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EFFECTS OF ANALYZING REASONS ON ATTITUDE CHANGE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF ATTITUDE ACCESSIBILITY

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This study examined the moderating effect of attitude accessibility on attitude change resulting from explaining the reasons for one's attitude. We assessed people's attitudes toward Ronald Reagan on two occasions, several weeks apart. Analyzing reasons at Time 2 resulted in attitude inconsistency across the two occasions for subjects with relatively inaccessible attitudes, but did not affect consistency for subjects with accessible attitudes. All subjects generated reasons that were somewhat inconsistent with their Time 1 attitudes, but only people with inaccessible attitudes based their Time 2 attitudes on these reasons. We argue that people with accessible attitudes are less likely to base their attitudes on temporarily salient thoughts about the attitude object.

When people explain the reasons for their feelings they often change their attitude, at least temporarily (e.g., Johnson, MacArthur, & Wright, 1991; Millar & Tesser, 1986, 1989; Wilson, Bybee, Dunn, Hyman, & Rotondo, 1984; Wilson & Dunn, 1986; Wilson, Kraft, & Dunn, 1989; Wilson & Schooler, 1991). For example, Wilson and Hodges (1991) asked students, as part of a phone survey, to explain why they felt the way they did about three different social issues, such as the death penalty. These students changed their attitudes more than did a control group who did not think about reasons.

The process by which thinking about reasons causes attitude change, we argue, is as follows: Because people do not always have complete access to why they feel the way they do about an attitude object (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), they search the cognitive landscape for reasons that are plausible, accessible, and easily verbalizable. The reasons that meet these

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conditions, however, may not accurately reflect a person's prior attitude; that is, the reasons that are plausible, accessible, and easily verbalizable often are not representative of a person's true reasons. A number of factors can bias the reasons people bring to mind. Subsets of "data" about the attitude object can be accessible because specific information has just been primed (Higgins, 1989; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988; Wyer & Srull, 1989), because one's current mood makes certain information more accessible (Schwarz, Strack, Kommer, & Wagner, 1987), or because they are more a part of our cultural theories about why people feel the way they do (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). We are not suggesting that the reasons people bring to mind are necessarily or always inconsistent with the real reasons behind their attitudes, only that often they may not be the most important reasons or the complete set of reasons behind their attitudes. Interestingly, though, people seem to assume that the reasons they bring to mind reflect how they feel. We argue that a self-perception process occurs, whereby people infer that their attitude matches the reasons they just generated (Bem, 1972; Wilson, 1990). Consistent with this view, Wilson, Hodges and LaFleur (1993) asked subjects to form an impression of a target person, and then manipulated whether positive or negative information about that person was more accessible in memory. As predicted, people who listed reasons about why they felt the way they did focused on those thoughts that were accessible, and changed their attitudes to be consistent with those reasons. In addition, we have found in several other studies that the attitudes people report after analyzing reasons correlate highly with the valence of these reasons (e.g., Wilson & Schooler, 1991; Wilson et al., 1993; for reviews see Wilson, Dunn, Kraft, & Lisle, 1989; Wilson & Hodges, 1992). To the extent that the reasons that come to mind are inconsistent with people's prior attitude, then, attitude change will result.¹

These hypotheses about why analyzing reasons can change people's attitudes suggest some boundary conditions on the effect. First, in order for attitude change to occur, the reasons that come to mind must be at least somewhat inconsistent with people's prior attitude. If they are not, then an attitude based on these reasons will be the same as people's prior attitude. Previous studies have found that people who are knowledge-

1. It should be noted that if researchers do not know the valence of the reasons that are likely to be accessible to people, the direction of reasons-generated attitude change can be difficult to predict. If positive thoughts about the attitude object happen to be accessible then change will occur in a positive direction, whereas if negative thoughts about the attitude object happen to be accessible then change will occur in a negative direction. If the valence of people's reasons is not manipulated, and is likely to be positive for some people but negative for others, then the best measure of attitude change is a bidirectional one, such as the correlation between attitudes reported before and after analyzing reasons.

able about the attitude object are less likely to bring to mind reasons that conflict with a prior attitude, and thus are less likely to show a reasons-generated change in attitude (Wilson, Kraft, & Dunn, 1989).

