~~Mis~~Information about Past Beliefs Influences Current Beliefs

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Memory biased according to current self

People may not have direct access to memory representations (Dunlosky & Thiede, 2013)

Memory of past aspects of self biased towards current aspects of self

- Attitude about bussing to achieve integration (Goethals & Reckman, 1973)

- Political attitudes (Markus, 1986)

- Student anxiety surrounding exams (Safer, Levine, & Drapalski, 2002)

- Beliefs about spanking effectiveness (Wolfe & Williams, 2018)

Contextual influences on attitudes

Attitudes are dependent on context (Schwarz, 2007)

- not stable, trait-like attributes

- salient information

Implicit Association Test

- results influenced by social/environmental context (Payne, Vulitech, & Lundberg, 2017)

Beliefs may function in a similar way

- reminders of past beliefs following belief change influenced current beliefs (Wolfe et al., 2014)

Current research

Investigates the influence that salient information has on belief construction

- Will people change their beliefs on a contentious topic like gun control effectiveness?

- Do we accurately remember what we used to believe?

- Will providing information about one's past beliefs influence their current beliefs?

Methods - Subjects

Participants: Undergraduate students (N = 324)

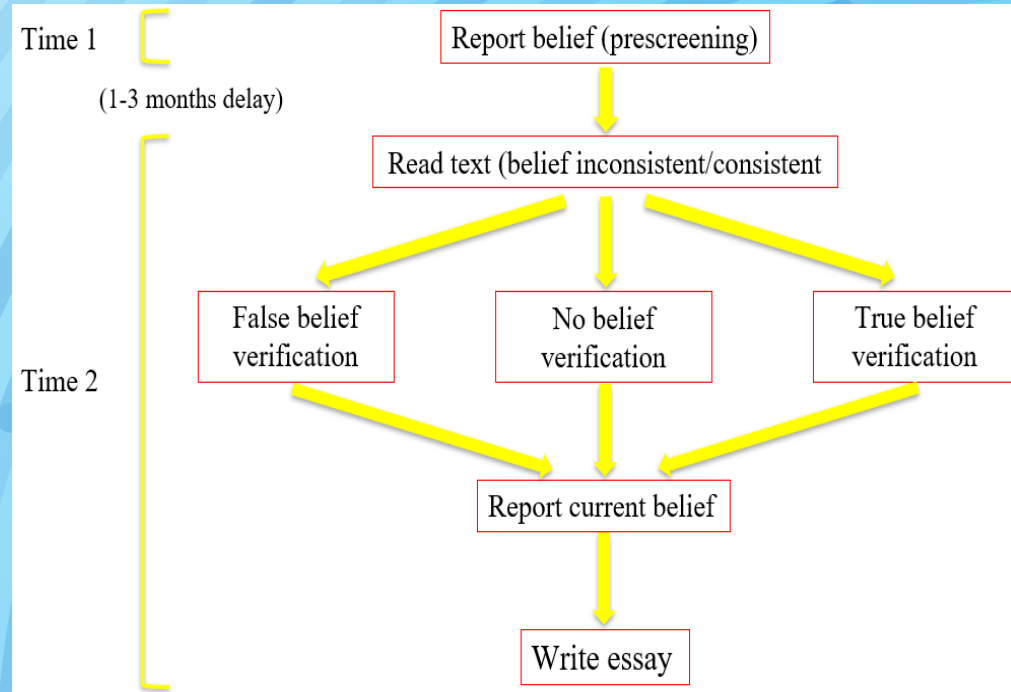Initial beliefs: On-line prescreening beginning of semester

"To what extent do you believe that increased gun control will reduce gun violence in the United States? Gun control is defined as strengthening laws or policies that regulate the manufacture, sale, transfer, possession, modification, or use of firearms by civilians." (9-point scale)

- believers and disbelievers invited to participate

Methods

Subject gun control beliefs

	Believer	Disbeliever
Pro text	Belief consistent	Belief Inconsistent
Con text	Belief inconsistent	Belief consistent

Text position

Time 1

(1-3 months delay)

Time 2

Report belief (prescreening)

Read text (belief inconsistent/consistent

False belief verification

No belief verification

True belief verification

Report current belief

Write essay

Methods - Procedure

1. Report beliefs in pre-screen

      (1-3 month gap)

