisons, and more on intrinsic or independent evaluation, demonstrating a greater capacity for psychological autonomy.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) stated that there will be a significant relation between SCO and QE, among young adults. The Pearson Correlation coefficients show that $r = 1.47$ ($p>0.01$ and 0.05, not significant at the 0.01 level or 0.05 level), indicating an insignificant, low, and positive relation between SCO and quiet ego. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

In terms of its dimensions, the fifth hypothesis (H5) and the sixth hypothesis (H6) stated that there will be a significant relation between SCO-A and QE, and SCO-O and QE,

respectively. The Pearson correlation results show that for SCO-A and QE, r = -.194 ($p < 0.05$, significant at 0.05 level), indicating a significant, negative, but low relation between the them. On the other hand, for SCO-O and QE, r = -.009 ($p > 0.01$ and 0.05, not significant at 0.01 or 0.05 level), indicating an insignificant, negative and negligible relation between them. So, the fifth hypothesis is accepted while the sixth hypothesis is rejected.

This finding, overall, may be supported by certain studies (Borgdorf et al., 2024; Gu et al., 2022) which found that while traits like mindfulness and self-compassion (related to quiet ego) may reduce social comparisons, they may not reduce the perceived value of these comparisons. Additionally, individuals that show high trait mindfulness may not always show less social comparisons, and that traits like self-esteem may moderate the association between traits like mindfulness and social comparison.

Furthermore, since theory and empirical research both have shown that SCO-A is more significant for determining personal competence and success (Festinger, 1954), and is better associated with trait competitiveness (Liu et al., 2021), it can explain the significant negative association between SCO-A and QE.

Lastly, the seventh hypothesis (H7) stated that there will be a significant relation between TOA and QE. The Pearson correlation results show that r = .175 ($p < 0.05$, significant at the 0.05 level), indicating a significant, positive but low relation between them. Hence, the seventh hypothesis is accepted.

This was also against expectations, as there seems to a theoretical association between the same. Though it can be explained by a study that explored the effects of an eight-week mindfulness meditation program on leadership-related traits, and found no prominent effects of the mindfulness intervention on the TOAin the group (Brendel et al., 2016), as well as partly, by the inconsistent relation between TOA and well-being. The results though, can also be explained by the prevalence of these constructs in the sample. The prevalence of TOA, was low overall in the sample, with only a few participants showing high TOA, whereas the prevalence of QE was moderate to high in the sample, with only two participants, in the whole sample (N=140) showing low QE. Hence, limited representation of scores may also explain the low correlation.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that those individuals that showed high ambiguity tolerance (TOA) showed less engagement in social comparison orientation (SCO), particularly ability-based comparisons (SCO-A). The study further showed that quiet ego (QE) is significantly, and negatively related to SCO-A but not significantly related to overall SCO or opinion-based comparison (SCO-O). Notably, higher TOA is positively and significantly, associated with a QE, however, a low association, suggesting a possible association that can be further explored with a more nuanced approach and larger sample.

Limitations of the Study

1. The sample is small (N=140) restricting in the representation of the population.
2. Limited representation of the responses. For instance, as stated before, with reference to the quiet ego scores, only two participants got 'low quiet ego score', suggesting limited variability in scores.
3. The study is correlational; therefore, it doesn't tell anything about the causal relationship between social comparison, ambiguity tolerance and quiet ego.

4. Self-report biases like social desirability, that reduce the accuracy and the reliability of the scores.

Implications and Suggestion for Future Research

1. The significant negative association between SCO and TOA suggests that interventions aimed at increasing TOA may help reduce harmful comparison tendencies in youth, particularly ability-based comparisons which were more strongly related.
2. The association found between ambiguity tolerance and quiet ego, was significant, positive but weak. Though the limitations of the study may have played a part, it doesn't negate the importance of both these traits in today's complex and unpredictable world, and polarizing world. These findings, along with past findings, emphasize the importance of promoting ambiguity tolerance and quiet ego traits (e.g., mindfulness, openness) in interventions targeting young adults.
3. Though the association found between SCO and QE was negative but insignificant and weak, the significant negative association with SCO-A suggests some more intricacies in understanding the interplay of these two psychological constructs, that could be further explored through a larger sample, an observational study, an experimental study that test quiet ego interventions on social comparison, specifically SCO-A as that shows higher association with trait competitiveness (Liu et al., 2021), and envy (Park and Baek, 2018).
4. Future studies, can study the association between these constructs, on a larger sample, using other methods including observation or experiment, to better assess their intricate, and possibly predictive association, without the constraints of self-report measures.
5. Lastly, future studies, to better assess the association between the variables, can test the effect of possible mediational variables like self-esteem, self-concept clarity and perceived self-control, that can affect the relationship between social comparison, ambiguity tolerance and quiet ego.

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The Authoritarian Personality*. Harper & Row, New York.

