

Assessing how private beliefs conflict with public action on Safe Systems

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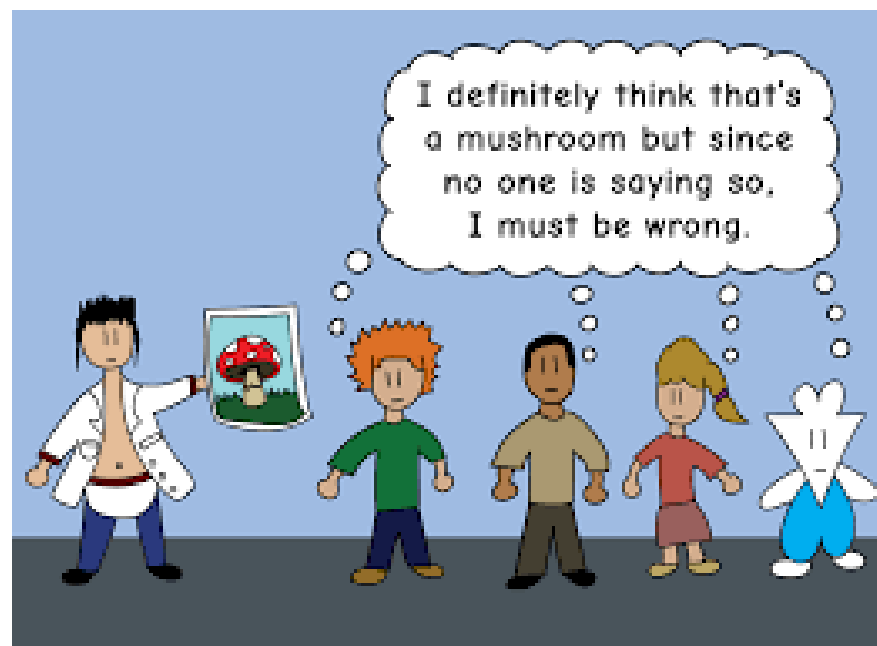
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Today

- Introduce the concept of Pluralistic Ignorance (PI), or the conflict between private beliefs and public action.
- Provide examples from the literature to ground PI.
- Highlight a key finding from a survey in NC to 1,000 residents about their - and what they think others' - transportation priorities are.
- Present ideas for future exploration.

What, you might ask, is pluralistic ignorance?

The incorrect belief that one's personal attitudes are different from the majorities' attitudes, and thus one goes along with what they think others think (Miller & McFarland, 1991)



Purpose of Project

- Assess how pluralistic ignorance of others' priorities affects attitudes, behaviors;
- Discern the degree to which PI helps to explain patterns in transportation funding and programming.
- Signal to policymakers and the public that equitable and safe access to services and community life is more widely valued than is commonly believed.

Research Questions

1. What do survey participants most value for their personal transportation?
2. How important is being able to get places by foot, bike, transit, or car to survey participants (i.e., what are their “travel mode aspirations”)?
3. How consistent (or inconsistent) are participants’ own transportation values and travel mode aspirations with their perceptions of others’ values and aspirations?
4. To what degree do public values in transportation and travel mode aspirations align (or not) with NCDOT’s evident priorities and travel mode affordances?

Literature on PI

- College-age youth and health risk behaviors
 - *Pluralistic ignorance and health risk behaviors: do college students misperceive social approval for risky behaviors on campus and in media?* (Hines et al, 2002)
 - Inquired about students' perceptions of health behaviors
 - Found other students have greater comfort levels than they do, and reported that other students would be more comfortable than they are with media depictions of those behaviors.
 - *Exposing pluralistic ignorance to reduce alcohol use among college students* (Schroeder and Prentice, 1998)
 - Experiment with 2 groups of undergrads who participated in discussion groups.
 - After 4-6 months, the group who participated in the discussion focused on pluralistic ignorance reported lower weekly alcohol intake than the undergraduates who participated in the discussion focused on individual choices.

