

Social Psychology Reflection Paper

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“The only thing that is constant in life is change” (*Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher*) is a powerful quote that applies to everyone in every walks of life. This change is either in the physical aspects of life of an individual or a change in the internal attributes of that particular person which can be triggered by different factors depending on the situation. These factors might be unknown to most individuals and may be caused unconsciously that result in a change to one’s self or to other people. So, what are these factors that could change a person’s behavior? What are these factors that could influence the attitude or thinking of one individual towards an object? And lastly, what factors could shift an individual positive feeling to a negative feeling and vice versa?

Entering the world of Social Psychology for the first time enables me to look deeper into these factors. It introduces me to a different world that helps me dissect these factors into small pieces and analyze how each component impacts change to myself or to others. Social Psychology has been defined as “the scientific study of the way in which people’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by real or imagined presence of other people” (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2006) and this definition has given me a wider explanation or understanding with regards to my behaviour or attitude on my previous experiences. Some of these past experiences that caused me some questionable behaviours include cognitive dissonance particularly postdecision dissonance, applied prejudgement to other people based on what I see or the fundamental attribution error and being easily influenced by others through conformity.

Cognitive dissonance is defined as being when a behaviour or an act doesn’t complement with the attitude of an individual producing an uncomfortable feeling (Aronson, Wilson, Akert &

Fehr, 2006 page 138). This uncomfortable feeling motivates individuals to reduce it which eventually leads them to change their attitude or what they think and the way they behave. One of the common ways to resolve cognitive dissonance easily is to change the behaviour and align it with the dissonant cognition. Some individuals will justify their behaviour by changing one of the elements of the cognitive dissonant in order to help them get away from this unpleasant state. Alternatively, others would simply add new cognitions to support their behaviour (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2006 page 139). According to the book, cognitive dissonance can be sometimes experienced after making big decisions that have huge impact on our life. The feeling of uneasiness and repeatedly questioning ourselves if we have made the right choice is what we call postdecision dissonance. Postdecision dissonance can be reduced by enhancing the attractiveness of our choice and devaluing the rejected choice (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2006 page 148).

To further explain the above concept particularly postdecision dissonance, I remember when I first stepped on to Canadian soil last August 2015. It was some kind of mixed feelings as I passed through the immigration counter at the airport. I kept asking myself if I had made the right decision to come here. Prior to coming to Canada, I had been enjoying my life working full time in Dubai, a newly built city in the desert. Dubai is known for its tallest building in the world and also hundreds of skyscrapers scattered all over the city, luxurious hotels, multicultural society, and with tremendous economic growth to name a few. The company that I had worked there for is listed as one among the top companies operating in Dubai. While living there, I had no problem with any financial matter as I was fully compensated by my company and in addition, I was not paying any kind of taxes to the government. This comfortable lifestyle changed automatically when I decided to move to Canada. I came here as a full time student in

contrast to being a full time employee in Dubai. During the first few weeks after I arrived, I kept asking myself if I had made the correct decision and the feeling was disturbing and causing me some sleepless night. As I fully settled and started doing some controlled thinking, I began to convince my self that Canada offers a better quality of life compared to Dubai. I told myself that Canada is intolerant to any kind of racial discrimination while Dubai doesn't have any law to protect expatriates living there. Most of all, I thought that Canada is able to grant me the right to stay here permanently without any risk of repatriation as long as you meet their requirements while in Dubai there is always a high probability that you will get deported for any simple act by disregarding their religious belief and there is no chance that you can get citizenship. In addition, I thought that Dubai may potentially go to war in the near future in the same way as the nearby countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen while Canada is peaceful and a very safe place to live. After all this thinking, I began to feel lighter. I stopped wondering if I had made the right decision. I started to appreciate living in Canada. Overall, I managed to resolve my postdecision dissonance by believing that Canada tends to offer a better place for immigrants like myself.

Often, we judge every individual based on how they look or how they conduct themselves in public. As we are limited and concentrated to what we see or hear only, this often leads to an incorrect interpretation of someone's behavior. However, if we look further at the situational background of that individual, we may come to know that such behaviour is not caused by their personality but rather due to some situational factors. This phenomenon is known to social psychologists as the Fundamental Attribution Error (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2006 page 65).

