Belief in the Immutability of Attitudes Both Increases and Decreases Advocacy

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People with a fixed mindset about attitudes are more certain of their attitudes and more willing to try to persuade. They are also less willing to advocate because they perceive others’ attitudes as unchanging. We find that these effects generally cancel each other out, but can be moderated by focus.

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Antecedents and Consequences of Beliefs about Stability and Change in Identity over Time
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Paper #1: The Belief in a Favorable Future
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Paper #2: Less Than We Know: The Effect of Trait importance in Connectedness to the Future Self
Rob St. Louis, University of Chicago, USA
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Paper #3: Belief in the Immutability of Attitudes Both Increases and Decreases Advocacy
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Paper #4: Are Artworks More like People than Artifacts?
Individual Concepts and their Extensions
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SESSION SUMMARY
Consumer behavior research increasingly recognizes the importance of identity for understanding consumer cognition and choice (see, for example, the JCR research curation “Self-Identity and Consumer Behavior), and recent research has shown that people’s beliefs about stability vs. change in identity can have profound consequences for consumer behavior (Bartels & Urminsky, 2011, Petrocelli, Clarkson, Tormala, & Hendrix, 2010). However, much remains to be learned about both (i) the mechanisms underlying people’s beliefs about changes in identity over time and (ii) the downstream consequences of those beliefs. This session will explore both sides of this topic. Two papers, from Urminsky and St. Louis and Rogers and Norton, investigate some of the characteristics of people’s beliefs about identity change and stability. Akhtar and Wheeler and Newman, Bartels, and Smith document some of the diverse consequences of people’s beliefs about the stability of identity.

How do people think about change in their identity and the identity of others over time? Rogers and Norton explore people’s beliefs about change in attitudes and preferences. They find that people believe that the general population will eventually grow to share their attitudes. Furthermore, they demonstrate that a motivated projection of a favorable future, rather than a projection of the current state of affairs, underlies people’s belief that the attitudes and preferences of others will change into alignment with their own.

Urminsky and St. Louis examine the straightforward idea (endorsed by respondents) that if you think your most important and stable traits will change, you view your future self as less connected to the current self. However, they find people’s sense of overlap with their future self—and the future oriented decisions influenced by this overlap—does not depend more on the traits rated by participants as most important for determining one’s identity. Change in more peripheral or transient aspects (like one’s level of happiness and life experiences) is just as destabilizing to future self connectedness and forward-looking consumer decisions as change in more important aspects of one’s identity (like one’s values and personality).

Akhtar and Wheeler find that general beliefs about one’s own attitude immutability can have profound implications for confidence in and motivation to advocate for a belief. These beliefs also influence one’s appraisal of how those with differing beliefs would respond to such a persuasion attempt. These two effects could cancel each other out, but by changing where participants directed their focus, Akhtar and Wheeler were able to significantly influence the effect of attitude immutability on advocacy behavior. This work probes both an important pathway through which beliefs about identity change can influence behavior and the role of attention in mediating the consequences during the act.

Newman, Bartels and Smith’s studies show that beliefs about human identity continuity appear to generalize to the way that people think about identity-related one-of-a-kind objects—namely, art (and not tools). Their studies find that artworks (unlike other artifacts) are restricted in the kinds of changes they can undergo and still maintain their original identity. Specifically, people care about the continuity of physical aspects of artworks because they believe the original pieces are imbued with the artist’s essence. This has downstream consequences for the value that people perceive in and are willing to pay for these objects.

Taken together, these four papers address the important next questions in the literature on stability and change in identity over time: what psychological processes give rise to our beliefs about identity change or stability, and how do these beliefs then influence other judgments, motivations, and behaviors? We believe this session will be of interest to a broad audience, including consumer and decision researchers and policy practitioners interested in the potential use of identity change manipulations as an intervention. We hope this session will help the diverse group of researchers studying the antecedences and consequences of identity change and stability develop new ideas and more effective research directions.

The Belief in a Favorable Future

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
People frequently construct beliefs about the unknown in self-serving ways. People believe others agree with them more than they actually do (the false consensus effect), and that good things that are out of their control will happen to them (optimism). We explore whether people exhibit a belief in a “favorable future” – a tendency to predict that future states of the world will align with their motivations and desires, and reflect favorably on them. We find that people believe that their ideological, policy and entertainment preferences will be more common in the future than they are today. Importantly, however, people do not believe that all of their proclivities will become more common. The constructed future favors the self: people believe that their bad attributes will become more common in future but that their good attributes will become rarer – such that only people’s positive aspects will stand out in the crowd.

Study 1 shows that liberals are more likely than conservatives and moderates to believe that in twenty years a greater proportion of people will identify as liberal. Conservatives, on the other hand, are more likely than liberals and moderates to believe that in twenty years a greater proportion of people will identify as conservative. Moderates demonstrate a similar pattern.

