Why I am less persuaded than you: People's intuitive understanding of the psychology of persuasion.

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Abstract

People generally assume that others are more influenced than the self (the third person perception or *TPP*). To further understand this perception, we investigated people's intuitive understanding of how persuasion works. Participants rated themselves or others on traits reflecting risk and immunity from persuasion (e.g., weak- and strong-mindedness) and need for cognition (NFC). They then rated how much they or others would be influenced by some advertisements. Results showed that participants associated perceived low NFC and high levels of weak-mindedness with influence. Perceived self-other differences in these variables mediated the TPP. Also, perceived NFC explained the role of self-enhancement in the TPP. People's intuitive understanding of persuasion therefore resembles the elaboration likelihood model on the role it grants to NFC.

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Persuasion is an inescapable feature of life. Each day people are confronted with commercial advertising, political propaganda and public education programs attempting to influence their opinions and behavior. Researchers have made great strides in understanding the psychological processes underlying persuasion. In turn, they have achieved many valuable insights into how persuasion attempts are most effectively formulated and resisted (Cialdini, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, for all psychologists know about persuasion, they know less about the sense that people make of this important social phenomenon. What motives, thought processes, and intuitive concepts affect observers' judgments of messages' persuasive power, and conversely, of persons' susceptibility to persuasion? The present report is intended to enrich scientific accounts of persuasion by casting some light on people's intuitive understanding of the psychology of persuasion.

Research has already shown that certain persuasion behaviors – such as resistance of persuasion attempts, or efforts to protect others from persuasion – are shaped by intuitive persuasion beliefs. For example, researchers have shown that some individuals more than others think they are personally invulnerable to the influence of advertising. Ironically, this belief renders these individuals less likely to resist influence (Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice & Serna, 2002). Conversely, individuals who believe others to be highly vulnerable are more likely to take a censorial stance toward the media, apparently in an attempt to protect others (Gunther, 1995). These findings illustrate how a comprehensive psychological account of persuasion processes, and their wider

social ramifications, therefore requires an account of commonsense representations of those processes.

The largest and most influential program of research into people's perceptions of persuasion has been the work on third-person perceptions (*TPP*: Davison, 1983; see also Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 2000). The TPP is the tendency for people to believe that others will generally be more persuaded than themselves by an influence attempt. It is a robust phenomenon having been demonstrated in over 106 studies to date (Sun, Pan & Shen, 2008). The TPP has also been demonstrated in a wide variety of contexts such as politics and news media (e.g., Cavazza & Mucchi-Faina, 2008; Hoorens & Ruiter, 1996; Perloff, 1989), pornography (e.g., Gunther, 1995; Reid, Byrne, Brundidge, Shoham & Marlow, 2007) and most notably in advertising (e.g., Duck, Terry & Hogg, 1995; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Tal-Or, 2007). These perceptions seem to stem, in part, from an illusion of personal invulnerability – individuals are persuaded by some messages without being conscious of any change in their attitudes (Douglas & Sutton, 2004; 2008). Thus, consistent with Sagarin et al. (2002), it appears that individuals may complacently expose themselves to persuasive messages such as advertising, oblivious to the effects that they are having.

A long-standing explanation for third-person perceptions is that being easily persuadable is intuitively linked to undesirable traits such as gullibility. According to this account, assuming that others are more persuadable than the self enhances self-esteem and feelings of personal control are enhanced by assuming that others are more persuadable than the self (David & Johnson, 1998). This can be likened to the process of downward social comparison whereby people compare themselves to people who are less fortunate or able than themselves (Wills, 1981). Supporting this account, TPPs

tend to be stronger among individuals high in self-esteem (e.g., Perloff, 1989), and internal locus of control (e.g., Haridakis & Rubin, 2005).

