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# What We Can't and Won't Believe: Rethinking Belief Polarization as Political Acceptance

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WHAT WE CAN'T AND WON'T BELIEVE:

RETHINKING BELIEF POLARIZATION AS POLITICAL ACCEPTANCE


by


RACHEL LEHMANN


Under the Direction of Neil Van Leeuwen, PhD

ABSTRACT

Despite being the most cognitively advanced animal, adult humans remain remarkably prone to defending absurd and false assertions. For instance, many adults can drive cars, calculate an appropriate tip at a restaurant, and execute cognitively complex tasks, yet still endorse Birtherism, maintain that Iraq had WMDs all along, or contend that Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration was the most widely-attended. Many of these strange commitments are the results of distorted reasoning and are identified in belief polarization literature. Psychologists and philosophers have written extensively about what mental process/es might play a role in forming these strange commitments. I intend to show that participants' utterances or responses do not always reveal their beliefs. Non-belief attitudes also motivate utterances and I propose a non-doxastic account of attitude polarization. I suggest that attitude polarization in politics could result from an attitude I call political acceptance which is distinct from belief in its functional profile.

INDEX WORDS: Belief polarization, Attitudes, Factual belief, Expressive responding, Political polarization

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RACHEL LEHMANN

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**DEDICATION**

For TM Funchion

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# 1    INTRODUCTION

Humans are the most cognitively advanced creatures on the planet, yet they remain remarkably prone to defending easily falsifiable assertions and baseless theories. Whether the assertions in question are as patently absurd as "the earth is flat," or as false as "Barak Obama is a Muslim," we find these persistent yet erroneous commitments in individuals across ideological and political spectrums. The study of these false commitments has revealed that those who hold these commitments persistently reaffirm them even after direct exposure to counter-evidence like objective data. This reaffirmation pattern, known as belief perseverance, has been increasingly documented in behavioral and social science literature. Belief perseverance is the core observation in the broader phenomenon called belief polarization in which parties with differing antecedent commitments will reaffirm these antecedent commitments even after viewing the same piece of evidence.

Psychologists and philosophers have studied and written extensively about the mental process/es that might generate these recalcitrant and irrational commitments. Models involving motivated reasoning, perceptual biases, and cognitive dissonance have been suggested. These models all share the core assumption that respondents who affirm or endorse a proposition on a survey (after exposure to counter-evidence) sincerely believe the propositions they endorse. This paper argues that this core assumption may be misguided. I have three objections to assuming participants always believe their responses and suggest an alternative model that solves the problems I find.

First, new evidence suggests that survey participants may make claims they do not believe. Experimental innovations in measuring attitude polarization have revealed that some participants are aware, or can be made aware, that they do not believe their responses. For

instance, Bullock et al. found that, when experimenters offered participants small monetary incentives to answer polarizing questions accurately the incentivized partisans gave more accurate responses than their unincentivized counterparts (Bullock et al. 2015). When experimenters offered less of an incentive to participants who admitted they did not know the correct answer, participants would admit ignorance instead of guessing. These results suggest that partisan participants find value in expressing responses they know are inaccurate or false, but under some conditions, can be incentivized to respond accurately. I discuss these findings in Section 2.2 – Expressive vs. Sincere.

Additionally, current belief polarization models fail to understand belief or what it is to believe. Ascribing Belief X to Person A based on the evidence that Person A said X might be an alluringly simple method. But, doing so does not take into account other factors about Person A and Belief X, such as Person A's behavior, Person A's other commitments, or in what contexts Person A avows "X." Treating all participants' avowals as beliefs is problematic from a psychofunctionalist perspective. To take one participant's utterance: "The world will end on January 21, 1954" as indicative of his belief in that same propositions fails to treat the term 'belief' in a way that preserves a coherent concept of beliefs and how beliefs function in our mental economy (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 2017). I address this issue in Section 4 – Attitudes.

Lastly, automatically classifying a participant's claim or utterance, such as, "Obama is a Muslim," as a belief is not a sound methodology for interpreting individuals' statements. I will argue that David Lewis's principle of charity can (and ought) to be applied when interpreting others' cognitive attitudes based on their utterances (Lewis 1974). This point is made in Section 5.1 – Methodology of Interpretation.

My arguments should show that participants' utterances or responses do not always reveal their beliefs. These arguments comprise the next three sections of this paper.

 As an alternative, I propose a non-doxastic account of belief polarization. By this, I simply mean that what we find in belief polarization data might reflect other attitudes besides belief.  I suggest that attitude polarization in politics could result from an attitude I call political acceptance, which differs from a belief in its functional profile.

Lastly, I hope the paper suggests an important lesson to researchers and theorists about the role survey responses should play in theorizing.  If, as I contend, belief polarization is not really about belief, but some other mental state, then belief polarization should cease to be a pillar grounding the "how does belief work?" project. Moreover, theories that rely almost exclusively on belief polarization as explanatorily powerful or fundamental to their evidence would need to be revised or altogether discarded.

## 2    BELIEF POLARIZATION LITERATURE

Imagine that two people with opposite views (one says that  P, one says not-P) both encounter a single piece of evidence – let us say the evidence is for P. However, both people subsequently bolster their same, previously-held commitments. For instance, Person A declares that "firefighters are very careful, risk-averse people in their day-to-day lives," but Person B claims that firefighters have a high-risk tolerance ordinarily. Both individuals review a study that found that the majority of firefighters are indeed risk-takers. The evidence corroborates Person B's position, but Person A continues to assert that firefighters play it safe. As strange as this example may seem, psychologists have demonstrated this exact effect in the case of firefighters' risk-taking (Anderson, Lepper, and Ross 1980). Person A's persistence to an unsupported claim is a case of belief polarization.

Researchers commonly agree that some mental processes, whether biased assimilation of evidence, learning blindness, or motivated skepticism, must be at play. (Taber, Lodge, and Taber 2006; Berinsky 2017; Schaffner and Roche 2017; Lord, Ross, and Lepper 1979). When Person A maintains their view on firefighters, some mental process is acting on Person A such that they continue to reaffirm my view after reading the contrary evidence.

This example captures the segment of belief polarization literature that I am interested in: the measurable disagreement between individuals regarding some descriptive fact about the world (i.e, firefighters are risk-takers). However, I intend to focus on the polarization accompanying descriptive facts that are political. For example, Schaffner and Roche's 2017 study focused on the polarized readings of the 2012 Jobs report, released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Schaffner and Roche 2017). The report, which cited the American unemployment rate as 7.8%, the lowest unemployment rate since the Great Recession, drew impressive media

attention. Schaffner and Roche asked study respondents registered in the Republican and Democratic parties to estimate the unemployment before reading the report. After letting the participants look over the report, participants were asked again about the unemployment rate. Most Democrats had initially overestimated the employment rate, but they lowered their response after viewing the report. Republicans, who had likewise overestimated, persisted with their initial estimates, and some raised their estimates. In cases like this, partisan disagreement before and after the presentation of evidence is demonstrable even when the evidence is something we commonly think should be non-partisan and when the issue at hand has only a descriptive (non-normative) quality.