Study 2 replicates Study 1 and extends the belief in a favorable future to entertainment preferences, policy preferences, and environ-
mental beliefs. People who are fans (not fans) of the television show *American Idol* are more likely to believe that the show will be more popular (less popular) in five years; people who believe that having an abortion or being involved in a same sex marriage should be easier (harder) are more likely to believe that in twenty years having an abortion or being involved in a same sex marriage will be easier (harder); and people who believe the climate is warming (not warming) are more likely to believe that in twenty years more (fewer) people will believe the climate is warming.

Study 3 shows that the belief in a favorable future is distinct from the false consensus effect. Participants report their current ideology, the ideology they believe is most common today, and which ideology will become more common in twenty years. People believe that their current ideology will be more common in the future (favorable future). People also believe that their current ideology is the most common ideology today (false consensus). Importantly, however, the favorable future effect is substantially larger in magnitude than the false consensus effect, suggesting that beliefs about the future are magnified beyond one’s (biased) perceptions of the present.

Finally, Study 4 demonstrates that the favorable future effect is motivated. People do not necessarily believe that all aspects of themselves will become more common in the future. Participants self-reported attributes about themselves that they liked and disliked, and then predicted the commonness of those attributes in twenty years. Participants believed that their disliked attributes will become more common in the future – making their faults less notable – but that their liked attributes will become less common – making their strengths more prominent. People’s construction of the future appears to be not simply a projection of their current self, but a motivated projection of a favorable future.

One ironic implication of the tendency to construct a favorable future may be that it demotivates behavior in the present: if the way I want the world to be is inevitable, why bother to go out and try to change it? For example, believing that same sex marriage is inevitable may decrease one’s motivation to cast a vote when same sex ballot initiatives arise.

**Less Than We Know: The Effect of Trait Importance to Connectedness to the Future Self.**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Prior research has demonstrated that people’s sense of connection to their “future self” — the person they will be in the future — can substantially influence intertemporal tradeoffs, including delay discounting tasks (Bartels & Urminsky, 2011). Building on prior literature, people’s future self connectedness has been operationally defined by whether the full set of features and attributes that define one’s identity are shared between the present and future self. Past research has suggested that people view some traits as more important for self-identity than others (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014). We conducted three studies to identify whether one’s sense of connection to the future self rested more heavily on the believed stability of important traits. Our results indicate that while consumers believe that stability or change on important traits is relatively important for connectedness, the effect of the stability of a trait on future self connectedness was not, in fact, moderated by the importance of that trait. We show similarly that manipulating the stability (or change) in less important traits is just as effective at increasing (decreasing) revealed preferences for the well being of one’s future self.

In Study 1 (n=142), we tested a comprehensive list of 49 attributes identified from prior work and pre-tests as potentially critical components of one’s identity (e.g., intelligence, honesty, humor, personality, level of friendliness, values, morality, everyday experiences, memories, etc.). Participants indicated whether they believed a change on each attribute would result in a change in their personal identity. They also rated expected magnitude of change on each attribute, in the coming year.

We found that beliefs about whether a given change would impact connection to the future self were negatively correlated with beliefs about whether that change would occur. In effect, people believed that changes in stable identity traits would affect their connectedness, but would be unlikely to occur, while changes in transient identity traits were likely but would not impact connectedness.

In Study 2 (n=61), we again tested participants’ lay beliefs, by asking them how their connection to the future self would be differentially affected by learning that they shared transient or stable traits with the future self, using a within-subject design. We tested 12 scenarios in which participants were told about one attribute which would change and one which would remain the same over time. Participants rated how connected they believed they would feel to their future self, based on each scenario. On average, participants said that their connectedness with their future self would be 30% lower (p<.01) when they were asked to imagined that the stable trait would change in the future, compared to when they imagined that the transient trait would change. This suggests that participants believed that learning that their more stable traits would change would have a larger effect on their connectedness.

In Study 3 (n=473), we tested how people’s connectedness to the future self and resulting decisions would actually be affected by information about the likelihood of traits changing or staying the same over time. We presented each participants with one scenario, similar to those in Study 2 but tested between-subjects. We conducted a 2x2 between subjects ANOVA, comparing how participants responded to learning that transient or stable attributes were likely to change or stay the same in the future. While we found a main effect of learning that any trait was likely to change, we did not find any evidence of interaction with the transience or stability of the trait (F<.01). This shows that while participants said that change on stable traits would be far more devastating to connectedness than transient traits, this is not what actually happened when they were presented with information about the likelihood of the identity changing over time.

In addition, in Study 3, learning that specific attributes were likely to change significantly reduced patience in a delay-discounting task (F=5.17) indicating that people’s beliefs about change on these attributes have important implications for future-oriented decision making. However, there were no significant differences in patience based on changes in transient vs. stable traits (F=1.02).

