This lab exercise appeared in Section VI: Cognition, developed by Amy C. Fineburg & Suzanne C. Baker, in "Promoting psychological science: A Compendium of laboratory exercises for teachers of high school psychology" (Miller, 2018). This exercise is provided here with permission from the editor.

Lab Title: Confirmation Bias and Custody Decisions

Section 1: Performance Expectations

What will the student be asked to do?

- Select one or more performance standards:
  - Explain how confirmation bias influences decision making
  - Analyze how confirmation bias can influence decision making
  - Practice random sampling and/or assignment as appropriate
  - Calculate descriptive and inferential statistics from data collected

Main Idea/Concept Demonstrated or Taught by Lab:

Students will discuss the concept of confirmation bias and how it applies to decision-making experiences. At the end of the lab, students should be able to:

Demonstrate an understanding of confirmation bias and its influence on decision making.

Identify some potential variables that affect confirmation bias.

Summarize data and calculate descriptive statistics; interpret inferential statistics

Key Terms and Psychologists Associated with Main Idea/Concept:

Confirmation bias

Materials:

Students will need to identify participants. The number of participants required will depend on the specific goals of the lab exercise. Teachers can adjust the lab based on availability of participants.

Instructions:

1. Students often believe that decisions are not influenced by situational factors. Researcher Elder Shafir (1993) presented participants with two identical scenarios about a child custody situation. One scenario asked participants to determine which parent should be awarded custody, and the other scenario asked participants to determine which parent should be denied custody. Participants in the study choose the same parent (Parent B) for both scenarios. Shafir explained that the results could be explained by confirmation bias. Participants looked at only the positive qualities when deciding to award custody and the negative qualities when deciding to deny custody. This lab replicates this research.
2. Teachers may wish to have students read the original research article (cited below) as a reference for structuring the experimental conditions.
3. Students should present one scenario to each participant and record the response. Other issues for the class to consider include:
   - How long to allow for participants to respond?

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- How to record responses. Responses could simply be counted using paper and pencil, or students may use some other method.

4. The class should develop a plan for data collection. Questions to consider include:
    - Number of participants needed
    - Age and other demographic characteristics of participants
    - Ethical considerations, including informed consent and debriefing
5. Students may collect data as individuals or in pairs or small groups, depending on the size and nature of the class.
6. Each student or small group should collect data on approximately an equal number of participants in each group.
7. Students should bring data back to class by a specified due date. In class, have students tabulate the number of unique responses generated by each participate, and then pool their data for the control and experimental groups.
8. Students can then calculate descriptive statistics, analyze the data, and construct appropriate figures to summarize the data. This could be done as homework or as a small group project within the class, depending on the level of the class and the number of students.
9. Have the students write a report summarizing the results of tests of each concept.
10. The students might want to look at other factors that could affect the dependent variable, such as age. The students could examine the data for this effect if their sample size is large enough.

Follow-up and Discussion:

- Have students discuss their findings and why they were consistent with (or not consistent with) the original research that was being replicated.
- Have students discuss how these findings can be useful in their daily lives. What factors can lead people to rely heavily on confirmation bias? How can people overcome this bias?
- Ask students to describe how their understanding of confirmation bias has changed now that they have hands-on experience collecting data on these concepts.
- Have students generate further hypotheses based on the findings of the lab that can be tested with more or different participants.
- Have students identify limitations with this exercise (e.g. sampling issues; measurement of variables), and how it could be modified.

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Section 2: Crosscutting Concepts

Select at Least One

- Select one or more of the following cross-cutting concepts central to the phenomena that students will investigate:
    - What *patterns* underlie responses to the questions?
    - *Cause and effect:* Students should be able to discuss how some factors may affect framing.

- Describe how the cross-cutting concept(s) will factor into the lab.
    - Students will be discussing these concepts when summarizing and analyzing the data.

Section 3: Lab Report (written, verbal, or recorded)

Suggested Content to be Included in Student Report:

The sections below could be included in a written report of this lab, depending on the teacher's specific goal for this activity. See above for more details.

- Background information
- Objectives
- Questions and hypothesis
- Materials used (include measurements, where necessary)
- Procedure described in detail (for replication)
- Graphs/tables of collected data
- Findings
    - Was hypothesis supported or not supported? Explain.
        - If inferential statistics are not calculated, students could discuss whether the data are consistent with findings in the research literature.
    - What do the findings mean? (use appropriate terminology related to concept)
    - How could the research be improved, if replicated?

References:

Shafir, E. (1993). Choosing versus rejecting: Why some options are both better and worse than others. *Memory and Cognition, 21,* 546-556.