In the present study however, we consider how TPPs may arise not only from these self-serving processes, but also people's intuitive psychological understanding of persuasion processes. These *intuitive theories* have not been examined before despite their potential impact on persuasion judgments and behaviors. At a general level, it is in the nature of human beings to engage in psychological theorizing. People constantly wonder about psychological states and traits, and invoke these psychological constructs in explanations of their own and others' behavior (Heider, 1958; Malle, 2004). In doing so, they make use of culturally shared assumptions and intuitive theories about human psychology (Fletcher, 1995; Levy, Chiu & Hong, 2006; Wegener & Petty, 1998). It is reasonable to assume that people do the same to attempt to understand how persuasion works.

What are perceived to be the psychological traits that are related to persuasion?

If we want to know how people understand persuasion, we may begin with what we, as scientists, already know about persuasive processes. As a starting point we therefore turn to one of the most prominent academic theories of persuasion – the Elaboration Likelihood Model (*ELM*; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Based on research testing the principles of the ELM, we know that factors such as *need for cognition* (NFC; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) determine the extent to which people are influenced by different types of persuasive media (e.g., Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein & Jarvis, 1996; Haddock, Maio, Arnold & Huskinson, 2008). In particular, individuals who are high in NFC – "the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful thought" (Briñol & Petty, 2005, p. 581) – tend to be persuaded by *central cues* in persuasion attempts, such as scientific

evidence and strong arguments. However, people who are low in NFC often appear to be more susceptible to *peripheral cues* –features of a message that do not typically provide logical or empirical grounds to accept the central argument of a message (see Petty & Wegener, 1999 for a full account of the ELM). Typically (but not always), these are cues such as the attractiveness of a model, slogans or the slickness of graphical design. Such cues are often used as powerful persuasion techniques in many types of advertising. In the present research, we investigate whether people's intuitive understanding of persuasion resembles the ELM in one key respect. Specifically, we investigate whether perceived NFC is negatively related to perceived susceptibility to persuasive advertisements that contain peripheral cues.

One reason to assume that there may be a resemblance between people's intuitive understanding and scientific theories of persuasion is that the theorizing of academic psychologists is likely to be influenced by the intuitive wisdom provided by the culture in which they grew up (Fletcher, 1995). Further, people appear to test intuitive explanations of behavior with less formal analogues to the procedures used by scientists such as analysis of variance (e.g., Sutton & McClure, 2001). Implicit understandings that generate highly inaccurate predictions in everyday life are unlikely to prosper (e.g., Read & Marcus-Newhall, 1993). Therefore, both commonsense and scientific theories of behavior are related, albeit to varying degrees of reliability, to psychological facts.

Also, with respect to TPP, we already know that people perceive others as more affected than the self by messages containing weak argumentation (White, 1997) suggesting that people's judgments of self-other differences in persuasion are informed by perceptions of the message itself. Further, Andsager and White (2007) argue that

people may use "an internalized set of judgment rules" (p. 113) about people when they estimate message impact on the self and others. For example, they may judge people as differentially persuadable to the self because of their social group membership. So, when judging the extent to which the self and others are persuaded, people may indeed use some implicit knowledge about persuasion and how persuasive processes may differ for the self versus others.

People's intuitive understanding of persuasion may therefore also not be restricted to NFC and other constructs from scientific psychology. To further examine people's intuitive understanding of persuasion, we therefore also consider the traits that people freely generate when they think about the characteristics that make people at risk, or immune from the influence of persuasive messages. Obtaining these participant-driven characteristics is, we argue, an important step in understanding how people understand the persuasion process. In the present study we therefore investigate whether personal characteristics linked to perceived risk of being influenced by advertising are positively associated with perceived susceptibility to persuasive advertisements, and if characteristics linked to perceived immunity from the influence of advertising are negatively associated with perceived susceptibility to persuasion.

Do beliefs about these psychological traits explain the TPP?

We also investigate the role of people's intuitive understanding of persuasion in the TPP. If persons tend to see themselves as less at risk, more immune and higher in NFC than others, then these perceptions have the potential to help explain the TPP. One reason to suspect that self-other differences in these variables will emerge is that they, too, are self-serving. Being at risk or vulnerable to influence is an undesirable trait that people may be more likely to ascribe to others than themselves, in much the same way

they assume that others are generally more at risk of negative outcomes in life (e.g., van der Pligt & Richard, 1994; Weinstein, 1987). Further, engaging in effortful thought is culturally valued such that people attribute above mid-point levels of NFC to themselves; indeed self-reported NFC is positively correlated with self-esteem (Osberg, 1987) and self-efficacy (Elias & Loomis, 2002). Therefore, perceived self-other differences in risk, immunity and NFC could explain the TPP, so long as these variables are linked in people's minds to resistance to persuasion.

