Capitolo 4

Case Study 1

Implicit egoism and major life decisions

People's high views of themselves even extend to things they own or are attached to in some way (Pelham, Carvallo, & Jones, 2005 [DOI:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00344.x]; SP p. 108). Nuttin (1985) found that people prefer the letters in their names to letters that are not in their names. The idea behind this tendency is that people generally like themselves and therefore like anything that is associated with the self. Our names are very strongly associated with our selves; they represent who we are. Therefore, our positive self-views are transferred to positive evaluations of our name letters. This name letter effect was found in a lot of countries, with different cultures and different alphabets.

Pelham, Mirenberg, and Jones (2002) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.82.4.469] went further with this idea and showed that people not only evaluate their name letters very positively, but also act like these preferences. People appear to base important life decisions on their name letters. In a set of 10 archival data studies, Pelham et al. showed that people (e.g., Dennis) choose cities with names that resemble their own names (e.g., Denver), and choose jobs that resemble their names (e.g., dentist). Another study by Jones et al. (2004) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.87.5.665] showed that people also choose a partner whose name resembles our own name (e.g. Denise). This also works for streets (e.g., Denper Street; Pelham et al., 2002 [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.82.4.469]).

Brendl et al. (2005) [DOI:10.1086/497552] found similar results for brand names. People are more likely to choose a brand when the brand name starts with letters from their names than when the brand name does not. The authors called this phenomenon *name letter branding*.

However, if the idea is that a positive self-view leads to a preference for anything that is associated with the self, what would be the role of the valence of these self-views? If positive self-views lead to a preference for self-associated stimuli, then only people who feel good about themselves should show this tendency. Smeets, Holland, and van Knippenberg (2006) investigated the role of (implicit) self-esteem on these name letter product preferences, and they found that only people high in implicit self-esteem showed a preference for self-associated objects. People low in implicit self-esteem even showed the opposite effect; they disliked the self-associated objects more.

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Case Study 2

Unrealistic optimism

It is good to be optimistic, right? A lot of research would certainly back up that claim, but research by Dillard, Midboe, and Klein (2009) [DOI: 10.1177/0146167209343124] suggests that, in certain situations, being unrealistically optimistic can have negative consequences.

In their study, Dillard et al. measured how unrealistically optimistic college students were about their likelihood of experiencing alcohol-related problems. At two points in their freshman year and two points in their sophomore year, students were asked to indicate how likely they were, in comparison to other students of their same age and sex, to experience alcohol poisoning or alcoholism in their future. In addition, the students answered questions about their typical alcohol consumption and any alcohol-related negative events they had experienced recently (e.g., hangover, blackout, destruction of property, trouble with the law, etc.).

From these responses, the researchers were able to categorize the participants into those who were unrealistically optimistic that negative alcohol-related events would befall them and those who were more realistic or unrealistically pessimistic. The results showed that, over time, the unrealistically

optimistic participants were more likely to experience negative alcohol-related events as compared to either the more realistic or pessimistic students.

In conclusion, looking on the sunny side of life may certainly be beneficial for your psychological health, but thinking that "It won't happen to me" when it comes to alcohol might actually lead to a greater number of negative alcohol-related health outcomes in your future. So, please drink responsibly *and* realistically (and only if you're of legal drinking age)!

Reference

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Case Study 3

Culture influences young people's self-esteem

As described in the text, members of collectivistic cultures tend to have lower levels of self-esteem than members of individualistic cultures. In a recent study by more than 30 researchers from all over the world (Becker et al., 2014) [DOI: 10.1177/0146167214522836], the question was not "Who has higher vs. lower self-esteem?", it was "what determines one's self-esteem?" Over 4,800 teenagers were surveyed to determine whether living up to one's respective cultural values has any influence on one's self-esteem.

You may have always thought that your level self-esteem was determined by your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. That is partly true. But our self-esteem is also influenced by the extent to which we are a reflection of the values that are prioritized in our culture. For example, in many Western cultures, people's self-esteem may be based on achieving status and feeling in control. In contrast, in many Eastern cultures, an important part of their self-esteem may be the extent to which people feel that they are doing their duty and putting others first.