Taken together, our results suggest that there is an important discrepancy between the attributes people believe make up the critical components of their self-identity and the way they actually use predicted change on those attributes to generate a sense of connectedness to their future self. Our evidence suggests that consumers believe they are using the relative importance of attributes in their calculations of similarity to the future self, but their actual connectedness and future oriented choice behavior do not actually evince any such calculation. This discrepancy suggests that consumer’s implicit self-identity may differ from their explicit conceptualization, leading them to underestimate the contribution of their more peripheral traits to their connection to their future self, and thus their future-oriented decision-making.
Belief in the Immutability of Attitudes Both Increases and Decreases Advocacy

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on implicit theories (i.e., the beliefs people have about human characteristics) shows that people with a fixed mindset about attitudes (i.e., the belief that attitudes are relatively stable and unchanging) are more certain of their attitudes (Petrocchi et al., 2010) than are people with a growth mindset (i.e., the belief that attitudes are malleable). Separately, research on the relationship between attitude certainty and advocacy generally shows that people with greater attitude certainty are more willing to express their opinions and try to persuade others (Visser et al., 2003; Akhtar et al., 2013). A synthesis of these literatures would suggest that people with a fixed mindset about attitudes are more certain of their own attitudes and consequently more willing to try to persuade others to their beliefs. However, it is also conceivable that people with a fixed mindset about attitudes may be more likely to perceive others’ attitudes as difficult to change, rendering people with a fixed mindset less willing to try to persuade others. Across four studies, we show that both of these countervailing effects occur simultaneously, resulting in the absence of an overall direct relationship between implicit theories of attitudes and advocacy. By shifting whom people focus on (themselves or others) or how advocacy is framed (as sharing, persuading, or defending), implicit theories can directly influence willingness to advocate.

Study 1. Participants were told that we were conducting public opinion research on a variety of issues. All participants reported their attitude, likelihood of trying to persuade others, and perceived persuadability of others regarding the death penalty. After completing a ten-minute filler task of personality scales, participants completed the eight-item implicit theory of attitude stability (ITAS) scale (from Petrocchi et al., 2010). Results indicated that a higher score on the ITAS scale (i.e., a fixed mindset) was inversely correlated with perceived persuadability of others but uncorrelated with likelihood of trying to persuade others. However, as expected, there was a negative indirect effect of ITAS on advocacy through perceived persuadability of others. These results provide initial correlational evidence that a fixed mindset leads to lower likelihood of trying to persuade others because of lower perceived persuadability of others, but that another, opposing mediator may be canceling out the direct effect.

Study 2. Study 2 was designed to (1) allow for causal claims by manipulating implicit theories, (2) replicate the indirect effect from Study 1, (3) replicate the effect of implicit theories on attitude certainty from Petrocchi et al. (2010), and (4) simultaneously identify attitude certainty as an opposing mediator contributing to the non-significant direct effect of implicit theories on advocacy. Participants were told that they would be completing two unrelated tasks. The first task was an implicit theories of attitudes manipulation under the guise of a reading comprehension test (adapted from Chiu et al., 1997). For the second task, participants reported their attitude, attitude stability, attitude certainty, perceived persuadability of others, and willingness to try to persuade others regarding the death penalty. First, replicating previous research, we confirmed that a fixed mindset led to greater perceived attitude stability, which led to more certainty of one’s own attitude. Replicating Study 1, we also found that a fixed mindset decreased perceived persuadability of others but had no direct effect on willingness to try to persuade others. A bootstrapped multiple mediation analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) confirmed that implicit theories indirectly affected advocacy through the opposing forces of attitude certainty and perceived persuadability of others. Thus, people with a fixed mindset are simultaneously more likely to advocate because they are more certain of their attitudes and less likely to advocate because they perceive others to be less persuadable, rendering the direct impact of implicit theories on advocacy inert.

Study 3. Participants were involved in two tasks (mindset: fixed vs. growth) × 2 (focus: self vs. others) between-subjects design in which they wrote about life experiences in which they (or others) have changed (or have not changed) their attitudes over time. Participants then completed an ostensibly unrelated second task in which they reported their attitude and willingness to try to change the opinions of others regarding the death penalty. Results showed a significant interaction. Consistent with the notion that people with a fixed mindset are motivated to advocate because of their own attitude certainty, people with a fixed mindset were more willing to advocate when they focused on their own attitudes rather than others’ attitudes. Those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, were more willing to advocate when they focused on others’ attitudes rather than their own.

