You Make Me Feel Bad About Myself: Shaken Self-View Through Observing a Merged Other Act Inconsistent With One'S Self-View

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We propose that observing a merged other indulging in unhealthy eating behavior could result in a shaken self-view among individuals who see healthy eating central to their self-view. This results in a subsequent goal of restoring the self-view and is manifested through higher preference for healthy products in a subsequent choice.

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Another important theme that emerged was the role of Bollywood movies in bringing the family together. Bollywood films were consumed and experienced as families and then reflected on as a family (Dudrah, 2006). Though there was an intergenerational conflict between the second generation, India born parents and the third generation, UK born children, Bollywood was used by the second generation to keep their children in touch with the Indian culture. In fact mothers often used the consumption of Bollywood movies to encourage their third generation children to resist acculturation to the Western world and maintain their Indian identity.

The third and final theme to materialize was the role of Bollywood in enabling young British Sikhs to become aware of their diasporic consciousness and therefore understand their hybrid, East/West identities as UK born British Sikhs. The Western and British culture was the dominant culture in the lives of young British Sikhs, however through exposure to Bollywood movies, they learnt about the significance of the Indian culture in their lives and identity. Through exposure to the Bollywood film medium they learnt that they did not have to choose either the Western or Eastern culture and were very aware of their diasporic consciousness and the transcultural mixtures. Young British Sikhs learnt that they were in fact able to adopt traits and characteristics of both the Eastern and Western cultures, therefore enabling them to comprehend and construct hybrid identities they were comfortable with as British Sikhs.

REFERENCES


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Imagine Nick, a PhD student who has a strong belief that eating healthy is an important attribute that one should possess and truly believes that he actually possesses that attribute. One day, on his way to the cafeteria, Nick sees his friend Jeff, another PhD student at Nick’s department to whom he really identifies, carrying a big bucket of French fries and toasted chicken in one hand and a big Coke in the other. How would this observation affect Nick’s choice (healthy vs. unhealthy) in the cafeteria?

The consensus in persuasion literature is that similarity of one individual to another increases the propensity of him being influenced by the other person. Therefore, it would be reasonable to predict that in the previous scenario Nick would be influenced by Jeff and take an unhealthy snack in the cafeteria. Yet, we suggest that exactly due to the high degree of merged identity between Nick and Jeff, Nick is more likely to choose a healthy food in contradiction to the above-mentioned prediction.
People have the motivation to maintain a positive and consistent self-view (Aronson 1999). Therefore, any temporal threat to this self-view could result in motivation to restore this confidence (Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009). For example, if someone believes that he has a healthy life-style, by reminding him that he had junk food yesterday, we would be able to shake his self-view confidence and create the motivation in him to restore his self-view by choosing a healthy snack next time. In this research, building on the spyglass-self model (Goldstein and Cialdini 2007) and merged identity theory (Aron et al. 1991) we propose that we necessarily need not remind an individual of his own self-view inconsistent behavior. The threat to self-view could be created by merely observing a merged-other behave in self-view inconsistent behavior. And this will result in changed behavior to restore one’s own self-confidence. In the scenario above, when Nick sees Jeff, a merged other, indulge in unhealthy eating behavior; he automatically makes a self-perception that he himself is an unhealthy eater. But this inference is contrary to Nick’s self-view and therefore it is a threat to his self-image. To restore his self-image, he will be more inclined to buy a healthy snack at the cafeteria.

Feeling of merged identity can be enhanced by perspective taking (Cialdini et al. 1997). A number of studies support this notion (Ku, Wang, and Galinsky 2010; Goldstein and Cialdini 2007). Based on this evidence, we propose that participants high in chronic belief of health consciousness, when instructed to take the perspective of another individual, will show higher preference for healthy products if they see that individual engage in unhealthy eating behavior. As the sense of merged identity is necessary for the effects of shaken self-view to emerge, we propose that this effect will not be observed in non-perspective taking individuals. Also, participants who do not see health-consciousness as central to their self-view, do not feel any treat to their self by observing a merged other act in unhealthy manner.

Design and procedure: One hundred and fifty one online panel members participated in a 2-group (perspective taker vs. observer) study for a fixed payment of 0.75$ and also “a chance to be included in a lottery for a price of around 15$”. Perspective taking was manipulated between subjects and attitude towards healthy eating was measured as a continuous-measure for all participants.

First, under the disguise of a study on personalitities and lifestyles, participants completed a 20-item questionnaire. Three of these items were of interest to us and were related to healthy eating and were averaged to come up with a single measure for health consciousness (α=0.864). As the next step, participants had to “read a transcript of an interview and to answer some questions about he interviewee” (always the same sex as participant). Depending on the condition, half of the participants were given perspective taking instructions and the other half did not get any particular instructions on how to read the interview. Perspective taking instructions and the interview were adopted (and slightly modified) from the ones previously used by Goldstein and Cialdini (2007). The interview was ostensibly a transcript of an audio recording and included some questions that the interviewee answered with generic responses. In the answer to the last question the interviewee showed unhealthy eating behavior. Then, participants wrote down three first thoughts that came to their mind about the interviewee. Then, they had to indicate their preference for either a 56 oz. bag of M&M or a black Fisher Space Pen (to receive incase they won the lottery). Also, they were (truly) informed that both products are worth around 15 dollars.

A logistic regression on choice data showed a significant interaction between perspective taking and health consciousness (B=-0.61, Wald=3.975, p=0.046), a simple effect of health consciousness (B=0.847, Wald=12.6, p=0.000) and a non-significant effect of perspective taking (B=2.32, Wald=2.61, p=0.106). Therefore, our hypothesis was supported by the data. To illustrate the difference between the conditions, we performed a median split on the health consciousness measure and calculated the percentage of participants who chose the M&M over the pen in each of the four conditions. In the non-perspective taking condition the health consciousness participants chose the M&M 47% of the time while the non-health conscious participants chose it 50% of the time. However in the perspective taking condition the non-health conscious participants chose the M&M 58% of the time compared to only 26% of the health conscious participants who chose the M&M.

Further experiments are already on the way to further establish the effect and also to shed light on the process. The authors are currently running an experiment with a manipulation of merged identity other than perspective taking.

REFERENCES


