Effects of Self-Relevant Perspective-Taking on the Impact of Persuasive Appeals

Iris W. Hung[1] and Robert S. Wyer, Jr.[2]

Abstract

Donation appeals often describe the situations that confront victims of misfortune and advertisements for consumer products often show people using the products being promoted. When people consider these messages from the perspective of the individuals described in them, they often imagine the reactions they would have if they personally experienced the situation described. When this occurs, they are likely to be influenced by the messages independently of the protagonists' characteristics. When recipients' attention is drawn to *themselves*, however, they compare themselves with the protagonists to determine whether the protagonists' actions or the situation described in the message have implications for their own behavior. This self-focused attention increases the impact of the message when they are similar to the protagonists, decreases its impact when they are moderately dissimilar, and has no effect at all when they are very dissimilar to the protagonists. Two experiments, in which participants' self-focused attention, the type of persuasive appeal (self-referential vs. impersonal), and protagonist-participant similarity were independently manipulated, confirmed these effects on the impact of both (a) an appeal for monetary donations to a charity and (b) a commercial advertisement.

Keywords

The persuasive communications that people encounter outside the laboratory often convey descriptions of people engaging in activities or having experiences that have implications for the behavior that the message is intended to influence. Appeals for donations, for example, often portray the situation confronting the victims of misfortune and the conditions that give rise to their suffering. Commercial advertisements often portray people enjoying themselves while using the product being promoted. Recipients can respond to these messages in different ways, and the way they respond can influence the messages' effectiveness.

On one hand, individuals who hear or read about another person's experience in a given situation might often comprehend the information by constructing a mental simulation of the experience it describes (Wyer, Adaval, & Colcombe, 2002; Wyer & Radvansky, 1999). This representation theoretically includes a mental image of the events that compose the experience. Consequently, like a picture, it is constructed from a particular perspective. In some cases, recipients might form the representation from the perspective of the protagonists, vicariously experiencing the cognitive and emotional reactions that they imagine the protagonists having (Green & Brock, 2000). On the other hand, they might construe the situation from the perspective of an outside observer who is a witness to the situation but is not personally involved.

Other considerations arise. In many instances, recipients' reactions to a communication may depend on their perception of the likelihood that they or persons like them would have the experience the message describes. This perception, in turn, requires an assessment of their personal characteristics and the similarity of these characteristics to the protagonists'. These assessments do not come into play when recipients construct a mental representation of the events described in the message from the perspective of the protagonists.

Recipients' self-perceptions play a role in both estimates of their similarity to the protagonists and their disposition to imagine the situation from the protagonists' perspective. However, these perceptions may be influenced by different factors. Individuals' disposition to imagine themselves as a protagonist in the situation may depend on characteristics of the message that stimulate them to construct a mental simulation

[1]National University of Singapore
[2]The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Corresponding Author:
Iris W. Hung, National University of Singapore, 15 Kent Ridge Drive, Singapore 119245.
Email: iris.hung@nus.edu.sg

of the situation from the protagonists' perspective. In contrast, their disposition to consider their similarity to the protagonists depends on situational factors that lead them to think about themselves as well as the protagonists. These dispositions could have different effects on the overall impact of the message.

To evaluate these effects, we examined participants' reactions to two quite different types of persuasive messages: an appeal for charitable donations and an advertisement for a consumer product. In each case, participants' similarity to the persons described in the message (in ethnicity, gender, or social status) was manipulated. To encourage recipients to take the perspective of the protagonists, the appeal explicitly encouraged recipients to imagine themselves in the situation being portrayed (e.g., "Imagine that you were . . ."). To stimulate participants to think about their personal characteristics in relation to the protagonists, however, we used a procedure used by Duval and Wicklund (1972, 1973) to induce self-focused attention.

In each study, we found that when messages urged participants to imagine themselves experiencing the situation confronting the protagonists, they had greater persuasive impact regardless of participants' similarity to the protagonists. In contrast, participants' self-focused attention increased the message's impact when participants were similar to the protagonists but decreased its impact when they were moderately dissimilar to the protagonists and had no effect at all when they were extremely dissimilar. Moreover, the effects of self-focused attention and the effect of imagining the situation from the perspective of the protagonists were independent. These effects and the processes that underlie them are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

Theoretical Background

Effects of Perspective

Not all comprehension involves the construction of mental images, of course. Abstract statements (e.g., "honesty is the best policy," "the man owns a motorcycle") are typically comprehended in terms of semantic concepts alone. The construction of these images is nevertheless fundamental to social perception. As Wyer and Radvansky (1999; Wyer, 2004) suggest, social events that are situationally and temporally constrained (i.e., that occur at a specific time and place) are spontaneously comprehended by constructing a mental simulation (i.e., a *situation model*) of the events that have an image component. Moreover, these images, like pictures, are necessarily formed from a particular perspective, or point of view.

Thus, as Black, Turner, and Bower (1979) found, pairs of verbal statements are more difficult to comprehend if the images formed from them require a shift in visual perspective (i.e., "Mary was reading in her room. John went in to talk to her") than if they can be formed from the same

perspective ("Mary was reading in her room. John came in to talk to her"). Moreover, statements elicit more extreme emotional reactions if the images they elicit are formed from the perspective of someone in the same situation (e.g., "The drunk came into the kitchen and threw up on the floor") than if they are formed from the perspective of someone outside the situation ("The drunk went into the kitchen . . ."; Jiang & Wyer, 2009). These considerations suggest that verbal descriptions of situation-specific events are spontaneously comprehended from a particular perspective and that individuals' reactions to the events can depend on this perspective.

In these examples, individuals presumably constructed the images they formed from the perspective of someone who observed the situation being described, much as they would if they were shown a picture that was taken from this perspective. As Green and Brock (2000) note, however, individuals who encounter a sequence of events involving a person can sometimes become "transported" into the situation, adopting the perspective of the protagonist in these events (Green & Brock, 2000) and experiencing thoughts and feelings similar to those they imagine the protagonist having. To this extent, two questions arise. First, what determines the perspective from which individuals view the events conveyed in a message? Second, what are the consequences of taking these perspectives?

Determinants of perspectives. Taking the protagonist's perspective in a situation can occur spontaneously when the message is emotionally absorbing (Green & Brock, 2000). However, it can be induced in other ways as well. Most obviously, it can be induced by implicit or explicit instructions to imagine oneself as a protagonist in the situation (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005; Galinsky, Wang, & Ku, 2008). In advertisements and donation appeals, for example, the perspective is induced by referring to the recipients as "you" and explicitly encouraging them to imagine being in the situation described.

In the situations we investigated, we expected that participants would normally construe the message they received from an impersonal perspective somewhat analogous to that formed by participants in the aforementioned studies by Black et al. (1979) and Jiang and Wyer (2009). However, we assumed that making the message self-referential in the manner used by Hung and Wyer (2009; see also Escalas, 2007; Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993) would increase recipients' disposition to imagine the situation from the perspective of the protagonists.

