

Prestige bias in cultural evolutionary dynamics

Saar Egozi^{1,3} and Yoav Ram^{2,3,†}

¹School of Computer Science, Reichman University, Herzliya, Israel

³School of Zoology, Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

³Sagol School of Neuroscience, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

[†]Corresponding author: yoav@yoavram.com

March 25, 2023

Abstract

If the traits of more successful individuals are more likely to be adopted, the resulting cultural transmission is described as being success-biased. Prestige may be used as a proxy for success. Here, we model prestige bias as a combination of indirect success bias and influence bias, the latter meaning that the choice of a role-model depends on the number of individuals that have already copied that role-model. The effect of prestige on cultural evolutionary dynamics is analyzed using mathematical analysis and stochastic simulations. Analytic approximations to the stochastic role-model choice process facilitate the mathematical analysis and reduce the computational complexity of simulations. Approximations are given to the fixation probability and the fixation time of an invading cultural trait in different environments. We show that indirect success bias effectively plays the role of natural selection, whereas influence bias effectively plays the role of genetic drift. Influence bias, which may be strong in communities where social media are prevalent, also accelerates the evolutionary dynamics, as can be expected in a rich-get-richer process.

Introduction

22 Cultural transmission of attitudes, preferences, beliefs, norms, and behaviors may combine vertical
transmission, in which parents transmit to their offspring; oblique transmission, in which adults
24 (teachers, leaders, and even strangers) transmit to unrelated offspring; and horizontal transmission, in
which individuals from the same age cohort transmit to one another [4]. It has been demonstrated that
26 non-vertical cultural transmission can maintain maladaptive traits, which can be beneficial in changing
environments [21, 55].

28 Transmission biases may cause a cultural trait to have a higher rate of transmission than its frequency in
the population. *Success bias* occurs when individuals prefer to copy from role models that demonstrate
30 success in some activity, such as fishing, growing yams, using medicinal plants [24], or hunting [54],
and it can increase the probability of learning a trait that is present in those successful individuals [53].
32 Indeed, in a tournament between learning strategies [7], most winning strategies included a mixture
of success-biased social learning and individual learning, implying that success-biased learning is a
34 good strategy, but that by itself it is not enough to best other strategies, even when success is measured
accurately.

36 Boyd and Richerson [5, Ch. 5] suggested that the assessment of success can be divided to three
categories: *direct bias*, *indirect bias* and *frequency-dependent bias*. Direct bias occurs when one
38 phenotype is more attractive than other phenotypes, and is evaluated by *directly* testing the trait. For
example, an individual observing a ping-pong match can try the observed paddle grips to determine
40 which grip is better. Frequency-dependent bias occurs when the probability of copying a phenotype
is higher or lower than the frequency of the phenotype among demonstrators. For example, suppose
42 the common paddle grip is used by 60% of the demonstrators; if the this grip is adopted by 80% of
copiers, then transmission is under positive frequency bias, also called *conformity*; if it is adopted
44 by 40% of copiers, then transmission is under negative frequency bias, or *anti-conformity* [15]. The
effects of conformity and anti-conformity on cultural evolution have been studied with both models
46 [36, 37, 52] and experiments [3]. Indirect bias occurs when an individual uses one phenotype to
determine the attractiveness of another phenotype. For example, an observer may copy the paddle
48 grip of the ping-pong player who scored more points in the match, thus indirectly evaluating the grip
by the points scored. However, this may cause mismatches between the copied trait and the rest of
50 the cultural or genetic repertoire of the individual [51]. Furthermore, Boyd and Richerson [5, Ch. 8]
suggest that maladaptive traits may spread widely in a population if indirect bias is strong enough,
52 e.g., by a runaway process caused by a cultural equivalent of sexual selection [8]. Indeed, helping
behaviors can evolve due to horizontal transmission bias even without any benefit to the recipient, or
54 when the benefit is much larger than the cost [35].

Heinrich and Broesch [24] studied such indirect success biases, which they call cross-domain success
56 bias or *prestige bias* (e.g., great fishermen may be chosen as role-models for growing yams). They
suggested that such biases, over generations, can lead to cultural adaptations, and that although prestige
58 can lead to maladaptive traits spreading in the population, it can also accelerate the spread of adaptive

traits [5, Ch. 8]. Prestige bias may be more common in humans than success bias [6], and prestige is often mentioned in the cultural evolution literature, although there are few models of it.

A broader definition of prestige is the “widespread respect and admiration felt for someone or something on the basis of a perception of their achievements or quality” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Indeed, Chudek et al. [31] have defined prestige bias as “a tendency to learn from individuals to whom others have preferentially attended, learned or deferred”, and demonstrated its occurrence in 3-4 year old children. Henrich and Gil-White [26] gave a similar definition of prestige as “freely conferred deference”, in contrast to *dominance*, and provided examples from the anthropological literature.

To distinguish this form of indirect bias from other definitions of prestige, we call it *influence bias*. This is an important distinction, as influence is a context-dependent bias, rather than a content-dependent bias: it does not depend on the phenotype itself but rather on the number of copiers that have already copied each role-model, which may be easier and more accurate to estimate than success. Influence bias also differs from conformity, which depend on the frequency of a trait in the population or in a sample of role-models, rather than the social dynamics of copying.

In contemporary human society, social media make it especially easy to estimate the social and cultural influence individuals have over others, which can have an effect on decision making. Online social networks such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* are known to affect the influence of individuals [39, 40, 41], and specific marketing practices have been invented to capitalize on this effect [38].

In the following, we develop a stochastic model of cultural transmission with prestige bias that combines both cross-domain indirect success bias and influence bias. We develop analytic approximations for this model and analyze its dynamics. We also find approximations for the probability and time to fixation of a ‘successful’ phenotype (i.e., that is subject to success bias). Comparing these approximations to Kimura’s approximations for the fixation of a favorable allele [19, 45], we demonstrate that success and influence bias play the role of natural selection and genetic drift, respectively.

Models

We begin with a continuous trait model with indirect bias suggested by Boyd and Richerson [5], propose an extension with influence bias, and then develop a model with a dichotomous trait. We implement our stochastic models and approximations, perform statistical analyses, and produce figures using Python [42] with NumPy [43] and Matplotlib [44]. Source code is available at <https://github.com/yoavram-lab/PrestigeBias>.

Continuous trait

We follow the Boyd and Richerson model [5], assuming only oblique transmission of the trait and omitting the indirect trait in order to reduce model complexity. Consider a population of N individuals, described by a single trait that takes continuous values. Each generation, N naive individuals, or copiers, choose a single individual from the entire previous generation, or role-models, from which they will copy their trait. This is different than the usual models studied by Feldman et al [37, 57] or

Boyd & Richerson [5], where the population is infinite and each copier samples n role-models, and
 96 copies the trait from them. Similar to a Wright-Fisher model, generations are non-overlapping, and
 the entire population is replaced in each generation. The population at time t can be described by
 98 $\mathbf{A}(t) = (A_1(t), \dots, A_N(t))$ where $A_i(t)$ is trait value of individual i at time t , and the initial population
 is drawn from a standard normal distribution, $\mathbf{A}(0) \sim N(0, 1)$. Cultural transmission is modeled by
 100 a function F such that

$$A_i(t+1) = F_i(\mathbf{A}(t)) . \quad (1)$$

102 **Success bias.** Boyd and Richerson [5, Ch. 8, p. 247-249] describe a transmission algorithm by defining
 F , a weighted average of the traits of all role-models, as

$$104 \quad F_i(\mathbf{A}) = \sum_{j=1}^N G_{i,j} \cdot A_{i,j} , \quad (2)$$

where $G_{i,j}$ is the success bias of role-model j in the eyes of copier i ,

$$106 \quad G_{i,j} = \frac{\beta(A_{i,j})}{\sum_{k=1}^N \beta(A_{i,k})} , \quad (3)$$

$A_{i,j}$ is the absolute trait value that copier i estimates for role-model j with some error $e_i \sim$
 108 $N(0, \eta^2)$,

$$A_{i,j} = A_j + e_i, \quad (4)$$

110 and $\beta(\cdot)$ is the bias function that quantifies the success bias of a role-model [5, eq. 5.11],

$$\beta(A_{i,j}) = b \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{(A_{i,j} - \hat{A})^2}{2J}\right) , \quad (5)$$

112 with \hat{A} as the arbitrary optimal trait value, and J and b as parameters that control the bias strength.
 Therefore, $G_{i,j}$ is a relative success score that copier i assigns to role-model j .

114 Boyd and Richerson [5] note that the deterministic blended transmission algorithm they use has
 alternatives. We can develop a similar stochastic model with transmission from a single random
 116 role-model where instead of eq. (2), we define the transmission function F as a random variable with
 its distribution given by

$$118 \quad \Pr(F_i(\mathbf{A}) = A_j) = G_{i,j} ; \quad (6)$$

here $G_{i,j}$ is the probability that copier i chooses to copy the trait of role-model j .

120 **Influence bias.** Here we introduce a new element to the model by assuming that in each generation,
 copiers choose their role-models one by one. Denote by $K_{i,j}$ the number of copiers that choose role-
 122 model j after copier i chose a role-model. Thus, i out of N copiers had already chosen a role-model,
 $\sum_{j=1}^N K_{i,j} = i$, and there are $N - i$ copiers that have yet to choose a role-model. The stochastic process
 124 of role-model choice,

$$\{\mathbf{K}_i = (K_{i,1}, \dots, K_{i,N})\}_{i=1}^N , \quad (7)$$

126 is described by the recurrence equation

$$K_{i,j} = K_{i-1,j} + S_{i,j}, \quad i, j = 1, 2, \dots, N, \quad (8)$$

128 where $S_{i,j} = 1$ if the i -th copier chose role-model j and 0 otherwise, and the initial state is $K_{0,j} = 0$.

130 Following eq. (6), the probability that the i -th copier chose role-model j is given by the prestige of role-model j in the eyes of copier i ,

$$132 \quad Pr(S_{i,j} = 1 \mid S_{1,j}, S_{2,j}, \dots, S_{i-1,j}) = G_{i,j}. \quad (9)$$

The prestige $G_{i,j}$ of role-model j in the eyes of copier i is determined by success—the estimated biased trait value $\beta(A_{i,j})$ —and influence—the number of copiers that chose role-model j before copier i , $K_{i-1,j}$, replacing eq. (3) with

$$136 \quad G_{i,j} = \frac{\alpha_{ij} \cdot \beta(A_{i,j}) + (1 - \alpha_{ij}) \cdot K_{i-1,j}}{W_i}. \quad (10)$$

Here, the bias weight α_{ij} determines the relative weighting of success and influence bias. It is a characteristic of the interaction of role-model j with copier i that determines the relative significance of direct success vs. influence in the role-model's overall prestige in the eyes of the copier.

140 Different individuals may evaluate the importance of success and influence differently. Additionally, we assume each role-model displays its influence and success individually. For example, individuals with more followers but lacking skill may emphasize the number of their followers rather than their skill.

