

Does the process of explaining affect one's beliefs?

Isaac Handley-Miner

Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, United States

Liane Young

Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, United States

Abstract

In an era in which people are bombarded by claims, often from unreliable sources (e.g., generative AI, click-bait headlines), understanding what leads people to believe such claims is imperative. Building on work demonstrating the role of explanation in learning, we test how the process of explaining a claim affects people's beliefs in it (3 studies; N=476, 17,580 observations). In Study 1, participants read 30 scientific news headlines. For each, participants either: generated an explanation for the reported phenomenon, wrote down any thoughts they had about it, or retyped it word-for-word. Participants rated the likelihood that the headline was true. In Study 2, participants also provided baseline ratings one week before the manipulation. Study 3 added a control condition where participants simply read the headline. Across studies, participants believed claims of fact were more likely to be true after trying to explain them compared to any control condition.