



Implicit Theories of Networking: Effects of Lay Beliefs on Attitudes and Engagement toward Instrumental Networking

Journal:	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>
Manuscript ID	AMR-2015-0076-Original.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Social Networks, Motivation, Social Capital
Abstract:	<p>Who builds effective networks remains an elusive question, particularly given mounting evidence that many people actually feel conflicted or ambivalent about the idea of instrumental networking. Here, we turn to an important piece of the puzzle that has been under-theorized: lay beliefs and attitudes that inhibit networking. Borrowing from the literature on implicit theories in motivational psychology, our theoretical model examines people's beliefs about three basic aspects of networking: the fixed versus malleable nature of social intelligence, social relations, and social capital. We explain how each lay belief affects people's attitudes toward both the utility and morality of networking, with consequences for their engagement in different forms of networking (i.e. searching for new ties, maintaining existing ties, and leveraging social capital). We also consider their downstream effects for the size, diversity, and cohesiveness of networks people build. Overall, by examining the role of domain-specific beliefs and attitudes that undermine people's motivation to network, our model departs from existing views of networking based on rationality, personality, and perception to shed new light on the motivational psychology of networking.</p>

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Lay Theories of Networking

How Laypeople’s Beliefs about Networks Affect Their Attitudes and Engagement toward
Instrumental Networking

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We thank Joel Brockner, Paul Ingram, Michael Morris, Jiyin Cao, and seminar participants at Dartmouth, INSEAD, McGill, and Stony Brook, three anonymous reviewers, and Kris Byron for valuable comments on earlier drafts.

ABSTRACT

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There is growing evidence of a “knowing-doing gap” in networking: many people feel conflicted or ambivalent about engaging in instrumental networking even while recognizing the importance of being well connected. Here, we turn to an important piece of the puzzle that has been undertheorized: laypeople’s beliefs about the nature of networks. Borrowing from the literature on lay theories in motivational psychology, our theoretical model examines the effects of how laypeople construe different components of networks—individuals and their social intelligence, social relations, and social capital—as relatively fixed or malleable. We explain how each belief affects people’s attitudes toward both the utility and morality of networking, with consequences for their engagement in different forms of networking (searching for new ties, maintaining existing ties, and leveraging social capital). We also consider their downstream consequences for the size, diversity, and cohesiveness of networks people build. Overall, by examining the role of domain-specific beliefs and attitudes that undermine people’s motivation to network, our model departs from existing views of networking based on rationality, personality, and perception to shed new light on the motivational psychology of networking.

Keywords: Networking, Networks, Lay theories

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3 *He is an associate partner. He should be important for me, but since I see a network as*
4 *something which happens naturally and not artificially, I don't really try to keep him.*

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7 Eric, an employee at ConsultCo (Bensaou et al., 2014)
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11 Building, maintaining, and leveraging relationships is a core competency for any professional,
12 whether seeking new ideas (Burt, 2004), power and influence (Brass, 1992), or job opportunities
13 (Wanberg et al., 2000). Yet, it is not difficult to find people like Eric around all of us: smart,
14 hardworking, perhaps even socially competent colleagues, who nevertheless fail or refuse to
15 network. While hardly anyone would dispute the importance of “who you know,” perhaps no
16 other word in business is imbued with so much moral ambivalence, sense of futility, or even
17 dread and distaste than “networking.” To many people, the idea of networking to build
18 instrumental ties and get ahead feels morally questionable—unfair, insincere, or simply “dirty”
19 (Casciaro et al., 2014; Molinsky, 2012; Ibarra et al., 2010). To others, it is a fine line between
20 networking and not-working; browsing LinkedIn, sending birthday cards, and spending yet
21 another weekend on the golf course feels hardly worth one’s time—futile at best,
22 counterproductive or even threatening at worst (Levin et al., 2011). In some cases, such attitudes
23 toward the morality and utility of networking can combine to pose a double bind that
24 demotivates even seasoned professionals like Eric who possess enough skills and resources to
25 network more effectively if they tried.
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29 Our goal in the present paper is to shed light on this “knowing-doing gap” (Pfeffer & Sutton,
30 2013) in networking by considering who comes to hold such attitudes, how they affect people’s
31 engagement in networking, and how to change them. To this end, we examine people’s “lay
32 theories of networking” by tracing their attitudes toward networking to their beliefs about the
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3 nature (i.e., malleability) of networks. Drawing on Dweck's (1996, 2000, 2007) influential work
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5 on motivational psychology, lay theory refers to the effects of naïve beliefs laypeople hold about
6
7 the "nature versus nurture" of various attributes and entities. For instance, students differ in their
8
9 beliefs about intelligence; some view it as inborn and fixed, while others believe in cumulative
10
11 effort toward learning and growth (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Such *fixed* versus *malleable* beliefs
12
13 have profound consequences for motivation, engagement, and performance across various
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15 domains of activities, including social interactions like negotiation (Kray & Haselhuhn, 2007),
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17 talking to strangers (Beer, 2002), and finding love (Knee, 1998). Of practical significance, lay
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19 theories—unlike many personality traits—can be taught or learned relatively easily (Levy et al.,
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21 2001), suggesting implications for management and policy.
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27 Building on these ideas, we begin by conceptualizing networking as a motivational problem,
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29 much like exercising—a perspective that goes beyond existing views of networking as a matter
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31 of rational choice or traits and skills. We then present our theoretical model to predict how
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33 holding fixed (versus malleable) beliefs about different components of networks (individuals,
34
35 relations, and resources) can undermine people's attitudes and engagement toward specific forms
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37 of networking (search, maintenance, and leverage), with downstream implications for various
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39 network structures (size, diversity, and cohesiveness). We also consider factors that could
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41 moderate these effects, thus specifying when and for whom each belief matters in particular.
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46 We conclude by discussing implications for theory, practice, and research. To our knowledge,
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48 our model is the first to extend the idea of lay theories to instrumental networking. Considering
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50 the sheer volume of research on networks to date, it is surprising how little attention has been
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52 paid to what demotivates people from networking. By identifying distinct beliefs that can
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3 independently undermine a person's motivation to engage in different forms of networking, our
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5 model contributes to a richer understanding of the motivational psychology of networking.
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8 9 **NETWORKING AS A MOTIVATIONAL PROBLEM**