144 The trait of role-model j estimated by copier i , $A_{i,j}$, remains as in eq. (4), and W_i is a normalizing factor that sums the numerator over all role-models ($1 \leq j \leq N$) to ensure $\sum_{j=1}^N G_{i,j} = 1$.

146 **Dichotomous trait**

We introduce a simplified version where the trait has only two phenotypes: an optimal phenotype \hat{A} and a sub-optimal phenotype A . All role-models with the same phenotype will contribute to the probability that that phenotype is transmitted, and thus influence is determined by the number of copiers that have already chosen a role-model with either phenotype. In addition, for simplicity and for easier mathematical analysis, we assume α is homogeneous, which entails exchangeability between role-models. Therefore, the probability that the i -th copier copies phenotype A is

$$G_{i,A} = \frac{(N - X)\alpha'\beta(A) + K_{i,A}}{i - 1 + (N - X)\alpha'\beta(A) + \alpha'X}, \quad (11)$$

154 where X is the number of role-models with trait \hat{A} ; $K_{i,A}$ is the number of copiers that already chose A when copier i chooses a role-model; assuming (without loss of generality) that $\beta(\hat{A}) = 1$; and defining $\alpha' = \frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}$ as the odds ratio of the bias weight. Complementing this, the probability of the i -th copier to copy phenotype \hat{A} is $G_{i,\hat{A}} = 1 - G_{i,A}$. The rest of the details follow the continuous trait model.

158 Results

Our models are defined by two nested stochastic processes. Change over multiple generations is described by the dynamics of the phenotype distribution at each generation, $\{\mathbf{A}(t)\}_t$, see eq. (1). The transition from one generation to the next is described by the number of copiers each role-model has after i copiers have chosen a role-model, $\{\mathbf{K}_i\}_{i=1}^N$, see eq. (7). We emphasize that the models are nested: $\mathbf{A}(t+1)$ can be computed from $\mathbf{A}(t)$ by evaluating \mathbf{K}_N , where $K_{N,j}$ is the number of copiers that chose role-model j after all copiers chose a role model. However, the former requires iterating over eqs. (8) and (9). Thus, we sought to find an equivalent stochastic process that has the same joint distribution as \mathbf{K}_N . We found two approximations for the distribution of \mathbf{K}_N , summarized here and explained in detail below. In both we assume that the bias weight is either completely homogeneous, $\alpha_{i,j} = \alpha$, or that α_j is a bias of role-model j only, meaning it does not vary between copiers. Note that these approximations apply for both the and the continuous trait (eq. (10)) and the dichotomous trait (eq. (11)) models.

Generalized binomial approximation. The number of copiers of a specific role-model at each step, $K_{i,j}$, follows the *generalized binomial distribution* [16] and therefore,

(i) the expected number of copiers of role-model j equals its prestige in the eyes of the first copier, multiplied by the total number of copiers, that is, $E[K_{N,j}] = N \cdot G_{1,j}$ if trait estimation error is uniform for all copiers ($e = e_i$ for $i = 1, \dots, N$); and (ii) the expected number of copiers of each role-model equals its relative biased trait value, similar to the role of relative fitness in population-genetic models, that is, $E[K_{N,j}] = \beta(A_j + e)/\bar{\beta}$ if the bias weight is uniform for all role-models ($\alpha = \alpha_j$ for $j = 1, \dots, N$), where $\bar{\beta} = 1/N \sum_{j=1}^N \beta(A_j + e)$ is the population mean estimated trait value.

Dirichlet-Multinomial approximation. The role-model choice process, $\{\mathbf{K}_i\}_{i=1}^N$, is equivalent to a *Pólya urn* model if trait estimation error is uniform for all copiers ($e = e_i$ for all $i = 1, \dots, N$), meaning that the order of copiers does not matter.

182 Generalized binomial distribution

The generalized binomial distribution (GBD) emerges from a series of dependent Bernoulli trials (in contrast to the standard binomial distribution in which trials are independent) and is denoted by $GBD(n, p, \theta)$ where n is the number of trials, p is the probability of success of the first trial, and θ is the correlation between trials ($\theta = 0$ gives the standard binomial distribution).

Result 1 (Generalized binomial approximation). *The number of copiers of role-model j after i copiers have chosen a role-model follows the GBD, $K_{i,j} \sim GBD(i, \alpha_i \cdot \beta(A_j + e))$ if $e_i = e$ for all role-models $i = 1, \dots, N$.*

Proof. Let $Q_j(k, i) = P(K_{i,j} = k \mid K_{i-1,j})$ be the probability that exactly k out of i copiers choose role-model j given $K_{i-1,j}$ out of $i-1$ copiers chose role-model j . Using conditional probability and

eq. (8),

$$Q_j(k, i) = P_j(S_{i,j} = 1 | k - 1, i - 1) \cdot Q_j(k - 1, i - 1) + P_j(S_{i,j} = 0 | k, i - 1) \cdot Q_j(k, i - 1), \quad (12)$$

where $S_{i,j} = 1$ when the i -th copier chooses role-model j . Equation (12) is equivalent to eq. (2.1) by [16], which completes the proof.

This result gives the following two corollaries on the expected number of followers of a given role-model j by the end of the role-model choice process, $K_{N,j}$. The proof of Corollary 1 is in Appendix A.

Corollary 1. *The expected number of copiers of role-model j after all copiers have chosen a role-model is $E[K_{N,j}] = N \cdot G_{1,j}$, where $G_{1,j}$ is the probability of the first copier to copy role-model j . In addition, $E[K_{N,j}] = \alpha_j \cdot \beta(A_j + e) / \overline{\alpha \cdot \beta(A + e)}$, where the averaging in the denominator is over the role-models index, j .*

Proof. Drezner and Farnum [16, eq. (2.3)] show that the expected number of successful trials, $E[k] = N \cdot Q_j(1, 1)$ (modified from their notation). $Q_j(1, 1)$ is the initial probability to choose role-model j , before any role-model choices are made. $Q_j(1, 1) = G_{1,j}$ by definition, which completes the proof.

The special case where the bias weight is uniform for all role-models ($\alpha = \alpha_j$ for $j = 1, \dots, N$) is interesting, because we can evaluate the expected number of copiers using a linear equation

$$E[K_{Nj}] = N \cdot \frac{\alpha \cdot \beta(A_j + e)}{\sum_{m=1}^N \alpha \cdot \beta(A_m + e)} = \beta(A_j + e) \sqrt{\overline{\beta(A + e)}}, \quad (13)$$

where the only variable is $A_j + e$, because $\overline{\beta(A + e)}$ is the mean of the distribution of the trait values, modified by some constant parameters of β . We can then write $L = 1/\overline{\beta(A + e)}$ and

$$E[K_{Nj}] = L \cdot \beta(A_j + e). \quad (14)$$

Numerical validation. To validate that our approximation is correct we ran 1,000 simulations of the full model, and compared the results with Corollary 1. We compare the distribution of number of copiers by plotting the histograms of both our simulations results and the expected values based on Corollary 1.

Although basic, Figure S1 shows good fit of the GB approximation. This validation is initial, and we do more extensive validations on the Dirichlet-Multinomial approximation, because that is what we will use in our analysis.

Dirichlet-Multinomial distribution approximation

Pólya urn model. This stochastic process consists of N draws from an urn with an initial number of colored balls of M colors. When a ball is drawn, it is then placed back in the urn together with an

additional new ball of the same color. Let $\mathbf{U}_i = \{u_{i,1}, u_{i,2}, \dots, u_{i,M}\}$ where $u_{i,j}$ is the number of balls
 224 of the j -th color in the urn after i draws. Let $S_{i,j} = 1$ when drawing a j -colored ball on the i -th draw,
 and 0 otherwise. The probability that $S_{i,j} = 1$ given \mathbf{U}_{i-1} is

$$226 \quad P(S_{i,j} = 1 \mid \mathbf{U}_{i-1}) = \frac{u_{i-1,j}}{\sum_{m=1}^M u_{i-1,m}} = \frac{o_j + w_{i-1,j}}{\sum_{m=1}^M o_m + w_{i-1,m}} = \frac{o_j + w_{i-1,j}}{i - 1 + \sum_{m=1}^M o_m}, \quad (15)$$

where o_j is the initial number of balls of color j in the urn, and $w_{i,j}$ is the cumulative number of new
 228 balls that were added to the urn after i draws of color j .

230 **Result 2** (Pólya urn model). *The role-model choice process, $\{\mathbf{K}_i\}_{i=1}^N$, is equivalent to a Pólya urn
 model if both trait estimation error and bias weight are uniform in the population, $e = e_j$ and $\alpha = \alpha_j$
 232 for all $j = 1, \dots, N$.*

Proof. Write $\alpha' = \frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}$ as the bias weight ratio, and $A'_j = A_j + e$. From eq. (10) and because
 234 $\sum_{j=1}^N K_{i,j} = i$, we have

$$G_{i,j} = \frac{\alpha' \beta(A'_j) + K_{i-1,j}}{\sum_{m=1}^N [\alpha' \beta(A'_m) + K_{i-1,m}]} = \frac{\alpha' \beta(A'_j) + K_{i-1,j}}{i - 1 + \sum_{m=1}^N \alpha' \beta(A'_m)}. \quad (16)$$

236 Substituting $M = N$, $o_j = \alpha' \beta(A'_j)$, and $w_{i,j} = K_{i,j}$ in eq. (15) gives eq. (16), thus completing the
 proof.

238 Frigyik et al. [17, section 2] prove that the proportion of different colored balls in a *Pólya urn model*
 converges to the Dirichlet distribution as the number of draws approaches infinity, N in our model,
 240 based on the *Martingale Convergence Theorem* [18]. We therefore have an approximation for the
 relative prestige each role-model has when evaluated by copiers. Thus, choosing the role-models
 242 for all copiers is equivalent to drawing from a multinomial distribution where the parameters are the
 modified weights from a Dirichlet distribution and we have the following corollary.

244

Corollary 2. *The number of copiers of each role-model approximates a Dirichlet-Multinomial distri-
 246 bution, $\mathbf{K}_i \sim \text{DM}(N, \mathbf{G}_1)$, under the conditions of Result 2.*

Numerical validation. To validate our model can be approximated by the Dirichlet distribution
 248 properly, i.e (Corollary 2), and test its sensitivity to the assumptions ($e_i = e$ and $\alpha_i = \alpha$ for $i = 1, \dots, N$)
 we compare it to results of stochastic simulations of the model, meaning we compare Corollary 2 to
 250 Equation (11). First, we compute an observed distribution of the number of copiers from the average
 empirical distribution of multiple simulations. We then compare this observed distribution with the
 252 expected theoretical DM distribution (Figure S2A). The difference in distributions was not perceived
 when plotting both distributions on the same figure, so we used the difference instead. The maximum
 254 difference is 0.5 role-models, which indicates a very good fit. In addition, we tested the likelihood

of the observed data to be drawn from the DM distribution, against a shuffle of the parameters vector
 256 of the DM distribution itself (Figure S2B). We see that the negative log likelihood of the observed
 258 data is much higher than any other shuffled version of the parameters vector, strongly supporting our
 approximation.

