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The other Fox News effect: Attractive people and women more strongly impact belief formation

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Abstract

In everyday learning, people often receive conflicting information from different sources. What factors determine which sources influence learning? In this study, we consider whether social characteristics of a source, such as attractiveness and gender, affect belief-updating in a simple category learning task. Participants sorted novel stimuli into two categories. After establishing an initial category boundary, two companions were introduced from whom categorization advice was received. These sources did not always agree, and participants were never told which of them was correct. Across participants, the gender and attractiveness of the companions was varied. After 300 trials receiving this feedback for a range of stimuli, participants category boundaries were again measured allowing a determination of belief-shifts. For both male and female participants, attractiveness had a significant impact, and female sources were afforded more weight than males. Our results suggest that category learning can be influenced by social factors like gender and attractiveness.