Research Statement

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I have revamped my research program with a little help from my friends. During the past few years, I have begun collaborating with some of the smartest and most productive faculty in the department. Additionally, I have continued my collaborations with some very capable colleagues across the country. Although I am clueless about departmental politics, I have a pretty good eye for research talent and it has enabled me to initiate several interesting new collaborations. Hopefully, it will also help to generate funding for my colleagues, my students, the department, the university, and me.

My colleagues and I are conducting research on a wide range of topics. The studies are all over the map in terms of content and do not present a very programmatic profile. However, I am of the view that “programmatic” is a highly overrated adjective in the evaluation of research. What is important is research that is theoretically innovative and that has important applications. I would like to think that the studies that I am conducting with Bert Uchino, Dave Strayer, Jeanine Stefanucci, Jason Watson, and some of my colleagues across the country rank high on the latter dimensions.

I will quickly go through some of our studies that are in progress. Arwen Behrends, Dominika Mazur, and I are completing a social perception study of the fundamental processes contributing to the confirmation and disconfirmation of trait impressions. The research builds on some of our previous work on the role of the perceived diagnosticity of evidence in hypothesis testing (Sanbonmatsu, Posavac, Vanous, & Ho, 2005). Our studies demonstrate that differences in the frequency and diagnosticity of correspondent behavior account for why some trait impressions are easy to acquire and hard to lose (e.g., the belief that someone is dishonest) while other trait impressions are hard to acquire but easy to lose (e.g., the belief that someone is ethical). I am currently writing up these findings for publication.

I am working with Shannon Moore and Bryan Gibson on the role of the self in decision making. The important role of the self in the selection of goals and behavioral responses has been neglected in the literature. This semester, we will be completing the second of two studies of the impact of specific vs. inflated global self-concepts on betting decisions.

Dave Strayer, Jason Watson, Joel Cooper, Nate Medeiros-Ward, and I have been studying the antecedents and consequences of multi-tasking. This work builds on Dave’s seminal research on the effects of the usage of cellular communications on driving performance. We know, of course, that people use cell phones while driving. At the same time, most people support legislation to limit the use of cell phones while driving.
This past year, Dave Strayer and I submitted a grant application to conduct a study to understand this hypocrisy. In research that is under review (Sanbonmatsu, Strayer, Medeiros-Ward, & Watson, 2012), we examined why people generally multi-task. Our findings showed that people do not multi-task because they are good at it. Rather, they multi-task because they think they are good at it. Our findings further indicate that people multi-task out of impulsiveness and a need for sensations. Altogether, these results suggest that people often multi-task because they are unable to inhibit secondary task engagement. We have submitted additional grant applications to investigate the self-regulation of interest and arousal in the operation of a motor vehicle through multi-tasking and to investigate the effects of multi-tasking on the self-awareness of driving performance deficits. Dave, Jason, Joel, Nate, and I believe that we are on the cutting edge of research on the antecedents of multi-tasking and have developed a general framework for understanding why people multi-task that is presented in our paper under review.

I am continuing my collaborative work on selective hypothesis testing (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, Akimoto, & Biggs, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, Posavac, Kardes, & Mantel, 1998) with Bert Uchino, Shannon Moore, and Justin Hill. We have completed two studies examining the effects of selective hypothesis testing on health explanations and personal treatment decisions. Our studies show that people badly overestimate the role of a hypothesized cause in explaining their everyday health problems which biases their decisions about what sorts of treatments or remedies to pursue.

Bert Uchino and I have conducted two studies with Wendy Birmingham, Joon Seo, and Kevin Wong on the role of attitude familiarity in relationships. We believe that this work is potentially transformative because it links up two central areas of research in social psychology – the literature on relationships and the literature on attitudes, and introduces a construct that may play a central role in relationship functioning. We have published or in press two papers on this topic (Sanbonmatsu, Uchino, & Birmingham, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, Uchino, Wong, & Seo, in press) with a third under review (Uchino, Sanbonmatsu, & Birmingham, 2012), and have submitted grant applications to NSF and NIH for funding of future work. Admittedly, the research has not been received as well as I expected; we have not been awarded funding and our papers have not been published in first tier journals. However, Bert has counseled me to be patient. We have been encouraged to apply for a third time to NSF. Moreover, Arwen Behrends and Shannon Moore are both planning Master’s thesis studies on attitude familiarity that are theoretically innovative and that may have a greater impact on the field.

For several years I worked on a book entitled “choice misassumptions”. The book delineates a set of fundamental misconceptions that pervades research and theory on decision making, and explicates a new theory of the choice process. I did not finish the book because I was unable to secure a publisher. I believe that the basic problem with the book was that it was too speculative and tread on too many prominent scholars’ toes. Obviously, my conceptualization of the decision process is flawless. Consequently, I am resorting to the old fashioned approach of generating data for my theory. In the near future, I will be initiating research aimed at providing empirical evidence for the more speculative facets of my conceptualization of decision making. I am hoping to enlist the
expertise of Jeanine Stefanucci in this work because at least one of the studies will examine how choice reasoning works together with emotions to guide behavior. Jeanine, Kyle Gagnon, Arwen Behrends, and I have already initiated research exploring the relation between emotions and stimulus appraisals that has generated some unexpected but interesting findings.

I have been continuing a long standing program of research on judgment based on limited information (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, Kardes, & Herr, 1992; Sanbonmatsu, Kardes, Posavac, & Houghton, 1997) with Steve Posavac, Frank Kardes, Bruce Pfeifer, and Dominika Mazur. We have a paper under review (Sanbonmatsu, Mazur, Pfeifer, Posavac, & Kardes, 2012) that examines the impact of increased knowledge on judgments of celebrity figures. Although the theoretical contribution of the reported studies is minimal, the research has important marketing applications and will be of interest to the general public.
References