Next, we examined the fixation probability and fixation time of a favored phenotype \hat{A} when invading
 260 a population of phenotype A and compared results from the full model and the DM approximation.
 Thus, we assume the population has a single individual with phenotype \hat{A} and $N - 1$ individuals
 262 with phenotype A . That the number of simulations needed to sufficiently approximate our model
 with the DM approximation is roughly 1,000 (Figure S3). We examined the robustness of the
 264 DM approximation to relaxing the following assumptions. First, we relaxed our assumption of no
 estimation error e . Estimation error in the original model was drawn from a normal distribution,
 266 and added to the trait value before evaluation of the bias ($A_{ij} = A_j + e_i$). When estimation error is
 applied, we sample J_i for each copier i from a normal distribution. Even when the standard deviation
 268 is 0.1, the fixation probability and time are similar (Figure S4). We also relaxed our assumption of
 a uniform bias weight α (i.e., $\alpha_i = \alpha$). We allowed α to vary in the population, drawing α_j for each
 270 role-model j from a normal distribution such that $\alpha_j \sim N(0.5, q)$ where $q \in [10^{-7}, 10^{-1}]$. We found
 again that results of the DM approximation are similar to those from stochastic simulations of the full
 272 model (Figure S5).

Fixation probability and time

274 After finding that the DM distribution is a good approximation of the (within-generation) role-model
 choice process, we turn our attention to the (between-generation) evolutionary dynamics. We focus on
 276 the fixation probability and conditional fixation time (conditioned on the population reaching fixation)
 of a favored phenotype, using a diffusion-equation approximation approach, similar to analyses of
 278 population-genetic models [19, 45, 46]. We are mainly interested in the effect of the bias weight, α ,
 which determines the relative effect of success and influence on prestige bias, given by eq. (10). For
 280 simplicity, we use the dichotomous model, and we do not include role-model estimation error in this
 analysis, i.e $e_i = 0$ for every copier i . As shown above, transmission in our model is approximately
 282 DM distributed (Corollary 2 and eq. (16)).

We start by finding the expectation and variance of the change in frequency from one generation to the
 284 next, which are the drift and diffusion terms of the diffusion equation. The proof is in Appendix B.

286 **Result 3** (Drift and diffusion terms in a constant environment). *Let x and x' be the frequency of type \hat{A}
 in a population with N individuals in the current and next generation, and β be the success coefficient
 288 of phenotype A , $\beta = \beta(A) < \beta(\hat{A}) = 1$.*

Then,

$$290 \quad E[x' - x] = O(x(1 - x)(1 - \beta)) , \quad V(x' - x) = O(x(1 - x) \left(\frac{1}{\alpha N + (1 - \alpha)} \right)) . \quad (17)$$

This analysis gives a surprising result relating the parameters α and β to parameters of the classical Wright-Fisher model from population genetics: the selection coefficient s , a measure of the effect of natural selection on the change in frequency of genotypes, and the effective population size, N_e , a measure of the effect of random genetic drift on the change in frequency of genotypes. In a diffusion-equation approximation of the classical Wright-Fisher model, the expectation and variance of the change in frequency are $E[x' - x] = x + x(1 - x)s + o(s)$ and $V[x' - x] = x(1 - x)/N_e$ [19, eq. 7], respectively. Therefore, we have the following result.

298

Result 4 (Effective selection coefficient and population size). *The effective selection coefficient s and effective population size N_e can be written in terms of the success coefficient β (eq. (5)), the bias weight α (eq. (10)), and the population size N as*

$$s = 1 - \beta(A), \quad N_e = \alpha N + (1 - \alpha). \quad (18)$$

Note that when $N \gg 1$, $N_e \approx \alpha N$, resulting in a very convenient expression.

304

Using our effective selection coefficient, $1 - \beta$, and effective population size, N_e , with the population-genetics fixation probability approximation given by [19, eq. 8], we obtain:

Result 5 (Fixation probability). *The fixation probability is approximately*

$$\pi(x) = \frac{1 - e^{-2(1-\beta)N_e x}}{1 - e^{-2(1-\beta)N_e}}, \quad (19)$$

where x is the initial frequency of the favored phenotype \hat{A} .

Similarly, we can use $1 - \beta$ and N_e in the population-genetics fixation time approximation given by [45, eq. 17].

312

Result 6 (Fixation time). *The expected fixation time (conditioned on fixation) from an initial frequency x is approximately*

$$T(x) = J_1(x) + \frac{1 - \pi(x)}{\pi(x)} \cdot J_2(x), \quad (20)$$

where $N_e = \alpha N + (1 - \alpha)$, $S = N_e(1 - \beta)$, and

$$\begin{aligned} J_1(x) &= \frac{-1}{(1 - \beta)(e^{-2S} - 1)} \int_x^1 \frac{1 - e^{2S\xi} - e^{-2S(1-\xi)} + e^{-2S}}{\xi(1 - \xi)} d\xi, \\ J_2(x) &= \frac{-1}{(1 - \beta)(e^{-2S} - 1)} \int_0^x \frac{(1 - e^{2S\xi})(e^{-2S\xi} - 1)}{\xi(1 - \xi)} d\xi. \end{aligned} \quad (21)$$

Note that these integrals cannot be solved in closed form, and are estimated numerically.

Numerical validation. We compare our approximations (eqs. (19) and (20)) with results of simulations of our dichotomous model using various α and β values, as well as simulations of the Wright-Fisher model, using the effective selection coefficient, $1 - \beta$, and effective population size, $N_e = \alpha N + (1 - \alpha)$. We find see that the two models have similar dynamics, and both are well approximated by our approximations (Figure 1).

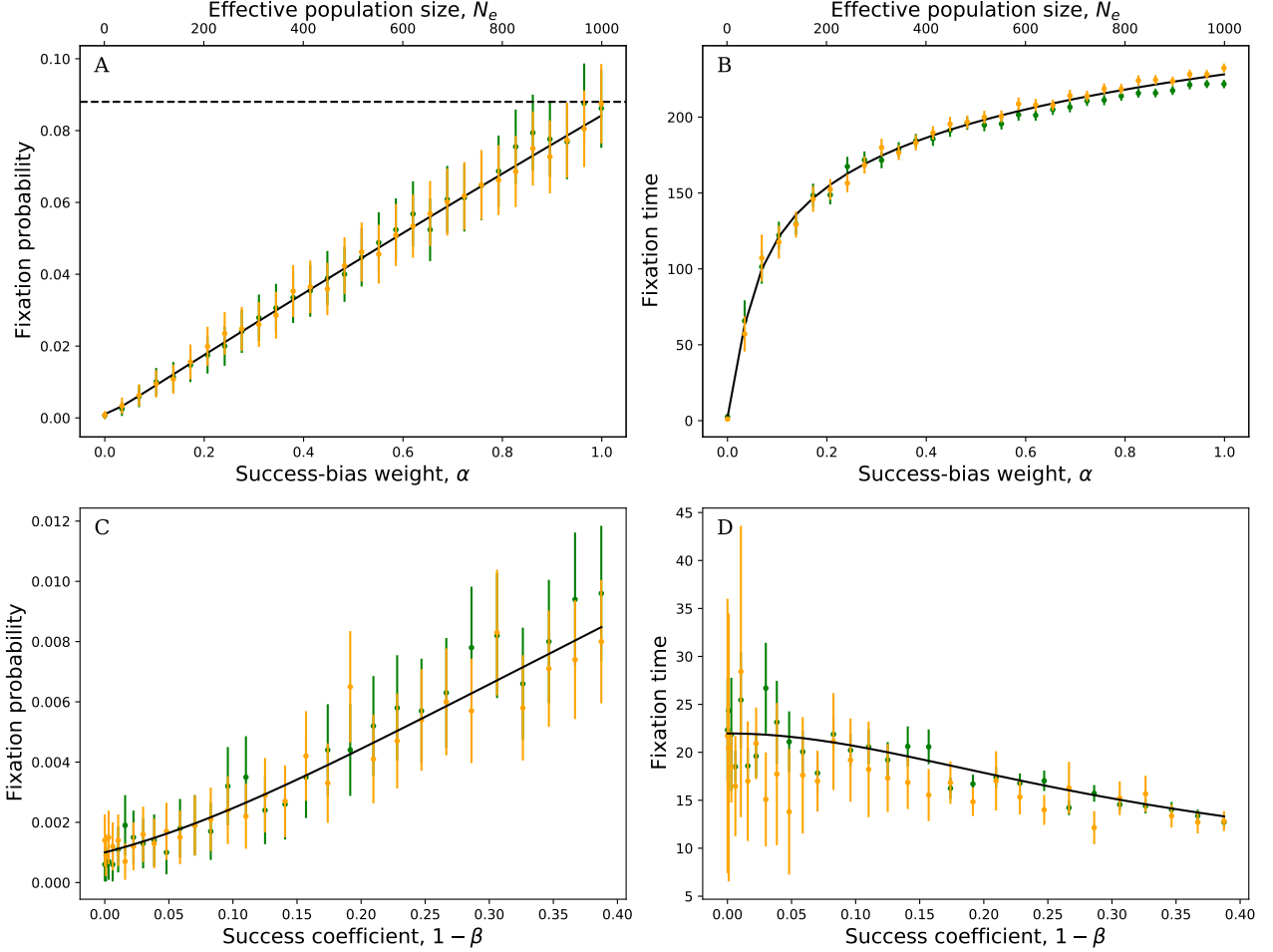


Figure 1: Fixation probability and time in a constant environment. Fixation probability and time (in generations) as a function of the success-bias weight α (bottom x-axis), or effective population size N_e (top x-axis) in the top row, and as a function of the success coefficient, $1 - \beta$, on the bottom row. The approximation (black; eq. (19)) agrees with both DM simulations (green) and Wright-Fisher simulation (orange). Fixation probability (A) is bounded by $2(1 - \beta)$ (blue). Markers are averages of 10,000 simulations, error bars show 95% confidence intervals for panels A and B and 75% for panels C and D. Here, Population size, $N = 1,000$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1$, $A = 0.7$ (panels A and B), $A = a \cdot \hat{A}$, where a is a modifier such that $0.01 \leq a \leq 0.99$ (panels C and D); success coefficient, $1 - \beta = s = 0.044$ (panels A and B); success-bias weight, $\alpha = 0.01$ (panels C and D).

Changing environment . After finding a good approximation in a constant environment, where the favorable trait is always \hat{A} , we proceeded to find an approximation for when the environment changes. Following [21], we denote k as the number of generations in which the invading phenotype is favored by success bias, and l as the number of generations in which the resident phenotype is favored by success bias. We then proceed to find expressions for the expectation and variance of the change in

frequency between $n = k + l$ generations. The proof is in Appendix C.

330

Result 7 (Drift and diffusion terms in a changing environment). *Let x be the initial frequency of the invading phenotype and X_t the number of individuals with that phenotype after n generation. Then,*

332

$$E[X_n/N - x] \simeq x(1 - x)S_n/N_e, \quad \text{and} \quad V(X_n/N - x) \simeq nx(1 - x)/N_e, \quad (22)$$

334 where $S_n = \sum_{t=1}^n N(1 - \beta_t)$ and β_t is $\beta(A)$ at generation t .