Consequences of perspective taking. Taking the protagonists' perspective when comprehending a message can have two consequences of importance in the conditions we constructed. First, recipients may vicariously experience the emotional reactions that they imagine the protagonists experiencing. Thus, if a donation appeal describes the situation

confronting persons in need of help, recipients who take the victims' perspective are likely to empathize with the victims and consequently are more likely to provide help.

Previous studies confirm this assumption. Encouraging recipients of a persuasive communication to imagine being in the situation described can elicit stronger affective reactions (Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993), and is consequently more likely to induce participants to take the action being advocated. Hung and Wyer (2009) found that taking the victims' perspective when reading a donation appeal increased its impact whereas taking the donor's perspective was often disruptive and decreased its effect.

A second consequence of taking the protagonists' perspective is suggested by Jones and Nisbett (1971; see also Storms, 1973). When people construe a situation from the perspective of the protagonists in a situation, their attention is likely to be directed outward, on characteristics of the situation rather than on the attributes of the protagonists themselves. To this extent, attributes of the victims and the similarity of these attributes to recipients' own attributes are unlikely to have much impact on the mental representation that recipients form from this perspective and, therefore, on the judgment they base on it. There is a qualification on this conclusion, however, of a sort we note presently.

Effects of Similarity

The perspective that individuals take when they construe the implications of a message is likely to exert an influence on their perceptions of the message's implications for the protagonists. In some cases, this may be sufficient to induce them to decide to take the action that the message recommends. However, this decision could also depend on recipients' perception that the recommended act has implications for *themselves.* This, in turn, may be influenced by their similarity to the protagonists and thus whether they can imagine themselves or others like them personally experiencing the situation in which the protagonists are involved.

The general effects of people's similarity to others on their behavior are well known. People are typically attracted to persons whom they perceive to be similar to themselves (Byrne, 1969), and are likely to conform to their opinions (Brock, 1965; Burger, Messian, Patel, Prado, & Anderson, 2004; Miller, Downs, & Prentice, 1998). Furthermore, they are more likely to help similar others than dissimilar ones (Cialdini et al., 1997). These findings suggest that message recipients' perceptions of their similarity to the protagonists might influence their belief that the protagonists' behavior has implications for their own actions and that the situation confronting the protagonist is similar one that they or persons like them might also encounter.

Perceptions of similarity could potentially be based on numerous criteria. In the absence of information about a person's background, attitudes, and values, however, the person's physical characteristics (e.g., sex, ethnicity, etc.) are very salient features and consequently are likely to be a particularly important determinant (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Thus, individuals may consider another's experience to be more personally relevant if they are similar to the other in these respects than if they are not.

In the present context, these considerations suggest participants are more likely to help the victims of misfortune described in a donation appeal if they perceive the victims to be similar to themselves. Correspondingly, they are likely to purchase a product if they can identify with the protagonists in an ad who are using it. If they perceive the protagonists to be dissimilar to themselves, however, they might use their personal attributes as a standard of comparison and be *less* inclined to imagine themselves in the situation than they would if they had not considered their similarity to the protagonists at all.

There is a qualification on the latter prediction, however. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Schachter, 1959; for a review, see Suls & Wheeler, 2000) indicates that people must perceive *some* commonality between themselves and another to consider the other to be an appropriate standard of comparison. (For example, a man is more likely to compare his performance on a skills test to someone who is similar to himself in sex, race, or age than to someone who differs from him in all three respects.) On a priori grounds, it is obviously difficult to know what level of dissimilarity is likely to induce a perception of irrelevance. It nonetheless seems likely that if people perceive themselves to have nothing in common with the individuals described in a communication, they may consider the situation confronting these individuals to be personally irrelevant and may base their responses to it on different criteria.

The Role of Self-Focused Attention

For recipients' similarity to the protagonists in a message to have an impact on judgments, they must be sensitive to not only the characteristics of the protagonists but also their own. Chronic individual differences in the disposition to think about oneself as an object of attention have been identified by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975; see also Gasper & Clore, 2000). However, this disposition can also be induced experimentally. Duval and Wicklund (1972, 1973; see also Scheier & Carver, 1977) showed that people's self-focused attention increases when they are placed in front of a mirror. As a result of this increased attention, people rely to a greater extent on their previously acquired knowledge when making judgments and decision, leading to resistance to persuasion and attitude-behavior consistency (Hutton & Baumeister, 1992; Pryor, Gibbons, Wicklund, Fazio, & Hood, 1977; Scheier & Carver, 1980). Furthermore, they are likely to attribute responsibility for an event to themselves rather than to external factors (Jones and Nisbett 1971) and to use of internalized norms and standards as bases for decisions (Diener, 1979; Diener & Srull, 1979).

The impact of self-focused attention on information processing has not often been examined. However, Hung and Wyer (2011) found that focusing individuals' attention on themselves stimulated them to imagine themselves using the products they evaluated and to base their judgments on this imagined experience rather than on the product's individual attributes. Pham, Goukens, Lehman, and Stuart (2010) showed that self-aware individuals are inclined to attribute the success of products or services to themselves rather than to the provider and are consequently less satisfied with the provider they might otherwise be.

We considered a different effect of self-focused attention. We assumed that when individuals are self-conscious at the time they learn about another's experience, they are likely to construe its implications for themselves and may base this construal on their perception of the similarity between themselves and the protagonist. Thus, in the conditions we investigated, inducing self-focused attention should increase participants' willingness to help victims of misfortune who are similar to themselves. At the same time, it might decrease participants' willingness to help victims who are dissimilar to themselves relative to conditions in which they do not compare themselves with the victims at all. Correspondingly, self-focused attention should increase recipients' willingness to purchase a product that is ostensibly used by the protagonists in an ad if the protagonists are similar to themselves but might have the opposite effect if the protagonists are dissimilar. These predictions, however, may be qualified for reasons noted earlier. That is, when participants perceive the protagonists to be *very* dissimilar to themselves along the dimensions that are salient, they may not consider the protagonists to be a relevant basis for comparison regardless of their self-focused attention and may base their evaluations on other criteria instead (e.g., attributes of the product being advertised).

To summarize, we predicted that the effects of a self-referent communication on the perspective that people take when construing the implications of a message were assumed to be independent of their similarity to the protagonists. In contrast, the effects of self-focused attention on people's perceptions that the protagonists' actions and the situation confronting them had implications for themselves should depend on this similarity. The interdependence of these effects was not completely clear a priori. On one hand, the effect of the comparison process that is activated by self-focused attention might not occur until the output stage of processing, when individuals construe the implications of the situation for a judgment or decision (Ostrom & Upshaw, 1968; Wyer & Srull, 1989). However, it could also occur in the course of comprehending the message, when participants construe the implications of the situation described for the individuals who are involved in it. That is, the perception of similarity to the protagonists induced by self-focused attention might influence the extent to which individuals take the protagonists' perspective and thus determine the influence of

self-referential processes. As will be seen, our results are more consistent with the second possibility.

