

## **UC Merced**

### **Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society**

#### **Title**

The Effect of Alternative Outcomes on Perceived Counterfactual Closeness

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/640986kx>

#### **Journal**

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 41(0)

#### **Authors**

Myers, Matthew

Rips, Lance

#### **Publication Date**

2019

Peer reviewed

# **The Effect of Alternative Outcomes on Perceived Counterfactual Closeness**

**Matthew Myers**

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States

**Lance Rips**

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States

## **Abstract**

Assessing the likelihood that a counterfactual event would have happened involves contrasting a factual outcome with the counterfactual alternative. In many situations, the number of alternatives will influence the perceived closeness of a particular alternative. For example, losers of a game in which participants guess which door conceals a prize will likely believe they were closer to winning when there were three doors compared to six. This reflects accurate probabilistic reasoning because more doors will be associated with a lower probability of winning. However, we test whether the number of alternatives has a unique influence on beliefs about counterfactual closeness. Experiments 1 and 2 show that, even when probability is held fixed, people believe counterfactual closeness decreases when there are more alternatives.