Note that here, we have the average selection coefficient during a cycle of n generations as the selection coefficient in eq. (19). Using the drift and diffusion terms and following [21], we can approximate the fixation probability in a changing environment using

336

$$\tilde{\pi}(x) = \frac{1 - e^{-2\frac{S_n}{n}N_e x}}{1 - e^{-2\frac{S_n}{n}N_e}}. \quad (23)$$

338

Numerical validation. To validate that Equation (23) can approximate our dichotomous model, we compared the results of this equation against simulations using Corollary 2. We find that the approximation fits the simulation results well for variable bias weights, α , which corresponds to the effective population size (Figure 2A).

340

However, the approximation is more sensitive to the value of the success bias coefficient β (Figure 2B). We suspect that when β is too small, there will not be many cycles in the simulations, because either the population reaches a high frequency of the fitter phenotype after just a few cycles, or the fitter phenotype goes extinct very quickly. For such β values (below 0.65), the fixation probability exceeds even the constant environment approximation (which is the upper limit). We note that the diffusion-equation approximation assumes weak selection, or in our case, weak success bias.

344

346

348

We found that for a large k/l ratio (with a constant cycle length, $n = k + l = 100$), the changing environment approximation (eq. (23)) converges to the constant environment approximation (eq. (19)), see Figure 2C and Figure 2D.

350

The approximation follows the trend of the simulation results for all α values. On increasing the success coefficient α to more than 0.15, the simulation results were located above the changing environment approximation, and below the constant environment approximation. We believe the reason is the structure of the cycle. Our proof and approximation in the changing environment are for a large number of cycles, and when the success coefficient α is too high, there might be very few cycles. Either the ideal trait is copied by enough copiers so that the influence is sufficient to negate the success bias when the cycle changes (and the trait favored by the bias becomes the disfavored), or the opposite happens, and the ideal trait goes extinct before there are enough copiers that copied it. We then tried to change the ratio between the number of cycles where \hat{A} is favored and disfavored. We showed that the approximation fits well regardless of the ratio, but when the ratio of favored generations to disfavored ones is very high, it is very similar to a constant environment model.

352

354

356

358

360

362

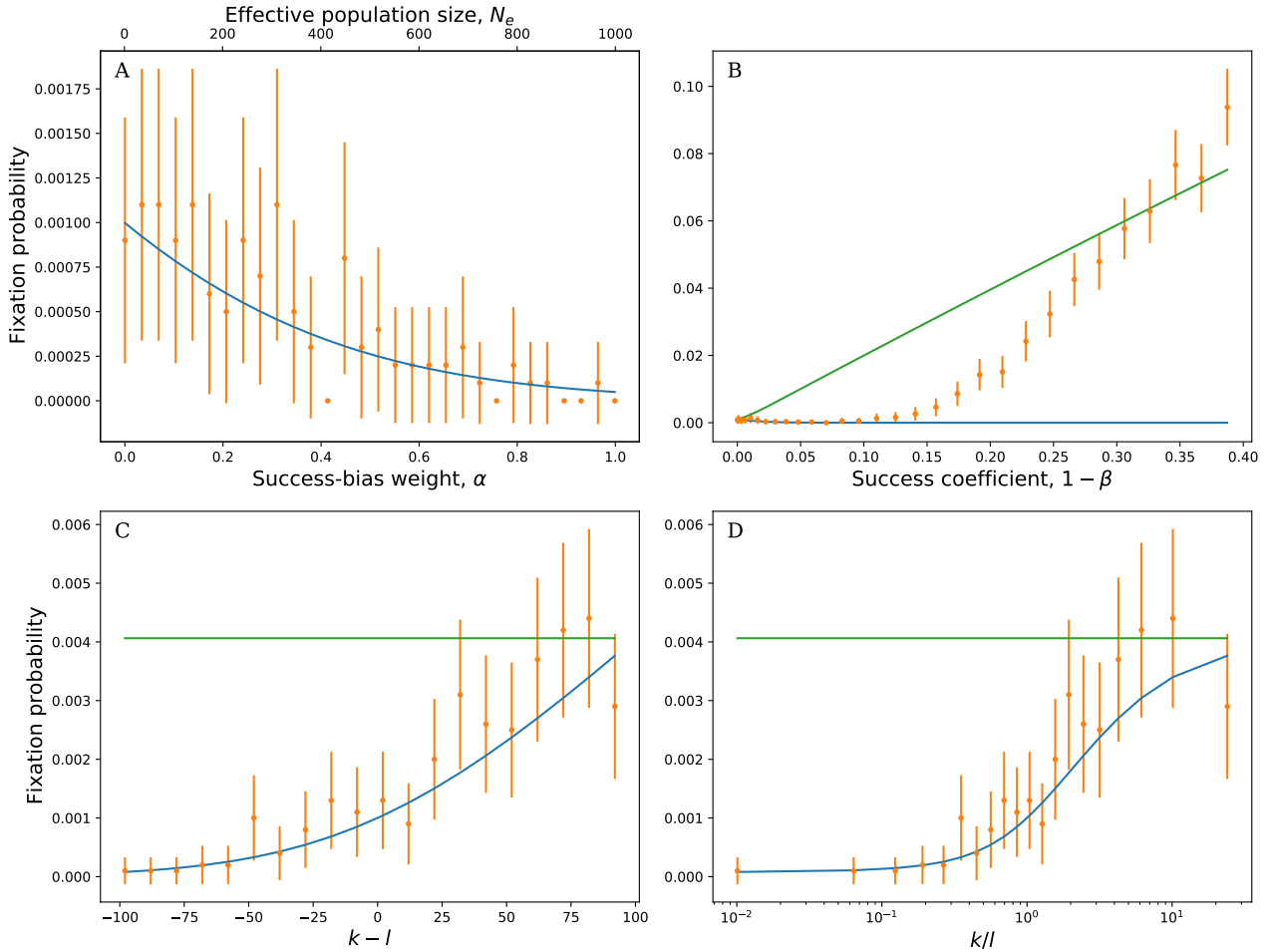


Figure 2: Fixation probability in a changing environment. (A) Fixation probability decreases with the success-bias weight (bottom x-axis) and effective population size (top x-axis). The approximation (blue; eq. (23)) agrees with simulation results (orange). (B) Fixation probability increases with the success coefficient, β . When success bias is large ($1 - \beta > 0.1$), simulation results (orange) are underestimated by the changing environment approximation (blue; eq. (23)). With even larger success bias ($1 - \beta > 0.35$), even the constant environment approximation (green; eq. (19)) slightly underestimates simulation results, likely because the diffusion equation approximation assumes weak "selection". (C,D) The approximation (blue) is robust to changes in environmental cycle length, as it agrees with simulations (orange) for different sizes of the changing environment cycle, where k and l are the number of generations each trait value is under success bias. When $k > l$, the approximation and the simulations are both very close to the constant environment approximation (green), because the more generations the rare phenotype is favored, the more similar it is to the constant environment model, where it is always favored by the success bias. Markers show average of 10,000 simulations, error bars show 75% (panels A, C, and D) and 95% (panel B) confidence intervals. Here, population size, $N = 1,000$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1$ with $A = 0.9$ (panels A and B) and $A = 0.8$ (panels C and D); In panel A, the success coefficient is $1 - \beta = s = 0.005$; In panels B, C, and D, the success-bias weight is $\alpha = 0.1$.

Adaptive success-bias weight

364 We ran simulations of the role-model choice process during a single generation in which every copier evaluates its own optimal success-bias weight, α^* , which minimizes the expected squared error

366 between the estimated and the ideal trait values,

$$\alpha^* = \operatorname{argmin} \sum_{j=1}^N \frac{\alpha A_j + (1 - \alpha) K_j}{\sum_{l=1}^N \alpha A_l + (1 - \alpha) K_l} (\hat{A} - A_j)^2, \quad (24)$$

368 where A_j is the trait of role-model j and K_j the number of copiers that already chose role-model j .

370 We find that when copiers choose their success-bias weight, it decreases with the number of copiers
 372 that have already chosen a role-model (Figure 3). Moreover, their estimation error is much lower
 374 compared to a constant success-bias weight, which gives roughly the same high estimation error to all
 copiers (compare Figure 3B and C): in this example, the adaptive weight estimation error converges
 to 0.046, whereas a constant weight gives values > 0.74 .

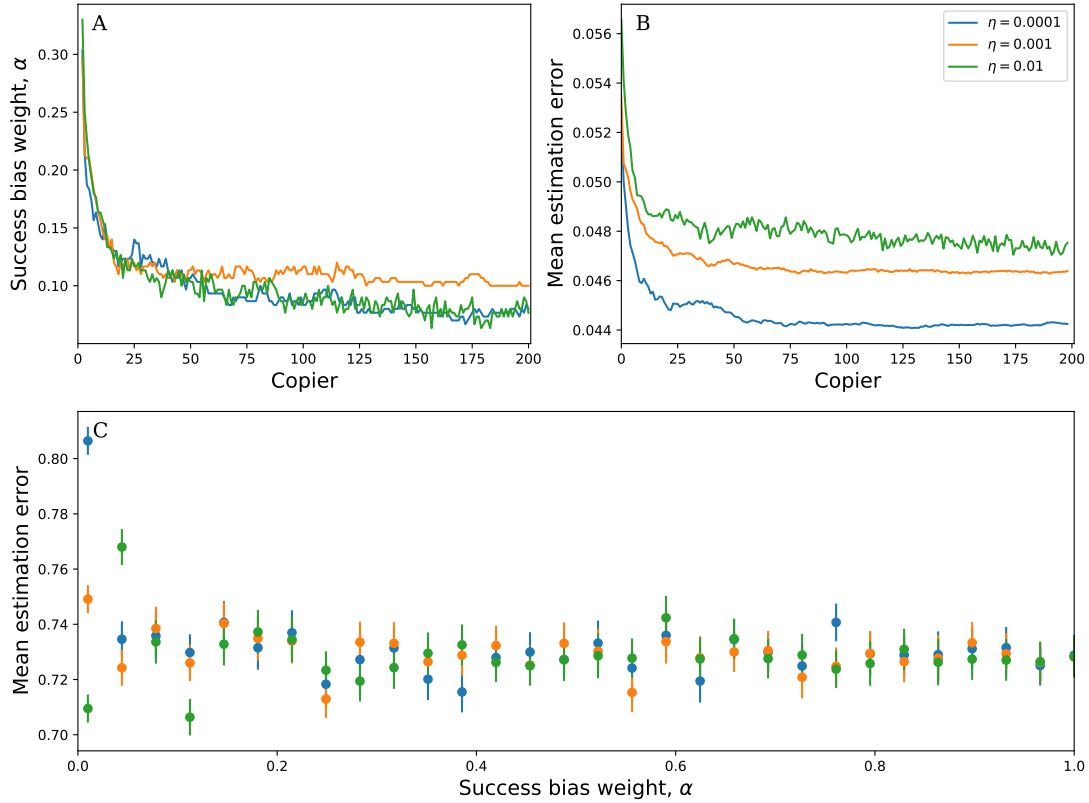


Figure 3: Advantage of an adaptive success-bias weight. Both success-bias weight α (A) and estimation error (B) decrease during the role-model choosing process, demonstrating that influence becomes more favored as more copiers have made their choice. However, when α is homogeneous (C), the mean estimation error doesn't decrease, regardless of α or η . The mean estimation error in the homogeneous α model is larger by a factor of 10 than the adaptive α model. Here, population size $N = 200$; estimation error is normally distributed $e \sim N(0, \eta^2)$ with standard deviation $\eta = 0.0001$ (blue), 0.001 (orange), 0.01 (green), plots are average of 300 simulations.