Cases like the jobs report study feel ridiculous yet predictable. It is ridiculous to imagine dozens of people ignoring explicit data, yet predictable if we remember that the jobs data cast a democrat, President Barak Obama, in a positive light. Descriptive facts often have implications that favor one group or another, so motivations to have oneself or one's group seen positively outweigh the motivation to be accurate. On the other hand, motivations for accuracy and positivity can both be served, such as in the case of the tested Democrats. Nevertheless, it seems that the motivation answer accurately could be outweighed by the motivation to positively portray one's group.

The groupish nature of belief polarization is particularly noticeable, though not all belief polarization research is conducted on issues that seem groupish.[1]

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[1] Not all belief polarization data is conducted on issues that seem "groupish." The Anderson et al. 1980 study on firefighter-risk-taking is a good example of belief polarization around a clearly non-tribal issue. Additionally, there are some documented incidents of belief polarization surrounding "groupish" topics that are not political (though the domain of what is "political" seems to grow ever-wider). See Robson, Jon (2014) "A social epistemology of aesthetics: belief polarization, echo chambers and aesthetic judgement." *Synthese* 191 pp. 2513–25284

Lord, Ross, & Lepper's (1979) often-cited study was the first to coin the term "belief polarization." They predicted that "individuals will dismiss and discount empirical evidence that contradicts their initial views, but will derive support from evidence ... that seems consistent with their views" (Lord, Ross, and Lepper 1979). They called this the "attitude polarization hypothesis" and tested it by measuring attitudes towards capital punishment. The study surveyed forty-eight undergraduates before and after exposure to different literature about the efficacy of capital punishment (some literature finding capital punishment efficacious in deterring crime, other readings finding the opposite). Both proponents and opponents of capital punishment seemed "swayed momentarily," the study reports. Advocates of reasonability might hope that both groups would have been persuaded to the "middle" given the conflicting studies they read. However, both groups ultimately realigned themselves with their antecedent views, increasing their favorable or unfavorable views towards capital punishment and noting higher confidence in its efficacy or inefficacy.

## 2.1 Expressive responses

Attitude polarization towards politically-charged facts is widely documented since the Lord, Ross, and Lepper study. More recent studies (Berinsky 2017; Schaffner and Luks 2018; Bullock et al. 2015) have contributed the term 'expressive responding' to the literature. The 'expressive responding' theory takes it that some people make claims that they do not necessarily believe to be true. We all admit there are liars, jokers, deceivers, exaggerators, and bluffers who might say something they know is simply wrong or the distorted truth. So, there are plentiful motivations to utter statements other than the ones we believe are true. Expressive responses are one such instance. This section explains expressive responding with an example from recent political history.

After Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration, the White House asserted that the inauguration drew the "largest audience ever" (Spicer 2017). Two days later, Schaffner and Luks conducted a survey measuring public opinion regarding the inaugural crowd size (Schaffner and Luks 2018). Figure 2.1 displays two photos taken from the same vantage point (one taken in January 2009, the other in January 2017) which participants viewed. Experimenters asked participants to identify which photo depicted the larger crowd.



*Figure 3.1.1-1*
Images of the 2017 and 2009 inaugurations. Schaffner & Luks 2018.

5% (or 1 in 7) of the participants who had voted for Trump identified Photo A as the image showing the larger crowd (compared to 2% of Clinton-voters) – clearly incorrectly picking the image with the larger crowd.

Schaffner and Luks did not report that 15% of Trump voters could not read instructions or that 15% of Trump voters had vision problems or astigmatisms. Instead, they wrote that some of these respondents already know that Photo A was taken at Trump's inauguration and that Photo B was from Obama's. If they admitted Photo B depicted more people, that would mean acknowledging that more people attended Obama's inauguration. It was as if that 15% of respondents looked at the two images and thought something like, "I know where this is going…."

It would be wrong to report that, based on the above, "15% of Trump voters surveyed cannot tell the difference between a smaller crowd and a larger crowd." The case dealt with above is not a straightforward case of participants falsely believing the smaller crowd was larger. These participants can, we assume, visually represent the crowd sizes perfectly fine. But, they chose to express an answer that contradicts their direct perceptual knowledge. This type of response is called expressive responding. Expressive responding (sometimes called partisan cheerleading) occurs when an individual offers a response that supports their team, while not knowing if their response is correct or knowing their response is not correct, but giving it anyway. The respondents did not actually see crowds of people that were simply not there. The more likely explanation is that participants were using the survey question to express their support for one side than to answer the survey question factually. In this case, these responses did not necessarily indicate an underlying false belief.[2]

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[2] It is important to address that some Trump-voting participants might believe that the photos had been manipulated by the media or doctored, and some answers reflect that belief and not simply team solidarity: "I know where this is going and I know that you lefty academics are trying get me to deny what I know is true about Trump's inauguration." I will address this issue at greater length in Section 3.3 (Possible Objection: Webs of Belief) and Section 6 (Conclusion), but for now, I will say that I am not asserting all responses in any give case represent only one phenomenon (expressive responding). I am asserting that expressive responding seems like a plausible explanation for at least some of the data, especially in this case.

Schaffner and Luks asked a second question of another group of participants. This time respondents were asked to identify which image belonged to which year (or to which inauguration). Was Photo B taken in 2009 during Obama's first inauguration? Or during the most recent one? This time, 40% of self-identified Trump-voters (compared with 2% of Clinton voters) incorrectly matched the images and elections.

How many partisans believe the misinformation about the election and how many knowingly provide an incorrect answer to support their partisan team (how many respond expressively)? The results from Question 1, where 15% of the Trump-voters incorrectly answered a simple question about crowd size, would more likely arise from cases of expressive responding. The polarized responses are not due to polarization of belief, but a consciously incorrect answer. Trump voters are not uniquely perceptually incompetent. An unassuming question about crowd size grows polarized only under a saliently divisive political climate, in which partisan participants choose team-bolstering responses over accurate ones.

## 2.2    Telling The Expressive from the Sincere

There is evidence that shows partisans respond differently to questions about political facts change under incentivized conditions. Bullock et al.'s recent study of Americans' factual beliefs about politics recorded participants' answers under a condition in which experimenters offered monetary incentives for accurate answers (Bullock et al. 2015). For example, in a control group, republicans and democrats gave polarized answers regarding the number of military casualties during the war in Iraq (republicans tended to underestimate while democrats overestimated). In what is called a "treatment condition," surveyors promised respondents $1 to answer correctly. Partisan polarization diminished in the treatment condition, indicating that participants from both parties adjusted their answers to be closer to what they thought was

accurate in order to be eligible for the reward. In another treatment condition, experimenters offer $1 for a correct answer and slightly less than $1 for respondents who admitted not knowing the answer. In both treatment conditions, partisan divergence decreased. The results from these three conditions support the straightforward intuition that partisans gave clearly exaggerated, "partisan-tinged" responses in the conditions without incentives for accuracy. The second trial in which the introduction of monetary incentives changes partisan responses confirms this intuition. The value of the $1 incentive appeared to be of greater value to the respondents than the value of offering an expressive, party-cheerleading response. Additionally, in the third condition with the "don't know" option, 48% of participants chose this option and received a small monetary award. Like the second, this result reveals that partisans can be incentivized to admit ignorance, thus giving up an opportunity to respond truthfully rather than guessing an answer that favorably portrays their party.