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, Singaporean Chinese participants read an appeal for donations to assist victims of child trafficking. The appeal was accompanied by a picture of either a Chinese child or an African child. In some cases, the appeal explicitly encouraged participants to imagine themselves in the situation confronting the victims, whereas in other cases, the appeal was impersonal. Finally, some participants performed the experiment in front of a mirror that focused their attention on themselves (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). We expected that inducing individuals to imagine the situation from the victims' perspective would increase their willingness to donate money regardless of their similarity to the victims. In contrast, we expected that inducing self-focused attention would sensitize participants to their similarity to the victims and lead them to use it as a basis for determining whether the situation confronting the victims had implications for the sorts of situations that they or persons like them might encounter. Therefore, we expected self-focused attention to increase participants' willingness to donate when the victims of child trafficking were of the same ethnicity as themselves but to decrease their desire to donate when the victims were of a different ethnicity (relative to conditions in which comparisons with the victims were not made at all).

Method

Three hundred Chinese undergraduate students participated in this study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to cells of a 2 (appeal type: self-referential vs. impersonal) × 2 (self-focused attention: high vs. low) × 3 (ethnicity: same vs. different vs. unknown) between-subject design. Self-focused attention was manipulated using the procedure used by Duval and Wicklund (1972; see also Hung & Wyer, 2011; Scheier & Carver, 1977). Under *high self-focused attention* conditions, a 16 cm × 16 cm mirror was placed on the desk in front of each participant. To avoid suspicion, a note was placed beside the mirror indicating "The mirror is set up for an experiment to be conducted by the Department of Humanities. Please do not move the set up." Under *low self-focused attention* conditions, however, no mirror was placed on participants' desks.

Participants were introduced to the study using instructions and materials similar to those used by Hung and Wyer (2009). Specifically, they were told that the researchers were interested in how people process information of the sort they encounter in daily life. With this preamble, they viewed a donation appeal from a charity called *Pangaea*. The one-page appeal described the problem of child trafficking and was either self-referential or impersonal. The *self-referential* appeal read as follows:

The buying and selling of children is a lucrative international trade. Imagine that you and others you know are among the estimated 1.2 million children who are sold each year by their families to be used for sex and labor. Your parents, like those of other children, might be unaware of its dangers, believing that you might have the chance for a better life outside your own country. Like other forms of criminal activity, trafficking is an underground activity and is difficult to address.

The *impersonal* description read as follows:

The buying and selling of children is a lucrative international trade. An estimated 1.2 million children are sold each year by their families to be used for sex and labor. Parents are often unaware of its dangers, believing that their children might have the chance for a better life outside their own country. Like other forms . . .

To manipulate participants' similarity to the victims, a picture of an ostensible victim was placed above the description that portrayed either an Asian child (in *similar ethnicity* conditions) or an African child (in *dissimilar ethnicity* conditions). In *unknown ethnicity* conditions, no picture was presented.

After participants had read the appeal, they turned to the next page to which a sealed envelope was attached. They were told that if they wished, they could make an anonymous donation to the charity. Participants were asked to put the envelope in a box by the door on leaving the experiment regardless of whether they donated money or not. (The amount of money that participants donated was sent to the charitable institution for the purpose indicated in the appeal.)

Then, participants completed a questionnaire in which they first indicated the extent to which they had an urge to help along a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). They also indicated the extent to which they imagined themselves being one of the children who was trafficked along a similar scale.

Participants then indicated the extent to which they were similar to the victim described in the appeal along a scale from 0 (*not at all similar*) to 10 (*very similar*). Furthermore, participants who were shown a picture of the victims were asked to identify their ethnicity. All participants reported the race (Chinese or African) correctly.

To confirm the manipulation of self-focused attention, participants were given a sentence construction task that was used in previous research assessing self-consciousness (Briley & Wyer, 2002). Participants were told that the researcher was interested in English sentence construction. They were given 25 sets of five words and were asked to underlie four that could form a sentence. Two sentences could be formed from each set, one of which required the use of a first-person pronoun and the other which did not (e.g., "take taxi I a they"). Participants were asked to underline the words that composed the first sentence that came to their mind. The number of sentences in which participants used a

self-referent pronoun was used as an index of self-focused attention.

Finally, to examine whether feelings of sadness influence donations (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980), participants reported how sad they were feeling "right now" along a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*). Then they were asked to guess the purpose of the study and were debriefed. No one guessed the hypothesis correctly.

Results

Manipulation checks. Participants indicated that they were more similar to the victim when the picture portrayed an Asian victim than when it portrayed an African victim ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.67$ vs. $M = 2.18$, $SD = .94$ respectively), $F(1, 214) = 248.29$, $p < .001$, and this was true regardless of whether participants' self-focused attention was high ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.72$ vs. $M = 2.28$, $SD = .99$) or low ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.60$ vs. $M = 2.15$, $SD = .89$). (Thus, individuals with low self-focused attention were able to report their similarity to the victims when they were asked to do so. As we will indicate presently, however, they did not take this factor into account when they were asked whether they would help the victims.)

The manipulation of self-focused attention was also successful. Participants constructed more sentences with self-relevant pronouns in high self-focused attention conditions than in low self-focused attention conditions ($M = 22.22$, $SD = 4.24$ vs. $M = 17.41$, $SD = 3.16$), $F(1, 288) = 111.40$, $p < .001$.

Imagining oneself in the victims' situation. Participants were more likely to imagine themselves being trafficked when the appeal was self-referential than when it was impersonal ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 2.95$ vs. $M = 3.26$, $SD = 2.96$ respectively), $F(1, 288) = 17.42$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .041$, and this difference did not depend on the victims' ethnicity ($F < 1$). Thus, taking the victims' perspective influenced participants' tendency to imagine themselves being trafficked without thinking about their actual similarity to the victims that were portrayed.

Independently of this tendency, however, participants were more likely to imagine themselves as a victim of child trafficking when they were ethnically similar to the victims described in the appeal ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 2.91$) than when they were dissimilar ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 2.92$) or when the victims' ethnicity was unknown ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 2.43$), $F(2, 228) = 23.34$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .137$. However, the interaction of self-awareness and ethnic similarity was also significant, $F(1, 288) = 8.21$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .036$, and indicated that inducing self-focused attention increased participants' tendency to imagine themselves as a victim when the victims were ethnically similar to themselves (from $M = 4.65$, $SD = 2.92$ to $M = 6.22$, $SD = 2.69$), $F(1, 288) = 10.63$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .066$, and decreased this tendency when the victims were dissimilar (from $M = 4.47$, $SD = 3.08$ to $M = 3.06$,

Table 1. Effects of Appeal Type and Self-Focused Attention and Ethnic Similarity to the Protagonist on Responses to a Donation Appeal—Experiment 1.