Discussion. Taken together, these findings reveal that implicit theories can play an important role in motivating advocacy, even if there appears to be no direct relationship between the two. A fixed mindset about attitudes simultaneously motivates and demotivates advocacy through greater certainty in one’s own attitudes and lower perceived persuadability of others, respectively. Thus, although greater attitude certainty generally leads to greater advocacy, this is not necessarily the case when that certainty is derived from a fixed mindset about attitudes. However, people with a fixed mindset actually can become more or less willing to advocate than people with a growth mindset, depending on whom they focus their attention. Implications for understanding implicit theories of attitudes, multiple mediation analysis, and determinants of advocacy are discussed.

Are Artworks More Like People than Artifacts? Individual Concepts and Their Extensions

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The literature on concepts has typically focused on general concepts—concepts like, *person*, *cat*, or *painting*. However, our concepts of individuals, such as my brother *Robert*, my cat *Jack*, or Van Gogh’s *Starry Starry Night*, play a key role in how we interpret the world around us.

The majority of the research on this topic has examined how people track the persistence of humans. For example, how people decide whether Jim is still *Jim* across time or various transformations. Previous research suggests that people’s beliefs about the continuity of persons tend to be dualistic: People believe that the continuity of an individual’s mental states (their thoughts, memories, and personality traits) is necessary for identity continuity, but at the same time, they also seem to place considerable importance on the continuity of the person’s physical *stuff* (e.g., Blok et al., 2001). Moreover, continuity judgments about persons seem to be somewhat unique in this respect—for example, people are more likely to say that a molecule-for-molecule copy of a hammer is the same individual hammer (provided that the original is destroyed when it is duplicated).

Here we extend research on continuity judgments for persons to examine a second domain in which people seem to place considerable importance on the continuity of the same physical stuff—namely, one-of-a-kind artifacts. For example, like persons (and unlike hammers) people do not tend to believe that an identical duplicate of a painting is the *same* painting, and they view duplicates as considerably less valuable than the original (Newman & Bloom, 2012). To explain this pattern, we draw on the notions of the ‘extended self’ (James, 1890; Belk, 1988; Olson, 2011), which proposes that the
The goal of the Study 1 was to examine whether people’s continuity judgments are more materialist for artworks than comparable artifacts. Participants read hypothetical scenarios in which an artwork or a tool was duplicated and the original was destroyed. In all cases, participants were told that the original artwork [tool] was made by a college student (to control for potential differences in value), and were given specific information about how it was made (e.g., using a mold and poured plastic), which was the same in both cases. We hypothesized that duplicate artworks should be less likely to be seen as continuers of the original compared to duplicate tools.

To test the notion of the extended self we also varied whether the duplicate object was made by the original creator or by another person. Specifically, participants read scenarios in which the original creator “agrees to make an exact duplicate” and scenarios in which he “agrees to have someone else make an exact duplicate.”

As predicted, we observed that duplicate artworks were less likely to be seen as continuers of the original compared to duplicate tools. Additionally, there was a main effect of creator such that objects made by the same individual were more likely to be seen as continuers of the original compared to objects made by someone else. However, this effect marginally interacted with object type, such that there was an effect of the creator for artworks, but not for the tools.

The goal of Study 2 was to explore some of the reasons why people may be more materialist when reasoning about the continuity of art versus other types of artifacts.

In this study, participants were asked to read a scenario about a painting. Between subjects we manipulated information about the painting, varying the dimensions of contagion (whether it was made by the original artist or an assistant), creativity (whether it was an original design or not) and personal attachment (whether the artist was personally attached to the artwork). In each condition, participants were told that painting was duplicated and the original was destroyed. Then, they indicated the extent to which they thought the resulting (duplicate) object was the same painting.

Overall, participants were more likely to agree that the duplicate was not the same painting when the artist painted it himself versus when it was painted by his assistant (contagion). The other factors, however, did not produce significant main effects or interactions. Thus, in this study, the central factor seemed to be whether or not the artist physically created it himself. This result is consistent with the results of the first study and our hypothesis that people might be more materialist about artworks because the original pieces are imbued with the artist’s essence. Some participants even spontaneously referenced this idea in their justifications.

In sum, when reasoning about the continuity of art, people appear to place greater emphasis on the sameness of “physical stuff” (i.e., materialism), because the original possesses an essence that cannot be duplicated. The first study demonstrated that even when all other information is held constant (the artist is unknown, the objects are not valuable, etc.) the mere categorization of an object as ‘art’ versus a ‘tool’ makes the duplicate artwork less likely to be seen as a continuer of the original object. And, the results from both Studies 1 and 2 provide further support for this proposal by demonstrating that physical contact with the original artist seems to play a crucial role in these judgments. Thus, in terms of judgments about identity continuity, the present studies demonstrate that there are important ways in which judgments about art appear to be more similar to judgments about persons (in their reliance on sameness of substance) than judgments about other kinds of artifacts.

REFERENCES


