Symposium S-H4

The curse of instrumentality: Burdening, objectifying, and replacing instrumental others in relationships, health, and work

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM, Room 17

Chair: Juliana Schroeder, University of Chicago
Co-Chair: Ayelet Fishbach, University of Chicago

Being highly instrumental for others’ goals may have both beneficial and detrimental interpersonal consequences. Four papers explore these consequences: people rely more heavily on instrumental partners in relationships, objectify instrumental health providers, and replace instrumental workers with nonhuman agents. Power can moderate objectifying instrumental others.

Relying on the self-control of instrumental others
Grainne Fitzsimons, Catherine Shea, Christy Zhou, Michelle vanDellen
Duke University; Northwestern University; University of Georgia

A growing body of work suggests that goal pursuers look to close relationship partners for help with their goals. Certain kinds of relationship partners -- reliable, motivated, and competent partners -- are likely to be particularly instrumental, and may thus come to be relied upon more heavily than their flightier counterparts. We find that when individuals are low in levels of self-control, they more highly value others who are high in self-control. High self-control individuals show no such pattern. A subsequent series of experiments suggest that observers have higher performance expectations and allocate more responsibilities to partners whom they perceive as high in self-control. Observers systematically underestimate the effort needed only when they perceive the actor as high in self-control. Thus, we propose that individuals tend to rely on high self-control others, especially when their own self-control resources are low. That tendency can lead to a burden on those high in self-control.

Instrumentality begets objectification of health providers
Juliana Schroeder, Ayelet Fishbach
University of Chicago

Individuals may consider instrumental others highly agentic but also less capable of human emotion because they are objects to fulfill one’s goals. We examine these perceptions of high agency and low experience in the context of the inherently instrumental doctor-patient relationship, and explore mechanisms and consequences of these perceptions. Studies 1 and 2 show that instrumental doctors seem simultaneously more capable of planning and thinking (agentic) but less capable of feeling emotions and having fundamental human experiences (experiential). Study 3 suggests that objectification is motivated; participants can recognize doctors’ experiential capacities, but only when it benefits them. Studies 4 and 5 investigate consequences, showing that instrumentality affects choice of doctor. Particularly, need for service increases preference for “robotic” doctors who are highly capable but devoid of human emotion. In sum, instrumentality begets objectification of health providers, which affects health care preference.

Botsourcing and outsourcing: Perspectives on using other agents for instrumental tasks
Adam Waytz, Michael Norton
Northwestern University; Harvard University
Innovations in technology have produced robots capable of performing jobs that, until recently, only humans could perform. The present research explores “botsourcing” -- the replacement of human jobs by robots -- by testing and providing support for four related hypotheses across five studies: (1) because robots are generally perceived as more capable of thought than feeling, people will express more comfort with botsourcing for jobs that require thought versus feeling; (2) workers will express more discomfort with botsourcing of their own jobs when they consider losing jobs that require feeling versus thought; (3) people can be induced to express more comfort replacing jobs that do require feeling if robots are made to convey more feeling; and (4) people also prefer outsourcing thinking versus feeling jobs to other humans who appear more versus less robotic. Discussion centers on implications for social cognition, job design, and the robot-dominated workplace.

When does power magnify the expression of dispositions?
Ana Guinote, Mario Weick, Alice Cai
University College London; University of Kent
Conventional wisdom holds that power magnifies dispositions, and can lead to objectification of instrumental individuals depending on chronic goals. Drawing on principles of construct accessibility, we propose that this occurs only in conditions that facilitate use of chronically accessible constructs. In three experiments, we assessed participants’ chronic dispositions, manipulated power, and then primed them (or not) with inaccessible/counter-dispositional constructs. In neutral contexts, power magnified chronic dispositions -- perceptions of other people (Experiment 1), preferences for charitable donations (Experiment 2), and pro-social behavior in an economic game (Experiment 3). However, the effect was eliminated when alternatives had been activated. In a fourth experiment, power-holders encoded information about a target in a positively or negatively biased fashion depending on contextual cues. We propose a single mechanism: power increases reliance on accessible constructs regardless of whether they are chronically or temporarily accessible.