



Reports

Narrowing down to the automatically activated attitude: A narrowed conceptual scope improves correspondence between implicitly and explicitly measured attitudes

Jeffrey R. Huntsinger

Department of Psychology, Loyola University Chicago, 1032 W. Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60660, USA

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ABSTRACT

People display a remarkable ability to focus either broadly or narrowly on their internal mental landscape. This project examined if such shifts in conceptual attention regulated correspondence between implicit and explicit measures of attitudes. Because a broadened conceptual focus should cause the mind to be awash in a rather disparate assortment of attitude-relevant material that all needs to be integrated, this was predicted to dilute the impact of activated attitudes, as estimated by the implicit measure, on explicit reports of attitudes. Because a narrowed conceptual focus should cause only the most accessible attitude-relevant material (i.e., the activated attitude) to enter the mind, this was predicted to maximize the impact of such attitudes on explicit reports of attitudes. These predictions were subjected to empirical scrutiny and confirmed in three experiments that employed two different manipulations of conceptual scope, two different attitude objects, and two different implicit measures of attitudes.

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Introduction

People display an amazing ability to visually zoom in and out, to focus on the forest or the trees. Just as people may focus broadly or narrowly on their external physical landscape, they may also focus broadly or narrowly on their internal mental landscape. Whereas the former reflects shifts in the scope of perceptual attention, the latter reflects shifts in the scope of conceptual attention, which refers to selection of internal mental representations, and involves the breadth of construct activation (Anderson & Neely, 1996; Anderson & Spellman, 1995; Förster & Dannenberg, 2010; Martindale, 1995). When conceptual attention is narrowly focused, activation is restricted to mental representations with the highest a priori accessibility (i.e., a limited range of concepts are called to mind). When conceptual attention is broadly focused, activation spreads to a range of mental representations, including those with low a priori accessibility (i.e., a wide range of concepts are called to mind). This project concerns the consequences of focusing broadly or narrowly on one's internal mental environment for correspondence between implicit and explicit measures of attitudes.

From the early days of attitude research, when investigators wanted to know people's attitudes they simply asked them to mark a number on a rating scale (Hovland et al., 1953; Thurstone, 1928). For the past two decades, however, investigators have had a choice between traditional self-report measures and several new measures

of attitudes that do not require people to directly report their attitudes. Instead, attitudes are inferred from these newer measures based on participants' performance during the task. Such implicit measures typically take the form of response latency tasks, such as the implicit association task (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) and evaluative priming tasks (Fazio et al., 1986), or other tasks in which the measurement of attitudes is obscured, such as the name–letter task (Nuttin, 1985).

Implicit measures of attitudes are thought to capture spontaneous evaluative tendencies, such as automatically activated attitudes, whereas explicit measures are thought to capture more deliberate or elaborated evaluative tendencies (Cunningham & Zelazo, 2007; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Hofmann & Wilson, 2010; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). One way to think about the relation between implicit and explicit measures of attitudes, then, is that explicit measures reflect an evaluation that is further “downstream” than that revealed by implicit measures (Fazio & Olson, 2003; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). In recent years, much research has focused on identifying those downstream factors that will lead people's responses on explicit measures to more or less faithfully reproduce those on implicit measures (e.g., Fazio, 2007; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Greenwald & Nosek, 2008; Hofmann & Wilson, 2010; Nosek, 2007; Petty et al., 2007; Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Wilson, Lindsey & Schooler, 2000).

Hofmann and Wilson (2010) recently proposed a general model of implicit–explicit consistency that outlines several factors that may impact whether people rely on activated attitudes, as estimated by implicit measures, when completing explicit measures of attitudes.

E-mail address: jhuntsinger@luc.edu.

One such factor, for example, is whether people perceive an activated attitude as a valid basis for their verbally reported attitudes (Fazio, 2007; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, 2011; Hofmann & Wilson, 2010). In some cases, such validation of activated attitudes may result from their consistency or inconsistency with other accessible information (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, 2011). In other cases, people may accept or reject activated attitudes as a basis for explicit reports for motivational reasons, such as self-presentational concerns (Fazio, 2007). People motivated to appear egalitarian or unprejudiced often reject activated negative attitudes toward stigmatized groups, and therefore display little correspondence between implicitly and explicitly measured intergroup attitudes (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Payne et al., 2005).

Another factor identified by Hofmann and Wilson (2010) concerns processes of information integration (Anderson, 1981). The idea here is that if additional attitude-relevant information, beyond the activated attitude, is retrieved from long-term memory and, therefore, needs to be integrated into a coherent summary judgment, the impact of activated attitudes on verbal attitude reports will be diluted. Conversely, if little additional attitude-relevant information, other than an activated attitude, is retrieved from long-term memory then explicit reports should be more likely to resemble activated attitudes (Hofmann & Wilson, 2010). Consistent with this idea, factors that prevent additional information integration, such as when explicit reports are made under time pressure, lead to higher implicit-explicit consistency (Koole et al., 2001; Ranganath et al., 2008).

