

# "I knew it!" Hindsight more likely to affect men

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(Phys.org)—They say hindsight is 20/20, but apparently that's not always the case.

When unexpected things happen, people tend to think they actually "knew it all along." This phenomenon is known as hindsight bias, and it occurs when we falsely convince ourselves we predicted something long before it happened. Most commonly seen during every day conversation, hindsight bias causes people to say things like, "I always knew we'd win the series!" or "I had a feeling we'd get lost."

Economics major Jacqueline Andros studied this behavior for her senior honors thesis, and her findings suggest neither gender is immune to the

problem. Men exhibit a hindsight bias that is 125 percent larger than for women; however, once men become aware of their bias, they correct it more often than women.

Andros believes the tendency to view the world as more predictable than it is plays a part in more than just trivial talk. From financial forecasts to judicial decisions, evaluating whether someone could have been able to predict something is a relevant societal issue.

"It's important for people to be aware of vulnerabilities like this, especially when they're more common, but less well-known," said Andros, who graduated from Brigham Young University in August.

Andros chose to explore [gender differences](#) in hindsight bias by using a series of questionnaires. Each survey included 30 true/false statements related to geography, entertainment, history, arts and literature, science and nature, and sports and leisure.

The first questionnaire asked participants to simply answer "true" or "false" to statements like the following(see answers at the end of this article to judge your own hindsight bias):

1. The satellites of Uranus are mostly named after Shakespeare characters.
2. In J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, the One Ring was made by elves.
3. [Leonardo da Vinci](#)'s famous painting, "The [Last Supper](#)", can be seen in Rome.
4. The New York Yankees have won the World Series more than any other team.
5. Russia is separated from Finland by the Bering Strait.

After collecting the participants' responses, Andros distributed the correct answers and asked participants to replicate their own original answers for each statement. While many had trouble recalling their first predictions, men were more than twice as likely to believe they'd initially given the right answers when they actually hadn't.

"I found a clear indication of gender difference at that point," Andros says. "Males obviously had a much higher propensity toward hindsight bias."

Andros took the experiment a step further to see what participants would do if they knew the severity of their bias. After calculating and distributing personal hindsight bias "scores" (extreme, moderate, or mild), Andros asked participants to again replicate their original answers, this time fully aware of the bias they previously exhibited. These results revealed men were much more likely than women to correct the problem once they knew what was going on.

Ironically, Andros occasionally found herself exhibiting the behavior she was so carefully observing.

"I'd catch myself saying, 'I knew I should have done it this way or that way!'" Andros admitted. "But those moments were fun—at least I knew I was normal!"

Though her research doesn't address causality, Andros believes gender differences like overconfidence and a desire to save face might be affecting the driving force behind hindsight bias. Such characteristics are empirically attributed more to men than women and would also explain why men are more eager to correct an appearance of weakness.

In a few years, Andros might take such hypotheses with her to graduate school, but her first stop is Washington, D.C. There she will work for

Cornerstone Research, a consulting firm that provides corporations with economic evidence for litigation purposes.

With so much to look forward to, Andros reflects on her years at BYU to confirm she harbors no hindsight bias about her academic career.

"I never expected to be so sad to move on," she said. "I really did love my BYU experience. I met and worked with such wonderful people and look forward to keeping those connections - hopefully for the rest of my life."

**More information:** Answers: (1) True (2) False—Sauron ( 3) False—Milan ( 4) True (5) False—Alaska

Provided by Brigham Young University

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