## 2.3    Summary and Conclusion

Belief polarization is the phenomenon where individuals persist in affirming some propositions (such as "Firefighters are risk-takers") even after exposure to evidence that should recalibrate, adjust, or abandon their commitment. We find this phenomenon frequently in people who align themselves with a particular group who share a loyalty to an ideology or political party. In these instances, many politically aligned individuals show the same pattern of reaffirming commitments to falsifiable claims (such as with the 2008 jobs report). Of concern to me is whether belief polarization data captures only the attitude of belief or other attitudes.[3] Schaffner and Luks present the case where participants choose an obviously incorrect answer

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[3] An attitude is a cognitive relationship to a proposition. For example, in the following sentence, "Jill believes that Jack fell down and broke his crown," Jill holds the attitude of belief towards the proposition "Jack fell down and broke his crown." Other attitudes include imaginations, desires, and hypotheses.

about a photograph. Participants answered so plainly incorrectly, that Schaffner and Luks conclude their participants *knew* the answers they gave were incorrect. Bullock et al. discovered that a host of democrats overestimates the number of military casualties in the Iraq war. However, in trials where the democrats were incentivized to give the most "accurate" answer (or to admit they did not know), nearly half them either admitted ignorance or lowered their estimates. This evidence suggests not only wide-spread ignorance about political facts (48% of Bullock et al.'s participants chose the "don't know" option when offered), but also that some participants have some awareness of accurate or closer-to-accurate estimates of the casualties in the Iraq war, though they might profess a higher number or insist on higher numbers to present the Iraq war especially unfavorably. Both findings call into question the assumption that participants initially reveal what they "really believe" in survey responses. In the studies discussed here, a good number of participants showed that they could easily express a viewpoint they might not believe and give answers they do not believe when there are other incentivizes or motivations.

Theories about the mental processes underlying belief polarization take for granted that participants always reveal their beliefs in surveys and studies. If this assumption is unsubstantiated, these explanations will need to be revised or discarded. In the next section I present several of these theories and demonstrate how they fail to cohere with the data about expressive responding.

### 3    TWO BELIEF POLARIZATION MODELS

In this section I will lay out two popular models for understanding belief polarization. Both models are what I call "all-belief" models. All-belief models share the assumption that, if a survey participant indicates a proposition to be true, then the participant believes the proposition to be true. The first model, which I call the "Involuntary Filtration" model, explains polarization by suggesting there is some sort of filter-mechanism in the belief formation process that would exclude some evidential information from being integrated into the belief system. The second model, which I call "Testimonial Filtration," proposes that certain polarized beliefs emerge from partisans' disparate and polarized sources of information.

### 3.1    Model One: Involuntary Filtration

In the involuntary filtration model, important evidence and information are filtered or discounted before a belief is formed. There are two main reasons this is proposed to occur: cognitive dissonance and cognitive biases.

#### 3.1.1    Cognitive Dissonance

Eric Mandelbaum (2019) suggests that a psychological immune system alleviates cognitive dissonance. The psychological immune system echoes information screening models suggested by others to maintain cognitive consistency (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 2017). The psychological immune system functions to preserve psychological comfort and cognitive economy. Mandelbaum thinks the psychological immune system could both explain and predict the irrational beliefs and belief-forming behaviors humans demonstrate. "We know that receiving disconfirming evidence . . . hurts," writes Mandelbaum (2019). Dissonance motivates belief-updating in such a way that relieves the discomfort of holding incongruent information. Belief polarization is this effect made visible. People "adjust their beliefs" to avoid discomfort after

exposure to some counter-attitudinal evidence. Such an adjustment might clash with the ideals of rationality, such as decreasing one's commitment to the antecedent belief. This observation is the basis for the psychological immune system: the system "ward[s] off … threats" that could cause psychological discomfort. Not all counter-attitudinal exposure causes dissonance. Dissonance tends to be a function of self-identification with a belief. "That is, the disconfirming information must attack beliefs. . . one self-identifies with. The more the person self-identifies with a certain belief, the more likely the psychological immune system will be activated when that belief is under attack" (Mandelbaum).

The model characterizes belief acquisition as a semi-rational, self-preserving process. Though evidence may be taken in and stored in memory, the information's veracity or value is discounted or filtered out before belief formation. This is not willful, conscious inconsideration, but a system one filter. Given what is attended to in belief formation, the beliefs that are formed may be said to be rational, given the evidence that gets through.

### 3.1.2  Cognitive Biases

In their study on confirmation and disconfirmation biases, Taber et al. presented participants with information that either complimented or contradicted their views on gun control and affirmative action (Taber, Lodge, and Taber 2006). The study measured the time participants spent reading both congruent vs. incongruent information and recorded their affective and evaluative responses (i.e. did they like the information they read, did they feel they had learned something new, did they think the information was convincing).

Participants on the whole took longer both reading and processing attitudinally challenging information. The time difference between reading and processing attitudinally congruent and incongruent information widened amongst participants with stronger opinions and

higher political sophistication (762). Reading time and the processing time were measured differently. The study measured the time participants scanned over the words in the argument for the first time. The processing time was measured by the time participants spent on the slide with the argument after reading it (maybe reading it over it again or considering it before moving on). The study found that participants took longer to individually read and process when faced with incongruent arguments.

The strongly-opinionated and politically sophisticated participants generated more comments on the incongruent arguments, almost all of which were denigrating to the incongruent arguments. Even participants asked to put their feelings aside in the comments made affective statements such as "I like" or "I do not like this argument or conclusion" or that they "liked" and or "disliked" facts or figures presented in the argument (762).
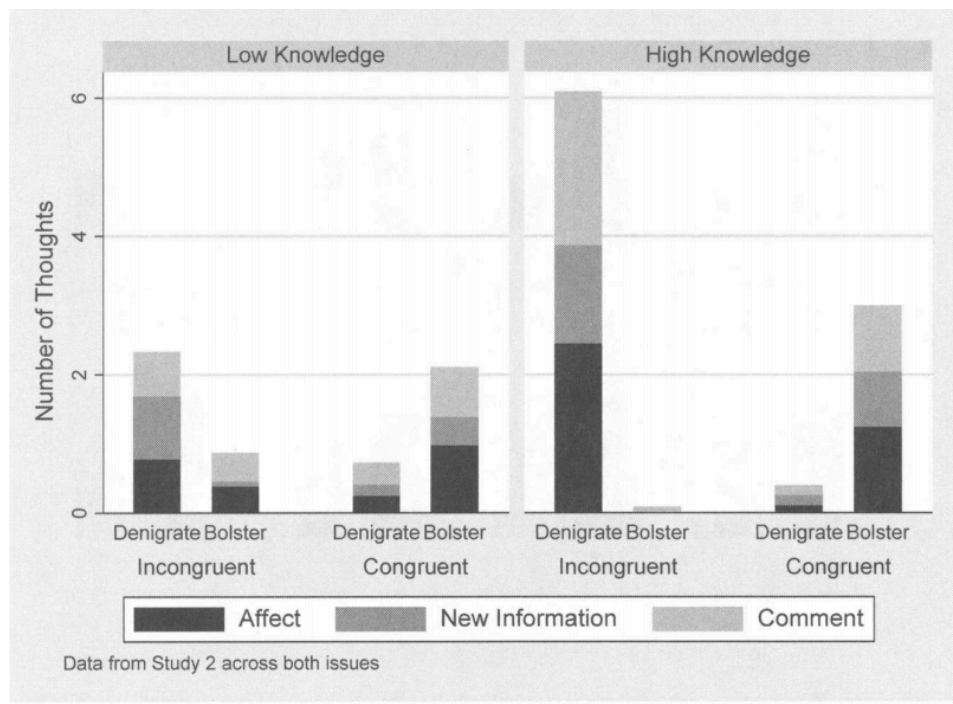


*Figure 3.1.2-1*

High Knowledge participants had more comments and demonstrated more affective responses to incongruent arguments. Taber and Lodge 2006.