Discussion

376 Some cultural traits or cultural role-models may be copied more often than others due to transmission
biases. One such bias is success bias, in which copiers are more likely to copy a successful role-model.
378 Although many models assume that success can be accurately estimated, it has been suggested that
because it is hard to estimate success, a more common bias is *prestige bias*—a bias towards role-models
380 perceived to be successful. This perceived success can be determined by performance with respect to
another trait (indirect) [5, 24], or by the influence an individual has on others [26, 31].

382 We developed a cultural-evolution model with prestige bias that includes both indirect success and
influence biases, where the latter is a bias towards role-models with many copiers and hence is the
384 same as conformity bias. We model these biases using a stochastic role-model choice process:
each copier, in turn, randomly chooses a role-model, and this choice is affected both by the estimated
386 success of each potential role-model and the number of copiers that already chose each role-model
(eq. 10).

388 Hence, our model has two “nested” stochastic processes: the role-model choice process within each
generation, and the cultural-evolutionary process between generations. To simplify the mathematical
390 and computational analysis, we developed analytic approximations for the role-model choice process
using the *generalized binomial distribution* (GBD, Result 1) and the *Dirichlet-Multinomial dis-*
392 *tribution* (DM, Corollary 2). The latter is especially useful, as it approximates the entire role-model
choice process and only requires us to assume that the relative effect of success and influence is a
394 characteristic of the role-model and not the copier.

Analyzing the model with the DM distribution, we found approximations for the fixation probability
396 and fixation time of a cultural trait under biased transmission in a constant environment. Our approxi-
mations are similar to Kimura’s evolutionary-genetic approximations, in that (i) the difference between
398 the resident and invading cultural trait values, $1 - \beta(A)$, is equivalent to the selection coefficient in
favor of a beneficial allele, s , and (ii) increasing the relative weight of influence versus success bias,
400 α , decreases the effective population size, N_e (Figure 1).

We also analyzed a cyclic changing environment in which the identity of the success-biased trait
402 switches after a fixed amount of generations (Figure 2). We find that, similarly to the constant
environment approximation, a change in the success-bias weight α has no negative effects on the
404 goodness-of-fit of the approximation to simulation results. We also showed that this approximation is
more sensitive to changes in the success coefficient β than the constant environment approximation,
406 and a lower value is required to have a good fit. The ratio between the number of generations in which
the rare phenotype is under positive transmission bias and the number of generations in which it is
408 under negative bias does not affect the goodness-of-fit of the approximation.

We also examined a scenario in which copiers can adapt their success-weight bias, α , to minimize their
410 copying error, i.e., copy trait values closer to the optimal value. We found that as the role-model choice
process proceeds (that is, more copiers make their choices), both the success-bias weight (chosen by

412 copiers) and the estimation error decrease. The latter is significantly lower than in a population using
a constant, fixed success-bias weight, regardless of the value of the constant weight (Figure 3). This
414 suggests that the later a copier makes its choice, the more it should rely on choices of previous copiers,
and the less it should rely on its own estimation. The rationale, then, is that the more information a
416 copier has, e.g., by using others as information sources, the more informative and effective his choice
can be.

418 Chudek et al. [31] report the first direct tests in children that suggest the existence of prestige bias,
defined as the tendency to learn from individuals to whom others have preferentially attended, learned,
420 or deferred. Their definition of prestige is similar to our influence bias. They showed that the odds
of 3-4 years-old children learning from an adult role-model to whom bystanders had previously
422 preferentially attended for 10 seconds were more than twice those of learning from a role model
whom bystanders ignored. They also note that prestige effects are domain sensitive: they found that
424 prestigious role-models were attended more when demonstrating artifact use, whereas role-models
presenting food preferences had less attendants, suggesting that the domain itself (artifact use vs.
426 food preference) can affect the attendance, and hence the prestige of the role-model. This led to the
suggestion that when the trait is costly to learn individually, prestige will have a stronger bias [31]. It
428 would be interesting to include costs in our model to try and observe these effects and dynamics in a
large population.

430 According to [24], natural selection has favored the emergence of psychological biases for learning
from those individuals most likely to possess adaptive information. They studied Fijian villages to
432 examine if and how such biases emerge in a small-scale society. They found that Fijian villagers are
more likely to learn from role-models perceived as more successful/knowledgeable, both within and
434 across domains. Their research thus suggests that copying from those perceived as successful, rather
than who are actually successful, is a common phenomenon. They show that the social networks
436 representing copier–role-model relationships are centralized, suggesting that it is consistent with
the prediction that people substantially share notions about who is a good cultural model, but that
438 individuals’ role-model selections are influenced by multiple factors.

Prestige bias also occurs in more modern domains such as western medicine. Norredam and Albus
440 [28] examined literature from 1950 to 2005 on the effects of prestige on medicinal practices. They
found that active, specialized, biomedical, and high-technological types of medicine on organs in
442 the upper part of the bodies of young and middle-aged people were accorded high levels of prestige,
whereas medicine and practices that weren’t of these types had low levels of prestige. For example, they
444 found that surgery counts as the most prestigious specialty, while psychiatry is the least prestigious.
In addition, doctors tend to rank practices that require more time to master as more prestigious, while
446 other procedures that are considered easier to master are less prestigious. This means that there may be
very important practices that are neglected due to prestige bias. They concluded that such differences
448 in prestige may affect for actual priority setting in healthcare systems.

Prestige bias can help to cheaply estimate and acquire knowledge, which may facilitate survival and
450 reproduction. However, it is not always the case, and there could be negative repercussions to this

bias, such as invasion of maladaptive traits. Takahashi and Ihara [27] mention that social learning
452 not only takes the form of random copying of other individuals, but also involves learners' choice
of what to learn and from whom to learn. They suggest a best-of-k model where an individual
454 samples k role-models and chooses the one he deems most "successful". They mention that a previous
mathematical analysis has shown that it may sometimes result in maladaptive cultural evolution when
456 the payoffs associated with cultural variants vary stochastically. In such a case, learners may be
selectively disfavored and in the long run replaced by unbiased learners, who simply copy someone
458 chosen at random. They developed new mathematical models that are simpler and mathematically
tractable. They found that best-of-k learning, unlike unbiased learning, can facilitate the invasion of
460 an on average inferior variant that sometimes gives a very high payoff (see Fogarty et al. [56] and
references there). Our model, which includes influence bias, is consistent with this claim. When a
462 maladaptive trait is "piggybacking" on a role-model with high influence, the former could spread in
the population. In addition, best-of-k learning can be stable against invasion by unbiased learning if
464 social learning is sometimes combined with individual learning [27]. Our model includes only social
learning, and not individual learning, but it could be interesting to combine it with individual learning
466 and see how it affects the dynamics.

Prestige bias can also accelerate reversal of harmful traditions such as child marriage and domestic
468 violence. Efferson et al. [25] suggest a *spillover* mechanism, in which an intervention affects a large
enough group in a target population, so that others not included in the intervention also change their
470 behavior. They find that there are individuals who act as *agents*, who are often observed, and therefore
they are ideal targets for interventions. This is similar to influential role-models in our model, where a
472 prestigious individual will be copied more often, and will therefore spread their trait faster and wider
in the population. They also suggest a way to use this phenomenon to change existing traditions in
474 a population. It is very clear however, that just as it can be used to end harmful traditions, the same
agents could start harmful traditions.

Dunbar [30] hypothesized that larger, more complex brains can store and manage more information
476 and in turn, this information can support the costs of a larger brain. Following this, Muthukrishnan
and Henrich [29] suggested that prestige can directly affect human physical evolution. They present a
478 concept called *cultural brains*—brains that evolved primarily for the acquisition of adaptive knowledge.
They then develop a model that predicts a strong relationship between brain size and group size,
480 because group size also provides access to more adaptive knowledge. They also presented the
cumulative cultural brain hypothesis, which proposes that human brains have evolved with an ability
482 and tendency for selective, high-fidelity social learning. As part of this process, there are a variety of
strategies and biases that have evolved to hone in on the most adaptive knowledge. These strategies
484 and biases include direct and indirect cues of the popularity of cultural traits (e.g. success and prestige
biases). They suggest that one of the reasons for the extreme increase in brain size in humans is the
486 ability to "cheaply" acquire adaptive knowledge via transmission biases such as prestige.

488 One path forward is an analysis of the dynamics of the adaptive success-bias weight model, in which
every copier chooses its α . It would be interesting to see the if the mean estimation error and the

490 adaptive weight, α^* , converge to specific values, and how they are affected by the model parameters. It
may also be possible to relax the assumptions required for our approximations, such as homogeneous
492 estimation error and success-bias weight. Lastly, it would be interesting to analyze the continuous
model and determine how much it differs from the dichotomous model.

494 Another way to expand our model is to account for the two types of prestige or leadership suggested
by Van Vugt and Smith [23] that are attributed to Confucius and Machiavelli. Confucius viewed
496 leaders as role-models who exercise influence through possessing superior knowledge, skills, and
(outstanding) personal qualities. This fits the success bias in our model. In contrast, Machiavelli
498 viewed leaders as rulers who exercise influence by imposing costs through (the threat of) punishment
and violence. Van Vugt and Smith suggest that these opposing views are both partially supported by
500 the available evidence but each one on its own offers an incomplete view of the complex and dynamic
concept of leadership. Several adjustments could be made so that our model reflects these leadership
502 styles, such as assuming there is a correlation between phenotype and leadership style. The resulting
cultural-evolutionary dynamics and their dependence on the costs and benefits are intriguing.

504 **Conclusions.** We studied a model of cultural evolution under two transmission biases: the commonly
studied success bias, together with influence bias, which has so far received less attention. We found
506 approximations for this complex dynamics. We then showed that success bias affects the evolutionary
dynamics much like natural selection does, whereas influence bias has a similar effect to random
508 genetic drift. We also find a clear advantage to individuals that can choose the relative weight of the
two biases.

510 Acknowledgements

We thank Marc Feldman, Martin Pontz, Gili Greenbaum, Alon Rozen, and Tal Simon for discussions and
512 comments. This work was supported in part by Minerva Stiftung Center for Lab Evolution (YR) and the John
Templeton Foundation (YR 61809).

