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Plausible or not plausible: How participants assess the experimental interventions as a result of motivated reasoning

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In experimental research, we often prime participants with an idea about their ingroup (IG) or outgroup (OG): e.g., IG members accept/empathize with OG, or OG members are willing to share disputed territory/have an inclusive sense of victimhood. As a part of a manipulation check, we ask participants to assess plausibility of the given content; those who assessed it as implausible are excluded from the analyses. By the motivated reasoning account, participants' prior beliefs should affect the success of priming: participants find the intervention less plausible if it goes against their initial attitudes. In two experiments, we explored how individual differences in IG identification, perceived OG threat, political orientation, and ethnocultural empathy affect the plausibility assessment of two dual identity interventions: a) exposing participants to a descriptive norm by IG (majority accepts that minority identifies dually, both with ethnic and national group), or b) exposing them to an OG experience (minority members claim to identify dually). In study 1 (N = 184, university students), those who perceived OG as a threat assessed the intervention as less plausible, but only if it was framed from the OG perspective. We replicated this effect in study 2 (N = 329, general population). It shows that exclusion practices based on plausibility assessment lead us to omit the most prejudiced respondents from analyses, which impacts intervention effect size and its generalizability.

Keywords: intergroup bias, experimental interventions, perceived outgroup threat, dual identity