	High self-focused attention		Low self-focused attention	
	Self-referential appeal	Impersonal appeal	Self-referential appeal	Impersonal appeal
Urge to help				
Same ethnicity	7.03 (1.34)	6.63 (2.06)	5.79 (2.25)	5.71 (2.17)
Different ethnicity	5.17 (1.93)	4.92 (1.91)	6.62 (1.79)	5.53 (2.29)
Unknown ethnicity	4.76 (1.48)	4.05 (2.46)	4.80 (2.33)	3.94 (1.98)
Monetary donation				
Same ethnicity	5.06 (4.91)	5.25 (4.07)	3.85 (3.33)	3.00 (1.97)
Different ethnicity	2.11 (1.67)	1.70 (1.57)	3.44 (3.00)	2.90 (1.85)
Unknown ethnicity	2.14 (1.85)	1.25 (0.72)	2.43 (1.41)	1.00 (1.90)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

$SD = 2.57$), $F(1, 288) = 10.31$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .061$, and had no effect on this tendency when the victims' ethnicity was unknown ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 2.19$ vs. $M = 2.40$, $SD = 2.70$).

Emotional reactions. Analyses of participants' reported feelings of sadness revealed a three-way interaction of appeal type, self-awareness, and ethnic similarity. Participants felt generally more sad when the ethnicity of the victims was known (M similar $= 6.40$ vs. M dissimilar $= 6.52$) than when the ethnicity was unknown ($M = 5.92$), $F(2, 288) = 7.71$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .041$. However, the interaction of ethnic similarity, self-focused attention, and appeal type was also significant, $F(2, 288) = 5.01$, $p < .01$. Data relevant to this interaction indicate that when participants were either similar or dissimilar to the protagonists, they reported less sadness when the appeal was impersonal and they were low in self-focused attention ($M = 6.11$) than they were at the other three combinations of these variables ($M = 6.55$), $F(1, 288) = 5.57$, $p < .02$, which did not differ from one another ($p > .10$). When the protagonists' ethnicity was unknown, however, the difference was in the opposite direction (6.29 vs. 5.81, respectively), $F(1, 288) = 3.15$, $p < .08$.

Urge to help. We hypothesized that stimulating participants to take the victims' perspective would increase their willingness to help regardless of their similarity to the victims, whereas the effect of self-awareness would be contingent on similarity. These hypotheses were confirmed on the basis of data pertaining to both participants' reports of their urge to help and the amount of money they actually donated. Analyses of each set yielded both (a) a significant effect of appeal type that was independent of both self-awareness and ethnic similarity ($F < 1$) and (b) a significant interaction of self-awareness and ethnic similarity that was independent of appeal type.

The effects of experimental variables on participants' urge to help are shown in the first section of Table 1. Participants reported greater urge to help when the appeal encouraged

them to take the protagonists' perspective than when it did not ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 2.04$ vs. $M = 5.18$, $SD = 2.31$), $F(1, 288) = 5.68$, $p < .02$, $\omega^2 = .013$, and this was true regardless of whether the victim was similar to themselves in ethnicity (6.41 vs. 6.17, respectively), dissimilar to themselves (5.90 vs. 5.22, respectively), or of unknown ethnicity (4.78 vs. 4.00, respectively). The interaction of appeal type and ethnic similarity was not significant, $F < 1$.

Participants reported a generally greater urge to help when the victims' ethnicity was similar to their own ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 2.01$) than when it was either dissimilar ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 2.05$) or unknown ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.09$), $F(2, 288) = 20.03$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .016$. However, the effect of similarity interacted with self-focused attention, $F(2, 288) = 7.21$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .035$. Specifically, self-focused attention increased participants' urge to help from 5.77 to 6.86 when the victims were similar, $F(1, 288) = 8.25$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .056$, but decreased their urge to help from 6.23 to 5.07 when the victims were dissimilar, $F(1, 288) = 9.56$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .063$, and had no effect at all on their urge to help victims whose similarity was unknown (4.42 vs. 4.41; $F < 1$).

Monetary donations. The amount of money that participants actually donated (in Singapore dollars) is summarized in the second section of Table 1. Participants' donations, like their urge to help, were generally greater when the protagonists' ethnicity was similar to their own ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 3.95$) than when it was dissimilar to their own ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 2.25$) or unknown ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 1.62$), $F(2, 288) = 20.02$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .107$. However, participants donated more money when the appeal encouraged them to take the victims' perspective ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 3.25$) than when it did not ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 2.73$), $F(1, 288) = 3.78$, $p < .05$, $\omega^2 = .008$, and this difference did not depend on whether the victims' ethnicity was similar to their own (4.45 vs. 4.12, respectively), dissimilar (2.78 vs. 2.30, respectively), or unknown (2.37 vs. 1.12, respectively).

In contrast, the effect of self-focused attention depended on ethnic similarity, as evidenced by an interaction of these variables, $F(2, 288) = 7.28$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .035$. Self-focused attention increased participants' donations from 3.57 to 5.14 when the victims were ethnically similar to them, $F(1, 288) = 6.01$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .035$, but decreased their donations from 3.25 to 1.94 when the victims were dissimilar, $F(1, 288) = 8.40$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .069$, and had no effect when the victims' ethnicity was not known (1.71 vs. 1.77; $F < 1$). No other effects were significant.

Mediation analyses. The effect of the type of appeal on participants' donations was expected to be mediated by its impact on their disposition to imagine the situation from the perspective of the victims. Bootstrapping analyses (based on 9,000 samples) confirmed this assumption. That is, the disposition to imagine themselves as a victim was a significant mediator of effect of appeal type on both urge to help (95% CI = [.3405, .9520]) and donation amount (95% CI = [.1319, .5986]). To evaluate the mediating effects of this disposition on self-focused attention, we restricted consideration to the two conditions in which self-focused attention had an impact (i.e., conditions in which the victims' ethnicity was known). The interactive effects of self-focused attention and ethnic similarity on participants' tendency to imagine themselves as a victim were a significant mediator of its effects on both urge to help (95% CI = [.0039, .4600]) and donation amount (95% CI = [.0039, .2353]).

Discussion

Experiment 1 confirmed our expectations. Inducing participants to take the perspective of the victims described in a donation appeal increased the appeal's effectiveness and this was true regardless of whether the victims were similar to participants or not. In contrast, the impact of similarity on the appeal's effectiveness increased with participants' self-focused attention. That is, participants who were thinking about themselves at the time they read the appeal were more willing to help ethnically similar victims, but were less willing to help ethnically dissimilar victims, than they were when they were not thinking about themselves.

These effects argue against an alternative interpretation of the effect of self-focused attention. That is, one might speculate that placing participants in front of a mirror distracts them from thinking carefully about the message, leading them to use more peripheral criteria (e.g., superficial characteristics of the protagonists) as a basis for judgment. This could explain the increased effect of similarity in these conditions. If this interpretation were correct, however, the effect of taking the protagonists' perspective should generally *decrease* when participants were placed in front of a mirror. In fact, this decrease was not at all evident in either this study or the experiment to follow.