Do beliefs about these psychological traits explain why the TPP is self-serving?

These differences could also help explain the statistical relation between third person perceptions and indices of positive self-perception. That is, one way in which the TPP may enhance positive self-perception could be due to self-enhancing judgments about one's own cognitive processes such as NFC. That said, self-enhancement motives are not the only reason why individuals may see themselves as higher in these desirable traits than others. With reference to NFC specifically, individuals have greater access to their own thoughts, and therefore to occasions on which they personally were motivated to think, engaged in effortful thought and enjoyed thinking. This *introspection illusion* (cf. Pronin, Berger, & Molouki, 2007) may lead people to attribute higher NFC to themselves. If so, and if people link NFC to resistance to persuasion as we are predicting, then self-other differences in NFC may help explain the TPP beyond the effects of positive self-perception. A similar process may be at work for people's perceptions of their own and others' invulnerability to persuasion. People may be able to recall many situations in which they have been invulnerable to attempts to influence their behavior, but will not have the same access to that information for

others. So, irrespective of the positive value ascribed to invulnerability, people may see themselves as more invulnerable and therefore less persuaded than others.

In the present experiment we asked undergraduate participants how much each of several advertisements would affect themselves or other undergraduate students. These advertisements employed peripheral cues rather than direct arguments in favor of the advertised products. We used a between-groups design to determine whether the predicted TPP (lower perceived influence on self than on others) is mediated by perceived traits indicating risk and immunity from influence, and NFC. Specifically, we predicted that individuals would tend to rate themselves as higher than other undergraduates in NFC, immunity factors, and lower in risk factors. We further predicted that perceived immunity and NFC would be negatively related to perceived influence to persuasion, whereas perceived risk would be positively associated with perceived influence to persuasion. Finally, we examined the interplay between people's intuitive understanding of persuasion and positive self-perceptions. If people's implicit understanding of persuasion helps explain the TPP independently of these perceptions, then perceived NFC, risk and immunity should mediate the TPP even when indices of positive self-perception are controlled for. Further, if an understanding of persuasion processes helps explain why third person perceptions are self-enhancing, then self-other differences in perceived NFC, risk and immunity should mediate the relationship between those positive self-perceptions and the TPP.

Method

Pilot study

In order to generate the characteristics that are perceived to make individuals vulnerable and invulnerable to influence, one hundred undergraduate psychology

students (70 female and 30 male, mean age = 24.5 years) answered the following question: “In your opinion, what is different about people who are persuaded by advertising compared to people who are immune to advertising?” Participants’ responses typically mentioned traits related to both persuasion and immunity. For example, one participant wrote: “I think that people more easily persuaded by advertisements are more weak of mind than those that aren’t, i.e. not as mentally strong.” Responses were content analyzed by two raters tallying the number of times a particular trait was mentioned. The two raters reached complete agreement that the four most commonly identified traits identified for people who are persuaded by advertising were vulnerability, being uncritical, weak-mindedness and impressionability. The four traits identified for people who are immune to advertising were strong-mindedness, independence, intelligence and critical thinking. These eight characteristics were included as dependent measures in the main study.

Main study

Participants and design

Participants were 132 undergraduate students from a university-wide participant pool of non-psychology students (82 women, 50 men; mean age = 23.4 years). As non-psychology students the participants were naïve in terms of their knowledge about psychological theories of persuasion. They participated in return for entry into a prize draw to win one of four £50.00 (~ US$80.00) prizes. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (rated person: self or other).