### *3.1.3    Shortcomings of Model One*

The filtration model has several shortcomings, rendering it explanatorily incomplete. First, the involuntary filtration model does not account well for participants maintaining a belief in the teeth of the evidence – such as when looking directly at the crowd photo or seeing Barak Obama's birth certificate published on the front page of a newspaper. These explicit pieces of evidence are not like the evidence buried in a two-paragraph passage that one of Taber and Lodge's participants might review. Responses under these explicit circumstances are explained better by an expressive responding model. For involuntary filtration models to work, we would need to say that the size of the crowd (in Schaffner & Luks' case) is literally unprocessed, leading to a larger perceptual glitch. Additionally, these models do not explain what Bullock et al. find where, even without looking at evidence, partisan participants adjust their answers to track accuracy when paid to do so.

## 3.2    Model Two: Testimonial Filtration

The testimonial filtration model proposes that subjects have conditions for what sources or testimony are trustworthy or benevolent. Belief polarization arises from agents selectively attributing trustworthiness to a source or selectively exposing themselves to sources of information, such as only tuning in to the "Obama is not an American" channel. Some sources are trusted, treasured or endorsed by the subject and they form regular beliefs about information presented by those sources. This model can be found in Neil Levy's paper, "Due Deference to Denialism" (Levy 2019). Levy argues that individuals choose certain trustworthy testimonies to inform them and are alert to certain cues that signal a source's trustworthiness. When individuals accept the views of only certain sources, he calls this "asymmetrical deference." In Levy's account, benevolence is a key cue for trustworthy testimony, and we should expect that partisans

filter evidentiary sources based on their perception of the messenger or source of the evidence rather than the evidence itself. In this model, some people are just epistemically unlucky and form honest beliefs based on shoddy evidence because they have trusted an unreliable messenger. As Levy puts it, the views of some climate change deniers are "individually rational but unreliable epistemic."

### 3.2.1    Shortcomings of Model Two

The testimonial filtration model, like the first model, does not explain cases like expressive responding, where participants see evidence directly in front of them like a photograph. Furthermore, this model does not account for what seems to be cherry-picking from a single source. Take my friend, Micha. Micha likes to teach his kids about space and so he uses the NASA website to show them slides of the planets. Micha is also a creationist and climate-change denier. When NASA published an article in 2015 about the mass gain of ice sheets in Antarctica, he eagerly shared it (Garner 2015). Micah ignores articles from NASA that discuss the rise in global temperature and melting ice caps. Micah chooses evidence based on the evidence's alignment with his prior theory, not on the source's benevolence. Testimonial filtration models lack an explanation for the special and selective discounting of otherwise benevolent and trustworthy sources.

## 3.3    Possible Objection: The Quine-Duhem Thesis and Webs of Belief

The Quine-Duhem thesis (hereafter QDT) could also explain some results found in expressive responding literature. Roughly the QDT states that no single hypothesis is ever evaluated alone, but is tested along with a set of background assumptions. We could say the participants who incorrectly identified the photo with the large crowd did not do so without reason, but did so of prior belief that the Schaffner and Luks (or the media) had doctored the

photos. Similarly, in Bullock et al's incentivized condition, we can imagine some participants giving answers that cohered with their background assumptions that the surveyors were corrupt and, conspiring with some political party, and were only accepting "alternative facts" as accurate answers.

Like the involuntary and testimonial filtration models, a QDT-based explanation for expressive responding does not fully explain the data. First, the QDT does not explain the 48% of participants who opted to admit they could not give an accurate answer in Bullock et al.'s third condition. This trial demonstrated a hefty portion of participants had some awareness of their ignorance and were willing to admit so for a small reward. In the absence of the award, participants were likely to give answers they guessed. Secondly, the QDT explanation requires us to assume a great many things about participants' background beliefs to rationalize their responses. The QDT requires more assumptions than direct observation. To explain why Joey believes Image A depicts the larger crowd, according to a QDT explanation, we need to assume Joey believes someone doctored the image and that it was intentionally doctored to deceive him. These assumptions merely push back the work of interpretation further into the web of Joey's beliefs. If the QDT tries to justify Joey's "Image A" choice, the QDT must also justify Joey's belief about doctored images. In general, the QDT requires an un-parsimonious number of assumptions about Joey's background beliefs. Additionally, even if we trace Joey's choice back to a belief in "fake news," I would still question whether Joey believes that Schaffner and Luks' are part of a fake-news media network, or if this explanation for his choices is itself an example of expressive responding that has yielded further reasoning and conclusions grounded not in a belief, but in a deeply, subjectively-important allegiance to the fake-news narrative.

# 4    ATTITUDES

I will make two distinct claims in this section. The first claim is that there is a propositional attitude called "Factual Belief" which consists of a cluster of functional properties that co-occur systematically so that it is worth preserving a concept from these properties (that concept is belief).[4] A second claim is that one can have attitudes towards propositions that may appear belief-like, but are not beliefs. Neil Van Leeuwen argues that the "habit" of relying on the word "belief" to describe many cognitive attitudes is a source of confusion (Van Leeuwen 2014). Let us take an intuitive example of this case.

**Attitude A.** Adam believes that his lunch is in the fridge.

**Attitude B.** Adam believes that people are fundamentally good.

We can certainly say these beliefs have different kinds of content. Still, as Van Leeuwen points out, these two attitudes are differentiated by more than just content – attitudes of these kinds have different "characteristic etiologies … and forward effects" (2014). The word "belief" works to associate both propositions ("Lunch is in the fridge" and "people are fundamentally good" with an individual (Adam). Loosely, we can say "Adam believes x" does the work of saying "Adam takes x to be the case." But examining how Adam comes to have Attitudes A and B and how these attitudes influence Adam's further cognition and behavior reveals that these attitudes function distinctly.

 The claim I have just made is pretty unextraordinary. We describe all sorts of functionally distinct attitudes in our common discourse such as imagining, hypothesizing, and desiring.

**Attitude C.** Bea imagines that her lunch is vegetarian.

---

[4] I get this language from Neil van Leeuwen

**Attitude D.** Bea hypothesizes that her lunch is vegetarian.

**Attitude E.** Bea desires that her lunch is vegetarian.

Though the above have the same content, we understand there is a difference between these attitudes unrelated to their content. The content has a different relationship to Bea and function differently in Bea's mind and will play out differently in her behavior.

## 4.1    Factual Belief

### 4.1.1    Factual Beliefs are Action Guiding

Let's say Cheryl holds the following beliefs:

1. Class starts at 12:00pm on Tuesday.
2. Pushing the 25th floor in the elevator gets one to the 25th floor.
3. The philosophy department is on the 25th floor.
4. Cheryl's mom drives a blue Ford with New York plates.