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11 We define professional-instrumental networking (or simply "networking") as proactive and
12
13 purposeful efforts to build, manage, or leverage relationships toward professional goals
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15 (Casciaro et al., 2014; also see Bensaou et al., 2013; Wolff & Moser, 2009). This definition
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17 includes ties between people who may share relations outside of work (i.e., friendship) but
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19 precludes purely affective relationships that lack any instrumental goals or functions (Ingram &
20
21 Zou, 2008). This definition also precludes spontaneous or passive interactions initiated by others
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23 as well as involuntary relations forged through assignment, such as project teams. While some
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25 people build effective networks without networking proactively, our interest is in conscious
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27 efforts people make to network with professional contacts.
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32 Undergirding this focus on proactivity is our view of networking as a motivational problem,
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34 much like exercising: most people desire to be fit, understand the importance of fitness, and
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36 know how to exercise, yet many still struggle to exercise regularly—not for lack of skills,
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38 rationality and purpose, access to opportunities and resources, or certain dispositions, but
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40 because of beliefs and attitudes they hold about what is physically possible, effective, or
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42 desirable (*I'll never lose this weight! Yoga is so pointless!*). Similarly, simply understanding the
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44 importance of networking or knowing how and where to network may not be enough to motivate
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46 people to actually network if they view networking as threatening, awkward, or dirty. Our goal is
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48 to understand who is prone to such views—that is, why people disengage from networking even
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50 when they desire to have effective networks (Ingram & Morris, 2007; Obukhova & Lan, 2013).
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3 The problem of motivation highlights an important gap in the literature on networking.
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5 Notwithstanding our growing understanding of various psychological factors that affect
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7 networking, including rational pursuit of opportunities (Nebus, 2006), social skills (Fang et al.,
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9 2014), personality traits (Wolff & Kim, 2012), and network perception (Casciaro et al., 1999;
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11 Krackhardt & Kilduff, 1999), the knowing-doing gap in networking cannot be attributed to
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13 irrational choices, wrong personality types, misperception of ties, or lack of skills alone, for to do
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15 so dismisses the crucial point that many people struggle first and foremost with the *idea* of
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17 networking as futile, threatening, or morally questionable. In their study of professional service
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19 firms, Bensaou et al. (2013) identified three types of networkers based on their attitudes toward
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21 networking. Of the 52 employees examined, 18 were “devoted players” who networked
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23 purposively and proactively. In contrast, 24 were more restrained, recognizing networking as
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25 important yet held back by the feeling that networking is difficult. The remaining 10 were
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27 overtly suspicious of the morality of networking. Thus, two-thirds of the professionals in this
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29 study were ambivalent toward either the utility or the morality of networking, or both. Given
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31 these observations, why some people hold such attitudes toward networking is a matter of both
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33 theoretical and practical importance.
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42 **LAY THEORIES OF NETWORKING: THE BASIC MODEL**

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44 Figure 1 presents our theoretical model. It is not meant to be a complete account of
45
46 networking, and we do not discuss performance implications of different networks (Brass et al.,
47
48 2004). Rather, our goal is to understand networking from lay perspectives by considering how
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50 *beliefs* about networks affect *attitudes* and *engagement* toward networking, with downstream
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52 consequences for *network structure*. The core intuition is that many people become disengaged
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3 from networking because of their attitudes toward networking as something devoid of utility or
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5 moral legitimacy. One basis of such attitudes is their beliefs about networks.
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8 Given the multilevel structure of networks, our model specifies a distinct lay theory for each
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10 level. This is represented by the dotted boxes in Figure 1 linking beliefs about different
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12 components of networks (actors, relations among them, and resources that flow through them) to
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14 engagement in different forms or subdomains of networking (search, maintenance, and leverage).
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18 Insert Figure 1 about here
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21 22 **Engagement in Networking**

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24 Engagement concerns the extent to which people commit their emotional, mental, or physical
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26 resources and energy toward networking. Although engagement can be measured objectively
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28 (e.g., by gauging the frequency, duration, or intensity of observable effort), it is fundamentally a
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30 psychological construct based on subjective experience, such as enjoyment or sense of meaning
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32 and significance (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The idea of engagement has received scant attention in
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34 the networks literature (but see Halgin et al., 2015).
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40 41 **Attitudes toward Networking**

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43 Attitudes are summary evaluations that elicit consistently favorable or unfavorable reactions
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45 toward an object or domain (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). We consider attitudes toward two aspects
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47 of networking: utility and morality. The utility of networking concerns its marginal cost-benefit,
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49 i.e., whether or not networking is useful or effective given one's effort, and ranges from positive
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51 to negative based on one's perceived performance. On the positive side, networking feels
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53 manageable, effective, and rewarding, perhaps paying off from time to time in concrete ways
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3 that reinforce one's sense of efficacy. Often, however, people become disengaged as the utility
4 of networking diminishes to zero (futility) or negative (disutility). At best, approaching strangers
5 with scripted openers, engaging colleagues in endless small talk, or sending birthday cards to
6 clients may seem futile, hardly worth one's time and effort. At worst, networking feels awkward,
7 humiliating, or even threatening to a person's sense of efficacy, competence, and self-reliance
8 (Beer, 2002; Molinsky, 2012). People thus come to dismiss or resent the idea of networking even
9 while acknowledging the importance of having a rich network, just as many people desire to be
10 fit but find the idea of exercising too onerous.
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22 Compounding this problem is the possibility that, even if people believe networking will
23 somehow pay off, they may still question its moral legitimacy or propriety. The morality of
24 networking concerns whether networking is fair, honest, or appropriate. To many, networking
25 signifies using others to get ahead, unfair in its own right. To others, the idea of building
26 instrumental ties feels fake and presumptuous. Pragmatists may accept networking as part of any
27 business, neither fair nor unfair, yet still squirm at the idea of self-promotion, pitching to
28 strangers, or deciding whom to befriend, not for true friendship, but for ulterior reasons.
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39 Together, attitudes toward the utility and morality of networking describe two fundamental
40 reasons why so many people feel conflicted about networking (Piskorski, 2014). People become
41 disengaged from networking because networking feels ineffectual, morally questionable, or both,
42 creating a pernicious double bind that requires rethinking one's basic beliefs about networks and
43 what it means to network.
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52 **Fixed versus Malleable Beliefs**