514 References

- [1] Battesti, Marine, et al. "Spread of social information and dynamics of social transmission within
Drosophila groups." *Current biology* 22.4 (2012): 309-313.
- [2] Creanza, Nicole, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W. Feldman. "Cultural evolutionary theory: How
culture evolves and why it matters." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114.30
(2017): 7782-7789.
- [3] Aljadeff, Naama, Luc-Alain Giraldeau, and Arnon Lotem. "Competitive advantage of rare be-
haviours induces adaptive diversity rather than social conformity in skill learning." *Proceedings of
the Royal Society B* 287.1933 (2020): 20201259.
- [4] Cavalli-Sforza, Luigi Luca, and Marcus W. Feldman. *Cultural transmission and evolution: A
quantitative approach*. No. 16. Princeton University Press, 1981.

- [5] Boyd, Robert, and Peter J. Richerson. Culture and the evolutionary process. University of Chicago press, 1988.
- [6] Fogarty, Laurel, et al. "The driving forces of cultural complexity: neanderthals, modern humans, and the question of population size." *Human Nature* 28 (2017): 39-52.
- [7] Rendell, Luke, et al. "Why copy others? Insights from the social learning strategies tournament." *Science* 328.5975 (2010): 208-213.
- [8] Andersson, Malte, and Yoh Iwasa. "Sexual selection." *Trends in ecology & evolution* 11.2 (1996): 53-58.
- [9] Kendal, Rachel, et al. "Chimpanzees copy dominant and knowledgeable individuals: implications for cultural diversity." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 36.1 (2015): 65-72.
- [10] Horner, Victoria, et al. "Prestige affects cultural learning in chimpanzees." *PloS one* 5.5 (2010): e10625.
- [11] Henrich, Joseph, and Richard McElreath. "Dual-inheritance theory: the evolution of human cultural capacities and cultural evolution." (2007).
- [12] McComb, Karen, et al. "Matriarchs as repositories of social knowledge in African elephants." *Science* 292.5516 (2001): 491-494.
- [13] Eickbush, Michael T., Janet M. Young, and Sarah E. Zanders. "Killer meiotic drive and dynamic evolution of the wtf gene family." *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 36.6 (2019): 1201-1214.
- [14] Xing, Wenpu, and Ali Ghorbani. "Weighted pagerank algorithm." *Proceedings. Second Annual Conference on Communication Networks and Services Research, 2004.. IEEE, 2004.*
- [15] Molleman, Lucas, Ido Pen, and Franz J. Weissing. "Effects of conformism on the cultural evolution of social behaviour." *PloS one* 8.7 (2013): e68153.
- [16] Drezner, Zvi, and Nicholas Farnum. "A generalized binomial distribution." *Communications in Statistics-Theory and Methods* 22.11 (1993): 3051-3063.
- [17] Frigyik, Bela A., Amol Kapila, and Maya R. Gupta. "Introduction to the Dirichlet distribution and related processes." Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Washington, UWEETR-2010-0006 6 (2010): 1-27.
- [18] Durrett, Richard, and R. Durrett. *Essentials of stochastic processes. Vol. 1.* New York: Springer, 1999.
- [19] Kimura, Motoo. "On the probability of fixation of mutant genes in a population." *Genetics* 47.6 (1962): 713.
- [20] Durrett, Richard, and Richard Durrett. *Probability models for DNA sequence evolution. Vol. 2.* New York: Springer, 2008.

- [21] Ram, Yoav, Uri Liberman, and Marcus W. Feldman. "Evolution of vertical and oblique transmission under fluctuating selection." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115.6 (2018): E1174-E1183.
- [22] King, Andrew J., and Guy Cowlshaw. "Leaders, followers, and group decision-making." *Communicative & integrative biology* 2.2 (2009): 147-150.
- [23] Van Vugt, Mark, and Jennifer E. Smith. "A dual model of leadership and hierarchy: Evolutionary synthesis." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23.11 (2019): 952-967.
- [24] Henrich, Joseph, and James Broesch. "On the nature of cultural transmission networks: evidence from Fijian villages for adaptive learning biases." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 366.1567 (2011): 1139-1148.
- [25] Efferson, Charles, Sonja Vogt, and Ernst Fehr. "The promise and the peril of using social influence to reverse harmful traditions." *Nature human behaviour* 4.1 (2020): 55-68.
- [26] Henrich, Joseph, and Francisco J. Gil-White. "The evolution of prestige: Freely conferred deference as a mechanism for enhancing the benefits of cultural transmission." *Evolution and human behavior* 22.3 (2001): 165-196.
- [27] Takahashi, Takuya, and Yasuo Ihara. "Cultural and evolutionary dynamics with best-of-k learning when payoffs are uncertain." *Theoretical Population Biology* 128 (2019): 27-38.
- [28] Norredam, Marie, and Dag Album. "Prestige and its significance for medical specialties and diseases." *Scandinavian journal of public health* 35.6 (2007): 655-661.
- [29] Muthukrishna, Michael, and Joseph Henrich. "Innovation in the collective brain." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 371.1690 (2016): 20150192.
- [30] Dunbar, Robin IM. "The social brain hypothesis and its implications for social evolution." *Annals of human biology* 36.5 (2009): 562-572.
- [31] Chudek, Maciej, et al. "Prestige-biased cultural learning: Bystander's differential attention to potential models influences children's learning." *Evolution and human behavior* 33.1 (2012): 46-56.
- [32] Henrich, Joseph, and Richard McElreath. "The evolution of cultural evolution." *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews: Issues, News, and Reviews* 12.3 (2003): 123-135.
- [33] O'Brien, Michael J., et al. "Cultural traits as units of analysis." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 365.1559 (2010): 3797-3806.
- [34] Whitehead, Hal. "Gene–culture coevolution in whales and dolphins." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114.30 (2017): 7814-7821.
- [35] Cohen, Dor, et al. "Non-vertical cultural transmission, assortment and the evolution of cooperation." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 288.1951 (2021): 20203162.

- [36] Denton, Kaleda K., Yoav Ram, and Marcus W. Feldman. "Conformity and content-biased cultural transmission in the evolution of altruism." *Theoretical Population Biology* 143 (2022): 52-61.
- [37] Denton, Kaleda Krebs, et al. "Cultural evolution of conformity and anticonformity." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117.24 (2020): 13603-13614.
- [38] Lee, Woojin, Lina Xiong, and Clark Hu. "The effect of Facebook users' arousal and valence on intention to go to the festival: Applying an extension of the technology acceptance model." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 31.3 (2012): 819-827.
- [39] Anagnostopoulos, Aris, Ravi Kumar, and Mohammad Mahdian. "Influence and correlation in social networks." *Proceedings of the 14th ACM SIGKDD international conference on Knowledge discovery and data mining*. 2008.
- [40] Peng, Sancheng, et al. "Influence analysis in social networks: A survey." *Journal of Network and Computer Applications* 106 (2018): 17-32.
- [41] Diga, Marichris, and Tom Kelleher. "Social media use, perceptions of decision-making power, and public relations roles." *Public Relations Review* 35.4 (2009): 440-442.
- [42] Van Rossum, Guido. "Python Programming Language." *USENIX annual technical conference*. Vol. 41. No. 1. 2007.
- [43] Van Der Walt, Stefan, S. Chris Colbert, and Gael Varoquaux. "The NumPy array: a structure for efficient numerical computation." *Computing in science & engineering* 13.2 (2011): 22-30.
- [44] Hunter, John D. "Matplotlib: A 2D graphics environment." *Computing in science & engineering* 9.03 (2007): 90-95.
- [45] Kimura, Motoo, and Tomoko Ohta. "The average number of generations until fixation of a mutant gene in a finite population." *Genetics* 61.3 (1969): 763.
- [46] Slatkin, Montgomery. "Fixation probabilities and fixation times in a subdivided population." *Evolution* (1981): 477-488.
- [47] Erhart, Elizabeth M., and Deborah J. Overdorff. "Female coordination of group travel in wild *Propithecus* and *Eulemur*." *International Journal of Primatology* 20 (1999): 927-940.
- [48] Boyd, Robert, and Joseph Henrich. "On modeling cognition and culture: Why cultural evolution does not require replication of representations." *Journal of cognition and culture* 2.2 (2002): 87-112.
- [49] Gardner, Andy, Stuart A. West, and Geoff Wild. "The genetical theory of kin selection." *Journal of evolutionary biology* 24.5 (2011): 1020-1043.
- [50] Truskanov, Noa, Yasmin Emery, and Redouan Bshary. "Juvenile cleaner fish can socially learn the consequences of cheating." *Nature communications* 11.1 (2020): 1159.
- [51] Kolodny, Oren, et al. "Differential application of cultural practices at the family and individual levels may alter heritability estimates." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 45 (2022): e167.

- [52] Denton, Kaleda K., Uri Liberman, and Marcus W. Feldman. "On randomly changing conformity bias in cultural transmission." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118.34 (2021): e2107204118.
- [53] Borofsky, Talia, and Marcus W. Feldman. "Success-biased social learning in a one-consumer, two-resource model." *Theoretical Population Biology* 146 (2022): 29-35.
- [54] The cultural transmission of great basin projectile-point technology II: An agent-based computer simulation
- [55] Lehmann, L., and M.W. Feldman. Coevolution of adaptive technology, maladaptive culture, and population size in a producer-scrounger game. *Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 276 (2009): 3853-3862.
- [56] Fogarty, L., J. Y. Wakano, M. W. Feldman, and K. Aoki. The driving forces of cultural complexity: Neanderthals, modern humans, and the question of population size. *Hum. Nat.* (2017): 28: 39-52.
- [57] Denton, Kaleda K, Yoav Ram, and Marcus W. Feldman. 2023. "Conditions That Favour Cumulative Cultural Evolution." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 378 (1872). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2021.0400>.

Appendices

Appendix A General binomial distribution approximation

Proving $E[K_{Nj}] = \alpha_j \cdot \beta(A_j + e) / \overline{\alpha \cdot \beta(A + e)}$, where the average in the denominator is over the role-models index, j .