Materials and procedure

Participants first rated either themselves (self condition), or other undergraduate students (“other undergraduate students in your class” – other condition) on the traits

identified in the pilot study. That is, participants were asked to rate to what extent they see themselves (or others) as vulnerable, uncritical, weak-minded, impressionable, strong-minded, independent, intelligent, and a critical thinker (0 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*). A factor analysis with Promax rotation identified two separate but inter-correlated factors, $r(131) = -.32$, $p < .001$. The traits of strong-mindedness, independence, intelligence and critical thinking loaded on one factor (eigenvalue = 2.53, proportion of variance = 31.64%). The traits of vulnerability, being uncritical, weak-mindedness, and impressionability loaded on the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.38, proportion of variance = 17.23%). For our further analyses, we therefore calculated mean totals for the two trait factors, which we named *weak-mindedness* ($\alpha = .71$) and *strong-mindedness* ($\alpha = .60$).

Next, participants were asked to rate either themselves ($\alpha = .88$) or others ($\alpha = .88$) on Cacioppo, Petty & Kao's (1984) 18-item need for cognition scale. This scale included statements such as "Thinking is not my [other undergraduate students'] idea of fun" and participants were asked to rate how much each statement was characteristic of themselves (1 = *extremely uncharacteristic* to 5 = *extremely characteristic*).

To measure perceived influence of persuasive material on self and others, participants next viewed six color advertisements for a range of everyday products (e.g., fast food, soda and cell phones). These advertisements were chosen from an original pool of 20 advertisements which were pre-tested for familiarity and gender neutrality. These advertisements were also selected on the basis that they used typically peripheral cues to persuasion, such as celebrities and attractive models, rather than providing direct information about the product. Specifically, the advertisements contained no text other than the product name and therefore included no additional information about the

product to induce deeper processing. As is typical in TPP research (see Paul et al., 2000), participants then rated how much they thought that each advertisement would influence themselves or other undergraduate students, depending on the condition (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

We then measured participants' self-perception. All participants rated themselves on Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) nine-item self-efficacy scale (α = .82) which included statements such as "I can handle whatever comes my way". Participants were asked to indicate how much each statement was true of themselves (1 = *not at all true* to 4 = *exactly true*). Participants' general self-enhancement was then measured by Taylor and Gollwitzer's (1995) 21-item self-perception scale in which all participants rated themselves in comparison with the average university student of their age and gender on a series of characteristics such as originality, creativity and individuality. Participants were asked to rate themselves compared to others from -3 = *much worse* to 3 = *much better* (α = .89). Another index of positive self-perception was provided by Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale which included statements such as "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others". Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement from 1 = *not at all,* 5 = *very much* (α = .88). At the conclusion of the experiment, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Results

What are perceived to be the psychological traits that are related to persuasion?

As predicted, higher perceived levels of *weak-mindedness* predicted greater perceived influence, $\beta = .384$, $t(131) = 4.75$, $p < .001$. That is, collapsed across target (self/other), the more people perceived a recipient to be psychologically at risk of persuasion, the more they thought they would be persuaded by the advertisements.

Higher perceived levels of *strong-mindedness* predicted lower perceived influence, β = -.351, $t(131)$= -4.28, $p < .001$. Similarly, higher perceived levels of NFC predicted lower perceived influence, β = -.564, $t(131)$ = -7.79, $p < .001$. Therefore, participants made the predicted associations between psychological traits and persuasion, thus demonstrating some implicit knowledge of the link between psychological traits and susceptibility to influence.

Do beliefs about these psychological traits explain the TPP?

We conducted a one-way between-groups analysis of variance on the total perceived influence ratings for self and others across the six advertisements. As predicted, participants rated others (M = 3.03, SD = 1.22) as more influenced by the advertisements than the self (M = 1.53, SD = 1.03), $F(1, 131) = 58.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .31$, replicating the third-person effect.