The participants in this study were asked to answer the following question 10 times: "Who are you?" For example, individuals from Western cultures might respond with completions such as "I am awesome" or "I am a go-getter." In contrast, people from Eastern cultures might respond with completions such as: "I am a brother" "I am a friend." The participants then answered a number of questions in order to determine how much importance they placed on a number of values (i.e., being in control, doing your duty, helping others, and achieving social status). The scores from members of each country were averaged to determine how much weight each culture placed on each value.

The results showed that people's self-esteem was influenced more by endorsing the values that one's culture felt were important than by endorsing values each individual felt was personally important. More specifically, if one's culture places importance on being in control and achieving social status (i.e., in Western cultures) then fulfilling those goals is an important part of one's self-esteem. In contrast, if one's culture places importance on doing one's duty and helping others, then people will base their self-esteem on the fulfilment of those goals. It seems that living up to one's cultural standards has an impact on people's self-esteem all around the world!

Reference

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Case Study 4

Bodily signs of emotion often intensify emotional feelings

The facial feedback hypothesis proposes a relation between emotional expressions and emotional feelings. Darwin (1872/1965) [DOI:10.1037/10001-014] noted that enhancing or inhibiting expressions influences the intensity of the corresponding emotions. Izard (1977) and Tomkins (1982) have proposed that the experience of emotions is affected by feedback from the muscles that are activated in the face (see Hess, Kappas, McHugo, Lanzetta, & Kleck, 1992 [DOI:10.1016/0167-8760(92)90064-I] for empirical evidence). This feedback mechanism applies to postures and vocal processes as well.

Adelmann and Zajonc's (1989) [DOI:10.1146/annurev.ps.40.020189.001341] review investigated the role of emotional facial action in the subjective experience of emotion. They concluded that there is a positive association between facial efference and emotional experiences within participants. Facial expressions can modulate and initiate the experience of emotions. Support for the modulating function comes from Strack, Martin, and Stepper (1988) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.768] (see SP p. 117).

Several studies also demonstrated that facial expressions can initiate emotions. An example was reported by Zajonc et al. (1989) [DOI:10.1037/0033-295X.96.3.395]; participants were asked to pronounce ü and o for one minute. Pronouncing ü causes an increase in forehead temperature, which is associated with negative feelings. Results showed that participants rated the o sound more positively than the ü sound. Zajonc et al. also included the sounds ah and e in their study, which produce a smile analog, and decrease forehead temperature, which is associated with positive feelings. The ah and e sounds were liked the most, while ü was least liked.

In general, Adelmann and Zajonc concluded that there are thus far no grounds to reject any theory on facial efference in the experience of emotion. McIntosh (1996) [DOI:10.1007/BF02253868] evaluated the possible mechanisms responsible for this facial effect on emotions. First, the Jamesian camp views the feedback effects as a part of the package of events that make up each emotion. Activating one part of the response set (for example, a smile) activates other parts of this set (for example, positive feelings). As noted, Zajonc et al. (1989) [DOI:10.1037/0033-295X.96.3.395] argued that feedback effects are due to changing brain temperatures associated with specific feelings. Other researchers, however, see facial feedback as a by-product and suggest conditioning, self-perception, or dramaturgy plays an important role in those effects (see McIntosh, 1996 [DOI:10.1007/BF02253868]).

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Case Study 5

Self-esteem and Facebook Use

Facebook is a world entirely of its own. It is a place where we can post even the most random bits of information and share such pearls of wisdom with the world. Perhaps you've noticed that people have different Facebook personalities. Some of your friends may frequently make positive comments about what they're looking forward to. Others may enjoy sparking political debates, and some just want to complain.

The virtual world may seem like a safe haven to people; a place where they can express themselves without fear of judgment from others – at least not face-to-face judgment. This feature of Facebook frees up people who don't feel as comfortable expressing themselves in face-to-face encounters – for example, people with low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem (LSE) is associated with less positive feelings about the self. People with low self-esteem often have more negative thoughts and, in interpersonal interactions, they are often more motivated to avoid rejection. Because of its virtual nature, then, Facebook might be just the place for LSE individuals to open up and express themselves. Because expressing yourself and sharing with others is good, right? Well, it depends on what you share.

Forest and Wood (2012, and yes, those are the authors' last names) [DOI: 10.1177/0956797611429709] from the University of Waterloo, conducted three studies to examine the Facebook use of high versus low self-esteem individuals. In their first study, the researchers found that, indeed, participants with LSE felt more comfortable expressing themselves on Facebook than in person and thought that Facebook was a great place to connect with others. Given the greater amounts of negativity experienced by those with LSE, though, what type of information do they generally share?

