

Self-serving Bias

Authored by
mohammad looti

November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Self-serving Bias*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39401>

A self-serving bias occurs when people attribute their successes to internal or personal factors but attribute their failures to situational factors beyond their control. The self-serving bias can be seen in the common human tendency to take credit for success but to deny responsibility for failure. It may also manifest itself as a tendency for people to evaluate ambiguous information in a way that is beneficial to their interests. Self-serving bias may be associated with the better-than-average effect, in which individuals are biased to believe that they typically perform better than the average person in areas important to their self-esteem. This effect, also called "illusory superiority", has been found when people rate their own driving skill, social sensitivity, leadership ability and many other attributes.

Use and purpose

The term "self-serving bias" is most often used to describe a pattern of biased causal inference, in which praise or blame depend on whether success or failure was achieved. For example, a student who gets a good grade on an exam might say, "I got an A because I am intelligent and I studied hard!" whereas a student who does poorly on an exam might say, "The teacher gave me an F because he does not like me!" When someone strategically strives to facilitate external causes for their poor performance (so that they will subsequently have a means to avoid blaming themselves for failure), it may be labeled self-handicapping.

Examples

Wearing fall protection when working at height is essential to protecting workers from injury. Self-serving bias can be observed on fatalities that occur to those who work at height and are unwilling to wear protective gear

Another example of self-serving bias can be found in the workplace. Victims of serious occupational accidents tend to attribute their accidents to external factors, whereas their coworkers and management tend to attribute the accidents to the victims' own actions.

Several reasons have been proposed to explain the occurrence of self-serving bias. One class of explanation is motivational: people are motivated to protect their self-esteem, and so create causal explanations that serve to make them feel better. Another class of explanation focuses on strategic impression management: although people may not believe the content of a self-serving utterance, they may nevertheless offer it to others in order to create a favorable impression. Yet another class of explanation focuses on basic mechanisms of memory: people might make success more available in memory for internal reasons rather than for external reasons.

Self-serving bias may result in bargaining impasse if each side interprets the facts of the dispute in their own favor. In this situation one or more of the parties may refuse to continue negotiating,

believing the other side is either bluffing or refusing to accept a reasonable settlement and thus deserves to be "punished".

There is a good deal of experimental evidence to support this hypothesis. In one experiment, subjects played the role of either the plaintiff or defendant in a hypothetical automotive accident tort case with a maximum potential damages payment of \$100,000. The plaintiff's prediction of the likely judicial award was on average \$14,500 higher than the defendant's. The plaintiff's average nomination of a "fair" figure was \$17,700 higher than the defendant's. When parties subsequently attempted to negotiate a settlement agreement, the discrepancy between the two sides' assessment of a fair compensation figure strongly correlated with whether or not parties reached an agreement within a set period of time. This experiment was conducted with real money with one real dollar being equal to 10,000 experimental dollars and if parties did not reach a negotiated agreement the case was decided by a third party and each side had to pay costly court and legal fees.

At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that people do not necessarily exhibit self-serving bias with respect to computer technologies. When they fail to achieve a desirable outcome by means of a computer, they often blame themselves, not the technology. The reason is that people are so used to bad functionality, counterintuitive features, bugs, and sudden crashes of most contemporary software applications that they tend not to complain about them. Instead, they believe it is their personal responsibility to predict possible issues and to find solutions to computer problems. This unique phenomenon has been recently observed in several human-computer interaction investigations.