New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

Irene Petruccelli

with dr. Daniele Vitale, psychologist, sexologist, expert in forensic psychology

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Self-Serving Bias

• Tendency to perceive oneself favorably
  • Explaining positive and negative events
    • Self-serving attributions
      • Tendency to attribute positive outcomes to oneself and negative outcomes to other factors
Self-Serving Bias

• Can We All Be Better than Average?
  “all the children are above average”
  • The Lake Wobegon effect is a natural tendency to overestimate one's capabilities and see oneself as better than others. Research psychologists refer to this tendency as self-enhancement bias and have found evidence for its existence in many domains.
  • Most people see themselves as better than the average person on the following dimensions
    • Subjective, (e.g. “disciplined”) vs. Observable (“punctual”)
      • Socially desirable
      • Common dimensions

Are we more self-serving on subjective or observable? Why?
Self-Serving Bias

Areas in which we believe we are above average

…but sometimes you’re right… but how will you know when?

• Ethics
• Professional competence
• Virtues
• Intelligence

• Parental support
• Health
• Attractiveness
• Driving

Explanation of Self-serving bias

› Motivational: Self-esteem maintenance.
› Social: Self-presentation and impression formation.
Self-Serving Bias

• **Optimism bias** describes a cognitive bias that causes someone to believe that they themselves are less likely to experience a negative event. It is also known as **unrealistic optimism** or **comparative optimism**.

• Optimism bias is common and transcends gender, ethnicity, nationality and age.

Factors that cause a person to be optimistically biased:

1. their desired end state,
2. their cognitive mechanisms,
3. the information they have about themselves versus others,
4. Overall mood.

*For example: people believing that they are less at risk of being a crime victim*...
• Although the optimism bias occurs for both positive events (such as believing oneself to be more financially successful than others) and negative events (such as being less likely to have a drinking problem), there is more research and evidence suggesting that the bias is stronger for negative events (the **valence effect**).

• Different consequences result from these two types of events: positive events often lead to feelings of well being and self-esteem, while negative events lead to consequences involving more risk, such as engaging in risky behaviors and not taking precautionary measures for safety.
Self-Serving Bias

Defensive Pessimism

- Adaptive value of anticipating problems and harnessing one’s anxiety to motivate effective action

- When implementing defensive pessimism, individuals set low expectations for their performance, regardless of how well they have done in the past.

- Defensive pessimists then think through specific negative events and setbacks that could adversely influence their goal pursuits.

- By envisioning possible negative outcomes, defensive pessimists can take action to avoid or prepare for them.

- Using this strategy, defensive pessimists can advantageously harness anxiety that might otherwise harm their performance.

Realistic pessimism makes us wiser and better prepared to cope with negative outcomes.
Self-Serving Bias

- False Consensus Effect
  - Tendency to overestimate the commonality of one’s opinions and one’s undesirable or unsuccessful behaviors
    - Why do you think integrity tests for employment work?

- False Uniqueness Effect
  - Tendency to underestimate the commonality of one’s abilities and one’s desirable or successful behaviors
Self-Serving Bias

• Explaining Self-Serving Bias
  • Self-serving bias is a by-product of how we process and remember information about ourselves

• Self-Serving Bias may be
  • Adaptive
    • Protects people from depression
      • *Depressed people may be more in tune with reality!*
  • Maladaptive
    • *Why didn’t I get the big merit raise?*
    • Group-serving bias
Self-Serving Bias
the tendency for an individual to maintain self-esteem by attributing positive events to their own character but negative events to external factors

Why Did I Pass the Test?
- I studied really hard
- I'm smart
- I earned the A myself

Why Did I Fail the Test?
- The teacher was bad
- Test was too hard
- It wasn't my fault

Fundamental Attribution Error
people's tendency to place undue emphasis on dispositional factors to explain someone else's negative behavior in a given situation rather than external factors

Why Did My Classmate Fail the Test?
- He's just not very intelligent
- He doesn't work hard at anything
- His reading and writing skills are too low to succeed
Self-Presentation

• Wanting to present a desired image both to an external audience (other people) and to an internal audience (ourselves)
  • It’s a good thing in employment interviews!

**Self-Handicapping (fear of failure):** is a cognitive strategy by which people avoid effort in the hopes of keeping potential failure from hurting self-esteem. Protecting one’s self-image with behaviors that create a handy excuse for later failure.

**Self-Monitoring:** Tendency to act like social chameleons

• Twin truths: self-efficacy and self-serving bias
  • *Find the middle ground through careful self-reflection!*
Self-Handicapping: Background

- Self-handicapping (SH) has been commonly defined as actively seeking or creating situations which will interfere with performance and therefore create an explanation for possible failure outside of individual ability attributions (Arkin and Baumgardner, 1985).

- SH has been described throughout current psychological literature as both a method of reducing threat to one’s self esteem (Jones and Berglas, 1978) and an impression management technique (Kolditz and Arkin, 1982).
# Types of Self-Handicaps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claimed</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>“I don’t know how to use PowerPoint very well”</td>
<td>“My boss said to hire that new employee”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Reduced Effort</td>
<td>Not learning how to use PowerPoint more effectively</td>
<td>Lack of mentoring new employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create Obstacle</td>
<td>Produce poor PPT slide deck</td>
<td>Bias against new employee in performance appraisal</td>
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Psychopathy

• The psychopath can appear normal, even charming. Underneath, he lacks conscience and empathy, making him manipulative, volatile and often (but by no means always) criminal.

• Adult psychopathy is mostly impervious to treatment, though programs are in place to treat callous, unemotional youth in hopes of preventing them from maturing into psychopaths.

• The terms “psychopath” and “sociopath” are often used interchangeably...

• Both constructs are most closely represented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as Antisocial Personality Disorder.

• Brain anatomy, genetics, and a person’s environment may all contribute to the development of psychopathic traits.