Flipping a coin for a decision and then doing the opposite of what it suggests is associated with more responsibility and accountability.

Responsibility and accountability for decisions when flipping a coin

Maria Douneva, Mariela Jaffé, & Rainer Greifeneder

INTRO

When struggling with decisions, people sometimes flip a coin. Interestingly, when looking at the coin flip’s outcome, they do not necessarily follow the coin’s suggestion (coin = decider), but realize what they really want (coin = catalyst). To date, little is known about how people experience and evaluate this phenomenon.

METHODS

In three studies (total N = 446), participants judged another person who makes a decision himself vs. flips a coin for a decision and ...

- simply adheres to the coin suggestion (decider condition)
- is happy with the coin suggestion and adheres to the suggestion (catalyst-yes condition)
- is unhappy with the coin suggestion and does the opposite (catalyst-no condition)

RESULTS

- Study 1: Participants ascribe higher responsibility and accountability to a person using the coin as catalyst vs. decider.
- Study 2: Participants ascribe higher responsibility and accountability to a person using the coin as catalyst and doing the opposite vs. adhering to it.
- Study 3: Flipping a coin vs. making a decision on your own is not seen as leading to negative outcomes or an act of tempting fate.

DISCUSSION

- Flipping a coin to decide does not always mean giving up responsibility and accountability for decisions.
- The attributions people make might predict the likelihood of using a coin for own decisions.