2. Read belief consistent or inconsistent text

3. Initial belief verification task

   - true, false, or no gun control belief verification

4. Post-reading beliefs (same question as prescreening)

5. Argumentative essay

Manipulation (belief verification task) was effective

82% verified false beliefs to be true

91% verified true beliefs to be true

Belief change following belief inconsistent text
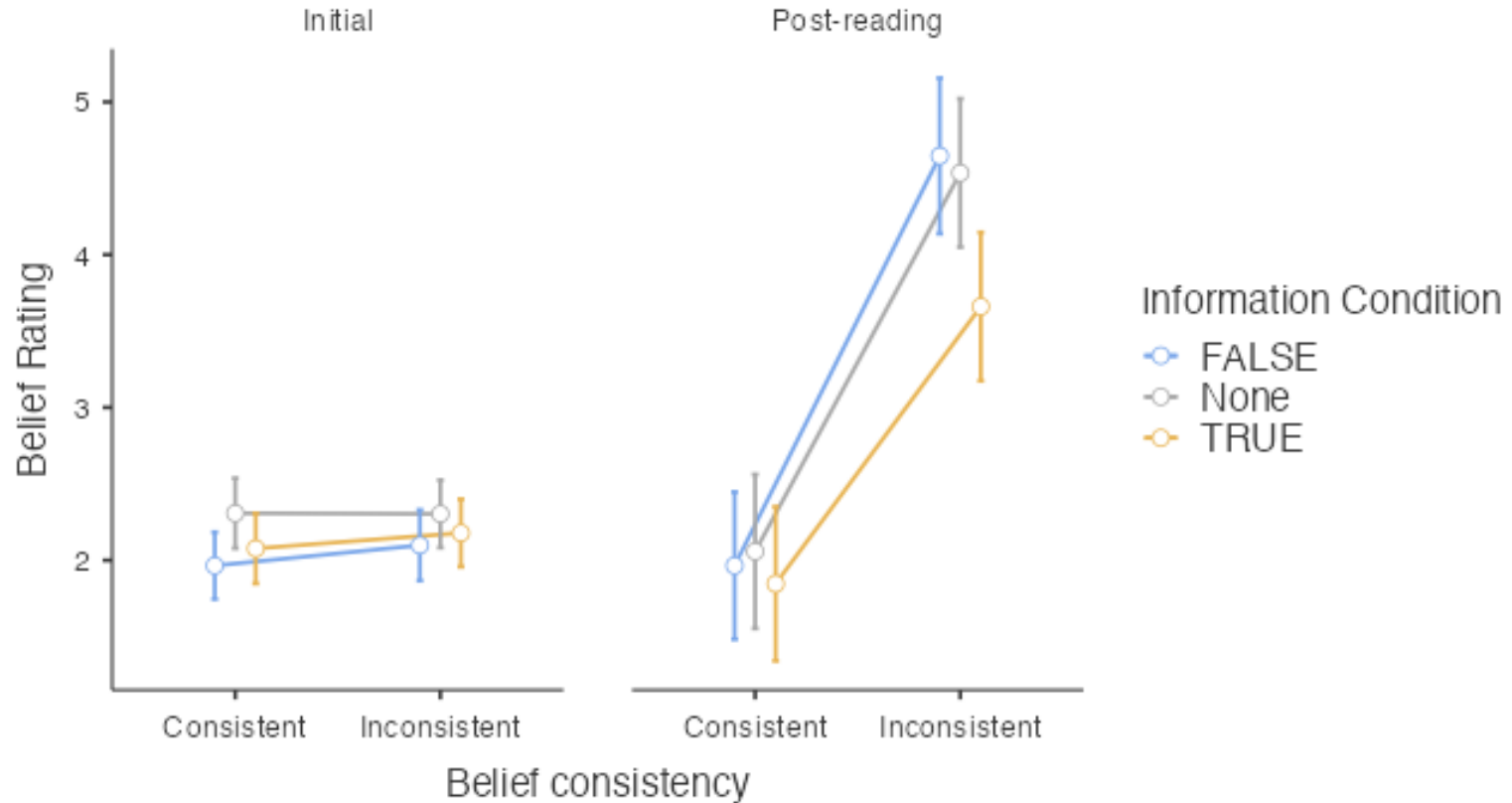
Conclusions

Reading a belief inconsistent text leads to more moderate beliefs – even on a contentious topic like gun control effectiveness

Misinformation about past beliefs did not affect belief change, however it was also unnoticed

Verifying true information about past beliefs led to less belief change than other information conditions

Belief recollection is poor

- 82% verified false beliefs to be true

Argumentative essay ratings will serve as a convergent measure for beliefs

- Analyses ongoing

Thank You!