We then examined if an understanding of the psychological traits linked to persuasion can explain this TPP. Participants rated themselves lower on weak-mindedness than other undergraduate students on the combined trait items from the pre-test (M_{self} = 2.33, SD = .75, M_{other} = 3.01, SD = .71), $F(1, 131) = 28.54$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .18. On the other hand, they rated themselves higher on strong-mindedness than other undergraduate students, (M_{self} = 4.45, SD = .65, M_{other} = 3.70, SD = .77), $F(1, 131)$ = 36.51, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. As predicted, participants also judged themselves as being higher in NFC (M = 3.80, SD = 0.59) than other undergraduate students (M = 2.89, SD = 0.57), $F(1, 131) = 84.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .39$. For all mediation tests, target (-1 = self, 1 = others) predicted perceived influence at Step 1 of Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure, β = .556, $t(131) = 7.62$, $p < .001$. We then examined if the TPP is mediated by

perceived weak- and strong-mindedness as generated by participants in the pre-test, and perceived need for cognition as derived from the ELM.

Target (self-other) predicted perceived weak-mindedness at Step 2, β = .424, $t(131) = 5.34$, $p < .001$. Step 3 showed that the self-other difference in perceived persuasion was significant but lower than in Step 1, β = .48, $t(130) = 6.04$, $p < .001$. Step 3 also showed that independently of target, perceived weak-mindedness was positively related to perceived influence, β = .181, $t(130) = 2.29$, $p = .024$, Sobel z = 2.10, $p = .035$.

Target predicted perceived strong-mindedness at Step 2, β = -.468, $t(131) = -6.04$, $p < .001$. Step 3 showed that the self-other difference in perceived persuasion was significant but lower than in Step 1, β = .501, $t(130) = 6.10$, $p < .001$. However, Step 3 showed that when target was taken into account, perceived strong-mindedness was not inversely related to perceived influence, β = -.116, $t(130) = -1.42$, $p = .159$ and therefore did not mediate the TPP.

Target predicted perceived NFC at Step 2, β = -.627, $t(131) = -9.18$, $p < .001$. Step 3 showed that the self-other difference in perceived persuasion was significant but lower than in Step 1, β = .332, $t(130) = 3.75$, $p < .001$. Step 3 also showed that independently of target, perceived NFC was inversely related to perceived influence, β = -.356, $t(130) = -4.02$, $p < .001$, Sobel $z = 3.68$, $p < .001$.

These results confirmed the relevance of people's intuitive understanding of persuasion, to perceived susceptibility to messages which rely upon typically peripheral cues. Notably, we replicated these results when all indices of self-perception were also included at all 3 steps (specifically, general self-enhancement, self-esteem, and self-efficacy). Both perceived weak-mindedness (Sobel $z = 2.22$, $p = .027$) and perceived

NFC (Sobel $z = 3.41$, $p < .001$) remained as partial mediators of the TPP. Therefore, perceived self-other differences in weak-mindedness and NFC contributed to the third-person perception independently of self-serving perceptions. Factors associated with immunity from persuasion (perceived strong-mindedness), on the other hand, did not.

However, when all three potential mediating variables (perceived weak-mindedness, strong-mindedness and NFC) were entered at Step 3, only NFC remained as a significant predictor of self-other differences in perceived persuasion, $\beta = -.346$, $t(127) = -3.39$, $p = .001$, Sobel $z = 3.10$ $p = .002$. Both perceived weak- ($\beta = .108$, $t(127) = 1.35$, $p = .179$) and strong-mindedness $\beta = .013$, $t(127) = .048$, $p = .586$ were no longer significant. This finding suggests that, from the variables tested in this experiment, perceived NFC is the most relevant to people in predicting their own and others' susceptibility to persuasion.

Do beliefs about these psychological traits explain why TPPs are self-serving?

We then examined the relationship between general self-enhancement and the TPP. To do this we used a moderated regression procedure (Aiken & West, 1991) examining the ability of an interaction term (target, -1 = self, 1 = others, multiplied by mean-centered self-enhancement) to predict persuasion over and above the main effects of target and self-enhancement. The interaction term was marginal, $\beta = .126$, $t(128) = 1.73$, $p = .087$, permitting only a modest level of confidence that general self-enhancement augmented the TPP. A similar procedure showed that self-esteem was not a moderator of the TPP, $\beta = .081$, $t(128) = 1.10$, $p = .272$. In contrast, self-efficacy was a significant moderator of the TPP, $\beta = .182$, $t(128) = -2.55$, $p = .012$. People with high self-efficacy committed the TPP more so than participants who were low in self-

efficacy (see Figure 1). This supports theorizing from previous literature about the role of TPPs in enhancing positive self-perception.