The interactive effect of self-focused attention and ethnic similarity on donation behavior was independent of the effects of self-referential communications. However, the evidence that participants' disposition to imagine themselves being in the situation mediated the effects of self-focused attention on donation behavior casts doubt on our speculation that the comparison processes activated by self-focused attention occurred at the output stage of processing. Rather, self-focused attention may have influenced participants' disposition to imagine themselves as a victim to different degrees depending on the victims' ethnicity, and thus exerted its influence at the initial, comprehension stage of processing. Results of the next experiment strengthen this conclusion.

Experiment 2

The effect of similarity that we observed in Experiment 1 raises a question. As we noted earlier, not all persons that people encounter are considered to be relevant bases for comparison. In fact, theory and research on social comparison processes (Festinger 1954; for a contemporary review, see Suls & Wheeler, 2000) suggest that similarity to another person in some respects may be necessary for the other to be considered an appropriate standard of comparison and, therefore, for differences in other respects to be considered. If participants consider the protagonists in an appeal to be extremely dissimilar to themselves, they are likely to consider these protagonists and the situation confronting them to be personally irrelevant. To this extent, the appeal might have little impact on participants' judgments or decisions regardless of their self-awareness.

Experiment 2 investigated this possibility. Participants considered a print advertisement for a tennis racquet that showed the ad protagonist using the product. The protagonist's similarity to participants varied along two dimensions. That is, the protagonist (a) was either male or female and (b) was either a well-known tennis professional or an unknown person. Participants' similarity to the protagonists in these respects was varied independently. We assumed that in this experiment, as in Experiment 1, differences along a single dimension were sufficient to reverse the effect of self-focused attention. (Although victims in this experiment differed from the protagonists in other respects, such as age, these differences were unlikely to be considered relevant to the judgment being made.) However, we expected differences along both dimensions would lead participants to consider the protagonists and the situation described to be relatively irrelevant. On a priori grounds, it was unclear whether dissimilarity along two dimensions would be sufficient to lead participants to consider the situation to be completely irrelevant. In the situations we investigated, however, only these dimensions were salient bases for comparison. We therefore predicted that focusing participants' attention on themselves

would increase the effect of the ad when participants were similar to the protagonist along both dimensions, decrease the ad's impact when they differed from the protagonist along one dimension, and would have relatively little effect when participants were dissimilar to protagonist in more respects.

In addition to confirming these predictions, the second experiment extended Experiment 1's findings in two important ways. First, it generalized the phenomena to conditions in which individuals contemplated acquiring something for themselves rather than doing something for others. Second, although the message used to induce participants to take the protagonist's perspective in Experiment 1 was quite detailed, the message used in the present experiment consisted of a single phrase that captioned a picture of the protagonists. Thus, very little elaboration was used to "transport" participants into the situation described and to stimulate them to consider the situation from the perspective of the protagonist (for other evidence that a short self-referential phrase is sufficient to induce this perspective, see Escalas 2007; Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter, 1982). Nevertheless, our results were very similar to those observed in the first experiment.

Method

Four-hundred fourteen undergraduate students (184 males and 230 females) participated in this study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (self-focused attention) × 2 (ad type: self-referential vs. impersonal) × 2 (similarity in status) × 2 (similarity in gender) between-subjects design. High self-awareness was again manipulated by placing participants in front of a mirror.

Participants were told that the study was intended to examine how people process information they encounter in daily life. On this pretext, participants were asked to view an advertisement for a Calypso tennis racquet (a fictitious brand). The advertisement was presented on a single page with a picture of the protagonist at the top and a one-line message below it. The *self-referential* message read "Imagine yourself using a Calypso tennis racquet" whereas the *impersonal* message read "Introducing a Calypso tennis racquet."

The gender and familiarity of the protagonist were varied independently. That is, the protagonist was either male or female. In *high status* conditions, the male protagonist was Roger Federer and the female protagonist was Maria Sharapova—tennis stars who were very well known to participants. In *equal status* conditions, the protagonist was an unknown player of Western ethnicity of approximately the same age as the participants.

After viewing the ad, participants reported their liking for the advertised product along a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). Then, they indicated the extent to which they imagined themselves using the product, and imagined themselves in the situation portrayed in the ad along similar scales. Responses on these scales were highly correlated

($\alpha = .83$) and were averaged to provide a single index of participants' tendency to imagine themselves in the situation described.

Participants then reported their similarity to the ad protagonist in gender and status along scales from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*), and reported the extent to which they thought about their similarity or dissimilarity to the ad protagonist along a scale from −5 (*thought most about dissimilarities*) to 5 (*thought most about similarities*). To confirm the manipulation of self-focused attention, participants were given the sentence construction task we used in Experiment 1. Participants then indicated their knowledge and interest in the product, the expertise and the attractiveness of the ad protagonist along scales from 0 to 10, and the likelihood that the ad protagonist was an ordinary citizen or a celebrity along a scale from −5 (*likely to be an ordinary citizen*) to 5 (*likely to be a celebrity*). Finally, they reported how involved they were in the task, guessed the purpose of the study, and were debriefed. (No one guessed the hypothesis correctly.)

Results

Manipulation checks. The manipulations of self-focused attention and similarity were both successful. Participants constructed significantly more sentences with self-relevant pronouns when they were placed in front of a mirror than when they were not ($M = 18.66$, $SD = 3.96$ vs. $M = 16.78$, $SD = 3.90$), $F(1, 399) = 22.40$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, participants reported being less similar to the ad protagonists when the protagonists were tennis stars than when they were not ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.99$ vs. $M = 7.72$, $SD = 2.21$, respectively), $F(1, 399) = 418.28$, $p < .001$, and less similar to protagonists of the opposite gender than to protagonists of the same gender ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 1.18$ vs. $M = 8.93$, $SD = 2.14$), $F(1, 399) = 2,573.36$, $p < .001$. The celebrity protagonists were also perceived to be more attractive than the noncelebrity protagonists ($M = 6.81$, $SD = 2.54$ vs. $M = 5.14$, $SD = 2.63$, respectively), $F(1, 399) = 278.29$, $p < .001$, and to have a higher level of expertise in tennis ($M = 8.83$, $SD = 1.63$ vs. $M = 5.61$, $SD = 2.74$, respectively), $F(1, 399) = 199.37$, $p < .01$. However, supplementary mediation analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008) indicated that neither attractiveness nor expertise significantly affected the impact of the independent variables on product evaluations (all ps > .15).

Product evaluations. We expected that a self-referential message would increase the ad's impact on product evaluations and that this effect would not depend on participants' similarity to the protagonist. In contrast, we expected that inducing self-awareness would increase the ad's effectiveness when participants were similar to the protagonist in both gender and status, to decrease the ad's effectiveness when participants were similar to the protagonist in one respect but not the other, and to have little effect when they were dissimilar to the protagonist in both respects.

