

People sometimes seek the truth, but most prefer like-minded views

July 1 2009



University of Illinois psychology professor Dolores Albarracín and her colleagues found that people who are unsure of their own beliefs are less likely to entertain opposing views. Credit: Photo by L. Brian Stauffer, U. of I. News Bureau.

We swim in a sea of information, but filter out most of what we see and hear. A new analysis of data from dozens of studies sheds new light on how we choose what we do and do not hear. The study found that while people tend to avoid information that contradicts what they already think or believe, certain factors can cause them to seek out, or at least consider, other points of view.

The analysis, reported this month in [Psychological Bulletin](#), published by

the American Psychological Association, was led by researchers at the University of Illinois and the University of Florida, and included data from 91 studies involving nearly 8,000 participants. It puts to rest a longstanding debate over whether people actively avoid [information](#) that contradicts what they believe, or whether they are simply exposed more often to ideas that conform to their own because they tend to be surrounded by like-minded people.

"We wanted to see exactly across the board to what extent people are willing to seek out the truth versus just stay comfortable with what they know," said University of Illinois psychology professor Dolores Albarracín, who led the study with University of Florida researcher William Hart. The team also included researchers from Northwestern University and Ohio University.

The studies they reviewed generally asked participants about their views on a given topic and then allowed them to choose whether they wanted to view or read information supporting their own or an opposing point of view.

The researchers found that people are about twice as likely to select information that supports their own point of view (67 percent) as to consider an opposing idea (33 percent).

Certain individuals, those with close-minded personalities, are even more reluctant to expose themselves to differing perspectives, Albarracín said. They will opt for the information that corresponds to their views nearly 75 percent of the time.

The researchers also found, not surprisingly, that people are more resistant to new points of view when their own ideas are associated with political, religious or ethical values.

"If you are really committed to your own attitude - for example, if you

are a very committed Democrat - you are more likely to seek congenial information, that is, information that corresponds with your views," Albarracín said. "If the issues concern moral values or politics, about 70 percent of the time you will choose congenial information, versus about 60 percent of the time if the issues are not related to values."

Perhaps more surprisingly, people who have little confidence in their own beliefs are less likely to expose themselves to contrary views than people who are very confident in their own ideas, Albarracín said.

Certain factors can also induce people to seek out opposing points of view, she said. Those who may have to publicly defend their ideas, such as politicians, for example, are more motivated to learn about the views of those who oppose them. In the process, she said, they sometimes find that their own ideas evolve.

People are also more likely to expose themselves to opposing ideas when it is useful to them in some way, Albarracín said.

"If you're going to buy a house and you really like the house, you're still going to have it inspected," she said. Similarly, no matter how much you like your surgeon, you may seek out a second opinion before scheduling a major operation, she said.

"For the most part it seems that [people](#) tend to stay with their own beliefs and attitudes because changing those might prevent them from living the lives they're living," Albarracín said. "But it's good news that one out of three times, or close to that, they are willing to seek out the other side."

More information: "Feeling Validated Versus Being Correct: A Meta-Analysis of Selective Exposure to Information" appears in volume 135, No. 4 of *Psychological Bulletin*. The co-authors: Albarracín; Hart, Inge

Brechan and Lisa Merrill, of the University of Florida; Alice H. Eagly, of Northwestern University; and Matthew J. Lindberg, of Ohio University.

Source: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: People sometimes seek the truth, but most prefer like-minded views (2009, July 1) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-07-people-truth-like-minded-views.html>

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