

It's hard to challenge someone's false beliefs because their ideas come from social networks, not facts

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Most people think they acquire their beliefs [using a high standard of objectivity.](#)

But recent arguments between people about issues like trans rights, vaccinations or *Roe v. Wade* point to a different reality.

Consider [the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*](#). There is plenty of evidence to show that [widely accessible abortions lead to safer outcomes for children and people who can become pregnant](#). Moreover, data suggests [abortion bans are ineffective, harmful and dangerous](#). A commitment to life, then, should favor [comprehensive health care for those who can become pregnant—including abortions](#). It seems like there is a disconnect: People are not having fact-informed arguments.

The world is hyperspecialized

There is a reason facts are quickly lost in contentious arguments: individual people do not have the resources to deeply understand complex [social issues](#). This is, in part, because the world in which we live is [hyperspecialized](#). This means all reliable information is produced thanks to vast, interconnected fields of study. Humans have [divided cognitive labor](#) so we [can know much more collectively than we can individually](#).

For example, the structural integrity of a bridge or the inner-workings of a cell phone are things the collective "we" understands better together.

But this feature of human knowledge is our downfall when it comes to the persistence of socially erroneous beliefs.

During arguments about social issues between those with differing opinions, one person often ends up insisting that if the other were only rational and could see the evidence, they would change their mind.

[Socially problematic or false beliefs](#) include things like racist,

homophobic, transphobic and misogynistic ideas. These ideas can lead to significant, negative social consequences, especially for those belonging to marginalized [communities](#).

False beliefs are pervasive in part because of the collective nature of human knowledge. As individuals, we can't assess every issue since they require specialized knowledge. And while some may argue "do your own research," individuals don't necessarily have access to the best avenues to conduct fair research. Not only that, [many would rather stick to their own set of beliefs](#).

Finding someone trustworthy

Due to the sheer volume of information that is relevant to any given [social issue](#), people have developed [psychological shortcuts—or heuristics—to point them in the right direction](#). These shortcuts have little to do with evidence and much more to do with evaluating who we can trust.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the extent to which we find a person trustworthy is calibrated according to our social communities. We naturally associate with people who share our values: [psychological processes encourage us to acquire values from our communities](#), and [we tend to seek out like-minded individuals](#).

Our social communities radically determine who we see as trustworthy. Our [social groups determine our political attitudes](#), [obscure which evidence will count as meaningful](#) and [moderate the extent to which most people evaluate how their beliefs correspond to what experts say](#).

The people already in our communities will appear to be the most knowledgeable—even if they have no expertise or understanding and even when they are perpetuating false beliefs.

While it might seem like accurate beliefs are easily acquired, people are not quite so adept when it comes to determining what is true, [nor are they equipped to determine who the appropriate experts are.](#)

Problematic beliefs persist because our psychological and [social circumstances](#) don't situate us appropriately to evaluate issues. This is partly why reasoning alone won't change people's minds.

Problematic beliefs are so appealing, then, because they're easy.

From the perspective of a person living in a community committed to socially problematic beliefs, there is almost always more "trustworthy evidence" from someone they know.

Instead of complacent acceptance of misinformed [beliefs](#), we need institutional moves to cultivate trust between experts and the public.

Perhaps more importantly, we need to cultivate a shared commitment to recognizing the humanity in others. Arriving at a problematic belief is easy, but building a better world requires authentic relationships and coalitions across community lines.

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