Table 2. Effects of Ad Type, Self-Focused Attention, and Similarity to the Protagonist on Responses to a Commercial Advertisement—Experiment 2.

	High self-focused attention		Low self-focused attention	
	Same status protagonist	Different status protagonist	Same status protagonist	Different status protagonist
Product evaluations				
Self-referential ad				
Same sex	5.84 (1.63)	6.04 (1.54)	4.63 (2.31)	7.14 (2.08)
Different sex	3.67 (1.28)	6.73 (2.09)	4.48 (2.03)	6.26 (2.19)
Impersonal ad				
Same sex	5.13 (1.42)	5.11 (2.01)	4.12 (2.16)	7.05 (1.82)
Different sex	3.05 (1.43)	6.05 (2.25)	4.21 (2.38)	5.90 (1.99)
Tendency to imagine oneself in the situation portrayed by the ad				
Self-referential ad				
Same sex	5.42 (1.92)	4.48 (2.37)	4.45 (2.38)	5.76 (1.68)
Different sex	3.64 (1.74)	3.96 (2.46)	4.48 (2.58)	4.29 (2.41)
Impersonal ad				
Same sex	4.63 (1.84)	3.00 (2.50)	3.62 (2.18)	4.70 (2.80)
Different sex	1.80 (1.55)	3.95 (2.62)	3.64 (2.59)	3.27 (2.37)
Attention to similarity				
Self-referential ad				
Same sex	3.40 (1.35)	−2.28 (1.37)	0.43 (2.61)	0.57 (1.78)
Different sex	−1.62 (2.04)	−0.15 (1.16)	−0.86 (2.64)	−0.52 (2.19)
Impersonal ad				
Same sex	3.04 (2.60)	−2.18 (2.18)	0.46 (2.83)	0.25 (2.55)
Different sex	−2.33 (1.35)	−0.26 (2.47)	−0.72 (1.43)	−0.81 (1.72)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

These hypotheses were confirmed. The top section of Table 2 shows product evaluations as a function of ad type, self-focused attention, and the two similarity manipulations. Analyses of evaluations as a function of these variables revealed the expected main effect of appeal type, $F(1, 399) = 7.00$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .011$. Specifically, when the ad's message encouraged participants to imagine themselves in the situation described, it increased participants' liking for the product (from 4.95 to $M = 5.59$) and this difference did not depend on either participants' self-focused attention or their similarity to the ad protagonist in gender or status ($p > .10$ in all cases).

Participants evaluated the product more favorably if the ad protagonists were celebrities than if they were not ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 2.07$ vs. $M = 4.43$, $SD = 2.06$), $F(1, 399) = 6.12$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .169$. However, the effect of protagonist similarity was contingent on self-focused attention, as evidenced by a three-way interaction of self-focused attention, gender similarity, and status similarity, $F(1, 399) = 24.64$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .044$. Self-focused attention increased participants' product evaluations from 4.38 to 5.49 when they were similar to the ad protagonist in both gender and status, $F(1, 399) = 8.02$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .064$. However, it decreased their evaluations of the product from 4.35 to 3.36 when they were similar to the protagonist in status but not in gender, $F(1, 399) = 5.98$, $p <$

.05, $\omega^2 = .045$, and from 7.10 to 5.58 when they were similar in gender but not in status, $F(1, 399) = 14.21$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .134$. When participants were dissimilar to the ad protagonist in *both* gender and status, self-awareness had no effect (6.39 vs. 6.09, when self-focused attention was high vs. low, respectively; $F < 1$). These effects were confirmed by significant interactions of self-focused attention and gender similarity at each level of status similarity, $Fs(1, 399) > 11.48$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 > .048$, and interactions of self-awareness and status similarity at each level of gender similarity, $Fs(1, 399) > 5.77$, $p < .03$, $\omega^2 > .016$. None of these interactions depended significantly on whether the ad encouraged taking the perspective of the protagonist ($p > .10$).

Imagining oneself in the protagonist's situation. We expected that a message that encouraged participants to take the perspective of the protagonist would dispose them to imagine themselves in the protagonist's situation and that this would be true independently of their similarity to him or her. Data relevant to this expectation are shown in the second section of Table 2. Analyses of these data revealed a main effect of appeal type, $F(1, 399) = 18.25$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .038$. That is, encouraging participants to take the perspective of the protagonist increased their disposition to imagine themselves in the situation portrayed (from $M = 3.56$, $SD = 2.47$ to

M = 4.54, SD = 2.30) and this was true regardless of their level of self-awareness and their similarity to the protagonist; no interactions involving these variables and the type of appeal were significant.

As in Experiment 1, however, self-focused attention influenced participants' likelihood of imagining themselves as the protagonist, and this effect depended on the protagonist's similarity to them. The three-way interaction of self-focused attention, status similarity, and gender similarity was significant, $F(1, 399)$ = 17.66, $p < .001$, ω^2 = .039, and did not depend on the type of appeal ($p > .10$). That is, self-focused attention increased participants' disposition to imagine themselves in the situation portrayed in the ad from 4.04 to 5.03 when they were similar to the ad protagonist in gender and status, $F(1, 399)$ = 4.59, $p < .05$, ω^2 = .039. However, it decreased this disposition from 4.06 to 2.71 when participants were similar in status but not in gender, $F(1, 399)$ = 7.56, $p < .01$, ω^2 = .055, and decreased it from 5.23 to 3.74 when they were similar in gender but not in status, $F(1, 399)$ = 10.38, $p < .001$, ω^2 = .082. Self-focused attention had no effect, however, when participants were dissimilar to the protagonist in gender and status (3.96 vs. 3.78, $F < 1$). These effects were reflected in significant interactions of self-focused attention and gender similarity at each level of status similarity, $F(1, 399) > 4.39$, $p < .05$, $\omega^2 > .025$, and interactions of self-awareness and status similarity at each level of gender similarity, $F(1, 399) > 6.81$, $p < .03$, $\omega^2 > .016$.

Attention to similarity. The effects of experimental manipulations on participants' attention to their similarity to the ad protagonist were consistent with our assumptions. Data relevant to these analyses are shown in the third section of Table 2. The three-way interaction of self-awareness, status similarity, and gender similarity was again significant, $F(1, 399)$ = 72.32, $p < .001$, ω^2 = .112. Self-focused attention increased their attention to their similarity to the protagonist from 0.45 to 3.22 when they were similar in gender and status, $F(1, 399)$ = 46.80, $p < .001$, ω^2 = .245. However, it decreased their attention to the protagonist from −0.33 to −2.12 when they were similar in only one of the two respects; however, $F(1, 399)$ = 37.41, $p < .001$, ω^2 = .010 and had no effect at all on the attention they paid to similarity when they were dissimilar to the protagonists in gender and status (−0.20 vs. −0.66), $F(1, 399)$ = 1.29, $p > .20$. Finally, the type of appeal had no effect at all on the attention paid to similarity (−0.33 vs. −0.13, when the appeal was self-referential vs. impersonal, respectively, $F < 1$).