The Student Summer Scholars Program was a great experience!

Possible theoretical explanations

Memory error:

Recollections generated using currently available mental representation.

Current beliefs bias ability to accurately recollect previous belief

(Levine & Safer, 2002; Ross, 1989; Schacter, 1999)

Desire for cognitive consistency:

Students desire to appear internally consistent across time (Aronson, 1969; Gawronski & Strack, 2012).

Belief change creates dissonance (eg. Festinger, 1957).

Dissonance reduced by recollecting previous belief as similar to current belief.

Methods – Design and Materials

Subject gun control beliefs

	Believer	Disbeliever
Pro text	Belief consistent	Belief Inconsistent
Con text	Belief inconsistent	Belief consistent

Text position

Materials:

"Pro text" – Argues gun control is effective. (2,252 words)

"Con text" - Argues gun control is not effective. (2,223 words)

Time 1

Report belief (prescreening)

(1-3 months delay)

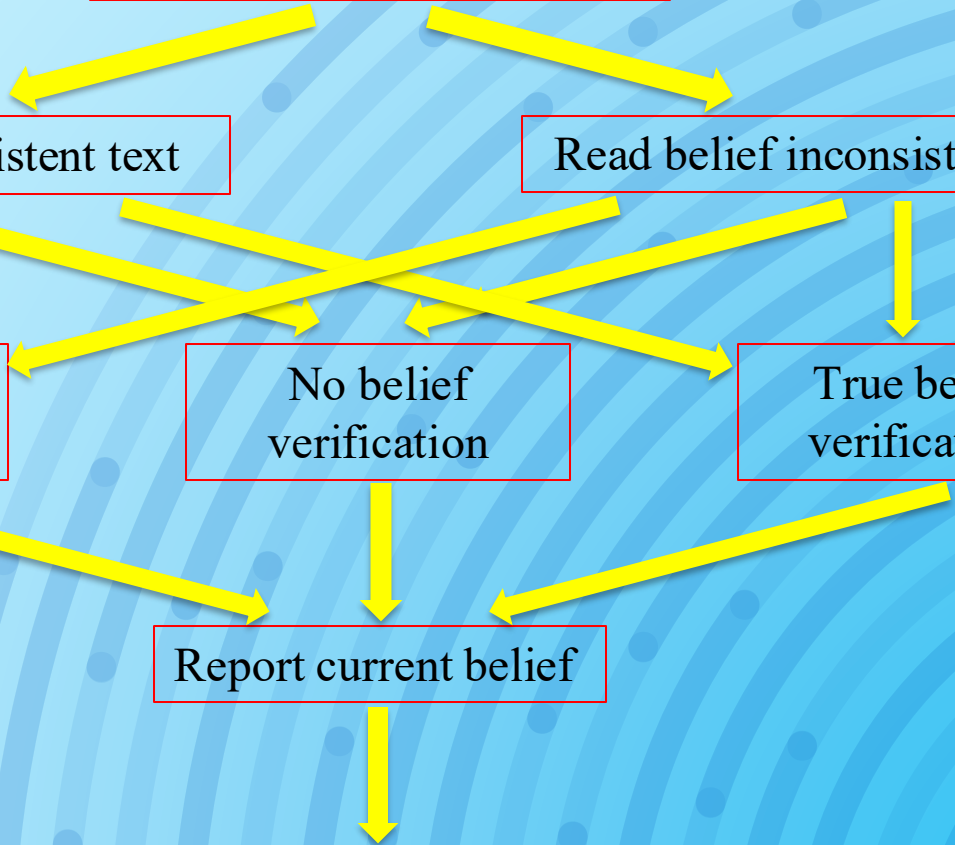Read belief consistent text

Read belief inconsistent text

Time 2

False belief verification

No belief verification

True belief verification

Report current belief

Write essay

Time 1 ⌐ (1-3 months delay)

Report belief (prescreening)

