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(Host: Sebastian Ebert)

Title:

Motivated Reasoning in the Social Domain *

Abstract:

Individuals tend to overweight positive signals relative to negative ones when updating beliefs in the ego-relevant domain, including their own intelligence, beauty, and skills. One's kindness to others can also be thought of as ego-relevant. Indeed, it has been documented that people have motivated memory regarding their generosity to others. However, motivated belief updating in the social domain has not been studied. In particular, this paper studies both types of motivated reasoning, i.e. asymmetric updating and motivated memory, in a consistent framework, replicates previous experimental paradigms in related ego-relevant domain, and documents interesting patterns in motivated reasoning about one's altruism. In particular, participants in our experiment exhibit significant asymmetric updating, relatively overweighting positive signals in the social domain, which can be attenuated by removal of ego-relevance or the prospect of obtaining objective feedback (uncertainty resolution). We also document patterns that have not been found in other domains. For instance, participants have more severe underweighting of negative signals when they are asked to update belief about themselves being the least selfish, rather than the most altruistic, within a group. Moreover, information suggesting that altruism is costly also attenuates asymmetric updating. In terms of motivated memory, we do find that participants were more likely to over-remember amount allocated to others when they chose the more selfish option in a binary dictator game.

* with Jing Li and Xinxin Zhu