Expertise mitigates the inherence bias in everyday explanations

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Abstract

A recent proposal suggests that the cognitive mechanisms involved in generating explanations (e.g., long-term and working memory) lead to an "inherence bias" in the content of the explanations generated. That is, explanations tend to rely on inherent or intrinsic features more often than would be normatively warranted. Here, we investigated a prediction of this account: namely, that participants' expertise in a domain should mitigate the inherence bias in their explanations in that domain, in part because experts have a broader and more accessible knowledge base about the domain, which might include extrinsic, contextual features. Across two studies (total N = 391), we asked participants how much they agree with inherent and extrinsic explanations for a variety of phenomena and measured their expertise in the relevant domains via self-report (e.g., how many books or articles they'd read). As predicted, in both studies greater expertise predicted lower inherence bias, ps < .05.

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