↓

Read text (belief inconsistent/consistent
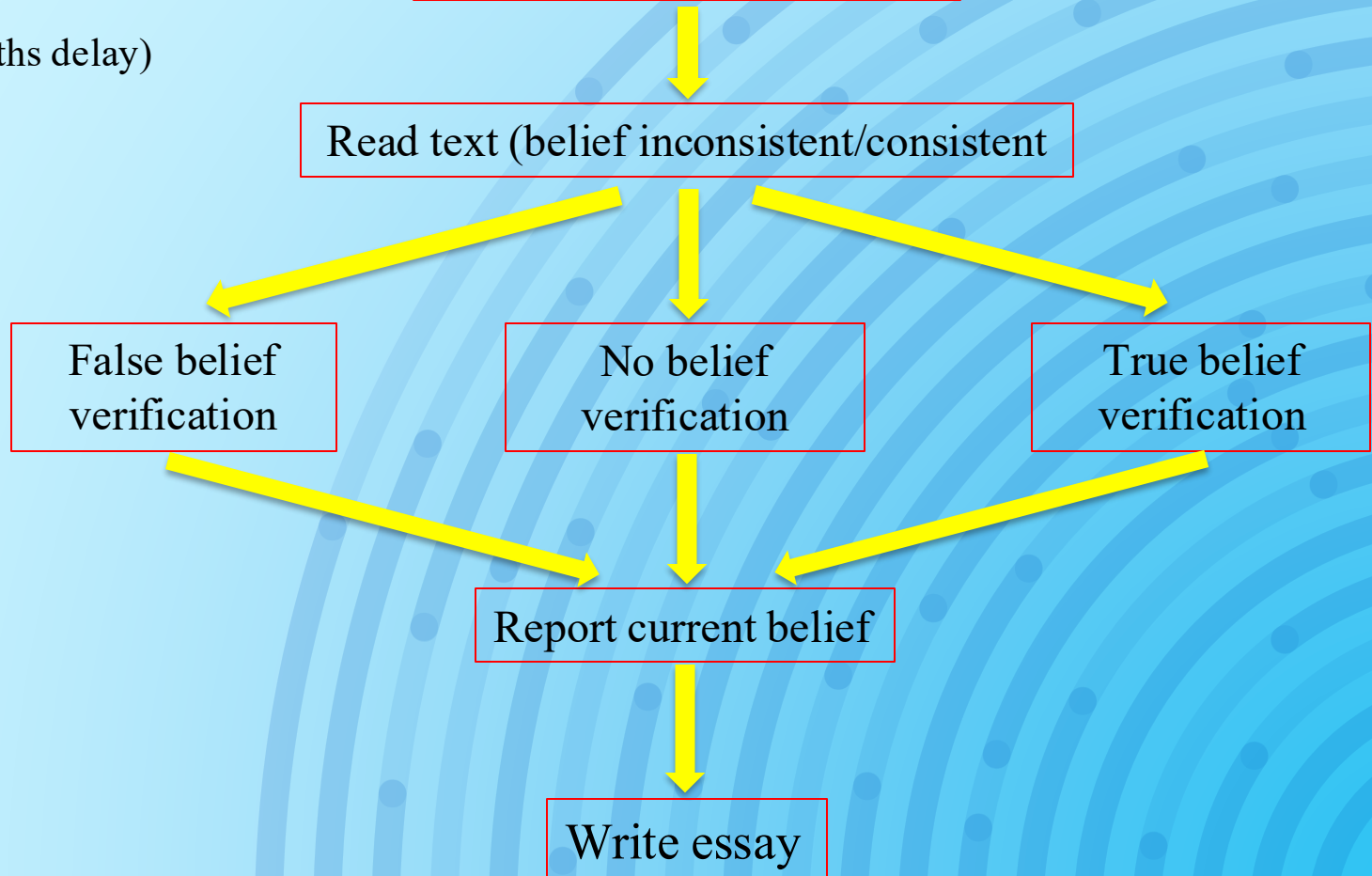
False belief verification   No belief verification   True belief verification

Time 2

Report current belief

↓

Write essay

Results

Estimated Marginal Means - Belief consistency ＊ Information Condition ＊ Belief Recollection

Belief Recollection	Information Condition	Belief consistency	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Time 1 (Baseline)	FALSE	Consistent	1.96	0.111	1.75	2.18
		Inconsistent	2.10	0.118	1.87	2.33
	None	Consistent	2.31	0.117	2.08	2.54
		Inconsistent	2.30	0.112	2.08	2.52
	TRUE	Consistent	2.08	0.117	1.85	2.31
		Inconsistent	2.18	0.112	1.96	2.40
Time 2	FALSE	Consistent	1.96	0.245	1.48	2.45
		Inconsistent	4.65	0.259	4.14	5.16
	None	Consistent	2.06	0.256	1.55	2.56
		Inconsistent	4.54	0.247	4.05	5.02
	TRUE	Consistent	1.85	0.256	1.34	2.35
		Inconsistent	3.66	0.247	3.17	4.15

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