To speak of Cheryl's factual beliefs in the abstract must begin with understanding how factual beliefs and actions are tethered.[5] Consider the following action:

i. Cheryl presses the elevator button for the 25th floor.

Cheryl's action is reasonable in light of a picture of her beliefs and attitudes (Davidson 1963). If she presses the 25th floor, she had a reason to do so (i.e., anything from "I want to go to a random floor in this building" to "I want to get to my class"). That reason further requires a belief that her action, pressing the button, has the "property" of aligning with the reason - pressing the button will get to her class is on the 25th floor" (Davidson). Cheryl's actions are based on a belief that a specific action will further the end of her desire. If primary reasons are causes of action (as Davidson argues), then Cheryl's Factual Belief (2) is both a reason for and a cause of, her action.

---

[5] Thanks to Neil Van Leeuwen for pointing me to Donald Davidson.

If a true Factual Belief (2) causes Cheryl's action (i), do false factual beliefs also cause actions? Yes, but false factual beliefs contribute to unsuccessful actions in that the action does not satisfy the agent's intentions or desires. Cheryl desires to perform the following actions this Tuesday:

(a) get to class on time

(b) attend her professor's office hours in the philosophy department

(c) pick up her mom's car from the garage, and drive to Florida for spring break.

However, Cheryl's beliefs (1), (3), and (4) are false (so she is mistaken about them). Her class actually starts at 11:00, the philosophy department is on the 16th floor, and her mom drives a green Toyota. Now we realize Cheryl will perform several wrong actions throughout her day based on her desires and false beliefs. She will not get to class on time, she will not get to office hours, and she will not find her mom's car. Why? Because Cheryl's beliefs will guide her actions throughout the day. She will aim to arrive at 12:00, take the elevator the 25th floor, and search the garage for a blue ford. She might satisfy her goals eventually, but to do so will require Cheryl to form new and correct beliefs about the items on her agenda.

When Cheryl acts with the desire of arriving to class, her actions are guided by the belief of where and when her class is. This rule applies to all of us in the most routine ways. Opening my cupboard every morning to find a mug is the action yielded by the desire to obtain a mug and the belief that I keep my mugs in that specific cabinet. Thus, when Cheryl acts, her actions are unsuccessful in that her desires (or intentions) are not realized. She does not get to class, she does not attend office hours, she does not find her mother's car.

This example should demonstrate that factual beliefs (or believing that F, where F is some fact about the world) must be true in order for any desire and action guided by them to

properly succeed.[6] For instance, if the intended action is to find my mom's car, then the belief I hold about what car my mother drives must be correct for me to find her car successfully. If my intended action is to get to work, my belief about where I work must be true for me to successfully get to work. If Jeopardy is on at 7:00 and Wheel of Fortune is on at 8:00 and I want to watch Jeopardy, I need to have a true factual belief about when the show starts in order to get to watch. Quite a few of us have false beliefs and, in a given day, these false beliefs might trip us up a number of times.

For example, I thought I parked on the south side of my building, but this was a false belief. When I got to the south side of my building, I could not find my car. I then thought that maybe I parked on the north side and went to check. When I found my car there, I then rightly believed I had parked on the north side. But my initial belief was false and my actions were initially unsuccessful. Factual beliefs must be true if they are to be useful to us. Factual beliefs motivate behaviors that can only succeed if the belief is true. If mental state M is a factual belief (Mfb), M makes you willing to take only actions that would succeed if the proposition represented by M is true (such as reaching into a particular cabinet to get your coffee mug because you have a factual belief that this particular cabinet is where you store your mugs).

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[6] There are cases in which successful actions occur despite some false factual beliefs. For example, if Cheryl's watch is set incorrectly to an hour ahead, she may arrive at class at 11:00am (the right time), though her intention was to arrive at 12pm (the wrong time, but the time she falsely believed to be right). Such happenstance does not negate the point, however. To quote Neil Van Leeuwen, "it's possible for particular false beliefs to be useful in particular circumstances. But his example only argues against the value of true beliefs if one ignores the large background of true beliefs" (Van Leeuwen 2018). Cheryl still had to have a largely true background of true factual beliefs (such as where the classroom was, the route to class, that it was, in fact, Tuesday etc.) in order to get to class on time, even if doing so was a cause of luck (like a watch set to the wrong time).

### 4.1.2    Represented as True

First, while factual beliefs are about facts of the world, the attitude itself, factual belief, internally represents the fact as true to oneself. The fact that my mom drives a particular car is useless to me if I do not have a way of conceiving of that fact and labeling it as true.

### 4.1.3    Involuntarily Formed

If I could choose what to believe, I would be very slow and unsuccessful at lots of tasks. Think of how useless it would be if you had to choose to believe what kind of car you drive, whether you have any children, or what your address is. It would be laborious and painstaking if I had to choose to believe that I am typing on a computer right now. The belief that I am typing on a computer is involuntarily formed, just as the belief that I work on the 16th floor was involuntarily formed. This is not to say factual beliefs have no cause. Factual beliefs have causal connections but are not caused by our will.

### 4.1.4    Context Insensitivity

I am allergic to peanuts. My mom drives a green Toyota. David Bowie is dead. These are all facts. Importantly, these are all facts which I believe. These beliefs are quite useful to me because having them allows me to perform important actions like avoiding foods with peanuts.

If I had different beliefs than these, I would probably try some food with peanuts and get sick if I did not believe I had an allergy. I would struggle to find my mom's car if I believed she drove a blue Chevrolet. Factual beliefs are context insensitive (Van Leeuwen 2014). They persist across multiple contexts. The belief that David Bowie is dead persists across contexts and is part of my cognitive background. You might say that the belief about David Bowie does not seem to persist at all across contexts. You were not thinking about it at all until just now, and maybe you had not bothered to think about it for a long time. But just because a belief doesn't occur to us

regularly does not mean it is not persistent in the background. These beliefs come to the forefront when contexts change. We all have a great many factual beliefs that persist in the background shaping what we do and presenting themselves to consciousness when they are required to perform a task.

## 4.2    A Methodology for Interpreting Attitudes

As I stated in my introduction, classifying a participant's claim or utterance, such as, "Obama is a Muslim," as a belief, simply because the participant stated such, is not a good methodology for interpreting an individual's statement. I intend to give a non-doxastic account of belief polarization (belief polarization is not always belief polarization per se).  The models I presented earlier, on the other hand, offered all-belief accounts of polarization.  Identifying the cognitive attitudes a subject may hold (She believes x, or she does not believe x) is an interpretive task. I will present both my methodology for interpretation and the methodologies of the alternative models.