Literature on PI (continued)

- Opinions on climate change

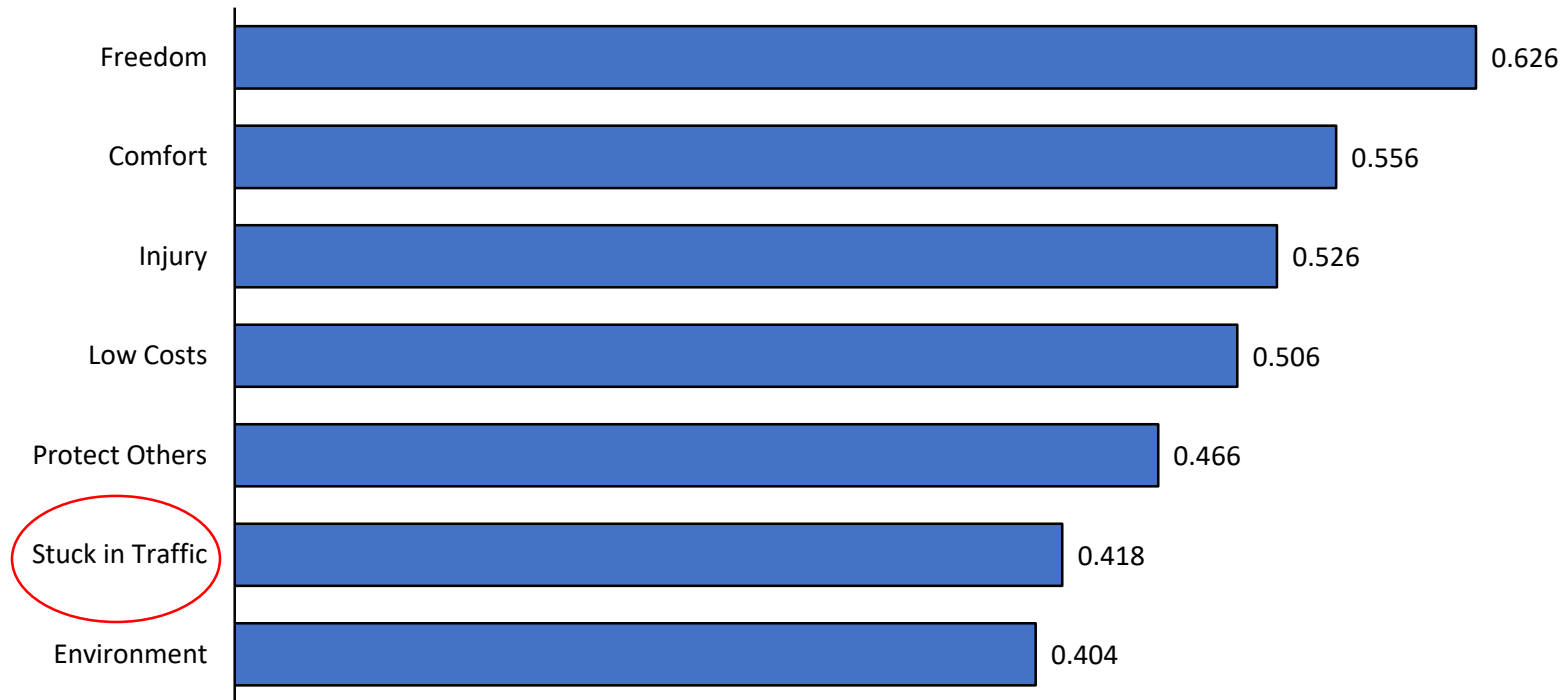
- *Climate of silence: Pluralistic ignorance as a barrier to climate change discussion* (Geiger and Swim, 2016)
 - Used 2 studies to investigate the relationship between pluralistic ignorance and interpersonal communication regarding climate change.
 - 1st study: surveyed undergrads to measure the effect of individuals' perceptions of other's opinions on climate change on their decision not to disclose their own opinions on the CC when the topic was being discussed.
 - 2nd study: used surveys and observations to assess the elasticity of PI effect on self-silencing.
- Surveys and classroom observations found that addressing PI could help minimize self-silencing.

Survey of 1,000 NC residents

- Values (safety, mode choice, freedom, congestion, comfort, etc.)
- Travel mode aspirations
- Time affluence
- Travel mode habits

People are less concerned about congestion relative to other values

People valued freedom in movement and choice, comfort, and avoiding injury.



Pluralistic ignorance re: avoiding congestion

- 43.9% of participants wrongly believed others were more concerned about avoiding congestion than they were.



For further exploration

- Explore how bringing PI to the surface can help minimize self-silencing and promote behavior change?
- If policy and decision makers knew that, in general, people cared more about avoiding injury than congestion reduction, how might this impact transportation planning?
- How might results vary by state?

Thank you!

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