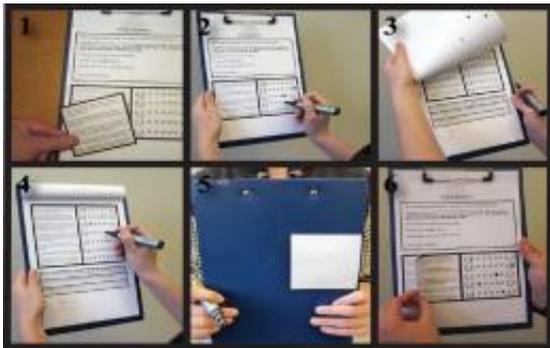


People change moral position without even realizing it

September 19 2012



This is a step-by-step demonstration of the choice procedure during a manipulation trial. (1) The questionnaire is attached to a clipboard. A paper slip with moral statements is attached to the first page of the questionnaire to conceal the same, but negated set of printed statements. (2) The participants rate their agreement with the statements on the first page of the questionnaire and (3) turn to the second page, and (4) rate their agreement with a second set of principles. (5) When the participants are asked to flip back the survey to the first page to discuss their opinions, the add-on paper slip from (1) now sticks to a patch of stronger glue on the backside of the clipboard, and remains attached there. When the participants now read the manipulated statements the meaning has been reversed (the equivalent of moving the actual rating score to the mirror side of the scale). (6) During the debriefing, the experimenter demonstrates the workings of the paper slip to the participants, and explains how the manipulation led to the reversal of their position. Credit: Hall L, Johansson P, Strandberg T (2012) Lifting the Veil of Morality: Choice Blindness and Attitude Reversals on a Self-Transforming Survey. PLoS ONE 7(9): e45457. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0045457

Shortly after expressing a moral view about a difficult topic, people may easily endorse the opposite view and remain blind to the psychological mismatch, according to research published Sep. 19 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE*.

In the study, led by Lars Hall of Lund University, Sweden, [participants](#) were presented with a survey about moral issues, including foundational principles and current hot topics with moral implications. To complete the survey they had to flip over the first page of questions, which was displayed on a clipboard, and this is where the researchers implemented a design usually used in performance magic: the back of the clipboard had a patch of [glue](#) that caught the top layer of the questions, so when the page was flipped back over, an opposite version of the original questions was revealed but the answers remained unchanged. In other words, the participants' responses were opposite to their originally declared positions

The researchers then discussed the participants' answers with them, and found that many participants supported their reported answers, even though the responses were opposite to what the individual had originally intended to express. The authors write that "participants often constructed coherent and unequivocal arguments supporting the opposite of their original position," suggesting "a dramatic potential for flexibility in our moral attitudes."

Commenting on their results, Lars Hall says, "It could have significant impact on research that uses self-reported questionnaires. Either we would have to conclude that many participants hold no real attitudes about the topics we investigate, or that standard survey scales fail to capture the complexity of the attitudes people actually hold".

More information: Hall L, Johansson P, Strandberg T (2012) Lifting

the Veil of Morality: Choice Blindness and Attitude Reversals on a Self-Transforming Survey. PLoS ONE 7(9): e45457.

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