Mediation analyses. The effect of ad type (self-referential vs. not) on participants' product evaluations was significantly mediated by its influence on their disposition to imagine themselves in the situation described in the ad, as confirmed by bootstrapping analyses (95% CI = [.1806, .5106]). This disposition also significantly mediated the interactive effects of self-focused attention, gender similarity, and status similarity

on product evaluations (based on 9,000 bootstrapping samples, 95% CI = [.0184, .4207]). Supplementary mediation analyses involving only those conditions in which the disposition to imagine oneself in the protagonist's situation was affected by self-focused attention confirmed this conclusion. That is, the interactive effects of self-focused attention and similarity on the disposition to imagine oneself in the protagonist's situation mediated its impact on product evaluations in analyses comparing both (a) high similarity cells to different sex/same status cells (95% CI = [.0508, .2429]) and (b) high similarity cells to same sex/different status cells (95% CI = [.0506, .3121]).

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the findings obtained in Experiment 1 in a quite different content domain, using quite different stimulus materials. Moreover, they extend the earlier findings, indicating that when participants were dissimilar to protagonists along two dimensions rather than only one, self-focused attention had little impact on their judgments rather than a negative one. In this case, participants who attended to their similarity between themselves and the protagonist apparently perceived the ad to be totally irrelevant and paid little attention to its implications regardless of their self-focused attention.

The negative impact of self-focused attention when protagonists were moderately dissimilar is worth noting in the context of analogous results of Experiment 1. Considered in isolation, the latter result might be attributed to the fact that participants had negative attitudes toward ethnically dissimilar victims and decreased their desire to help them when this attitude was salient. However, this could not account for the results of Experiment 2, in which the protagonists in the ad were generally attractive.

To this extent, the effect of protagonists' similarity on judgments should be distinguished from the effects of source characteristics on communication impact identified in other research on persuasion. In this research, the adoption of a source's opinion was typically a result of perceptions that the source's opinion was credible or socially desirable (Cialdini 2001; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Johnson, Maio, & Smith-McLallen, 2005), and its effect was often mediated by motivational factors that led it to be used as a judgmental heuristic (Chaiken, 1980; but see Petty and Wegener 1998). These factors were unlikely to play a role in the conditions we considered, however. In Experiment 2, for example, the celebrities' (tennis stars') opinions of the tennis racquet being promoted were certainly credible and the celebrities themselves were physically and personally attractive. Nevertheless, their behavior provided a negative standard of comparison when participants had relatively little tennis expertise.

It may be worth noting that under high self-focused attention conditions of Experiment 2, product evaluations were nonsignificantly more favorable when the protagonist was

dissimilar to them in two salient respects than when the protagonist was similar in both respects. Perhaps when participants perceived the ad's protagonists to be very dissimilar to them, they considered the situation to be irrelevant and presumably based their evaluations on criteria other than similarity (e.g., specific product attributes), and these criteria had more favorable implications than similarity did.

General Discussion

When a persuasive message describes a situation involving other persons, recipients could potentially comprehend the situation from the perspective of either the protagonists or an outside observer. Moreover, they might often think about the protagonists' similarity to themselves and use it as a basis for construing the message's implications for themselves. Our research has implications for the determinants and effects of these dispositions. Persuasive appeals that urge recipients to take the perspective of the protagonists in the situation being described stimulate them to imagine the reactions they might have if they personally encountered the situation without considering their similarity to the individuals involved. These imaginings increase the persuasive impact of the appeals regardless of this similarity.

At the same time, recipients who are disposed to think about themselves and their personal characteristics at the time they receive a message may compare themselves with the protagonists with respect to attributes that happen to be salient (gender, ethnicity, etc.) and may use their similarity to the protagonists as an indication of whether the protagonists' behavior or the situation in which it occurs has implications for themselves. These conclusions apply in quite different situations. That is, they influence not only individuals' willingness to help others who are described in a donation appeal but also their likelihood of adopting the behavior of potential role models.

Although other research has demonstrated an impact of taking the perspective of others on a communication's influence (Galinsky et al., 2005, 2008), evidence that this impact is independent of the similarity between the recipients and the protagonists described in the message has not previously been reported. This finding suggests that communicators who attempt to persuade persons to adopt a point of view by inducing them to empathize with the individuals described in their message need not be particularly concerned about the individuals' similarity to the persons they are trying to persuade.

This obviously does not mean that participants' similarity to the protagonists in a situation is unimportant. For this similarity to have an appreciable impact, however, individuals must think about themselves as well as the protagonists and to use their similarity to the protagonists as a basis for inferring whether the situation confronting the protagonists is personally relevant. Moreover, under conditions in which these conditions exist, the influence of similarity on reactions

to the individuals may be nonmonotonic. The fact that self-focused attention can actually decrease participants' judgments when the protagonists are dissimilar to them is somewhat provocative. For this negative impact to occur, however, individuals must perceive that the other is similar to them in some respects and, therefore, is a relevant basis for comparison (Festinger, 1954; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). Thus, in Experiment 2, the participants' dissimilarity to the protagonist in gender had a negative impact on their judgments only when they were similar to the protagonist in social status, and their dissimilarity in status had a negative impact only when they were similar to the protagonist in gender. When they were dissimilar to the protagonist in both respects, participants apparently considered the situation confronting the protagonist to be personally irrelevant and the protagonist's behavior had no effect whatsoever.

It would of course be inappropriate to conclude that dissimilarity to the protagonists along a single dimension always decreases the adoption of the protagonists' behavior and that differences along two dimensions always lead the behavior to be regarded as irrelevant. The two dimensions along which protagonists varied in the present experiment (sex and status) were particularly salient to participants and few other dimensions of comparison were immediately evident. When more bases for comparison are prominent, the number of dissimilarities that produce these effects may differ. Nevertheless, the conclusion that self-focused attention has nonmonotonic effects on the impact of a message, depending on the degree of dissimilarity that recipients perceive to exist between themselves and the protagonists, seems viable.

A more important aspect of our findings results from the evidence that the effect of inducing self-referencing on judgments and decisions and the effects self-focused attention are independent. To the extent that self-focused attention increases participants' sensitivity to both their own and the protagonists' attributes, one might expect it to influence their comprehension of the message and to influence their judgments as a result. In fact, there was no evidence that this was so. Nevertheless, the evidence that self-focused attention influenced participants' self-reported tendency to imagine themselves in the situation confronting the protagonists calls into question the possibility that its effects and the effects of self-referencing occurred at different stages of processing. Rather, although the *content* of the mental representations that participants formed when they took the protagonists' perspective is independent of the characteristics of the protagonist, the disposition to *construct* these representations may depend in part on participants' sensitivity to the protagonists' similarity to themselves. In other words, participants' perception of the protagonists' similarity, induced by self-focused attention, may have exerted its influence at the initial, comprehension stage through its impact on the perspective from which the message was comprehended.

