Forewarning Does Not Increase Adjustment From Self-Generated Anchors: Failures to Replicate Epley and Gilovich (2005)

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INTRODUCTION

- When making estimates of unknown quantities, people are typically biased by a previously considered value--i.e., an anchor.
- Epley and Gilovich (2005) had participants in a large Boston–area train station answer six self-generated and six externally-provided anchoring questions.
- They found that forewarning participants increased adjustments away from self-generated anchors but not from externally-provided anchors.

METHOD

- We conducted 3 replication studies: online with students (N=207), in lab with students (N=195), and with local community residents (N=197).
- Participants answered the self-generated anchor and externally provided anchor questions used by Epley and Gilovich (2005)
  - Self-generated: “At what temperature does vodka freeze?”
  - Externally provided: “Was the telephone invented before or after 1920?” “In what year was the telephone invented?”
- Participants were randomly assigned to either the forewarning condition or no forewarning condition.

Forewarning Instructions

Previous research has demonstrated that people’s judgments are often biased by the first pieces of information that come to mind. For example, imagine that a real estate agent is trying to figure out how much a house is worth. It is possible that this agent might first think about the price of the last house she assessed and refer to that number when estimating the value of the new house. This tendency to think about or anchor on the first value that came to the agent’s mind can cause her to underestimate or overestimate the actual value of the house. The following questions will either provide you with information or ask you to generate this information yourself when answering the trivia questions. Please make sure you don’t anchor too much on the first information that comes to your mind and, instead, that you adjust your estimate to give the most accurate estimate you can.

Epley and Gilovich (2005; Study 2; N = 48) found that forewarning of anchoring effects increased adjustments away from self-generated anchors.

We replicated their study (Ns = 207, 195, 197) and did not find consistent evidence that forewarning increases adjustment from self-generated anchors.

Preregistration, materials, and data:
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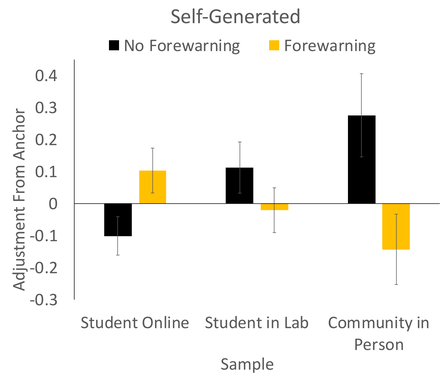
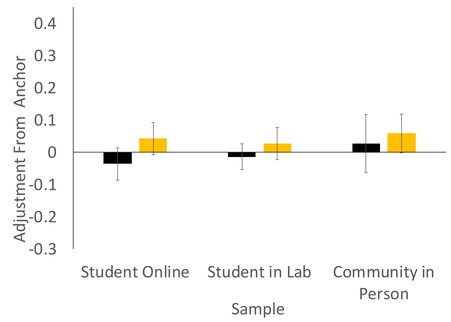
RESULTS

- With self generated anchors, no main effect of sample (p = .722, η^2 = .001) or forewarning (p = .093, η^2 = .006). However, significant sample X forewarning interaction (p = .001, η^2 = .028).



- With externally provided anchors, no main effect of sample (p = .745, η^2 = .001), no main effect of forewarning (p = .279, η^2 = .002), and no interaction (p = .905, η^2 = .000).



DISCUSSION

- These studies do not support Epley and Gilovich’s (2005) claim that that forewarning increases adjustment from self-generated anchors.
- In one study, forewarning slightly increased adjustment, in one study had no influence, and in one study decreased adjustment.
- Overall, with 12x the sample size of the original study, there was no influence of forewarning on adjustment.