The Hot-Cold Empathy Gap and Persuasion: Does Fatigue Boost or Reduce the Argument Quality Effect?

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Hot-Cold Empathy Gap

• Being in the same visceral state as someone increases empathy
  – Cold torture (Nordgren et al., 2011)
  – Impulsive eating (Nordgren et al., 2007)

• What if that person is trying to persuade you?

I was late because I was tired.
Argument Quality Effects

• Difference in persuasion between strong vs. weak arguments

• Stronger if:
  – Relevant (Petty et al., 1981)
  – Thinking a lot (Need for Cognition; Cacioppo et al., 1984)

• Weaker if:
  – Distracted (Petty, Wells & Brock, 1976)
• If someone is in a relevant visceral state (fatigue):
  – Will persuasion increase regardless of argument quality?
  – Will argument quality effects:
    • DECREASE due to distraction?
    • INCREASE due to relevance?
  – Will NFC moderate any effects?
• 310 MTurk participants (151 women)
• Argument quality condition: strong vs. weak
• Instructions:
  – George, online contractor
  – Has not had enough sleep (3-4 hours per night)
  – Missed project deadline
  – Email to his boss
Stimuli: Strong vs. Weak Argument

- I am so sorry for missing last night’s deadline. My only explanation is that I have been unable to sleep much over the past week .... I am currently about 90% finished with my report and I am attaching what I have so far. I would like to request an extension....An extension would allow me to be as thorough as possible in reviewing all potential sites for the new building. ...Granting me a short extension would also prevent you from having to start from scratch and give it to someone who hasn’t been on the project ...

- I am so sorry for missing last night’s deadline. My only explanation is that I have been unable to sleep much over the past week... I’m currently about halfway finished with my report and I am attaching what I have so far. I would like to request an extension...An extension would allow me to make sure none of the sites in my list are mistyped or duplicates. ...Granting me a short extension would also allow the rest of the company to relax for a bit before having to read through my report.
Measures

Outcomes

• Persuasion (7 items, $\alpha = .97$)
  – “How likely would you be to grant George the extension he requested?”

• Evaluation of George (10 items; $\alpha = .95$)

• Argument quality

• Current mood (3 items; $\alpha = .95$)
Measures

Mediators
• Personal Involvement (10 items; $\alpha = .94$)
• Similarity to George (3 items; $\alpha = .84$)

Predictors
• Current fatigue (4 items, $\alpha = .94$)
• NFC (18 items; $\alpha = .95$)
• Between-subjects ANCOVA predicting persuasion from:
  – Argument quality (strong vs. weak)
  – Current fatigue
  – NFC
  – All interactions
  – Covariates: mood, age, gender, argument complexity
Results

- No effect of/interactions with NFC
- Argument quality x fatigue, $F(1,296) = 7.39, p = .007, \eta^2_p = .02$

Simple effect of fatigue for weak arguments, $b = .44, SE = .13, F(1,296) = 12.26, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .04$
Which prediction is supported?

• Impact of fatigue
  – Did persuasion increase regardless of argument quality? No.
  – Did argument quality effects...
    • Increase due to relevance?
      – Apparently not.
    • Decrease due to distraction?
      – Possible. Weak arguments were more persuasive for fatigued people
      – BUT evidence that weak arguments were more INVOLVING for fatigued people...
Compare with Research on Hunger

- Among people higher in NFC, hunger increased argument quality effects
  - Hunger = higher relevance?
  - Fatigue = higher distraction?
Limitations & Future Directions

- Non-manipulated predictor
- Conceptual replication
  - Both hunger & fatigue-related messages
  - Manipulate hunger
Thank You!

- Anna George
- Andy Luttrell
- Russ Fazio