Even if people do bring to mind inconsistent reasons, they will only change their attitudes if they assume that these reasons are an accurate reflection of how they feel. Again, there is evidence that such a self-perception process occurred in our prior studies. There may be, however, conditions under which people do not infer their attitude from their reasons. In the present study, we tested the hypothesis that people with accessible attitudes would be less likely to base their attitudes on their reasons and hence, would change their attitude less after analyzing reasons.

Attitude accessibility is defined as "a function of the associative strength of the attitude object and the evaluation that (an) individual holds of the object" (Fazio & Williams, 1986, p. 505). Fazio and his colleagues have amassed a great deal of evidence indicating that individuals with accessible attitudes have stronger attitudes in a number of respects. Predominant among the characteristics of an accessible attitude is that when people encounter the attitude object, or are questioned about it, their evaluation comes quickly to mind. Indeed, response time is the key measure of attitude accessibility (Fazio, in press; Fazio, Chen, McDonel & Sherman, 1982; Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989; Fazio & Williams, 1986).

We predicted that people with accessible attitudes would be less swayed by their reasons, because their attitudes are at the forefront of their minds. Put differently, an accessible attitude should exert more influence than the momentarily salient features of these people's internal and external environments. Because people with inaccessible attitudes do not have their evaluation at the forefront of their minds, they should be more influenced by information that happens to be salient—including the reasons they have generated.

This view is consistent with a study by Fazio et al. (1989) that examined the accessibility of subjects' attitudes towards consumer goods. One point of the study was to see how much people's choice of consumer goods was influenced by an arbitrary situational variable, namely how the items were arranged in the display of objects. People who had relatively inaccessible attitudes were most influenced by the position of the items in the display, that is, by the "momentarily salient and potentially unrepresentative features" (Fazio et al., 1989, p. 281) of the objects they could see most easily. People with accessible attitudes were less influenced by position, presumably because they could easily access their evaluations, "overriding" what happened to be salient in that situation.

Similarly, when people generate reasons that are an incomplete or biased sample of factors influencing their attitudes, it may be those with inaccessible attitudes who are most likely to base their attitude on these reasons. Just as an accessible attitude can "override" the temporary salience of external features of the attitude object, so may it be able to override the internal salience of reasons people generate when thinking about why they feel the way they do.

It is possible that attitude accessibility might moderate the effects of analyzing reasons in a second way. Because their evaluation is at the forefront of their minds, people with accessible attitudes might be less likely to bring to mind inconsistent reasons in the first place. That is, when thinking about why they feel the way they do, their attitudes might guide the types of reasons that come to mind, thereby generating a more complete and unbiased set of reasons that is consistent with their initial attitude. Even if people based their subsequent attitudes on these reasons, attitudes would be stable because the reasons would imply the same attitude as was held earlier.

However, there is no guarantee that accessibility of an attitude ensures accessibility of the true reasons for an attitude. People with accessible attitudes are still likely to be influenced by what factors are easy to verbalize and by the momentary salience of information about the attitude object, and therefore might be as likely to generate biased reasons as people with less accessible attitudes. By "biased" we do not mean that people will bring to mind reasons that are diametrically opposed to their initial attitude. Thinking about reasons will not, for example, cause politically conservative people to focus on exclusively liberal thoughts and undergo a radical change in their political beliefs. We simply suggest that when people analyze reasons, they are often unable to articulate exactly why they feel the way they do, and focus on thoughts that may be somewhat inconsistent with their prior attitude. We suggest further that, given the limits of human introspection, this tendency may be present in both people with accessible and inaccessible attitudes. Where accessibility matters, we predict, is in the extent to which people base subsequent attitude reports on these reasons. People with relatively inaccessible attitudes should use their reasons to infer their current attitude, whereas people with relatively accessible attitudes should not.

To test these hypotheses about the moderating role of attitude accessibility, we examined people's attitudes toward Ronald Reagan at the time that he was president. Participants first attended a laboratory session during which they completed ratings of their attitude toward Reagan and an accessibility measure of this attitude. Several weeks later they participated in what they thought was an unrelated phone survey, in which they were asked again for their attitude toward President Reagan. Half of the

subjects first analyzed the reasons for their attitude; half did not. We predicted that analyzing reasons would be most likely to cause attitude change among people with relatively inaccessible attitudes toward Ronald Reagan. We expected that people with accessible attitudes would be less swayed by the content of their reasons when inferring how they felt at Time 2.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

Two hundred and eighteen introductory psychology students participated in the initial laboratory session, in return for course credit. We were able to reach 88% of these participants during the later phone survey, for a final sample size of 191 (148 women and 43 men).