We then examined the relationships between positive self-perceptions and self-other differences in perceptions of weak-mindedness and NFC. We did so to examine if either of these variables, which appear to predict self-other differences in perceived persuasion at least separately, mediate the relationship between self-efficacy (and other indices of self-enhancement) and the TPP. To do so, we first regressed positive self-perceptions (self-enhancement, self-esteem and self-efficacy) separately on self-other differences in weak-mindedness and NFC (target, -1 = self, 1 = others, multiplied by weak-mindedness, and NFC respectively).

The self-other difference in perceived weak-mindedness was only marginally augmented by general self-enhancement, $\beta = -.152$, $t(131) = -1.93$, $p = .056$, non-significantly by self-esteem, $\beta = -.098$, $t(131) = -1.242$, $p = .216$, and only marginally by self-efficacy, $\beta = -.145$, $t(131) = -1.84$, $p = .068$. When all three variables were entered simultaneously, none moderated self-other differences in perceived weak-mindedness. Therefore, perceived weak-mindedness was not a significant mediator of the effect of self-enhancement on perceived influence.

The self versus others difference in perceived NFC appeared to be augmented by general self-enhancement, $\beta = .206$, $t(131) = 3.10$, $p < .001$, self-esteem, $\beta = .192$, $t(131) = 2.84$, $p < .001$, and self-efficacy, $\beta = .246$, $t(131) = 3.80$, $p < .001$. When these three variables were entered simultaneously, neither self-esteem nor general self-enhancement affected self-other differences in perceived NFC (both $t < 1$). Only self-efficacy moderated this difference, $\beta = .201$, $t(128) = 2.18$, $p = .031$.

We then conducted Step 3 to test whether perceived NFC mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and the TPP. The significant relationship between self-efficacy and self-other differences in perceived persuasion from Step 1 was no longer significant, β = -.045, $t(130)$ = -.60, p = .548. Step 3 also showed that independently of self-efficacy, perceived NFC was inversely related to perceived influence, β = -.553, $t(130)$ = -7.39, $p < .001$. Therefore, perceived NFC fully accounted for the relationship between self-efficacy and the TPP, Sobel z = 5.36, $p <$ .001 (see Figure 2).

Discussion

To our knowledge, this study comprises the first examination of the types of information that people may draw upon when they make judgments about their own, and others' susceptibility to persuasion. We found that people make intuitive judgments about persuasion based on the extent to which they perceive themselves and others as weak-minded, and also the extent to which they perceive themselves and others as high in need for cognition – the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful thought. Further analyses revealed however that of these two constructs, perceived NFC emerged as the most significant predictor of self-other differences in persuasion.

These results demonstrate that people's intuitive understanding of persuasion therefore resembles an established theoretical model of persuasion (the ELM) in a key respect. Specifically, perceived NFC is related to perceived resistance to persuasion by advertisements which rely on typically peripheral cues. This gives psychological and evaluative meaning to resistance and susceptibility to persuasion, helping explain why individuals are motivated to see themselves as less influenced than others. Of course it is important to note that people may not necessarily be able to articulate their

understanding of this link between NFC and persuasion. For example, it is unlikely that people would be able to invoke NFC as a construct in everyday life because it is unlikely to be readily accessible, unlike features such as intelligence and critical thinking. Also, it is important to note that we only tested people's responses to glossy advertisements here and did not focus on direct persuasive arguments – such stronger arguments are likely to be seen to appeal more to people high in NFC. Future research may examine the effects of central cues to persuasion, such as argument quality, on judgments of persuasion. It may also be useful to consider peripheral and central cues as a more abstract category of persuasive evidence where the *relevance* of the evidence to people who are high and low in NFC, rather than the nature in which it is delivered, is important in determining persuasion (Erb & Bohner, 2007; Kruglanski & Thompson, 1999). Further, it will be useful to examine people's lay use of the tenets of other prominent theories of persuasion. For example, the heuristic-systematic theory of persuasion proposes that people process messages either systematically by analyzing message content, or through the use of short cuts or heuristics (Chaiken, Liberman & Eagly, 1989). Whether people show an implicit awareness of such processes, or processes implicated by other persuasion theories, remains to be tested. Nevertheless, our results suggest that people may possess an implicit understanding of a key psychological factor – NFC – and its importance to persuasion.