Proof. The initial prestige of role-model j based on eq. (10) is

$$G_{1,j} = \frac{\alpha_j \cdot \beta(A_j + e)}{\sum_{m=1}^N \alpha_m \cdot \beta(A_m + e)} . \quad (A1)$$

The denominator of eq. (A1) can also be formulated as:

$$\sum_{m=1}^N \alpha_m \beta(A_m + e) = N \cdot \overline{\alpha \cdot \beta(A + e)} , \quad (A2)$$

where $\overline{\alpha \cdot \beta(A + e)}$ is the mean value of $\alpha_m \cdot \beta(A_m + e)$. Using eq. (A2) and **Corollary 1** we get,

$$E[K_{Nj}] = \alpha_j \cdot \beta(A_j + e) \left/ \overline{\alpha \cdot \beta(A + e)} \right. , \quad (A3)$$

Appendix B Drift and diffusion in a constant environment

Proving drift and diffusion terms in a constant environment. Let x and x' be the frequency of type \hat{A} in a population with N individuals in the current and next generation, and β be the success coefficient of phenotype A , $\beta = \beta(A) < \beta(\hat{A}) = 1$. Then,

$$E[x' - x] \approx x(1 - x)(1 - \beta) , \quad V(x' - x) \approx x(1 - x) \left(\frac{1}{\alpha N + (1 - \alpha)} \right) .$$

Proof. Let X be the number of individuals of type \hat{A} such that $x = X/N$. X' is the number of individuals with \hat{A} in the next generation. The expected number of individuals is (due to the DM approximation),

$$E[X'] = N \frac{\alpha_1}{\alpha_1 + \alpha_2} , \quad (B1)$$

where $\alpha_1 = \alpha'X$ and $\alpha_2 = \alpha'(N - X)\beta$, from eq. (11). To use frequencies instead of counts, $E[x'] = E[X'/N] = \frac{1}{N}E[X']$. Putting it together,

$$\begin{aligned} E[x'] &= \frac{1}{N}N \frac{\alpha'xN}{\alpha'xN + \alpha'N(1-x)\beta} = \frac{x}{x + (1-x)\beta} \\ &= \frac{x}{x + (1-x) - (1-x) + (1-x)\beta} = x \frac{1}{1 - (1-x)(1-\beta)} \\ &= x(1 + (1-x)(1-\beta) + o(1-\beta)) = x + x(1-x)(1-\beta) + o(1-\beta), \end{aligned} \quad (\text{B2})$$

following Durrett [20, p. 253, ch 7.2] and because $1/(1-y) = 1 + y + y^2 + \dots$

We therefore have

$$E[x' - x] = E[x'] - E[x] = x(1-x)(1-\beta) + o(1-\beta), \quad (\text{B3})$$

which gives us the drift term of the diffusion equation.

Using the variance of the DM distribution,

$$V(X') = N \frac{\alpha_1}{\alpha_1 + \alpha_2} \left(1 - \frac{\alpha_1}{\alpha_1 + \alpha_2}\right) \left(\frac{N + \alpha_1 + \alpha_2}{1 + \alpha_1 + \alpha_2}\right). \quad (\text{B4})$$

Again, we want to use frequencies so we have $V(X'/N) = \frac{1}{N^2}V(X')$. Putting it together with our model notations,

$$V(x') = \frac{1}{N^2}N \frac{x}{x + (1-x)\beta} \left(1 - \frac{x}{x + (1-x)\beta}\right) \left(\frac{N + \alpha'xN + \alpha'N(1-x)\beta}{1 + \alpha'xN + \alpha'N(1-x)\beta}\right). \quad (\text{B5})$$

Following Durrett [20, ch 7.2], we assume $\beta \approx 1$, such that

$$\frac{x}{x + (1-x)\beta} \approx x \quad (\text{B6})$$

and for the entire variance expression we get

$$V(x') \approx \frac{1}{N}x(1-x) \left(\frac{N + \alpha'xN + \alpha'N - \alpha'xN}{1 + \alpha'xN + \alpha'N - \alpha'xN}\right) = x(1-x) \left(\frac{1 + \alpha'}{1 + \alpha'N}\right). \quad (\text{B7})$$

Now because x , the initial frequency, is a constant, $V(x) = 0$, and therefore

$$V(x' - x) = V(x') - V(x) \approx x(1-x) \left(\frac{1 + \alpha'}{1 + \alpha'N}\right). \quad (\text{B8})$$

α' is the odds ratio of the bias weight,

$$\alpha' = \frac{\alpha}{1 - \alpha}. \quad (\text{B9})$$

Combining eq. (B8) and eq. (B9) we get:

$$V(x' - x) \approx x(1 - x) \left(\frac{1 + \frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}}{1 + \frac{\alpha}{1-\alpha}N} \right) = x(1 - x) \left(\frac{1}{\alpha N + (1 - \alpha)} \right). \quad (\text{B10})$$

This gives the diffusion term of the diffusion equation.

Appendix C Drift and diffusion in a changing environment

Proving drift and diffusion terms in a changing environment. Let x be the initial frequency of the invading phenotype and X_t is the number of individuals with the phenotype at time t . Then,

$$E[X_t/N - x] \simeq x(1 - x)S_t/N_e, \quad \text{and} \quad V(X_t/N - x) \simeq tx(1 - x)/N_e,$$

where $S_t = \sum_{i=1}^t N(1 - \beta_i)$.

Proof. Let $s_t = N(1 - \beta_t)$, and $S_n = \sum_{i=1}^n s_i$, where β_t is $\beta(A)$ at generation t . We prove by induction both terms in eq. (22). From eq. (B3) we know that

$$E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - \frac{X_t}{N} \middle| X_t \right] = \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) (1 - \beta_{t+1}) = \frac{1}{N} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) s_{t+1}. \quad (\text{C1})$$

Also note that using the definition of $V(y) = E[y^2] - (E[y])^2$

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right] &= E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} - \left(\frac{X_t}{N} \right)^2 \right] = E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] - E \left[\left(\frac{X_t}{N} \right)^2 \right] \\ &= E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] - V \left(\frac{X_t}{N} \right) - \left(E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \right)^2. \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C2})$$

We can now use the induction assumption of $V(\frac{X_t}{N})$ to get

$$E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right] \simeq E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \left(1 - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \right) - \frac{1}{N_e} tx(1 - x). \quad (\text{C3})$$

From eq. (C1) we know that

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - \frac{X_t}{N} \right] &= \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right] \simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \left(E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \left(1 - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \right) - \frac{1}{N_e} tx(1 - x) \right) \\ &\simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \cdot E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \left(1 - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \right) - \frac{1}{N_e N} s_{t+1} tx(1 - x). \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C4})$$

Now we omit $O(\frac{1}{N_e N})$ and get

$$E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - \frac{X_t}{N} \right] \simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \cdot E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \left(1 - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] \right). \quad (\text{C5})$$

We now look at the induction assumption to see that

$$E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} - x \right] = E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] - E[x] = E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] - x , \quad (\text{C6})$$

so using the assumption we get

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] &\simeq \frac{1}{N} S_t x (1 - x) + x , \\ 1 - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \right] &\simeq 1 - \frac{1}{N} S_t x (1 - x) + x . \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C7})$$

We use both expressions in eq. (C5) and get

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - \frac{X_t}{N} \right] &\simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \left(\frac{1}{N} S_t x (1 - x) + x \right) \left(1 - \frac{1}{N} S_t x (1 - x) + x \right) \\ &\simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \cdot x (1 - x) , \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C8})$$

after again omitting $O(\frac{1}{N^2})$ terms. To conclude the proof, we note that

$$E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - x \right] = E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - \frac{X_t}{N} \right] + E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} - x \right] , \quad (\text{C9})$$

so again using the induction assumption, together with eq. (C8) we get

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} - x \right] &\simeq \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \cdot x (1 - x) + \frac{1}{N} S_t \cdot x (1 - x) \\ &\simeq \frac{1}{N} x (1 - x) (S_t + s_{t+1}) \simeq \frac{1}{N} S_{t+1} x (1 - x) , \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C10})$$

which proves the drift term.

For the diffusion term, we use a property of variance,

$$V \left(\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \right) = E \left[V \left(\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right) \right] + V \left(E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right] \right) . \quad (\text{C11})$$

Using eq. (C1) we see that

$$\begin{aligned} E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right] - E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \middle| X_t \right] &= \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \\ E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right] &= \frac{X_t}{N} + \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) . \end{aligned} \quad (\text{C12})$$

Using eq. (B10) we get

$$V \left(\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right) = \frac{1}{N_e} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) , \quad (\text{C13})$$

and using the equation $y'(1 - y') \simeq y(1 - y)$ on the first part of eq. (C11) we get

$$E \left[V \left(\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right) \right] = \frac{1}{N_e} E \left[\frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right] \simeq \frac{1}{N_e} x(1 - x) . \quad (\text{C14})$$

Moving on to simplify the second part of eq. (C11) using eq. (C12),

$$V \left(E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right] \right) = V \left(\frac{X_t}{N} + \frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right) \quad (\text{C15})$$

Now, because $\frac{X_t}{N}$ is a frequency, i.e $0 \leq X_t/N \leq 1$, we know that $V \left(\frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right) \leq \frac{1}{4}$. We therefore find that

$$V \left(\frac{1}{N} s_{t+1} \frac{X_t}{N} \left(1 - \frac{X_t}{N} \right) \right) \leq \frac{1}{4N^2} s_{t+1}^2 ; , \quad (\text{C16})$$

and so it can be ignored. Combining our equations we get

$$V \left(E \left[\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \middle| X_t \right] \right) = V \left(\frac{X_t}{N} \right) + O \left(\frac{1}{N^2} \right) \simeq V \left(\frac{X_t}{N} \right) . \quad (\text{C17})$$

Using the induction assumption and eq. (C14),

$$V \left(\frac{X_{t+1}}{N} \right) \simeq \frac{1}{N_e} x(1 - x) + \frac{1}{N_e} t x(1 - x) \simeq \frac{1}{N_e} x(1 - x)(t + 1) \quad (\text{C18})$$

which proves the diffusion term.

Supplementary Figures

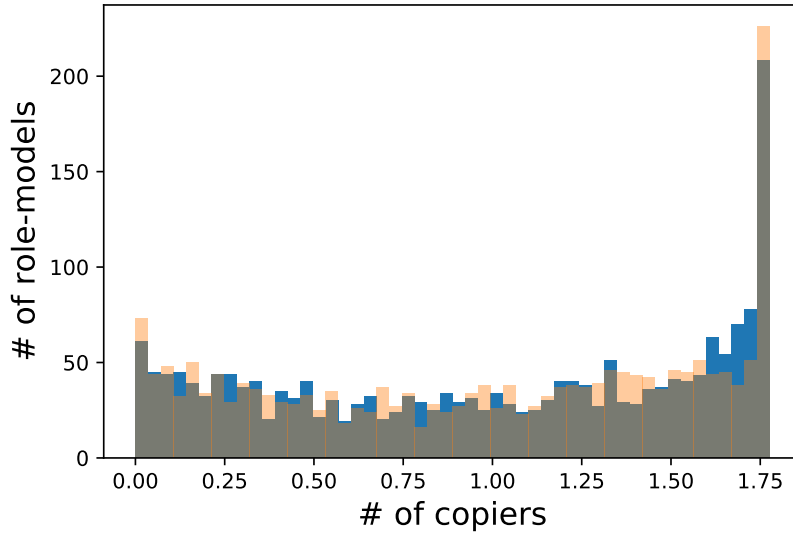


Figure S1: Numerical validation of the GB approximation. The approximation (orange) fits simulation results (blue) well when using 1,000 simulations. Here, population size, $N = 2,000$; bias weight, $\alpha = 0.1$; ideal phenotype value, $\hat{A} = 1$; role-model traits $\mathbf{A} \sim N(0, 1)$; success bias value, $\beta(A) = 0.956$.