PROCEDURE OF LABORATORY STUDY

Subjects were seen individually in the Fall of 1987 and Spring of 1988. They were told that the purpose of the study was to develop new ways of measuring attitudes toward social issues, and that they would be given a variety of different attitude questions, some on a computer and some on a questionnaire.

Attitude Accessibility. Subjects completed an attitude accessibility measure identical to one developed by Fazio (e.g., Fazio et al., 1982). A social issue appeared on the monitor of an Apple IIe computer, followed by the word "good" (e.g., "Gun Control: Good?"). Subjects were instructed to push either a "Yes" or "No" button, according to how they felt about the issue. The computer recorded the latency of their response from the time the issue appeared on the screen to the time subjects pressed a button. Subjects were not told that latency was being recorded, though they were told to respond "as fast as you can, while making sure that you press the key that best represents your attitude on that issue." Subjects first responded to six practice questions. The experimenter then left the room while the subject responded to six more social issues (e.g., abortion, the death penalty). Imbedded in these questions—in a random order—was the target question about Reagan ("President Reagan: Good?").

When subjects had completed the response time task the experimenter gave them a questionnaire, and asked them to complete it page-by-page. She assured people that their responses would be anonymous, and instructed them to put their questionnaire in a box with those of other participants when they were done. Among other measures, participants

were asked to "Please give your evaluation of Ronald Reagan." They indicated their response by circling a number from 1 ("unfavorable") to 6 ("favorable"). To assess attitude change, we compared subjects' responses on this measure to the attitude they expressed during the later phone survey. The remainder of the questionnaire assessed various components of attitude structure and strength, which are not relevant to the current hypotheses (see Erber, Hodges, & Wilson, in press, for a discussion of these other measures).

PHONE SURVEY

Several weeks after subjects were in the study ($M = 11.9$ weeks, $SD = 5.86$) they were telephoned and asked to participate in a survey of student attitudes. The interviewer, who was unaware of the hypotheses of the study, made no mention of the earlier session people had attended. In the control condition (randomly assigned) the interviewer explained that she would read a statement, and that the subject should tell her how much he or she agreed or disagreed with it by naming a number from 1 to 7. The interviewer gave a label for each number on the scale; for example, she said that 1 represented "strongly disagree," 4 represented "neither agree nor disagree," and 7 represented "strongly agree." To disguise the connection to the earlier laboratory session, the question about President Reagan was worded somewhat differently ("President Reagan has been one of the best presidents this country has had in this century").

The procedure for people in the reasons condition was identical, except that before asking subjects how much they agreed with each statement, the interviewer asked them to give reasons explaining their attitude. She said, "What I'd like to do is ask you why you feel the way you do about an issue. The first thing I will do is name an issue, then I want you to tell me *why* you feel the way you do about it." She named the issue ("How good a president Ronald Reagan has been"), paused while the subject gave his or her reasons, then gave one prompt for more reasons ("Are there any other reasons that come to mind?"). She then asked subjects how they felt about the issue, following the same procedure as in the control condition.² The interviewer asked a subset of the participants in

2. An alternate procedure would be to give control subjects a filler task of equivalent length to the time it took subjects in the reasons condition to explain their attitudes. We have used this procedure in a number of other studies (e.g., Wilson, Kraft, & Dunn, 1989), and found very similar results to those reported here. Further, in a recent study we manipulated whether control subjects completed a filler task or not, and found that it had little effect on their responses (Wilson & Schooler, 1991).

both conditions if she could record their responses; all agreed. All subjects were mailed an explanation of the study after it was concluded.

RESULTS

Initial analyses revealed that men reported a significantly more favorable attitude toward Reagan than women, at both the initial session and the phone survey, $F(1, 187) = 7.53, p < .01$. Because gender did not interact significantly with the reasons manipulation, $F(1, 187) < 1$, subsequent analyses were collapsed across this variable. When gender was included in the analyses as a factor or a covariate, the results were very similar.

EFFECTS OF THINKING ABOUT REASONS ON ATTITUDE CHANGE

As expected, and consistent with previous research, subjects who analyzed reasons at Time 2 showed less consistency between their Time 1 and Time 2 attitudes, $r = .61$, than did people who did not analyze reasons, $r = .77, z = 2.16, p < .05$.

