Self-deception facilitates interpersonal persuasion

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**Abstract**: Self-deception is commonplace and costly, which raises the question of why it exists. According to the dominant explanation in psychology, self-deception is an *intra*personal process that fortifies and protects the self from threatening information. An alternative possibility is that self-deception evolved as an *inter*personal strategy that is intended to persuade others. To investigate interpersonal aspects of self-deception, we gave people a persuasive task and measured their information processing biases and their persuasiveness. In Experiment 1 people who were financially motivated to persuade demonstrated biased information gathering to support their upcoming claim. Specifically, these individuals stopped their information gathering sooner when the initial information was supportive of their persuasive goals than when it was not. Relatively unmotivated people did not show this bias. Experiment 2 replicated this biased information gathering in a different context and demonstrated that it led people to form opinions that were consistent with their persuasive goals. In combination with their biased information processing, these goal-consistent opinions enabled people to be more persuasive to others. These findings suggest that self-deception might serve an interpersonal purpose.

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