Al-Kire, R., Wayment, H.A., Eiler, B., Callaway, K.D., & Tsang, J.A. (2022). Quiet ego is associated with positive attitudes toward Muslims. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13:8939 04.10.3389/fpsyg.2022.893904

Baumeister, R. F. (1998). The self. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 680–740). McGraw-Hill.

Borgdorf, K., Küchler, G., Wrzus, C. & Aguilar Raab, C. (2024). Less Frequent but Equally Useful: Social and Temporal Comparisons in Light of Mindfulness and Self-Compassion. *Mindfulness*, 5(11), 2906-2918. 10.1007/s12671-024-02472-w

Brendel, W., Hankerson, S., Byun, S. & Cunningham, B. (2016). Cultivating leadership Dharma: Measuring the impact of regular mindfulness practice on creativity, resilience, tolerance for ambiguity, anxiety and stress. *Journal of Management Development*, 35(8), 1056-1078. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-09-2015-0127

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848. 10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822.

Budner, S. (1962). Intolerance of ambiguity as a personality variable. *Journal of Personality*, 30(1), 29–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1962.tb02303.x

Bushman, B. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (1998). Threatened egotism, narcissism, self-esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hate lead to violence? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 219–229. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.1.219

Butzer, B., & Kuiper, N. A. (2006). Relationships between the frequency of social comparisons and self-concept clarity, intolerance of uncertainty, anxiety, and depression. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 41(1), 167–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2005.12.017

Buunk, B. P., Collins, R. L., Taylor, S. E., VanYperen, N. W., & Dakof, G. A. (1990). The affective consequences of social comparison: Either direction has its ups and downs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(6), 1238–1249. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.6.1238

Campbell, W. K., & Buffardi, L. E. (2008). The lure of the noisy ego: Narcissism as a social trap. In H. A. Wayment & J. J. Bauer (Eds.), *Transcending self-interest: Psychological explorations of the quiet ego* (pp. 23–32). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11771-002

Campbell, W. K., Rudich, E. A., & Sedikides, C. (2002). Narcissism, self-esteem, and the positivity of self-views: Two portraits of self-love. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(3), 358–368. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202286007

Chhetri, K. & Bhargava, K. (2024). Influence of Social Comparison on Life Satisfaction in Young Adults: A Study Amongst the Indian Population. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(3), 1-14.

Citivici, N. & Civitci, A. (2015). Social Comparison Orientation, Hardiness and Life Satisfaction in Undergraduate Students. Procedia - *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 205, 516-523. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.09.062

Collins, R. L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(1), 51–69. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.1.51

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(1), 113–126. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.44.1.113

De Vries, H. (2021). *Tolerance of Ambiguity*. In V. P. Glăveanu (Ed.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible.* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98390-5_173-1

De Vries, H. B. (2018). *Cultural differences of scientific creativity: A relation with tolerance of ambiguity/ uncertainty: An empirical study with children in Luxembourg, France, Thailand, India, and Russia.* Doctoral dissertation, Sorbonne Paris Cité, Paris. http://www.theses.fr/2018USPCB052

Elembilassery, V., Jain, N.K., & Aggarwal, D. (2024). What influences individuals' tolerance for ambiguity? Exploring the role of social comparison orientation, tendency to maximize and feel regret. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 217, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112436.

Ellsberg, D. (1961). Risk, ambiguity, and the Savage axioms. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 75(4), 643–669. https://doi.org/10.2307/1884324

Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.005

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Frenkel-Brunswik, E. (1949). Intolerance of ambiguity as an emotional and perceptual personality variable. *Journal of Personality*, 18(1), 108–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01236.x

Freud, S. (1961). *The ego and the id*. W W Norton & Co.

Furnham, A., & Marks, J. (2013). *Tolerance of ambiguity: A review of the recent literature*. *Psychology*, 4(9), 717–728. https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2013.49102

Gerber, J. P., Wheeler, L., & Suls, J. (2018). A social comparison theory meta-analysis 60+ years on. *Psychological Bulletin*, 144(2), 177–197. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000127

Gibbons, F. X., & Buunk, B. P. (1999). Individual differences in social comparison: Development of a scale of social comparison orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(1), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.129

Goswami, S., Brahmi, M., Suresh, G., Sharma, G., & Kumar, J. (2024). Exploring Hindu-Buddhist Philosophies: The Role of Quiet Ego and Non-Attachment in Fostering Resilience among Young Indians. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences*, 8(6), 705-717. 10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806055.

Gu, C., Liu, S. & Chen, S. (2022). The effect of trait mindfulness on social media rumination: Upward social comparison as a moderated mediator. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13:931572. 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.931572

Jessani, Z., & Harris, P.B. (2018). Personality, politics, and denial: Tolerance of ambiguity, political orientation and disbelief in climate change. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 131, 121-123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.04.033.