To test the moderating effects of accessibility, we divided people into low and high accessibility groups, based on their reaction times at Session 1. As recommended by Fazio (1990) we computed the reciprocal of the response times and controlled for attitude extremity by performing a median split at each level of evaluation of Reagan. That is, a separate median accessibility score was computed for all subjects who rated Reagan a "1" at Time 1, for all subjects who rated him a "2," and so on at each level of evaluation. Subjects were assigned to the high or low accessibility group based upon whether their score was above or below the median accessibility score for their level of evaluation. We then performed a 2 (reasons vs. control) \times 2 (low vs. high accessibility) analysis of variance on the correlations between people's attitudes at Time 1 and Time 2, using procedures described by Games (1978), Snyder and Kendzierski (1982), and Steiner and Darroch (1969). This procedure is essentially an extension of Fisher's (1946) test of the difference between two correlations, to designs in which there are more than two groups.

As predicted, the accessibility of people's attitudes moderated the effects of analyzing reasons, as reflected by a significant Reasons \times Accessibility interaction, $z = 1.99, p < .05$ (see means in Table 1). Analyzing reasons led to a significant decrease in attitude stability among people with less accessible attitudes, $z = 3.17, p < .002$, whereas analyzing reasons had no detectable effect among people with more accessible attitudes, $z = .36, n.s.$ A contrast testing the specific hypothesis that low

TABLE 1
Correlations Between Attitudes at Times 1 and 2

| Correlation | Low Accessibility | | High Accessibility | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Control (<i>n</i> = 46) | Reasons (<i>n</i> = 49) | Control (<i>n</i> = 43) | Reasons (<i>n</i> = 53) |
| Time 1, Time 2 Attitudes | .85 | .54 | .73 | .70 |

accessibility subjects who analyzed reasons would show the least stability of the four cells was also significant, $z = 2.45$, $p < .02$.³

ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTS' REASONS

Among the subset of subjects whose phone calls we recorded, 62 were in the reasons condition. Two research assistants coded the number of reasons these subjects gave for their attitude toward President Reagan (Spearman Brown reliability = .92). The mean number of reasons people gave was 2.60 ($SD = 1.88$), and did not differ significantly across accessibility condition, $t(60) < 1$. The assistants also rated the implied attitude toward Reagan expressed in people's reasons (Spearman Brown reliability = .91). There were no significant differences between accessibility conditions in the means or variances on this measure.

We predicted that people with accessible attitudes would be less likely to base their attitudes on the reasons they brought to mind than people with inaccessible attitudes. To test this hypothesis, we correlated the attitude implied in people's attitudes with the attitude they subsequently expressed at Time 2 (during the phone survey). As predicted, this correlation was significantly higher among people with inaccessible than accessible attitudes, $r_s = .86$ vs. $.60$, $z = 2.24$, $p < .03$ (see Table 2). Subjects with inaccessible attitudes appear to have based their Time 2

3. Tesser (1978) has found that asking people to think about an attitude object causes polarization, such that those who were initially positive became more positive, and those who were initially negative became more negative. It might appear that asking people to analyze the reasons for their attitudes should have the same, polarizing effects. We suggest, however, that when people analyze reasons, the direction of the attitude change depends not on their initial position, but on the positivity or negativity of the reasons that happen to come to mind. For example, a person with a positive attitude will moderate if negative reasons come to mind, and polarize if positive reasons come to mind. Consistent with this view, we have found in previous studies that analyzing reasons has no effect on attitude polarization (Wilson, Kraft, & Dunn, 1989; Wilson & Kraft, 1993). The same was true in the present study: Neither the reasons manipulation nor level of accessibility had significant effects on polarization, $F_s(1, 187) < 1.11$, *n.s.*

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Liking Implied by Reasons and Attitudes at Times 1 and 2

| Correlation Between Liking Implied in Reasons and: | Attitude Accessibility | |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Low (<i>n</i> = 29) | High (<i>n</i> = 33) |
| Time 1 Attitude | .73 | .71 |
| Time 2 Attitude | .86 | .60 |

attitude more on features that were highlighted by their reasons than did people with accessible reasons.