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54 One important basis of attitudes is beliefs people hold in relevant domains (Fishbein & Ajzen,
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3 1975). Although a person can hold a variety of beliefs about an attribute, whether something is
4 fixed or malleable is a particularly fundamental aspect of social cognition (Haslam et al., 2006;
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6 Ross & Nisbett, 1991), with profound consequences for engagement (Dweck, 2007). For
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8 example, students who believe that intelligence is innate and fixed are more likely to disengage
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10 from schoolwork than those who see intelligence as malleable (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Similar
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12 beliefs have been shown to reduce engagement across a variety of domains, including physical
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14 exercise (Kasimatis et al., 1996), moral judgment (Chiu et al., 1997; Schweitzer et al., 2006),
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16 interacting with strangers (Beer, 2002), romantic relations (Knee, 1998), negotiations (Kray &
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18 Haselhuhn, 2007), and entrepreneurship (Pollack et al., 2012). These effects can be surprisingly
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20 persistent, because people are generally unaware of how beliefs affect their behavior.
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27 Research suggests two related reasons why holding a fixed belief reduces engagement in a
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29 given domain (Dweck, 1996). First, believing that something is innate or fixed increases one's
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31 sensitivity to (actual or potential) rejection and failure because how someone or something
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33 performs today is more diagnostic of its true quality, or lack thereof, if it is assumed to be fixed
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35 rather than malleable. By this account, even those with high ability (e.g., precocious second-
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37 graders) may disengage over time as they face greater and greater challenges if they believe that
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39 effort will not lead to growth and mastery (Dweck & Leggett 1988). Second, people with a fixed
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41 belief may disengage, not (only) because they might fail, but because of what (even successful)
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43 engagement might reflect on their self-image. For instance, some students disengage from
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45 schoolwork because they do not want to be seen as nerdy or overachieving (Fordham & Ogbu,
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47 1986). Such people are concerned about affirming and protecting their sense of self through
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49 effortless performance or disengagement instead of exerting greater effort, because the goal in
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3 the fixed view is not to learn and grow, but to look good (e.g., competent, moral)—and naturally
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5 so—to others and themselves (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).
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8 Directed at oneself, heightened sensitivity to rejection means people with fixed beliefs about
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10 their own attributes are more likely to avoid or disengage from situations that threaten their sense
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12 of competence and self-worth, because people who focus on fixed attributes are likely to see
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14 failures in terms of their innate deficiencies rather than lack of effort—that is, as something
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16 permanent rather than changeable (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Directed at others, people with
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18 fixed beliefs about others' inability to change are more likely to focus on first impressions in
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20 order to judge and reject them quickly if they do not meet one's needs (Knee, 1998). By contrast,
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22 people with malleable beliefs are inspired by the possibility of cultivation: if an attribute is
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24 malleable, it can be nurtured through care and effort. This belief promotes resilience and sustains
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26 engagement despite occasional hurdles and setbacks. Accordingly, malleable beliefs are
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28 particularly critical in challenging situations that demand perseverance (Dweck, 2000).
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35 **Beliefs and Attitudes versus Other Accounts of Networking**

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38 How does our approach differ from other accounts of networking? Much of the literature on
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40 network dynamics has focused on various situational, dispositional, and normative factors that
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42 are largely domain-general and theoretically unspecific to instrumental networking. Far less
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44 attention has been paid to domain-specific beliefs and attitudes about instrumental networking in
45
46 particular. For instance, laypeople's beliefs and attitudes are largely absent from structuralist
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48 accounts of networks, including many rational-choice models, that focus on opportunities and
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50 resources embedded in concrete situations or relations. While this approach has been criticized
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52 for downplaying individual psychology in general (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kilduff &
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3 Krackhardt, 1994), more recent efforts to capture agency in psychologically richer terms have
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5 incorporated subjective utility and expectancy (Nebus, 2006; Porter & Woo, 2015) as well as
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7 network cognition, showing that some people are more accurate than others in perceiving or
8
9 recalling who is connected to whom (Brands, 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Janicik & Larrick, 2005).
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11 These perspectives have added important elements of subjectivity to structuralism, but the focus
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13 remains on situation- or relation-specific decisions and reactions (e.g., whether to go to Tom
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15 versus Bob for advice) rather than beliefs and attitudes that sustain engagement over time and
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17 across situations (i.e., building a network of colleagues).
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22 Because lay theories are domain-specific (Dweck 1996), they also differ from general
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24 dispositions like traits and abilities. This matters because networking is a distinct form of
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26 sociality from friendship or courtship (Casciaro et al., 2014). Although dispositions like
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28 extraversion (Fang et al., 2015) and social skills (Fang et al., 2014) have been shown to correlate
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30 with various types of networks, they do not explain how people actually think about networks,
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32 how they attach meaning and commit to the idea of networking, or how introverts might learn to
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34 network (Cain, 2013). Without dismissing the importance of traits, we argue that a more
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36 contextual understanding of networking requires examining specific beliefs and attitudes about
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38 networking (Labianca, 2014; Wanberg et al., 2000).
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43 Finally, unlike normative or ecological factors that are collectively shared (Yuki & Schug,
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45 2012), lay theories are held individually. Studies have shown networking patterns to vary across
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47 cultures, such as individualist versus collectivist countries (Anderson et al., 2008; Sharone,
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49 2013). Our primary focus of analysis, however, is on individual rather than cultural differences.
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BELIEFS AND THEIR EFFECTS: THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Having outlined our model in the abstract, we now discuss lay theories of three specific forms of networking. At the individual level, the primary form of networking is *search*, which concerns networking at the most elemental level of isolated actors and their individual ability and effort to form ties. Search occurs prior to the establishment of relationships, including preparation to identify needs and opportunities for new ties and initiation to approach and establish initial contact (Vissa, 2012). At the level of relations, networking entails *maintenance*, i.e., efforts to affirm, sustain, or strengthen ties (Porter & Woo, 2015), which often occur through non-instrumental interactions (e.g., hosting dinner, sending holiday cards). Instrumental exchanges (e.g., asking for favors, collaborating on projects) can also—if incidentally—help maintain relationships, but they are motivated first and foremost by concerns about *leverage*, i.e., accessing or mobilizing resources from others and brokering structural holes. Search, maintenance, and leverage are related but distinct subdomains of networking comprised of different goals, logics, and forms of engagement (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Because lay theories are domain-specific, we first focus on the effects of different beliefs within each subdomain.