In ongoing work, we have shown that the intuitive link between NFC and perceived persuasion has many of the functional characteristics of a bona fide theory. For example, people invoke NFC to *predict* and *explain* the extent to which other individuals are influenced by persuasive material, and also *apply* this understanding when tailoring persuasive messages, using more central and fewer peripheral cues for

audiences high vs. low in NFC (Sutton, Douglas, & Stathi, 2009). Future research will further endeavor to provide a clearer understanding of the ways in which people apply their implicit understanding of persuasion processes.

Further, our results revealed that the intuitive link between NFC and persuasion is sufficient to explain third person perceptions above and beyond the effects of positive self-perception. According to previous theory and research, TPPs arises because people have a basic desire to see themselves positively in comparison to others, and to preserve their self-esteem (e.g., Perloff, 1989). In our study, we found no evidence for the self-esteem buffering effect of the TPP. Instead, self efficacy significantly moderated the TPP. Of course, which form of positivity regarding the self is related to the TPP is likely to depend on the content of the persuasion attempt. In our study, consumer choices were at stake rather than, say, susceptibility to hate messages where self-esteem is likely to be more relevant. Nevertheless, in this experiment the power of self-efficacy to predict perceived self-other differences in persuasion was driven largely by the extent to which people saw themselves (versus others) as high in need for cognition. This is further evidence pointing to the importance of people's implicit understanding of persuasion in determining judgments about their own and others' responses to persuasive attempts. It also suggests that the way in which third person perceptions enhance positive self-perception is due to self-enhancing judgments about one's own cognitive effort.

In addition to the novel findings of our research, we should also highlight a methodological strength of our study. To our knowledge, the present results comprise the first demonstration of third person perceptions when the self and others are rated in a between-groups design. This shows that the TPP does not depend on allowing

participants to anchor their ratings of others on their ratings of the self (or vice-versa), and is therefore unlikely to depend on demand characteristics. Similarly, participants were not able not base their judgments of their own NFC on their judgments of others' (or vice versa). This gives us confidence that our findings are not merely an artifact of demand characteristics but instead reveal an underlying link between people's judgments of effortful thought and persuasion.

Understanding the dynamics of persuasion in everyday life requires that we, as psychologists, understand the sense that lay people make of these processes. This research provides the first evidence that people do indeed use their intuitive understanding of persuasion and the personal characteristics associated with persuasion, to judge the extent to which persuasive attempts will be successful.