Of the factors discussed above, shifts in the scope of conceptual attention seem most likely to impact processes of information integration. A broadened scope of conceptual attention facilitates access to cognitive material with lower a priori accessibility, allowing a collection of loosely related attitude-relevant material to enter the mind. When explicitly reporting one's attitudes, such a conceptual focus should cause the mind to be awash in a rather disparate assortment of attitude-relevant material that all needs to be integrated. In this case, because such a large amount of materials needs to be integrated into a coherent whole, the impact of activated attitudes, as estimated via the implicit measure, on explicit reports should be minimized. A narrowed scope of conceptual attention inhibits access to cognitive material with lower a priori accessibility, allowing only the most highly accessible material to enter the mind. Now, when explicitly reporting one's attitudes, such a conceptual focus should cause one to only entertain the most accessible attitude-relevant material (i.e., the activated attitude) when making an explicit report. In this case, because the only thing in mind on which to base an explicit report is the activated attitude, the impact of the activated attitude on such reports should be maximized.

To illustrate, consider explicitly reporting one's attitude toward several academic subjects (e.g., Psychology, Physics, etc.). When reflecting on each subject, a person with a broadened conceptual scope will have a heterogeneous collection of attitude-relevant material and experiences come to mind. This material will include the activated attitude, of course. However, when completing the explicit measure, this flood of relatively remotely associated material must be integrated into a coherent, summary evaluation. As a result, the activated attitude will be given less weight in the explicit report. Consider the same situation, but the person now has a narrow conceptual scope. When reflecting on each academic subject, a person with a narrowed conceptual scope will have little additional attitude-relevant material and experiences come to mind, other than the activated attitude. Thus, when completing the explicit measure little integration is necessary as the only thing in mind is the activated attitude. As a result, the activated attitude will be given greater weight in the explicit report.

These predictions were subjected to empirical scrutiny across three experiments that employed two different manipulations of conceptual scope, two different attitude objects, and two different

implicit measures of attitudes. In each experiment, explicit measures of attitudes were predicted and found to more closely resemble activated attitudes, as estimated via the implicit measures, for participants with a narrow conceptual focus than those with a broad conceptual focus.

Experiment 1

Participants in this experiment first completed an implicit measure of academic attitudes. Next they experienced the manipulation of conceptual scope. Finally, participants completed the explicit measure of academic attitudes. Explicitly measured academic attitudes were predicted to more closely reflect implicitly measured academic attitudes when a narrow as opposed to broad conceptual scope was primed.

Method

Participants

Sixty-nine female participants completed the experiment for course credit.¹

Materials and procedure

The experiment involved several stages. First, participants completed the implicit measure of academic attitudes. Second, participants completed a task that primed a broad or narrow conceptual scope. Third, participants completed the explicit measure of academic attitudes.

Implicit measure. The Implicit Association Test used to measure academic attitudes, identical to that used in past research (Nosek et al., 2002), assessed associations between attitude objects (e.g., math and arts) and evaluative attributes (e.g., pleasant and unpleasant). Participants completed the task in seven blocks following the recommendations of Nosek et al. (2005). All reported analyses used the *D* measure as the measure of academic attitudes (Greenwald et al., 2003). Higher values on this measure indicated a more positive implicitly measured attitude toward arts than math. The implicit measure exhibited good internal consistency (Spearman–Brown coefficient = .83).

Manipulation of conceptual scope. Given the close connection between perceptual and conceptual scope (Anderson & Neely, 1996; Derryberry & Tucker, 1994; Förster & Dannenberg, 2010), following past research (Förster et al., 2008) a variant of the Navon-letter-task was used to prime conceptual focus. This manipulation represents a form of procedural priming (Schooler, 2002) in which a cognitive tendency activated in one task, in this case a broadened or narrowed conceptual scope, carries over, without participants' awareness, to other unrelated tasks, in this case the explicit measure. On each trial, a large letter made up of smaller letters appeared on a computer screen. Four of the composite letters included global targets (e.g., an H made of F's) and four included local targets (e.g., an F made of L's). Participants were instructed to press the "L" key if the letter "L" appeared in the compound stimulus, and press the "H" key if the letter "H" appeared. In the broad conceptual scope condition, all 80 trials had global-letter targets whereas in the narrow conceptual scope condition all 80 trials had local-letter targets.

Explicit measure. Following past research (Nosek et al., 2002), participants were asked to describe where their feelings toward mathematics (or arts) were located using the following six scale anchors: good–bad; sad–happy; delightful–disgusting; ugly–beautiful; avoid–approach; unafraid–afraid (scale anchors 1 to 7). After

¹ Participants in Experiments 1 and 2 first completed an unrelated study in which only women were recruited.

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