### 4.2.1    *Do they believe? The Principle of Charity*

The "Do they believe?" methodology does not presume utterances bespeak factual beliefs without attributing rationality to the speaker. This method employs the principle of charity in seeking to understand persons and language. David Lewis asks us to imagine that we meet Karl, a perfect stranger who we want to understand (Lewis 1974). We want to understand his beliefs, his desires, and what he means when he speaks. His beliefs, desires, and meanings are private facts about him and imperceptible to us. Karl's observable behaviors are the physical facts of him. If Karl's behaviors are all we are privy to, understanding Karl would be impossible. But we do have a principle: we are made of the same physical stuff as Karl. To the extent that we admit the physical is determinative of the mental, we can assume Karl's psychological stuff is similar to

ours. Thus, we plan on Kyle believing the way we believe, desiring the way we desire, and meaning his sentences in a way we would mean (though maybe in a different language). To understand Karl's beliefs, we must ask, were I Karl, and had I lived in his shoes, what would I believe? This approach allows us to reason that, like anyone, Karl might have false beliefs because his life's experience could have exposed him to poor or inadequate evidence that led him to believe something incorrectly. But this also makes him like us – we, like Karl, make mistakes in similar ways by not accounting for certain factors or misunderstanding the evidence. This guiding principle, which David Lewis calls the principle of charity (or the Karl-is-like-us principle), lets us triangulate ourselves (and what we know of ourselves), Karl's beliefs, and Karl's life experience. We can thus make two guiding judgments when understanding Karl. First, we ought not to attribute beliefs to Karl that we, as the same type of physical creature governed by the same physical rules, would not believe. Secondly, we presume there is some common inductive method that we and Karl share, that would have us and Karl believe almost identically were we to have identical life histories and access to evidence.

If Karl and I were at an Atlanta mall and he uttered, "There are lions nearby," this would present a problem for us. This is a surprising statement to make in the middle of the Georgia capital. Would I believe lions are nearby in the Atlanta Mall? If I am dubious about myself holding the belief, I must not immediately assign the belief to Karl. And if I withhold assigning the belief to Karl, there remains the question: Why did Karl say what he said? What cognitive attitude might accompany and motivate his utterance? I may discover that Karl really does believe (incorrectly) that lions are nearby in the Atlanta Mall. He seems anxious, upset and urges me to walk the other way.  When I interrogate Karl a bit, Karl tells me that he heard barking from a pet store and took there to be a lion. I can reason that Karl does not know the difference

between dogs and lions, or that he thinks they make the same noises. My reasoning is in line with the principle of charity because I attribute rationality to Karl's behavior – if Karl believes that lions make barking noises, then I can he would believe a lion was nearby if he heard barking. I would believe the same thing, if I also believe that lions make barking noises. What we discover is that Karl's utterances may reveal false-beliefs, but they still reveal coherently false beliefs. Karl may have a false belief about lions being nearby, but it is a false belief based on a rational line of reasoning of previous false beliefs.

### *4.2.2    I Believe They Believe: The principle of truthfulness*

The I Believe They Believe method is an all-belief account. It takes a subject's expression of some proposition to indicate that the subject believes the proposition they expressed to be true in most contexts. Under this interpretative method, we take Karl's verbal expressions to straightforwardly reveal his propositional attitudes.

This methodology prioritizes another principle – the principle of truthfulness. What our new friend Karl offers us by way of behavioral evidence, mostly by way of speech, is what the principle of truthfulness tries to account for. For instance, if, in our language, the statement "Lions are nearby" is only true when a lion is nearby, the principle of truthfulness requires us to hold that:

a) Karl believes a lion is nearby when he says, "Lions are nearby" or when he hears others say, "Lions are nearby."

b) Karl only desires to utter 'Lions are nearby" when Karl believes the truth conditions for that statement are met – or only when there are lions nearby.

In other words, we should only expect Karl to utter some proposition P when Karl believes that the proper truth conditions for that proposition are met. What the principle of truthfulness leaves

us with is having to attribute irrational false beliefs to Karl. Aside from instances where Karl is speaking ironically or playfully, we may need to conclude that Karl is somehow deluded, bizarre, or unlike us. Every time we go to the Atlanta mall, Karl repeats "Lions are nearby." If we insist on (a) and (b) in the principle of truthfulness, we are missing that Karl has a simple false belief that could be corrected: lions don't bark. Insisting on (a) and (b) means that we perceive Karl as an earnest simpleton. In preemptively attributing a belief to Karl, a similar creature to us, we fail to keep the Karl-is-like-us principle, we fail to understand our common inductive method of reasoning, and we make Karl out to be stupid and irrational, if, at least, sincerely stupid and irrational.

A simple point that is quite easy to miss is that we commonly employ the principle of charity over the principle of truthfulness all the time. We regularly interpret people as acting and speaking rationally. Importantly, we also regularly interpret people's utterances in light of assuming they have a large background of true factual beliefs, such as "dogs bark," "the sun is hot," and "Monday is a weekday." The important point is that belief perseverance emerges from a largely rational background of straightforward beliefs. In fact, if we did not assume this largely rational background, belief perseverance would not be so troubling a phenomenon. Rather it would be the predictable chaos caused by incoherent minds. We only find belief polarization odd or incongruent against the large backdrop of consistent rationality.

## 4.3    Other Attitudes

I made a few claims in 4.1. One claim is that a cluster of properties (internally representing a proposition, involuntary formation, and being action-causing) co-occur systematically in such a way that is worth preserving a concept from these properties – that concept is factual belief. The claim of this section is that there are other attitudes one can have

towards propositions. Importantly, the content of the attitude cannot be confused with the form the attitude takes (belief, desire, and so on). So, it will be important for me to show that one can have a non-factual belief attitude towards a proposition whose content seems factual.  This point can be intuitively demonstrated by the examples I used at the beginning of this chapter

1) Bea imagines that her lunch is vegetarian.

2) Bea hypothesizes that her lunch is vegetarian.

3) Bea desires that her lunch is vegetarian.

A lunch is either vegetarian or not. The claim "the lunch is vegetarian" has facticity in that it can be checked against the conditions of the real world. But Bea's attitudes in (1)-(3) do not, (a) require the claim be verified and, (b) do not indicate whether Bea has a factual belief about her lunch. These attitudes also have utility (as in being able to imagine, hypothesize, and desire all serve a purpose), but their utility is quite different than the action-guiding utility of Factual Belief. Additionally, the utility of imagination, hypothesizing, and desiring does not, unlike Factual Belief, depend on whether the propositional contents of the attitudes are indeed true.

Additionally, though the content of the attitudes is the same, we understand there is a difference between these attitudes unrelated to their content. The content has a different

relationship to Bea and function differently in Bea's mind and will play out differently in her behavior[7]. All I am suggesting is this:

"Bea believes that her lunch is vegetarian" and "Bea believes Barak Obama is from Kenya" might, despite the conventional use of the word "belief" refer to two separate attitudes in the way factual belief and imagining differ or in the way hypothesizing and desiring differ.

The next goal of the paper is to flesh out this last point in greater detail.

## 5   A POLITICAL ATTITUDE MODEL: "POLITICAL ACCEPTANCE"

In this section, I want to bring together the discussion of belief polarization and the discussion on attitudes. Thus far in this paper, I have presented evidence that some participants in political surveys respond expressively to questions about political facts – that is they offer responses that they take to represent their party well or that identify them as a member of a party or political "team." Examples of these kinds of responses include the Trump supporters who pick an incorrect photo for the simple question, "Which photo depicts the larger crowd?" Other examples include the 48% of participants in the Bullock et al. study who, for a small reward, admit they do not have accurate answers for the questions provided, but who, in another condition, would still offer party-favoring responses.