Table 1 summarizes our propositions. Our basic argument is that holding a fixed belief induces negative attitudes toward a particular form of networking (search, maintenance, and leverage), reducing engagement (Propositions 1a, 2a and 3a). We also consider their downstream implications for the size, diversity, and cohesiveness of networks—three core measures of network effectiveness (e.g., Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001) (Propositions 1b, 2b and 3b). Finally, based on the evidence that lay theories are particularly important in the face of challenges (Dweck and Leggett, 1988), we also consider factors that moderate each lay theory (Propositions

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3 1c, 2c and 3c). While the three lay theories share the same theoretical logic and can be correlated
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5 (as we discuss later), they thus operate at different levels of networks, with implications for
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7 different forms of networking, creating a model that is at once multilevel yet logically coherent.
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17 In our propositions, we treat malleable beliefs as our baseline. While most people have a mix
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19 of fixed and malleable beliefs (e.g., relationships can be cultivated, but only to a degree), we are
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21 interested in the consequences of fixed beliefs on why people disengage from networking. We
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23 thus view lay theories as a source of inertia that reduces engagement (Ahuja et al., 2012).
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26 27 **Beliefs about Social Intelligence and Lay Theories of Search** 28

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30 Social intelligence refers broadly to a person's individual ability to get along with others,
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32 manage social interactions, and navigate the interpersonal world (Mayer et al., 2004; Ferris et al.,
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34 2002). For the purpose of our model, it is a person's core ability to network. Like cognitive
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36 intelligence, social intelligence can be viewed as fixed or malleable (Beer, 2002). A person with
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38 a malleable belief construes social intelligence as a matter of skills or tactics learned through
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40 effort, whereas a person with a fixed belief construes it in terms of personality traits (e.g., charm
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42 or extraversion) that are assumed to be largely fixed and innate. This, we argue, has implications
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44 for how people feel about the utility and morality of search efforts to create new ties because—
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46 although social intelligence is essential in a variety of social situations—it plays a particularly
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48 central role in search as individuals seek to make initial contact and positive impressions with
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50 people they hardly know. Although beliefs about social relations or social capital may influence
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3 how one goes about search or whom to search, it is beliefs about social intelligence that
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5 determines how much to engage in search. Beliefs about social intelligence become less critical,
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7 and beliefs about social relations and social capital become more prominent once relations form
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9 and individuals shift their focus to maintenance or leverage (Baumeister & Leary, 1995;
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11 Sedikides et al., 1993).

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15 Holding fixed beliefs about social intelligence reduces engagement in search for two reasons.
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17 First, people with fixed beliefs are more likely to feel that their networking efforts will yield
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19 limited returns: simply trying harder is unlikely to payoff—futile at best, exhausting or
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21 humiliating at worst—because how well or poorly they network, in their view, is largely fixed
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23 and reflects directly on their sense of competence and self-worth (Sharone, 2013). In comparison
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25 to those with malleable beliefs who believe that building new relations is a matter of effort that
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27 gets easier with experience, people with fixed beliefs are thus more liable to fear failure, giving
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29 up more quickly in the face of failed efforts or avoiding such situations altogether (Beer, 2002).

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34 Second, people with fixed beliefs about social intelligence are more likely to view the idea of
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36 building instrumental ties as morally questionable. In this view, some people are better
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38 networkers—and perhaps more successful professionally—because they are somehow blessed
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40 with desirable traits or abilities by nature rather than effort. For them, social intelligence is not
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42 unlike beauty that confers unfair advantage to some but not others, an idea that stands at odds
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44 with meritocracy and the value of hard work.
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50 *Proposition 1a: Holding a fixed belief about social intelligence reduces engagement in search*
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52 *by increasing negative attitudes toward the utility and morality of search efforts.*
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3 This belief has consequences for network structure as well. Because of lower engagement in
4 search for new ties, people with a fixed belief about social intelligence should develop smaller
5 networks with fewer contacts, all else equal.
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11 *Proposition 1b: Because of lower engagement in search, people with a fixed belief about*
12 *social intelligence develop smaller networks.*
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16 Finally, because lay theories are particularly important in challenging situations that require
17 perseverance and learning, the effect of beliefs about social intelligence should be greater for
18 people who are unsure about their social intelligence and are likely to experience networking as
19 challenging. For highly skilled people, fixed beliefs should matter less and may in fact reinforce
20 their confidence and promote engagement (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Thus, one's actual social
21 intelligence may moderate the negative effects of fixed beliefs about social intelligence.
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32 *Proposition 1c: Fixed beliefs about social intelligence have stronger effects on disengagement*
33 *from search for people with lower levels of social intelligence.*
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37 **Beliefs about Social Relations and Lay Theories of Maintenance**