In their second study, Forest and Wood (2012), assessed participants' self-esteem and then asked them to log in to Facebook and submit their 10 most recent Facebook posts. Coders who were blind to the hypothesis then coded each post. The results showed that the posts by people with LSE were generally more negative and also expressed more negative emotional states such as anger, frustration, anxiety, and fear. In addition (without knowing the participants' level of self-esteem), the coders rated the low self-esteem individuals as being less likeable, just from reading their posts. So, it seems that those with low self-esteem post more negative content and are liked less when they

do. But, the individuals coding these posts were strangers to the participants. How might one's friends react to posts such as these?

Before describing Study 3, ask yourself the following questions:

- Imagine that someone has just posted something negative on Facebook. Whose post will you be more likely to "Like" (if appropriate) and comment on: someone who generally tends to post positive information or someone who generally posts negative information?

- Now, imagine that someone has just posted something positive on Facebook. Whose post will you be more likely to "Like" and comment on: someone who generally tends to post positive information or someone who generally posts negative information?

Do you have some answers? Are you thinking of some specific people and posts? Well, read about Study 3 and see if you agree with the results…

In Study 3 by Forest and Wood (2012), participants again completed a self-esteem scale and they again submitted their 10 most recent Facebook posts. A separate set of individuals coded all of the same things as the previous study, in addition to one extra component. In this study, the coders also counted the number of "Likes" each post received as well as the number of people who commented on each post. What did they find? Forest and Wood found that people were more likely to comment/"Like" positive posts when they were made by someone with LSE (i.e., someone who *usually* posts negative information) than when they were made by someone with HSE. In contrast, negative posts made by HSE individuals (whose posts were presumably, usually more positive) resulted in a greater number of comments/"Likes" by their friends in comparison to such posts made by LSE individuals.

Are these results in line with your own personal experience? Forest and Wood (2012) suggested that people are more likely to comment on the positive posts made by LSE individuals because they are comparatively rare for such individuals. It can become tiresome reading the same old negative posts over and over again, so rather than commenting on (and thereby reinforcing posts such as these) one's Facebook friends are more willing to reinforce the positive comments. In contrast, negative posts made by those with high self-esteem are less common and therefore comment-worthy. No one wants their usually upbeat, positive friend to be down in the dumps, so what better way to cheer him or her up than with an encouraging post on Facebook?

The take home message for individuals with low self-esteem is that Facebook can be a wonderful place to disclose and share information, but you'll receive more support from your friends if your posts are positive.

Reference

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Case Study 6

The inability to shake regrets

It is an unfortunate, but natural part of life to have regrets. But what happens if you want to right a past wrong but you can't because it's too late? Researchers Bauer and Wrosch (2011) [DOI: 10.1177/0146167210393256] from Canada, suggest engaging in downward self-comparisons. In other words, compare yourself to someone whose regrets are even worse than yours.

Participants in this study completed a survey at two points in time. At the first point in time (the baseline), the participants were asked to write down their biggest life regret and then rate the extent to which there was a way for them to make amends and undo that regret. Next, participants were asked to indicate how their regret compared to the regrets felt by others of their own age. This indication provided a measure of upward and downward social comparisons. Those who engaged in upward social comparisons would see others as not having regrets that were as large as their own, whereas those who engaged in downward social comparisons would see others as have even bigger regrets than their own. Finally, the participants rated the extent to which they had experienced a variety of positive and negative emotions in the past couple of months and in the past year. The participants rated their emotions at the two points in time which allowed the researchers to determine a change of emotion score. The researchers then determined if there was any relationship between the use of upward/downward social comparisons, ability to undo a regret, and the participants' emotional state.

The results showed that participants who engaged in downward social comparisons actually experienced a greater change in positive emotion from baseline to Time 2, but only if they felt that it was very unlikely that they could undo past wrongs. In contrast, the lowest amount of positive affect was felt by people who made upward comparisons and who felt that it was unlikely that they could undo past wrongs.

So, if you're experiencing regret and it seems like it's too late to right your wrong, consider comparing yourself to those who have worse regrets and hopefully you will feel a little better.

Reference

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