

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

Viewing yourself positively and negatively are both motivating:

The effects of regulatory focus and culture

Date: July 30, 2012 (Monday)
Time: 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Venue: Room 813, 8/F Building C, Centennial Campus, HKU
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Viewing oneself positively has long been regarded as motivating. Past studies (e.g., Bandura, 1982; Taylor & Brown, 1988) have shown that maintaining positive self-view has positive impacts on motivation. However, the importance of positive self-evaluation has been challenged by some recent studies (e.g., Kim, Chiu, & Zou, 2010; Marx & Roman, 2002). The motivational benefits of positive self-evaluation are inconclusive. The present research addressed this issue by investigating the conditions that may facilitate or undermine the motivational effects of positive or negative self-evaluations.

Study One adopted a 2 (self-evaluation: positive vs. negative) x 2 (cultural groups: Caucasian vs. Chinese) experimental design and investigated the moderating role of culture on the motivational effects of self-evaluation. One hundred and eleven participants (56 Chinese and 55 Caucasian) were recruited. The participants were asked to engage in a novel task and their persistence and performance were measured. The findings showed consistent interaction effects between culture and self-evaluation on the two outcome measures: positive self-evaluation was motivating to the Caucasian participants whereas negative self-evaluation was motivating to the Chinese participants.

Study Two further investigated if regulatory focus, a personality variable that has different prevalence across cultures (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000), moderates the motivational effect of self-evaluation. It adopted a 2 (self-evaluation: positive vs. negative) x 2 (regulatory focus: promotion focus vs. prevention focus) experimental design. Ninety-three Hong Kong college students participated in the experiment that was similar to that of Study One. The findings showed a pattern parallel to those in Study One. Positive self-evaluation was motivating to participants with promotion focus, whereas negative self-evaluation was motivating to participants with prevention focus.

The two studies showed both within and between cultural differences in the motivational effects of positive and negative self-evaluations. The findings were discussed with reference to the literature on cultural and individual differences in motivation.