

For Immediate Release: November 15, 2011

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Put Yourself in Someone Else's Shoes: What Type of Perspective Makes Consumers Self-Conscious?

Certain emotions are heightened when we view ourselves from a first-person perspective, while others amplify when we observe ourselves from the outside, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“People often feel various emotions when they recall past events or visualize future ones,” write authors Iris W. Hung (National University of Singapore) and Anirban Mukhopadhyay (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology). “For example, one might feel excited about going to a rock concert, but at the same time guilty about not studying for an important exam; proud about winning an award, but also embarrassed about tripping en route to the podium.”

The authors found that people who are “in the moment” (also called an “actor’s perspective”) experience emotions such as joy, sorrow, or excitement more strongly than people who use an observer’s perspective—as if they were watching a movie of themselves—which heightens self-conscious emotions like pride, guilt, and embarrassment.

In one experiment, the authors asked half of the participants to imagine choosing to attend a concert instead of studying for an important exam. The other half imagined choosing to study rather than going to the concert. The participants were instructed to use either an actor’s perspective or an observer’s perspective.

“Actors felt more happiness but less guilt than observers when imagining themselves choosing going to the concert over studying for the exam,” the authors write. “In contrast, actors felt more sadness but less pride than observers when imagining themselves studying for the exam over going to the concert.”

The authors found similar results across a variety of situations, both real and imagined. They also discovered that actors were more likely than observers to focus on situational circumstances (how much they want something), whereas observers were more likely to focus on how others might evaluate them.

“Emotions people feel are often influenced by the information they attend to,” the authors write. “Hedonic emotions get amplified if we view the situation in the first person. In contrast, self-conscious emotions are amplified if we view the same situation in the third person.”

Iris W. Hung and Anirban Mukhopadhyay. “Lenses of the Heart: How Actors’ and Observers’ Perspectives Influence Emotional Experiences.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2012 (published online July 18, 2011). For more

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