We also predicted that people with accessible attitudes would not bring to mind reasons that were any more consistent with their Time 1 attitudes than did people with inaccessible attitudes. As seen in Table 2, this prediction was confirmed. The correlation between the attitude expressed in people's reasons and their Time 1 attitude was very similar among people with inaccessible and accessible attitudes, and did not differ significantly, $z = .16$. The correlations in both conditions were high, suggesting that, as noted earlier, people do not bring to mind reasons that are diametrically opposed to their initial attitudes. Nonetheless, only about 50% of the variance of people's reasons was accounted for by their initial attitudes, which is consistent with our point that there is some slippage between the reasons that people list and their initial attitudes.

DISCUSSION

As predicted, attitude accessibility moderated the effects of analyzing reasons on attitude change: People with inaccessible attitudes changed their attitudes after thinking about reasons, whereas people with accessible attitudes did not. As expected, attitude accessibility was unrelated to the consistency between people's initial attitudes and the reasons they generated. Both people with accessible and relatively inaccessible attitudes generated reasons that were fairly consistent with their initial attitudes, but not completely so. Also as expected, the two groups differed in how consistent their reasons were with their subsequent attitudes. People with accessible attitudes were less likely to base their subsequent attitudes on their reasons, perhaps explaining why they were more likely to exhibit attitude stability.

The fact that people with accessible attitudes were less likely to base their Time 2 attitudes on their reasons extends Fazio et al.'s (1989) findings about the effects of situational salience on people's attitudes. As

noted earlier, Fazio et al. found that people with accessible attitudes were less influenced by the temporary salience of an array of consumer goods. Our findings suggest that people with accessible attitudes will also be less influenced by thoughts that are temporarily salient, namely the reasons they generated about why they felt the way they did.

These results also extend Bem's self-perception theory, which posits that when "internal cues are weak, ambiguous, or uninterpretable" (Bem, 1972, p. 2), people will resort to external cues to infer their attitudes, cues that are equally available to outside observers (i.e., one's own overt behavior and the conditions under which that behavior occurs). In our study, people with inaccessible attitudes had weak internal cues, in that there was not a strong link between the attitude object (President Reagan) and an evaluation. As Bem suggested, they had to infer how they felt from other information. However, this information was not external behavior that was available to other people. Instead, people seem to have inferred their attitude from another type of *internal* cue, namely the nature of the thoughts that came to mind when they thought about reasons. Thus, our results might reflect a different sort of self-perception process: A case where people infer their attitudes from internally generated thoughts, instead of overt behavior. If so, it is an example of a self-perception process whereby people are not in a functionally identical position as outside observers, because they are inferring their attitudes from privileged information (their reasons).

It is important to note that the attitude change we observed among people with inaccessible attitudes, though not especially large in magnitude, can be consequential. In other research, we have found that people's choices and self-predictions stem from their reasons-generated attitudes (e.g., Wilson et al., 1993; Wilson & LaFleur, 1993). However, these attitudes are based on thoughts that happen to be accessible and easy to verbalize. Assuming that people's initial attitudes were based on a chronic means of weighting attributes about the attitude object, then over time, these initial attitudes are likely to return, when people's reasons are no longer so accessible. If so, then people may not be happy with the choices they make on the basis of their reasons-generated attitude, and predictions they make based on this attitude may not be very accurate. We have found support for both of these predictions (Wilson et al., 1993; Wilson & LaFleur, 1993).

The present results suggest that people with accessible attitudes may be protected from these negative outcomes. Furthermore, it can be seen from the correlations in Table 2 that they are not protected because the reasons they list are more consistent with their Time 1 attitudes than the reasons people with less accessible attitudes list. For subjects with both accessible and inaccessible attitudes, their Time 1 attitude accounted for

only about one half the variance in the attitude implied by their reasons. Factors other than the subject's original attitude accounted for the other half of the variance. However, even though people with accessible attitudes may list reasons that are inconsistent with their original attitudes, these reasons stand less of a chance against the more accessible attitude, and are less likely to guide subsequent attitudes or behavior.

Conversely, people with less accessible attitudes are more at the whims of whatever information has been made temporarily accessible, whether that is the reasons they have just listed, where attitude objects are in a display, or some other transient factor. Because what is most accessible may change over time, and because there is no chronically accessible attitude to overcome these temporary forces, it is no wonder that people with inaccessible attitudes are more likely to show attitude-behavior inconsistency (Fazio, 1986) and less attitude stability (Fazio, in press).