This effect, however, was independent of the effects of self-referencing on this perception.

In conceptualizing the role of perspective in comprehension of persuasive messages of the sort we considered, an additional consideration arises. In Hung and Wyer's (2009) study, individuals who simultaneously considered a charitable appeal from two different perspectives (that of a protagonist and that of a donor) experienced conflict, and this had a detrimental effect on the communication's effectiveness. In the situation we constructed in Experiment 1, taking the protagonists' perspective presumably exerted its influence at the time individuals received and comprehended the donation appeal. If recipients had been disposed to take the perspective of a potential donor at the time they considered the appeal, however, the message's impact on their perception of the victims and its consequent influence on donations might have been quite different. Furthermore, taking a donor's perspective could influence their thoughts about themselves. Consequently, whether the effects of self-focused attention would be independent of these perspective effects is unclear. These matters suggest directions for future research.

Acknowledgment

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Bagozzi, R. P., & Moore, D. J. (1994). Public service advertisements: Emotion and empathy guide prosocial behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, *58*, 56-70.

Black, J. B., Turner, T., & Bower, G. H. (1979). Point of view in narrative comprehension, memory, and production. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, *11*, 717-726.

Briley, D. A., & Wyer, R. S. (2002). The effects of group membership on the avoidance of negative outcomes: Implications for social and consumer decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *29*, 400-415.

Brock, T. C. (1965). Communicator-recipient similarity and decision change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *1*, 650-654.

Burger, J. M., Messian, N., Patel, S., Prado, A. D., & Anderson, C. (2004). What a coincidence: The effects of incidental similarity on compliance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*, 35-43.

Byrne, D. (1969). Attitudes and attraction. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 35-89). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*, 752-756.

Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Cialdini, R. B., Brown, S. L., Lewis, B. P., Luce, C., & Neuberg, S. L. (1997). Reinterpreting the empathy-altruism relationship: when one into one equals oneness, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 73 (3), 481–94.

Cunningham, M. R., Steinberg, J., & Grev, R. (1980). Wanting to and having to help: Separate motivations for positive mood and guilt-induced helping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *4*, 442-443.

Davis, M. H., Conklin, L., Smith, A., & Luce, C. (1996). Effect of perspective taking on the cognitive representation of persons: A merging of self and other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*, 713-726.

Diener, E. (1979). Deindividuation, self-awareness, and disinhibition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*, 1160-1171.

Diener, E., & Srull, T. K. (1979). Self-awareness, psychological perspective, and self-reinforcement in relation to personal and social standards. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*, 413-423.

Duval, S. T., & Wicklund, R. A. (1972). *A theory of objective self-awareness*. Oxford, UK: Academic Press.

Duval, S. T., & Wicklund, R. A. (1973). Effects of objective self-awareness on attribution of causality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *9*, 17-31.

Escalas, J. E. (2007). Self-referencing and persuasion: Narrative transportation versus analytical elaboration. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *33*, 421-429.

Fenigstein, A., Scheier, M. F., & Buss, A. H. (1975). Public and private self-consciousness: Assessment and theory. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *43*, 522-527.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, *7*, 117-140.

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Galinsky, A. D., Ku, G., & Wang, C. S. (2005). Perspective-taking: Fostering social bonds and facilitating social coordination. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *8*, 109-125.

Galinsky, A. D., Wang, C. S., & Ku, G. (2008). Perspective-takers behave more stereotypically. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*, 404-419.

Gasper, K., & Clore, G. J. (2000). Do you have to pay attention to your feelings to be influenced by them? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*, 698-711.

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 701-721.

Gregory, W. L., Cialdini, R. B., & Carpenter, K. M. (1982). Self-relevant scenarios as mediators of likelihood estimates and compliance: Does imagining make it so? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *43*, 89-99.

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *15*, 635-650.

Hung, I. W., & Wyer, R. S. (2009). Differences in perspective and the influence of charitable appeals: When imagining oneself as the victim is not beneficial. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *46*, 421-434.

Hung, I. W., & Wyer, R. S. (2011). Shaping consumer imaginations: The role of self-focused attention in product evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *48*, 381-392.

Hutton, D. G., & Baumeister, R. F. (1992). Self-awareness and attitude-change: Seeing oneself on the central route to persuasion. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*, 68-75.

Jiang, Y., & Wyer, R. S. (2009). The role of visual perspective in information processing. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *45*, 486-495.

Johnson, B. T., Maio, G. R., & Smith-McLallen, A. (2005). Communication and attitude change: Causes, processes, and effects. In D. Albarracin, B. T. Johnson, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *The handbook of attitudes* (pp. 617-669). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1971). The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of the behavior. In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanhouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79-94). Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

Miller, D. T., Downs, J. S., & Prentice, D. A. (1998). Minimal conditions for the creation of a unit relationship: The social bond between birthdaymates. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *28*, 475-481.

Ostrom, T. M., & Upshaw, H. S. (1968). Psychological perspectives and attitude Change. In A. G. Greenwald, T. C. Brock, & T. M. Ostrom (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of attitudes* (pp. 217-242). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Petty, R. E., & Wegener, D. T. (1998). Attitude change: Multiple roles for persuasion variables. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (pp. 323-390). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Pham, M. T., Goukens, C., Lehman, D. R., & Stuart, J. A. (2010). Shaping customer satisfaction through self-awareness cues. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *47*, 920-932.

Preacher, K. J. & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models, *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers,* 36 (4), 717–31.

Preacher, K. J. & Hayes, A. F. (2008), Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models, *Behavior Research Methods,* 40 (3), 879–91.

Pryor, J. B., Gibbons, F. X., Wicklund, R. A., Fazio, R. H., & Hood, R. (1977). Self-focused attention and self-report validity. *Journal of Personality*, *45*, 513.

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

Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1977). Self-focused attention and the experience of emotion: Attraction, repulsion, elation, and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *35*, 625-636.

Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1980). Private and public self-attention, resistance to change, and dissonance reduction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*, 390-405.

Storms, M. (1973). Videotape and the attribution process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *27*, 165-175.

Sujan, M., Bettman, J. R., & Baumgartner, H. (1993). Influencing consumer judgments using autobiographical memories: A self-referencing perspective. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *30*, 422-436.

Suls, J., & Wheeler, L. (2000). A selective history of classic social comparison theory and neo social comparison theory. In J. Suls & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic.

Wyer, R. S. (2004). *Social comprehension and judgment: The role of situation models, narratives and implicit theories*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wyer, R. S., Adaval, R., & Colcombe, S. J. (2002). Narrative-based representations of social knowledge: Their construction and use in comprehension, memory and judgment. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 34, pp. 131-197). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Wyer, R. S., & Radvansky, G. A. (1999). The comprehension and validation of social information. *Psychological Review*, *106*, 89-118.

Wyer, R. S., & Srull, T. K. (1989). *Memory and cognition in its social context*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.