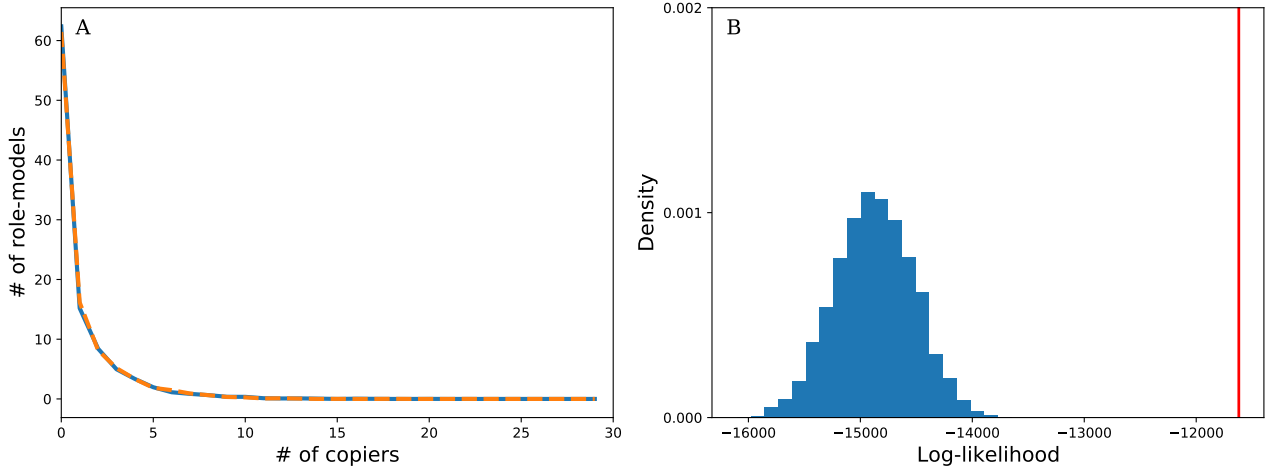


Figure S2: Numerical validation of the DM approximation. We performed computational simulations of the role-model choice process, i.e the fully iterative process, and compared them to the results of simulations using the DM distribution approximation. **(A)** The difference between the DM distribution (orange) and the empirical distribution of the simulations (blue) is very small. **(B)** The log-likelihood of the DM distribution for results of the simulations (red vertical line) is much higher than the log-likelihood of permutations of simulations (blue histogram). Here, population size, $N = 100$; number of simulations, $m = 100$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1$, $A \sim N(0, 1)$; success-bias weight, $\alpha = 0.5$. No estimation error or bias is applied, and traits are estimated and copied perfectly.

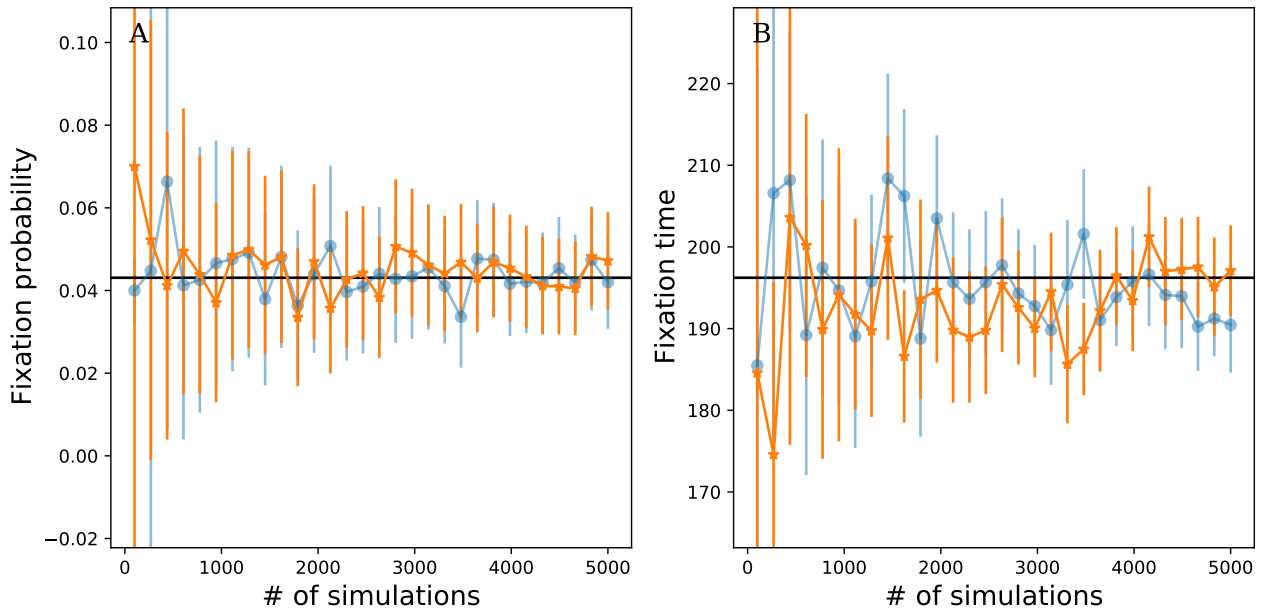


Figure S3: DM Approximation precision as function of number of simulations. Our DM approximation (orange) agrees with stochastic simulation results (blue) when using 1,000 or more simulations. Both fluctuate around the analytic fixation probability approximation (black; eq. (19)). Markers are averages across simulations, error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Here, population size, $N = 1000$; success-bias weight, $\alpha = 0.5$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1$, $A = 0.7$; success-bias value, $\beta(A) = 0.956$.

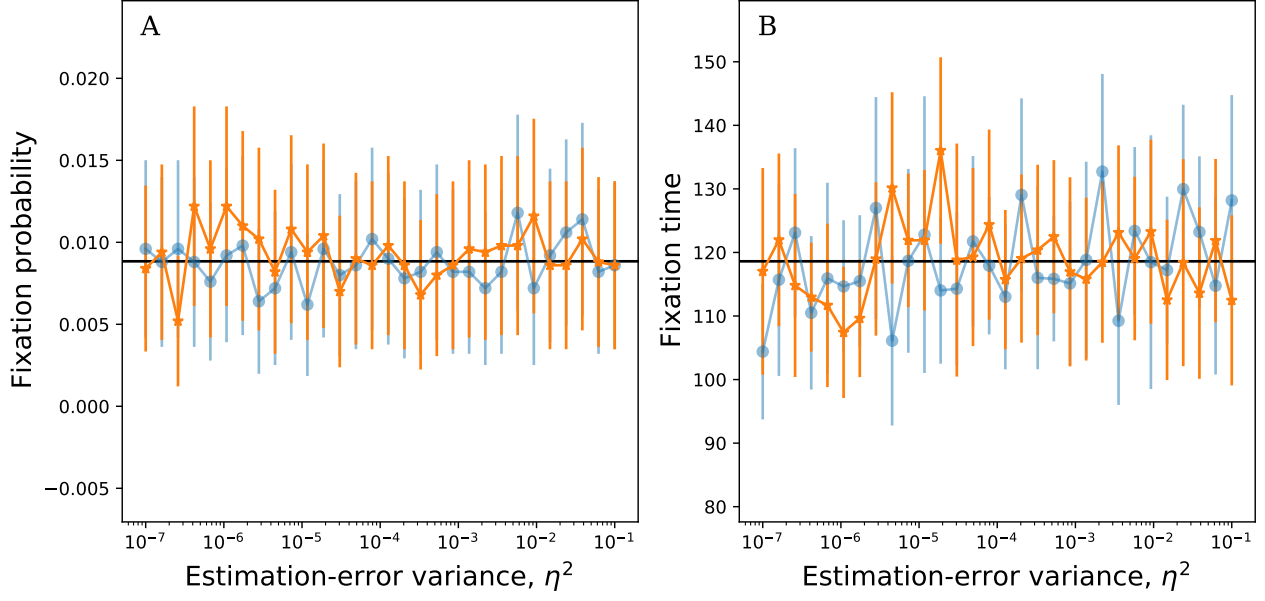


Figure S4: Robustness of DM approximations to success estimation error. Both the DM approximation (orange) and our approximation (black) agree with the stochastic simulations (blue), even with a high estimation error. Markers are averages across simulations, error bars are 95% confidence intervals. 5,000 simulations per data point; population size, $N = 1000$; success-bias weight, $\alpha = 0.1$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1, A = 0.7$; bias strength parameter $J \sim N(1, \eta^2)$ where η^2 is on the x-axis.

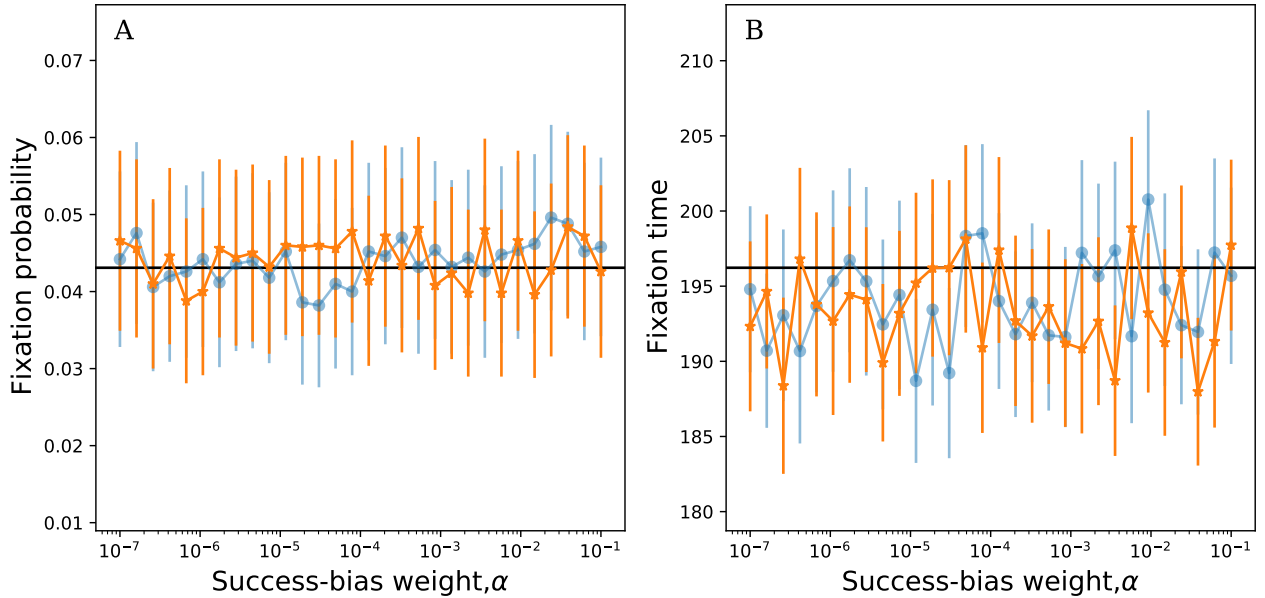


Figure S5: Robustness of DM approximations to variation in the bias weight α . Both the DM approximation (orange) and Kimura's equation (black line) fit the stochastic simulations (blue) well even with a high variation in success bias weight. Markers for average across 5,000 simulations, error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Here, population size, $N = 1000$; success bias weight normally distributed, $\alpha \sim N(0.5, x^2)$ where $e^{-7} \leq x \leq e^{-1}$; phenotype values, $\hat{A} = 1, A = 0.7$; success bias value, $\beta(A) = 0.956$.