

Study Name: The development of evidence assimilation in a motivated reasoning context

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Exploratory or Confirmatory: Exploratory

Overview:

Prior research suggests that adults who are motivated to believe a proposition P do not optimally assimilate evidence contradicting P appropriately (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Specifically, evidence taken to confirm someone's beliefs are more readily accepted than evidence that disconfirm their beliefs; and disconfirming evidence is more critically evaluated than confirming evidence. However, in some cases the evidence uniformly supports one belief over another. Even in these cases, researchers have reported that interventions can backfire – people still grow stronger in their original belief in the face of this strong contradictory evidence.

In this study, we are examining the development of evidence assimilation. Specifically, we are investigating how children's beliefs are affected by different distributions of evidence when they are inclined to believe one proposition over another because it will allow them to get a prize.

Our hypothesis is that even when the bulk of the evidence supports believing P over Q, the fact that one piece of evidence supports Q over P combined with their desire for Q to be true will be enough for children to think that Q is in fact true. One issue with our design is kids might have a really hard time remembering everything. So, we will also run another study, regardless of the outcome of this one, that uses tabs to help kids keep track of where the evidence points