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39 How people construe the malleability of social relations has implications for how they feel
40 about the utility and morality of efforts to maintain existing ties. Beliefs about social relations
41 refer to the ontological basis of connectivity. In the fixed view, social relations are constrained
42 by natural compatibility between people, that is, people are largely fixed in their match potential,
43 like jigsaw puzzle pieces that are meant to either fit or not. People can be brought together, but
44 relationships cannot be molded at will. Relationships should develop spontaneously and
45 organically between people who are naturally compatible, and only inauthentic relations can
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3 form between those who are not. Thus, people with fixed beliefs believe that deliberate efforts to
4 maintain ties are not only unnecessary, futile, and even threatening—a sign that the relationship
5 is perhaps not meant to be—but also inauthentic and manipulative (Melé, 2009; Vissa, 2012),
6 like romantics who believe that it is not true love if one must work hard at it, for true love
7 between people who are “meant to be” is effortless and forever in the fixed view of romance
8 (Knee et al., 2003). For these reasons, maintaining existing relationships is a less integral part of
9 networking for people with fixed beliefs. In contrast, for people with malleable beliefs,
10 relationships must be cultivated proactively. For them, relations are like muscles that can grow
11 and stretch and, unlike puzzle pieces, gradually wither without care. Compatibility still matters,
12 but to a comparatively lesser degree.

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29 *Proposition 2a: Holding a fixed belief about relations reduces engagement in maintenance by*
30 *increasing negative attitudes toward the utility and morality of maintenance efforts.*

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35 A notable implication of this proposition is that people with fixed beliefs about social
36 relations should be less likely to maintain networks with diverse contacts. Diversity—having ties
37 to people from different backgrounds as oneself—is often considered a hallmark of an effective
38 professional network (Burt, 1992). However, dissimilar contacts tend to be weak ties
39 characterized by low frequency of contact, emotional closeness, and durability, because people
40 are less likely to feel a strong sense of connection with those who are dissimilar (Rivera, 2012).
41 As a result, people with a fixed belief should be less likely to maintain ties with diverse contacts,
42 namely, those who appear not to be a natural fit from the get-go, or to cultivate them into
43 stronger ties, insofar as they believe people are either compatible or not and that relationships are
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3 best abandoned unless they form naturally and effortlessly. This may explain why people prefer
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5 to collaborate with coworkers they like rather than respect (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008) or why
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7 dissimilar couples are more likely in long-term than short-term relations (Eastwick & Hunt,
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9 2014).¹
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14 *Proposition 2b: Because of lower engagement in maintenance, people with fixed beliefs about*
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16 *relations develop less diverse networks.*
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19 Finally, the effect of beliefs about social relations may depend on how compatible people
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21 actually are, because whether a relationship can grow through effort or not is irrelevant if people
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23 can easily connect with each other without effort. One basis of compatibility is the breadth of
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25 shared identity (Mehra et al., 1998). Some people click easily with different people because they
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27 are multilingual, have diverse interests, or belong to a majority group (e.g., white men). The
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29 fixed belief—that people, like puzzle pieces, can maintain significant relations with only certain
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31 others—should matter less for such people who share more in common with others around them.
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33 Conversely, holding a malleable belief that relationships can be cultivated with effort is
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35 particularly important for those who are different, such as minority group members or those with
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37 unique identities, who face greater challenges in clicking with others (Ibarra, 1993).
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44 *Proposition 2c: Fixed beliefs about social relations have stronger effects on disengagement*
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46 *from maintenance for people with narrower breadth of shared identity.*
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48 **Beliefs about Social Capital and Lay Theories of Leverage**

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51 The third component of networks, social capital, can also be viewed as fixed or malleable,
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53 with consequences for how people feel about leveraging relationships. Social capital refers to the
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3 intangible value or resources that reside in relationships, such as trust, cooperation, information,
4 and ideas (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1990). With respect to social capital, the primary form of
5 engagement is leverage, which can occur at the level of both dyads (ego and alter) and triads
6 (ego and two alters).
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12 At the dyadic level, leverage involves direct *exchange* of resources between two people.
13 While exchange may take various forms, such as transactions, negotiations, or reciprocity, the
14 crucial issue with respect to fixed versus malleable beliefs is whether a particular exchange is
15 viewed as zero-sum or variable-sum. Zero-sum exchanges occur over distributive issues or
16 resources in fixed supply, such that a person's gain is the other's loss, whereas variable-sum
17 exchanges present integrative potential that creates benefits for both parties by "growing the
18 pie." Zero-sum exchanges are thus more conflictual, competitive, or even exploitative than
19 variable-sum exchanges, pitting exchange partners against each other (Molm et al., 2006).
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31 Whether an exchange is zero-sum or variable-sum is a matter of both objective facts and
32 subjective beliefs (Thompson & Hastie, 1990; Coleman, 2004). Certain types of social capital,
33 such as unique information or finite resources, are effectively zero-sum and in fixed supply,
34 losing value once shared with others. In contrast, trust, norms, and shared identity are examples
35 of resources that can increase in value as more people share them. Although many exchanges
36 entail both types of social capital, people with fixed beliefs about social capital are more likely
37 than those with malleable beliefs to focus on zero-sum aspects of exchange and assume a "fixed
38 pie" (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). In this view, leveraging relations is not only difficult,
39 conflictual, and perhaps futile, but also morally questionable, benefiting at the expense of others.
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People with fixed views therefore avoid asking for favors (Brooks et al., 2015) or sharing

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3 resources (Coleman, 2004), fearing that such requests may strain their relationships. In contrast,
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5 people with malleable beliefs are more likely to engage in exchange, believing that each act of
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7 cooperation or reciprocity will actually strengthen their ties, because they focus on variable-sum
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9 aspects of exchange.
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13 At the triadic level, countless studies have examined whether social capital is increased by
14
15 leveraging or *brokering* triadic closure versus structural holes (Stovel & Shaw, 2012). Closure
16
17 occurs when people are all connected to each other, closing the loop in which “a friend of a
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19 friend is a friend.” Closure increases social capital by promoting trust, cooperation, and
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21 coordination through dense connections (Coleman, 1990). In contrast, structural holes occur
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23 when alters are disconnected from each other, creating open triads. Structural holes create social
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25 capital by providing access to non-redundant resources or information (Burt, 1992).
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29 Although closure and structural holes often occur naturally, they can also be engineered by a
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31 broker playing the “union” strategy (*tertius iungens*; Obstfeld, 2005), such as referral or
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33 collaboration that closes the triad, or “disunion” (*tertius gaudens*; Burt, 1992) to keep alters
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35 apart. Whether and why brokers might play union or disunion varies from case to case depending
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37 on what type of social capital they seek in a particular situation, e.g., trust and cooperation vs.
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39 information. Studies suggest, however, that people also vary in their chronic orientation toward
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41 union versus disunion (Burt, 2012; Obstfeld, 2005), although what explains such individual
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43 differences remains debated (Kleinbaum et al., 2015; Stovel & Shaw, 2012).
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49 Our model suggests that people’s orientation to union or disunion may be driven in part by
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51 their beliefs about social capital. Union makes more sense if one believes that social capital
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53 grows in dense connections. By this account, people with malleable beliefs should focus on
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3 closing triads and leveraging the integrative potential of dense ties to create mutual trust and
4 identification, or simply join an already dense circle. In contrast, people with fixed beliefs about
5 social capital should not only feel that closing triads is unlikely to add value but also fear that it
6 can create disutility by redirecting the flow of resources away to the alters who can now bypass
7 the broker to reach each other. People with fixed beliefs may also feel morally indifferent about
8 playing union. For people with malleable beliefs, believing that two people might benefit from
9 meeting each other creates a certain social obligation to facilitate an introduction, for not helping
10 is thoughtless (Ferrazzi, 2005: 18-19). Such concerns are less urgent for those with fixed beliefs
11 who expect very little from connecting alters to each other. Thus, they may not feel morally
12 opposed to playing union, but they may not feel the moral obligation or urgency to do so, either.

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28 *Proposition 3a: Holding a fixed belief about social capital reduces engagement in leverage at*
29 *the dyadic level (exchange) and triadic level (union) by increasing negative attitudes toward*
30 *the utility and morality of leverage efforts.*

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35 A structural consequence of lower engagement in leverage is a less cohesive network. At the
36 dyadic level, this means weaker ties characterized by low frequency of contact, emotional
37 closeness, and durability. Beyond dyads, this means sparse networks with more open triads.

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43 *Proposition 3b: Because of lower engagement in leverage, people with fixed beliefs about*
44 *social capital develop less cohesive networks.*

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48 There are reasons to believe that these beliefs matter more in certain situations than others. At
49 the level of dyadic exchange, an important basis of whether social capital is perceived as zero-
50 sum or not is a person's social or demographic similarity to an alter. People view exchange in
51 more cooperative terms when they trust or identify with each other (Kollock, 1998). By

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3 promoting mutual trust and identification, similarity should mitigate the view that exchanging
4 will create conflict over resources in fixed supply.²
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8 At the triadic level, beliefs about social capital are moderated by similarity among alters. For
9 people with growth beliefs about social capital, similarity signifies trust and identification that
10 help relationships grow in value. In the fixed belief, however, similarity decreases social capital
11 because the idea that structural holes create social capital assumes that disconnected alters are
12 dissimilar from each other, thus providing access to different sources of information and
13 resources, compared to alters who are directly connected. This is less likely, the more similar the
14 alters are to each other. Whatever the basis of their similarity—race, skills, industry, or culture—
15 similar alters are likely to have similar (and thus redundant) information and resources, even if
16 they are not directly connected (Burt, 1992). In such cases, it may be more reasonable to let the
17 triad close, or drop one of the ties, than to expend the effort to maintain separate ties that are
18 functionally redundant. By this logic, people with fixed beliefs should pursue disunion and
19 maintain sparse networks only insofar as alters are sufficiently dissimilar. In contrast, those with
20 growth beliefs are likely to pursue union to build dense networks whether alters are similar or
21 dissimilar. In fact, they may be more motivated to close triads and help build trust precisely
22 when alters are dissimilar and unlikely to connect with each other on their own.
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44 *Proposition 3c: Fixed beliefs about social capital have stronger effects on disengagement*
45 *from leverage when alters are dissimilar (to each other or to the actor).*
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48 49 **Beyond the Primary Effects**

50 Do lay theories have joint effects? Because lay theories are domain-specific (Dweck, 1996),
51 how they interact with each other or affect engagement outside of each domain is beyond the
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3 theoretical scope of our model. Using the analogy of exercising, believing that cardiovascular
4 fitness is malleable might increase engagement in a particular domain (e.g., running), but it is
5 unclear how such a belief might affect engagement in other domains (e.g., weight training or
6 yoga). Likewise, it is unclear how construing social intelligence as fixed or malleable, for
7 instance, would affect the diversity or cohesiveness of networks, as one may search for ties that
8 increase or decrease diversity and cohesion. Our model therefore assumes that the effects of the
9 lay theories are additive and independent of each other; they do not interact.

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20 Nevertheless, beliefs about social intelligence, social relations, and social capital can become
21 *correlated*, such that people with fixed beliefs about social intelligence may come to see social
22 relations and social capital as relatively fixed also, creating self-reinforcing dynamics that can
23 amplify the extent to which networking contributes to disparate and stratified outcomes in life
24 and business. So long as the beliefs are uncorrelated, one conclusion is that people are simply
25 different; some are engaged in search, others in maintenance, but no one is better or worse at
26 networking altogether. If the beliefs can become correlated, however, the implication is that
27 certain people with malleable beliefs may become all-round networkers while others remain
28 networking couch potatoes, disengaged from not just one but multiple forms of networking.

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41 The basis of such correlations may be external, such as surrounding cultures. For instance,
42 fixed beliefs may be more prevalent in the West. Dweck and Leggett (1988) suggest that the
43 English language “entifies” people and objects to a greater degree than the Chinese language.
44 Similarly, fixed beliefs may be more prevalent in bureaucratic organizations that constrain
45 opportunities to network outside of formal protocol or hierarchies (Brass et al., 2004).

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53 Beliefs may become correlated endogenously from personal experiences also (Wood &
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3 Bandura 1989) as beliefs that people develop in one domain spill over to other domains. For
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5 instance, people with fixed beliefs about social intelligence may gradually develop fixed beliefs
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7 about social relations because people who construe social intelligence as fixed may in turn focus
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9 more on natural compatibility rather than individual effort as the basis of relationships. Similarly,
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11 people may be more likely to hold fixed or zero-sum views of social capital if they view
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13 relationships in fixed terms, because the binary view that people are either compatible or not
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15 leaves less room for the idea that they can somehow create additional value by engineering their
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17 relations. Thus, a fixed belief can lead to disengagement in one domain, depriving people of
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19 opportunities to learn, grow, and develop skills that reinforce malleable beliefs in other domains.
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25 Finally, correlated beliefs may stem from individual dispositions. For instance, people with a
26
27 heightened sense of power and control are more likely to network in conditions of uncertainty
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29 (Smith et al., 2012; Srivastava, 2015). One possibility is that power reduces the perception of
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31 networking as “dirty” because people who feel powerful are less concerned about how others
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33 feel (Casciaro et al. 2014). Another possibility is that feeling powerful reinforces beliefs about
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35 the malleability of the social world, including beliefs that people, relations, and resources can be
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37 changed. This points to a more positive view of how power might promote networking.
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42 **DISCUSSION**

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44 Given the growing recognition that individual psychology plays an important role in the
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46 development of professional networks, the lack of attention to lay perspectives—what people
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48 actually believe or feel about networking—is surprising. To our knowledge, our model is the first
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50 to apply the idea of lay theories to instrumental networking. By specifying how beliefs about
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52 different components of networks can reduce engagement in different forms of networking, our
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3 model presents a novel framework for understanding the knowing-doing gap in networking—
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5 why people disengage from networking for reasons other than lack of skills, disposition,
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7 opportunities, or resources.
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10 11 **Implications for Networking: Theory and Practice**

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14 Our focus on beliefs and attitudes as domain-specific constructs departs in several ways from
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16 much of the literature on network dynamics that has focused on situation-specific decisions,
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18 domain-general dispositions, or collectively held norms and cultures. First, it highlights the idea
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20 of proactive and sustained engagement as something distinct from episodic decisions based on
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22 rational decisions or general predispositions based on traits (Grant & Ashford, 2008). In doing
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24 so, our approach underscores the relevance of motivational psychology for network dynamics.
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26 While various strains of psychology, from personality and perception to emotions, have informed
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28 our understanding of networking, motivation has been given a rather short shrift until quite
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30 recently (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Parker et al., 2015), seen only as an epiphenomenon of rational
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32 choice or certain traits. This is a notable gap, given the recurring call to better theorize the role of
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34 agency in networks (Burt et al., 2013), including an “actor’s motivation... to shape relations”
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36 (Ahuja et al., 2012: 437). Empirical research has long treated agency in the relatively static terms
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38 of stable traits and demographics or at the surface level of observable actions without examining
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40 motivation directly. We speak to this issue by examining agency at the deeper level of lay
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42 theories that constrain willful and proactive action.
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50 Second, by considering beliefs about different components of networks, our model specifies
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52 unique effects for distinct forms of networking and helps diagnose particular issues in one’s
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54 networks, such as lack of size or diversity. Such analyses are more difficult using domain-
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3 general constructs, including traits like extraversion, that do not distinguish between different
4 contexts or forms of engagement (Mischel & Shoda, 1995).
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8 Third, our model builds on the idea that lay theories can be readily taught and learned
9 because—much like academic theories—lay theories are dynamic (Dweck, 2000). Although lay
10 theories organize our thoughts and actions from day to day in coherent ways, a new belief can
11 “suddenly” change the way we think. For instance, people report stronger growth or fixed beliefs
12 after reading a short article supporting a particular view (Chiu et al., 1997b). This is critical
13 insofar as traits are often difficult to change, as are many deeply held attitudes. In contrast,
14 changing people’s beliefs has the potential to shape their behaviors at a deeper level because
15 many attitudes and behaviors ensue directly from implicit beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).
16 Moreover, framing networking as a problem of beliefs rather than traits, skills or opportunities
17 may also inspire professionals to change the way they approach networking, because
18 networking—from the perspective of motivational psychology—is as much about managing
19 oneself as it is about managing others. For anyone wary of the idea of using people conjured by
20 the popular image of networking, focusing internally on beliefs may help construe networking in
21 more positive terms of personal growth rather than dependency or exploitation.
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41 Beyond the direct implications of our model, the idea of lay theory raises broader questions
42 for future research. For instance, where do beliefs about networks come from? Because such
43 questions remain unsettled in the literature at large (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Knee et al., 2003),
44 examining how beliefs are shaped by personal experiences in given contexts or cultures may
45 shed valuable light on why some people develop fixed beliefs about networks in the first place.
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53 It also remains to be seen how lay theories of networking affect social perception. We have
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3 largely focused on self-perceptions, but lay theories may also affect how people view others who
4 network. For instance, many women who engage in networking or brokering are viewed as
5 competent but cold, relative to male networkers (Brands & Kilduff, 2013; Ely et al., 2011).
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10 People with fixed beliefs about social intelligence, who focus on stable traits such as gender or
11 feminine attributes rather than effort and skills, may be particularly prone to hold such biases. If
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13 so, understanding lay theories may help promote more positive cultures of networking within
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15 organizations and beyond for both men and women.
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21 **Implications beyond Networking**

