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Belief Change Triggers Behavioral Change

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Abstract

Beliefs have long been posited to be a predictor of behavior. However, empirical investigations into the relationship between beliefs (e.g., “vaccines cause autism”) and behaviors (e.g., vaccinating one’s child), mostly correlational in nature, have provided conflicting findings. To explore the causal impact of beliefs on behaviors, participants first rated the accuracy of a set of statements (health-related in Study 1, politically-charged in Studies 2 and 3) and chose corresponding campaigns to donate available funds. They were then provided with relevant evidence in favor of the correct statements and against the incorrect statements. Finally, participants rated the accuracy of the initial set of statements again and were given a chance to change their donation choices. The results of all three studies show that belief change predicts behavioral change, finding of particular relevance for interventions aimed at promoting constructive behaviors such as recycling, donating to charity, or employing preventative health measures.