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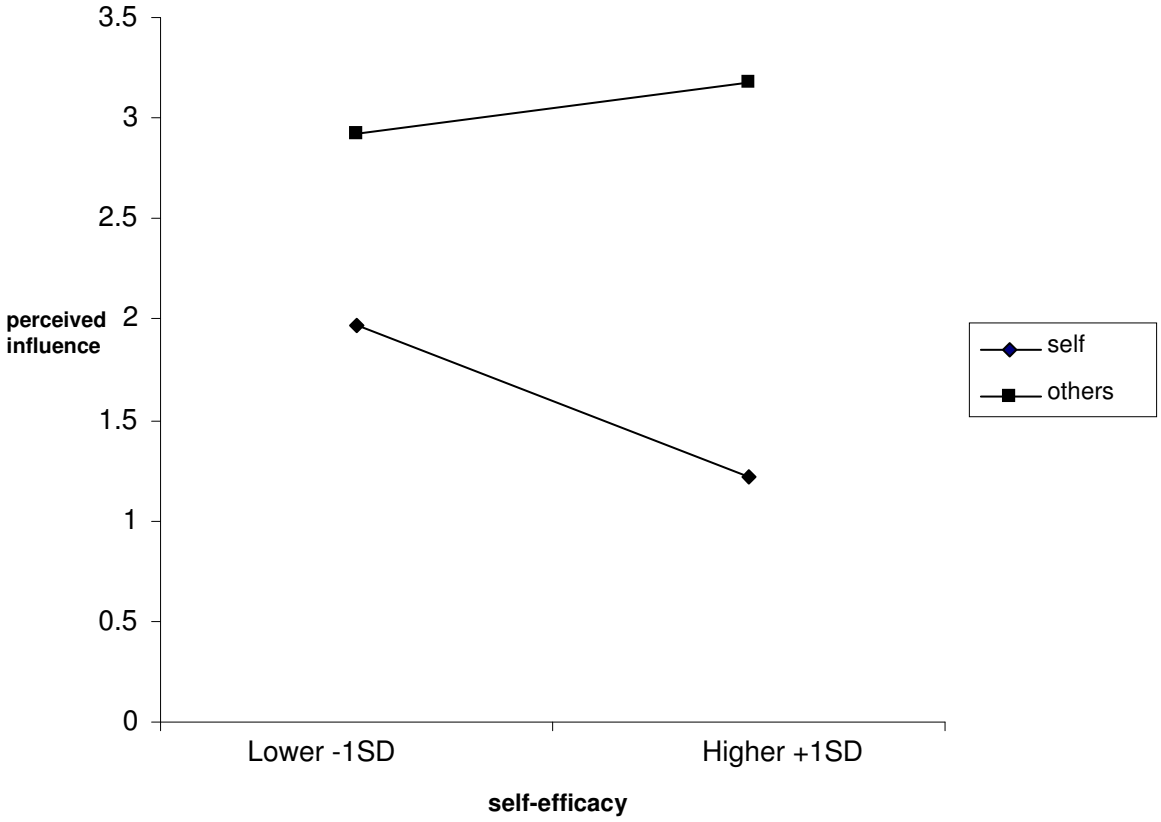
Figure captions

Figure 1. Self-efficacy moderates the third-person effect. Perceived self-other differences in persuasion are augmented at higher levels of self-efficacy.

Figure 2. The relationship between self efficacy and perceived differences in influence for self and others is fully mediated by perceived self-other differences in need for cognition.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.


3.5
3
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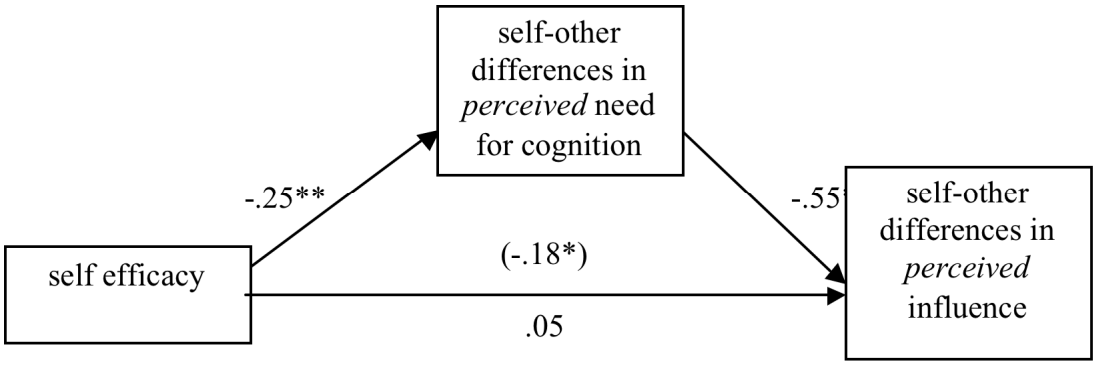
perceived influence
Lower -1SD
Higher +1SD
self-efficacy
self
others


self-other differences in *perceived* need for cognition
-.25**
-.55
self-other differences in *perceived* influence
self efficacy
(-.18*)
.05