

Study Name: The influence of motivation on evidence assimilation in a repeated judgement task – Study 2.

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Exploratory or Confirmatory: Confirmatory

Overview:

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 (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). In this study, we are examining evidence assimilation in adults in a motivated reasoning context. Specifically, we are investigating how people's beliefs are affected by different distributions of evidence when they are motivated to believe one proposition over another because it will allow them to get more points on a task. People will be motivated to score higher in this task because they will be told that higher scores indicate a participant has "more attentional control."

This study is a follow-up to a prior study with 350 adults which suggested three main findings: First, even when motivated to believe the contrary, adults generally make decisions based on the evidence presented for a proposition. Second, when the evidence does not clearly support one proposition over another, adults tend to make the decision that maximizes the points they would win. Third, when equal amounts of evidence were presented for both propositions and adults reported that they *remembered* three or more pieces of evidence being presented, they chose the proposition that led to a larger reward 75% of the time.

The mechanisms behind these findings may or may not be because participants are making rational decisions. Our hope is that by adding a certainty question and a no-motivation condition – where participants are not provided any motivation to choose among two propositions – we will be better able to understand the mechanisms underlying the results from Study 1.

Our hypothesis is that participants will recognize the evidence equally supports two inconsistent propositions but choose the proposition that maximizes the points they'll win because that is the rational decision. To measure this, we will add a question asking how certain people are that the proposition they chose was the correct response. We hope to find that people will be uncertain about their choices when they are given equal evidence for both propositions.

References:

Lord, C. G., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1979). Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(11), 2098.