Back to my childhood days, I thought I had the hardest disciplinarian father. He was the very opposite of the father that my other siblings and I wanted. Every simple mistake we

committed had an equivalent punishment. In most cases, we were hit on our behind by a two-inch thick and one-meter long stick made out of bamboo . As all mothers do to protect their children, she would try to stop my father from being physical on us but the power and control in our family was with him. My father would argue with my mother that he was doing the right thing to discipline his children. While growing up, my schema for my father was a strong man, strict in all senses, a disciplinarian and physically abusive. Every member of the family was afraid of him and everyone tried not to violate any of his rules to avoid the consequences. If I remember correctly, I was in sixth grade and I would say I was matured enough to understand what was happening in our family when I had this conversation with my grandmother, my father's mother, that eventually changed my perception about him. She told me that my father has a lot of pressure to provide our family's needs especially because we were six siblings while the only source of income was farming. I heard also from my grandmother that my father cared so much about our future and that he did not want us to live the same way as he lived in the past. I learned that my grandfather, on my father's side, died early and no one was there during my father's young age to guide or discipline him properly about his bad choices in life which resulted in him being put in jail. On a lighter note, my grandmother also told me that my father joined the army during World War II and fought side by side with American soldiers to overthrow the Japanese who invaded our country. After hearing these facts from my grandmother, I thought that my father was not after all the hardest disciplinarian I have known. I thought that he has plenty of good reasons to be strict with us because of his past bad experiences in life. I thought that he has every right to discipline us because of the responsibility on his shoulders that pressures him to build a good family. In addition, as a veteran of world war II, I understand that his way to raise us might be in line with what he learned from the army which

might he thought as an effective strategy. On that day, I felt guilty for misjudging him while in fact there were some situational factors that forced him to be what he was. Learning the other side of the story changed my schema about my father as a disciplinarian with good intentions and a responsible father.

To influence someone to be at your side during uncertain situations or a crisis and believe in you that you have the full knowledge about things or simply to be accepted in a group is called conformity (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2006 page 162). Every individual conforms in different ways depending on their reason. They conform to certain things because they think that it is the right choice even though they don't totally agree. Others will conform for the reason not to be rejected by a group if they oppose the social norms of the majority.

Back when I was working full time as logistics coordinator, I know myself to have a self-schema of a good employee that always follows company's policies and procedures and cannot be easily persuaded. In addition, I know also that I always follow government rules in terms of importing and exporting shipments of our company to avoid any problem that could jeopardize the integrity of our company. As part of my job, I worked with several shipping companies that process all the necessary paper works for our shipments either for export or import. I monitored all our shipments and ensured all were moving smoothly and arrived at the destination on time. In addition, the big responsibility of my job was to decide what appropriate actions should be taken when problems arose on our shipments based on the company's policies and government rules. This was my daily routine and how I worked until one important shipment had an issue due to incomplete documentation from the origin and the customs officials did not want to release it. The shipment contained products for an event of our company. The said event had been planned a few months earlier and important clients had been invited to attend. To make it

worse, the event was on a Sunday and we came to know about the problem on the Thursday before which left us almost only one day to bring the shipment out from the customs because the weekend was almost there. Moreover, there was no way that we would be able to receive the missing documents from the supplier before the event. It was a total crisis for me at that time to try to come up with an immediate solution. The marketing manager who organized the event was calling me every 30 minutes for an update. The pressure came to the boiling point when the president of the company heard about the situation and asked me also for a solution and stressing that they could not cancel or postpone the scheduled event because some elite clients had already confirmed to attend. In finding the correct solution, I called the shipping company for their expert advice as they were the ones handling this shipment. They informed me that they could have a solution for it by going “under the table”. I didn’t agree at first that this was the best solution as it was clearly against the company’s policies, government rules and most especially against my work ethics. Nevertheless, I presented this matter in a meeting with the marketing manager and the company’s president and both agreed that this was an exceptional case and we should go for it. At the end, I conformed with them even though I thought it was not the right thing to do.

In learning social psychology, we may come to know more about ourselves including the different theories on how to examine our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It will also make us understand the contributions of other people around us or even the imagined one on the changes that happen on ourselves. In addition, social psychology explains that changes in behaviours of certain individuals are not always due to personality traits but can be caused also by situational factors. Hence, learning all the concepts on this course should make us more aware about ourselves and prepare us how to act properly in our social environment.

Reference

Aronson, E. (2006). *Fundamentals of social psychology* (Canadian ed.). Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall.