

Choosing the unimaginable: Social psychological factors in seeking transformative experiences

Marta Kryven

MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Laura Niemi

University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Laurie Paul

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Josh Tenenbaum

MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Abstract

How do people make transformative decisions (the outcomes of which are hard to imagine, and which might change one's self in lasting ways)? We investigate social psychological factors that contribute to making transformative decisions in contrast to ordinary decisions (with easily imaginable outcomes). We show that transformative decisions are uniquely predicted by a desire for self-improvement and forming new social bonds. However, contrary to our expectations, epistemic curiosity did not play a role in making transformative decisions. In contrast, ordinary decisions are uniquely predicted by the preferences of the community, and younger age. We identify important differences that point to separate cognitive mechanisms used to evaluate transformative decisions.