Having an Interdependent Self-Construal Leads to Greater Weighting of Data In Causal Judgment

Kelly M. Goedert  
Seton Hall University

Lisa R. Grimm  
The College of New Jersey

Arthur B. Markman  
University of Texas, Austin

Barbara A. Spellman  
University of Virginia

Abstract: People’s causal judgments show systematic biases, including over-weighting of confirming information, and favoring prior beliefs over data. We investigated the effects of self-construal on data-weighting in causal judgments. We primed participants with interdependent or independent self-construals (interdependent people define themselves through relationships; independent through individual traits). On 56 trials, each containing complete frequency information (i.e., frequency of presence/absence of the cause and presence/absence of the effect), participants judged the ability of a cause to produce an effect. We observed a main effect of prime: Interdependent participants’ judgments covaried more with frequency information, suggesting they make greater use of data. Furthermore, on non-contingent trials, interdependents weighted all frequency data equally (independents did not). However, being interdependent did not perfectly ameliorate biases in the weighting of data: on contingent trials, both groups weighted the data unequally, favoring confirming, cause-present information. Thus, independents only sometimes demonstrated extra sensitivity to background information.