

Study Name: The influence of motivation on evidence assimilation in a repeated judgement task – Study 3.

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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 a "more attentional control."

This study is a follow-up to an initial study with 100 children which suggested two main findings: First, even when motivated to believe the contrary, children are remarkably sensitive to the evidence for a proposition at question. Second, when the evidence does not clearly support one proposition over another, children tend to make the decision that maximizes the prize they would win. The mechanisms behind these findings may or may not be similar in adults. However, our hope is that by studying adult participants we will better understand the mechanisms underlying these effects.

One 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* it will maximize the points they win. A second possibility is that when the evidence does not clearly support one proposition over another, participants *remember* that the evidence more strongly supports the proposition that maximizes points earned. Obviously, these are two very different mechanisms and entail different claims about the nature of how adults make decisions in a motivated reasoning context.

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.