Leary, M. R., Tipsord, J. M., & Tate, E. B. (2008). Allo-inclusive identity: Incorporating the social and natural worlds into one's sense of self. In H. A. Wayment & J. J. Bauer (Eds.), *Transcending self-interest: Psychological explorations of the quiet ego* (pp. 137–147). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11771-013

Lee, J.K. (2020). The effects of social comparison orientation on psychological well-being in social networking sites: Serial mediation of perceived social support and self-esteem. *Current Psychology*, 41(9), 6247–6259. 10.1007/s12144-020-01114-3

Liu, G., Isbell, L. & Leidner, B. (2022). How Does the Quiet Ego Relate to Happiness? A Path Model Investigation of the Relations Between the Quiet Ego, Self-Concept Clarity, and Well-Being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 23(3), 1007-1020.10.1007/s10902-021-00438-6.

Liu, Z., Elliot, A.J. & Li, Y. (2021). Social comparison orientation and trait competitiveness: Their interrelation and utility in predicting overall and domain-specific risk-taking. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 171, 110451. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110451

McCarthy, P.A., & Morina, N. (2020). Exploring the association of social comparison with depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 27(5), 640-671. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2452

Mac Donald, A. P., Jr. (1970). Revised scale for ambiguity tolerance: Reliability and validity. *Psychological Reports*, 26(3), 791–798. https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1970.26.3.791

Masood, G., Alilou, S., Babalou, K. & Akbarlou, N. (2024). Depression, Perfectionism, and Hypertension in the Elderly: A Path Analysis Examining Worry, Ambiguity Tolerance, and Problem-Solving. *Elderly Health Journal*. https://doi.org/10.18502/ehj.v10i1.15968

McComb, C. A., Vanman, E. J., & Tobin, S. J. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of social media exposure to upward comparison targets on self-evaluations and

emotions. *Media Psychology*, *26*(5), 612 – 635. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2023.2180647

Mor, N., & Winquist, J. (2002). Self-focused attention and negative affect: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(4), 638–662. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.4.638

Moulding, R., Nix-Carnell, S., Schnabel, A., Nedeljkovic, M., Burnside, E. E., Lentini, A. F., & Mehzabin, N. (2016). Better the devil you know than a world you don't? Intolerance of uncertainty and worldview explanations for belief in conspiracy theories. *Personality and Individual Differences, 98*, 345–354. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.04.060

Park, S.Y. & Baek, Y.M. (2018). Two faces of social comparison on Facebook: The interplay between social comparison orientation, emotions, and psychological well-being. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 79, 83-93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.028

Sadeghi, J., Jalalian, Z.S., Mousavi Nezhad, M., Bagheri, S., Peyvastegar, M., & Rashidpour, R. (2024). Predicting Growth Mindset: The Roles of Ambiguity Tolerance and Competence Beliefs in High School Students. *International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences*, 5(4), 24-31. https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijeas.5.3.4.

Schachter, S. (1959). *The psychology of affiliation: Experimental studies of the sources of gregariousness*. Stanford University Press.

Sharma, M. & Teotia, A. (2024). Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(3), 2051-2057. 10.25215/1203.202.

Smith, R. H., Kim, S.-h., & Parrott, W. G. (1988). Envy and jealousy semantic problems and experiential distinctions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *14*(2), 401–409. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167288142017

Sun, S., Feng, M., Guo, X., Lin, S., Cheng, G. & Bai, X. (2025). The impact of social comparison orientation on malicious envy among high school students: The chain mediating role of avoidance goal orientation and negative rumination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 232: 112867. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112867

Syyed Mirzaei, S.Z., Hatami, M., Hobi, M. B. & Hasani, J. (2022). The role of metacognition, tolerance of ambiguity and psychological flexibility in predicting resilience. *Journal of Psychological Science*, 21(117), 1799-1814. 10.52547/JPS.21.117.1799

Vives, M.-L., & FeldmanHall, O. (2018). Tolerance to ambiguous uncertainty predicts prosocial behavior. *Nature Communications*, 9, 2156. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-04631-9

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000047

Wayment, H. A., & Bauer, J. J. (2008). The quiet ego: Motives for self-other balance and growth in relation to well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 19(3), 881-896. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9848-z

Wayment, H. A., & Taylor, S. E. (1995). Self-evaluation processes: Motives, information use, and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality*, 63(4), 729–757. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1995.tb00315.x

Wayment, H. A., Bauer, J. J., & Sylaska, K. (2015). The quiet ego scale: Measuring the compassionate self-identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16(4), 999–1033. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9546-z

Wayment, H.A., West, T.N. & Craddock, E.B. (2016). Compassionate Values as a Resource During the Transition to College: Quiet Ego, Compassionate Goals, and Self-Compassion. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 93-114.

Wheeler, L., & Miyake, K. (1992). Social comparison in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62(5), 760–773. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.62.5.760

Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. Psychological Bulletin, 90(2), 245–271. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.90.2.245

Zuo, T. (2024). Tolerance for ambiguity and happiness: Mediating role of creativity among Chinese college students across majors. *Current Psychology*, 43(34), 27690-27713. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-06396-5.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Celly, K. & Singh, A.K. (2025). Social Comparison, Tolerance of Ambiguity and Quiet Ego Among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *13*(2), 2419-2434. DIP:18.01.218.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.218