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Competitive Routes to Belief and Their Impact on Future Learning

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Abstract: Models of belief formation and conceptual change have begun to allow for affective preferences and motives to supplement normative processes, such as reasoning and coherence evaluation (Kunda, 1990; Thagard, 2006). Griffin (2008) goes a step further in arguing that affect can be a separate competitive route to belief formation that could prevent these normative processes from taking place. One implication is that affect-based beliefs will lack the conceptual coherence presumably produced by engaging in reasoning and coherence evaluation processes. Borrowing from the expertise literature (e.g., Ericsson & Kintsch, 1995), this reduced conceptual coherence should hinder one's ability to represent new domain-related information. We present a study showing that a person's route to belief (evidence or emotion based) predicts their comprehension of belief-relevant information, even after controlling for several general and domain-specific individual differences in knowledge, skills, dispositions, motivation, and task engagement.