Turning to a finding that is less central to our main hypothesis, it is curious that among people who did not analyze reasons, the difference in attitude stability between those with accessible attitudes and those with inaccessible attitudes was not significant. This result conflicts with previous findings that accessibility is associated with more stable attitudes (e.g., Bassili, 1993; Fazio & Williams, 1986). It must be noted, however, that all control subjects showed a relatively high degree of stability from Time 1 to Time 2, suggesting a possible ceiling effect. The correlation of .77 between Time 1 and Time 2 across all control subjects is quite high, especially considering the different wording of the two attitude questions. Given the small amount of attitude change between Time 1 and Time 2 for control subjects, there may not have been room for accessibility to show a moderating effect, and the non-significant difference we obtained in the opposite direction may have been due to chance.

Another possible explanation of this null finding, and a possible general criticism of our study, is that because we measured rather than manipulated attitude accessibility, accessibility may have been associated with other variables that influenced attitude stability. However, such an explanation still leaves unclear why our results should differ from those collected by Fazio and Williams (1986) and Bassili (1993), since they also did not manipulate accessibility. More generally, it is possible that subjects who differed on accessibility also differed on some other crucial dimension that moderates the effects of analyzing reasons. Though we cannot completely rule out this possibility, it should be noted that in a number of studies, Fazio and his colleagues have found that measured and manipulated accessibility have very similar effects (e.g., Fazio et al. 1982).

A related issue is the question of how accessible an attitude has to be before people become immune to the effects of analyzing reasons. In most studies of accessibility people are divided into "high" and "low" groups, either on the basis of measured or manipulated accessibility. Fazio (1986) has been careful to note, however, that accessibility is a continuum, and it is not entirely clear at what point on this continuum that thinking about reasons no longer changes people's attitudes. One clue comes from the results of earlier studies, in which people were given behavioral experience with a set of puzzles, and then asked to analyze reasons for why they felt the way they did about these puzzles (e.g., Wilson et al., 1984). Behavioral experience has been used by Fazio (e.g., Fazio et al., 1982) to increase the accessibility of people's attitudes toward the puzzles, and yet, using the same paradigm, Wilson and his colleagues (Wilson et al., 1984; Wilson & Dunn, 1986) found that even such experienced people changed their attitudes after analyzing reasons.

It seems likely, however, that the accessibility of people's attitudes in the puzzle paradigm was not as great as the accessibility of our "high" group in the present study. In the puzzles study, people spent only a few minutes playing with puzzles they had never seen before, whereas our participants probably had dozens, if not hundreds of opportunities to rehearse and act on their attitudes toward Ronald Reagan, in numerous contexts. The results of the puzzle study suggest that attitude accessibility must be quite high before people become immune to the effects of analyzing reasons. Although a quick laboratory manipulation is able to increase accessibility, it may not be able to create accessibility levels that are quantitatively and qualitatively equivalent to those of attitudes we have held for some time and thought about quite a bit. It is these latter levels of accessibility that appear to make people immune to the effects of analyzing reasons.

To summarize, previous studies have identified attitude accessibility as a good predictor of resistance against external attempts to change attitudes, such as persuasive messages (Fazio, in press). Our findings suggest that it is also a good defense against attitudinal attacks from within, i.e., analyzing reasons. Our results are consistent with a model that explains the attitude change that results from analyzing reasons as occurring because biased or incomplete thoughts about the attitude object become temporarily accessible. However, we have also shown that merely generating biased or incomplete lists of reasons when analyzing reasons is not sufficient to change our attitude when our original attitude is highly enough accessible to counteract the temporary accessibility of our reasons.

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ACTORS AND OBSERVERS REVISITED: CORRESPONDENCE BIAS, COUNTERFACTUAL SURPRISE, AND DISCOUNTING IN SUCCESSIVE JUDGMENTS OF CONSTRAINED BEHAVIOR

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In two experiments we examined first, whether observers given information about a film actor's personality would infer correspondent dispositions from a role he played in a film, and second, the impact these judgments have on subsequent dispositional judgments made from constrained behavior of different targets. In both experiments, observers received a fictitious description of the primary actor as either interpersonally warm and sensitive or interpersonally cold and callous. Observers then watched one of two clips—depicting the primary actor playing a role that was either congruent or incongruent with the description they had received—taken from his films. Finally, observers rated the primary actor's true personality. Results showed that observers who watched a congruent film clip provided significantly more extreme correspondent dispositional ratings than did subjects who saw an incongruent clip. Following the ratings of the primary actor, all observers watched other targets engaged in constrained behavior. Observers

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