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24 While we have discussed networking in relatively abstract terms, our model is applicable to a
25 variety of domains in which networking plays a crucial role, from job search (Wanberg et al.,
26 2000) and mentorship (Higgins & Kram, 2001) to teamwork (Joshi, 2006) and innovation
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28 (Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). In addition, our model has implications for other outcomes
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30 besides how much one networks or what types of networks people build. Consider authentic
31 leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). An interesting question is whether leaders feel more
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33 authentic as they network if they believe that they can change or when they believe in stable
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35 traits. The question of authenticity is also relevant to emotional labor and the stress it creates in
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37 many jobs (Hochschild, 1983). Because emotion regulation is a major component of social
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39 intelligence (Cote & Miners, 2006), understanding the effects of beliefs about social intelligence
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41 may help identify effective coping strategies. More generally, lay theories of networking may
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43 have implications for job satisfaction. While the relationship between networking and
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45 satisfaction at work is complex (Brass et al., 2004), having a sense of control is a major
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47 determinant of satisfaction (Mitchell et al., 1975). Believing that networks are malleable may be
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3 one source of satisfaction. Finally, lay theories of networking may be relevant for workplace
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5 conflict. Studies show that negative ties marked by conflict are more consequential than positive
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7 ties (Labianca et al., 1998). That may be the case in particular for people with fixed beliefs,
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9 whether they believe that their ability to manage conflict is limited, they are fundamentally
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11 incompatible with certain others, or that they are in direct competition over certain resources.
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15 16 **CONCLUSION**

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18 A critical insight from motivational psychology is that simply knowing what one should do—
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20 whether saving more, eating better, or exercising—is often not enough to sustain engagement
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22 toward those goals; people have to also believe that their efforts are both legitimate and effective.
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24 So it is, we contend, with networking. While recognizing the importance of “who you know,”
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26 people also feel conflicted about whether networking will actually pay off or feel right. We hope
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28 that our model provides a useful lens for understanding the deeper roots of such tension.
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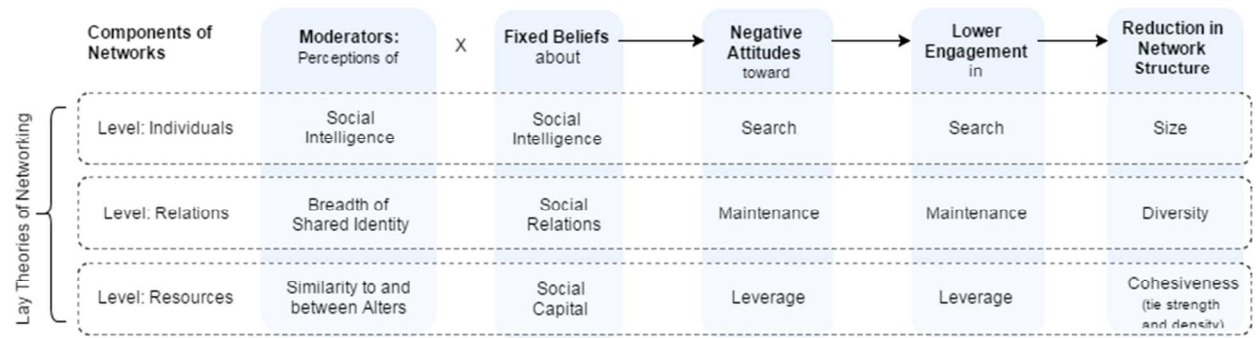
TABLE 1

A Summary of Propositions

Beliefs about		Social intelligence (SI)	Social relations (SRs)	Social capital (SC)
Belief that SI/SR/SC is	Fixed	SI is fixed and innate, based on stable traits.	SRs are like jigsaw puzzles, based on natural compatibility.	SC is a fixed (zero- sum) resource.
	Malleable	SI consists of learned skills and strategies.	SRs, like muscles, can be grown.	SC is malleable (variable-sum).
Consequences of fixed beliefs for	Attitudes toward the utility of networking	Networking to build new ties is futile and threatening.	Networking to maintain relations is futile and threatening.	Networking to leverage resources is futile and threatening.
	Attitudes toward the morality of networking	Networking to build new ties is unfair.	Networking to maintain relations is insincere.	Networking to leverage resources is exploitative.
	Engagement in networking	Reduces engagement in search for new ties (P1a).	Reduces engagement in maintenance of existing ties (P2a).	Reduces engagement in leverage (P3a).
	Network structure	Smaller (P1b).	Less diverse (P2b).	Less cohesive (P3b).
Moderators	Fixed beliefs matter more for people with	Low social intelligence (P1c).	Low degrees of shared identity (P2c).	Alters who are dissimilar to each other or ego (P3c).

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FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model



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FOOTNOTES

¹ Lower engagement in maintenance does not imply building weaker or stronger ties. Just as different people seek romance in different ways, people with a fixed belief can be as likely as those with a malleable belief to seek strong ties (and hold weak ties in the process of it), but in different ways—by looking for instant connection versus potential for growth through effort.

² While the idea of similarity is closely related to what we termed “breadth of shared identity” in the previous section, we are concerned here with to the extent of similarity between particular individuals engaged in exchange, whereas shared identity refers to the degree of relatedness to generalized others (within a particular group). This distinction is important because a person may be very similar to another person but not share much in common with everyone else. Conversely, a person may not be very similar to anyone in particular but still share something in common with a broad set of people. It is similarity to a particular person that matters for exchange, but broadly shared identities that matter to beliefs about maintaining relationships.