

Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado

Volume 6

Number 1 *Special Issue: Research Day 2016 - Undergraduate Research Excellence Award Winners & Finalists*

Article 16

December 2016

The Relevance of Intuitions in Experimental Philosophy Surveys

Alexander Lidiak

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digscholarship.unco.edu/urj>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lidiak, Alexander (2016) "The Relevance of Intuitions in Experimental Philosophy Surveys," *Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <http://digscholarship.unco.edu/urj/vol6/iss1/16>

This Abstract is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado by an authorized editor of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

The Relevance of Intuitions in Experimental Philosophy Surveys

Alexander Lidiak, *Philosophy*

Faculty Sponsor: Nancy Matchett

Experimental philosophy (X-Phi) is a novel approach to philosophy, which surveys people's intuitions in order to support or undermine philosophical theories. It is a major assumption of X-Phi that these surveys accurately capture people's intuitive responses to philosophical issues. The central purpose of this research is to investigate whether this is a safe assumption. One of the most influential X-Phi surveys discovered a surprising asymmetry in people's "intuitions" about intentionality (Knobe, 2003). In my project, I distribute the same survey questions but provide a philosophical definition of intentionality to participants in advance. It will be investigated how the survey results change if participants are given something other than their intuitions to rely on. I hypothesize that the responses will be more symmetrical in my survey than in Knobe's. If this hypothesis is true, this may support the claim that most people rely on ambiguous definitions of philosophical concepts and that X-Phi surveys like Knobe's are accurate evidence of people's intuitions. Alternatively, it could be evidence that critically thinking improves consistency. If the survey responses show asymmetry even after defining intentionality, this may indicate that the participants either ignored the definition, have intuitions so strong that they override the definition, or committed a performance error in using the concept of intentionality. In which case, the many uses of survey data in X-Phi may not be accurate representations of people's intuitions at all, but could be evidence of differences in the use of concepts, i.e., the ways in which people reason.