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[7] To defend this point, I want to first explain more about why, when a person asserts that "*X*" or asserts, "I believe *that X,*" it does not mean they factually believe *X*. Not only do we all admit there are liars, jokers, deceivers, exaggerators, and bluffers who might say so wrongly, but the conventional use of the term "belief," as has already been discussed, is widely used and captures a folk notion of personal significance but does not pinpoint a cognitive attitude. What I mean by this is simply that, when we say "she believes x" or she "sincerely believes x" we usually mean to convey the subjective value or of central importance of some content to an individual.  However, a proposition's content can have some personal salience for someone without their believing it. For instance, the propositional content of hopes and desires are clearly salient, though not believed. The attitude I propose, political acceptance, which motivates expressive responses, might be commonly referred to as "belief", though it differs conceptually from the attitude of factual belief I outlined in Section 4.

The question for psychologists and philosophers has been, what do these respondents really believe? And how do they form these beliefs?

## 5.1   A Short Taxonomy of Responses and Attitudes

I suggest that there may be advantages to approaching the question with an understanding that not all participants believe what they say. Consider the question, "Which photo depicts Donald Trump's inauguration?" (or for any equivalent question with a factual response), participants who respond incorrectly, may fall into one of the following groups:

(1) **Sincere Responders** – responders with an honest, but false, factual belief that Photo B is from Donald Trump's election. Sincere responders may have false beliefs because of a number of reasons:

    (a) They have bad information – they are part of a "low-information" group, or have been lied to, but formed a straightforward factual belief based on bad information.

    (b) They have some sort of cognitive bias or have fallen into some sort of motivated reasoning trap. These sorts of models I discussed in Section 3. These models might explain sincere responders, though as I argued in Section 3, these models cannot account for expressive responders.

(2) **Expressive Responders** – responders who

    (a) Do not know the answer but choose Photo B to express allegiance to Trump.

    (b) Know the answer is A, but choose Photo B to express allegiance to Trump.

The attitude/s motivating expressive responses warrant explanation. In section 4, I outlined some of the key features of factual belief. I argued that a cluster of properties (including involuntarily formation and context insensitivity) co-occur systematically in such a way that it is worth preserving a concept from these properties – that concept is factual belief. I also claimed that there are other attitudes one can have towards propositions (I discussed imaginings, hypotheses, and desires). Importantly, the content of the attitude cannot be confused with the

form the attitude takes (belief, desire, and so on). It is possible to have different attitudes –

believing, desiring, and imagining – towards the same content, i.e. "the lunch is vegetarian." I

stated that to straightforwardly "get by" in life – getting to appointments, going to work, making

breakfast and so on – individuals rely on a whole host of factual beliefs about the world around

them.

## 5.2    Introducing Acceptance

I now want to introduce the idea of an attitude called "acceptance." This attitude is

discussed at length in several important papers, including Jonathan Cohen's "Acceptance and

Belief" and Michael Bratman's "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context." Both Cohen

and Bratman make a case similar to the one I am making. While there may be an attitude called

belief (or what I am specifically calling factual belief), there is another attitude, called

acceptance, which can be identified by its unique functional properties. I will be building on

Cohen and Bratman's work.[8] Cohen and Bratman identify two important properties of

acceptance: they can be formed voluntarily and can vary based on context and practical

constraints.  In 4.1c and 4.1d I discuss how the opposite properties are common to factual beliefs.

We do not form factual beliefs voluntarily and factual beliefs persist in the background,

informing and grounding further beliefs.

It is probably important to say more about what I mean by "persisting in the

background" and "grounding further beliefs." If you remember "Karl" from the section on

interpretation, you will recall that Karl had a false belief that lions make barking noises. It is this

belief that persisted in the background which grounds Karl's new belief, "There are lions

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[8] Though I should mention I do not fully endorse Cohen's account. Specifically, I disagree with Cohen's idea that acceptances induce deductive, logical closure whereas beliefs do not. But this disagreement does not make or break the notion of acceptance.

nearby," when he hears the barking at the mall. Karl does not need to have consistent, conscious awareness of his background belief about barking, but his mistaken belief "clicks" in the right scenario – we say the belief becomes "occurrent" – when he hears the barks. A belief may be dormant and become occurrent, but this is different from saying beliefs change depending on the context. Karl's belief doesn't change from one context to another, it simply occurs in some contexts and not others. Michael Bratman offers the following example. Gloria needs to calculate whether she can afford her home renovation.  In the process, she assumes each individual component of construction will be maximally costly. Doing so allows her to assess whether she can truly afford to take on the entire renovation at once. It is wise, from a budgeting perspective, to assume the maximum cost of the renovation, so she calculates that $100,000 is the high end of the renovation. Confident she could afford the high price tag if it came to it, Gloria proceeds with the renovation. However, she was asked to take a bet on her best guess of what the final cost will come to. Gloria does not bet that every component of construction will be maximally expensive, so she bets a lower cost than she totaled for her budget assessment. Gloria thus has two different goals and two different estimates with differing utility. She is accepting two different propositions at once – she is accepting that the construction project will be, say, $100,000 for her budget for the purpose of making a prudential decision about whether she could afford the high-end of her project. She also simultaneously bets that the renovation will cost closer to $60,00 for the utility of winning a bet based on an accurate estimation. Does Gloria have a factual belief that the renovation will cost $60,000? No, because not only is this a voluntary estimate, she is choosing to let a higher estimate guide her behavior and planning. Present in the background of Gloria's decision to follow-through on the renovation are a host of factual beliefs such as

Gloria's belief that the lumber supplier charges $0.58/square ft, or the believe that her home is a certain size.

## 5.3    Political Acceptance

Expressive responses reflect an attitude I am calling "Political Acceptance." Instead of reading all belief polarization literature as revealing wholly irrational and recalcitrant attitudes about facts in the world, I argue that not all attitudes toward factual proposition are beliefs. As I said in the conclusion to the previous section, when we consider "Bea believes that her lunch is vegetarian" and "Bea believes Barak Obama is from Kenya," despite the conventional use of the word "belief," the term refers to two separate attitudes in the way factual belief and imagining differ or in the way hypothesizing and desiring differ. Further, we should want to maintain and preserve Bea's rationality (if we otherwise and in general find her to be largely rational), but not attributing incoherent beliefs to her based on statements she makes (Section 4.2).

A political acceptance $A_p$ can be held at the same time as another acceptance or belief even if the two are inconsistent. This is called double-bookkeeping. Double-Bookkeeping

The text-book examples of double-booking come from psychiatry, specifically the study of the schizophrenic delusion. Eugene Bleuler first introduced the notion of "double awareness" as he noted patients who professed some delusions, but seemed to act is if they really did not believe what they said. Bleuler noticed that schizophrenic patients are inconsistently delusional. Louis Sass (1994, 2001, 2004) and Shaun Gallagher (2009) build on Bleuler's idea and call the phenomenon "double bookkeeping." They suggest that some people with delusions are at least implicitly aware that their delusions are not about reality. Gallagher writes: "A patient can view doctors and nurses as poisoners

(in delusional reality) but happily eats the food they give her (in everyday reality)" (Gallagher 2009).[9]

The explanation with reference to delusions, however, can be quite un-illuminating as delusions are not commonly observed and remain controversial. However, Neil Van Leeuwen also references something like double-bookkeeping when he discusses cases of imagining. Van Leeuwen suggests that when people play pretend, factual beliefs and imagining "combine to form a two-map cognitive structure" where both attitudes contribute to the actions involved in imaginative play (Van Leeuwen 2016). In the case of pretending that a piece of furniture is a spaceship, for example, Van Leeuwen suggests a set of factual beliefs (such as 'the sofa is in the living room' and 'the sofa has three cushions') informs and accompanies a set of imaginings (such as 'the sofa is in outer space,' and 'the sofa has controls for flying'). These two sets of propositional attitudes are recruited in imaginary play where the factual belief world does not disappear but is utilized.

Sass wrote that the attitudes constituting patients' delusions reminded him of imaginings in that they seemed to lack the "ontological weight associate[d] with …reality" (2014). The "esthetic" quality of imagining is never enough to allow imaginary mental states to dominate the realm of "reality" which is why factual beliefs persist in imagining.[10]

I believe the above model can be applied to political acceptance. Some acceptances are formed with practical considerations in mind, recall Section 5.2's examples of accepting varying propositions about the weather, or varying propositions about the cost of a renovation. Other

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[9] For more, see Barolotti, L and Broome, M "Affective Dimensions of the Phenomenon of Double Bookkeeping in Delusions" Emotion Review Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 2012) pp. 187–191

[10] Though whether delusions are beliefs is still contested among psychiatrists and philosophers, Sass, in 2014, argued that it was his patients' inability to separately navigate distinguished worlds of imaginary-like propositions and factual beliefs that causes the pathology of delusion. While the patients' behaviors indicated that their imagination-like attitudes did not consistently hold the "ontological" weight of reality, the patients were themselves unable to articulate the difference between the two worlds. Delusions are complicated by the fact that patients seem to actually have sensory *perception* of a world which is not there. These perceptions constitue part of the mysterious status of delusions." Aberrant perceptions aren't straightforward facts nor are they completely imaginary projections" writes Sass (2014).

propositions are adopted for imaginative play, such as "my couch is a spaceship" or "the floor is made of lava." Additionally, political acceptances, such as "Donald Trump's inauguration had the largest attendance" can be adopted for party loyalty or other concerns.[11] Acceptances can coexist with factual beliefs and other acceptances, even ones that completely eclipse the possibility that "Donald Trump's inauguration had the largest attendance" could be true. Contextual and political considerations might even make it reasonable for me to accept the previous claim, if, in doing so in a particular setting, I can advance my goals. For instance, if my goal is to promote the president or to make my political party seem consistent, it would be purpose-serving to accept propositions I might not believe. In doing so, I am meeting a practical concern, but remain rational, though I might frustrate those around me.

## 6    CONCLUSION

One remaining question deserving further question is whether participants are self-aware of their political acceptances, or whether they take their acceptances to be beliefs. In the case of the imagination, many people can tell the difference between what they imagine and what they believe. In the case of schizophrenic delusion, Sass, Gallagher and others find that patients do not seem to be aware of their own inconsistencies, and this is part and parcel of the state of being deluded. Richard Dub, for instance, argues that, in the case of schizophrenia, powerfully strong and overwhelming feelings are made sense of by acceptances (2017). Put (too) simply, an overwhelming and persistent anxiety around other people might be explained if one accepted that all friends and caretakers were truly imposters and enemies in disguise. If pathologically strong, negative emotions are the origin of an acceptance that could explain those feelings, continuing

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[11] See "A 'Need for Chaos' and the Sharing of Hostile Political Rumors in Advanced Democracies" by Michael Bang Petersen, Mathias Osmundsen, & Kevin Arceneaux. They argye some political rumors are accepted and endorsed for the motivation of promoting political chaos.

the acceptance might assuage the discomfort of strong emotions. At least this is part of Dub's explanation. Schizophrenic patients end up being unable to tell that their delusions apart from reality, though their regular behavior bespeaks the remnants of factual beliefs, such as in the case of the patient who willingly eats the food provided by the caregiver whom she thinks is an enemy in disguise. Political acceptances seem far more straightforward than schizophrenic delusions in many respects. The motivations for political acceptances to be formed seem broadly tribal and political party loyalty is known to have quite an emotionally powerful sway (Huddy et al. 2015).

My hunch is that many partisans may be unaware that they hold acceptances and not beliefs. How is this possible? First, a link has been shown between those who hold politically "radical beliefs" and poor metacognitive ability (Rollwage, Dolan, and Fleming 2018). Secondly, the belief perseverance effect is consistent shown to be stronger in groups who have higher education and higher political sophistication (Taber, Lodge, and Taber 2006; Schaffner and Roche 2017). Often, political sophistication is measured by self-report. The well-known metacognitive failure, The 'Dunning-Kruger' report, has also been shown to affect those who identify as highly politically knowledgeable and politically sophisticated (Anson 2018).

This paper is intended to offer an alternative to the all-belief accounts of belief polarization. I do not claim that my account is to be a totalizing replacement of the belief accounts and that all belief polarization around political facts can be subsumed into my account. Rather, my account is meant to supplement all-belief accounts by adding a plausible alternative. I have found some psychological explanations for belief polarization that would not explain or do not fit my account. For instance, Mandelbaum's explanation of belief polarization is that human cognition does not track evidence and probability, but that our belief-forming system makes the

best of a limited cognitive economy by preserving psychological comfort rather than preserving rationality. Mandelbaum argues that discomforting information, or information that disconfirms beliefs that are important to the subject, is the type of information that is "warded off" by the psychological immune system (2014). Put simply: We are irrational about what really matters to us. Many of us are poorly reflective about what is personal to us, just like it is possible to be poorly reflective in areas our areas of expertise. But there are many reasons enumerated throughout this paper to reject the notion that partisans are wholly irrational.

Suppose I am right, and the polarization data does not warrant a presumption that respondents factually believe what they attest, but rather that they can give pro-party answers they do not believe. In that case, Mandelbaum's explanation of the non-Bayesian mind does not explain the full picture. Mandelbaum's account, and accounts about testimonial filtration (such as Neil Levy's) or "QDT" accounts, cannot explain cases found in the Bullock et al. study, for instance. Nor do they fully explain why respondents might choose an obviously incorrect image in a low-stakes survey.

To sum up, I argued that current belief polarization literature does not offer us a complete picture of what happens in the phenomenon. I cited two recent papers, Schaffner and Luks (2018) and Bullock et al. (2015) who have introduced the concept of expressive responses in political surveys. Schaffner and Luks caught what they took to be expressive responses in a control question about crowd size, and Bullock et al. offered differing incentives that changed how participants responded under different conditions. I explained how three popular psychological models of understanding belief polarization could not account for expressive responding cases. Another model is needed to make sense of this behavior. I then changed course a bit to introduce the discussion on attitudes. Relying largely on work by Neil Van Leeuwen

(2018), I suggested the idea of factual belief be considered conceptually separate from other attitudes – which we intuitively do in the cases of imagining, hypothesizing and so on. I also suggested that David Lewis' work presents a good reason for us not to reflexively attribute to others the attitude of factual beliefs. I then introduced the attitude of acceptance and how it appears in ordinary life in the contexts of practical reasoning. I applied the attitude of acceptance to political contexts and argued that participants' expressions might be motivated by the attitude of political acceptances, not factual beliefs.

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