

Overconfidence linked to one's view of intelligence

March 7 2016



Washington State University psychologist Joyce Ehrlinger has found that a person's tendency to be overconfident increases if he or she thinks intelligence is fixed and unchangeable. Credit: WSU

Washington State University researcher Joyce Ehrlinger has found that a person's tendency to be overconfident increases if he or she thinks intelligence is fixed and unchangeable.

Such people tend to maintain their overconfidence by concentrating on the easy parts of tasks while spending as little time as possible on the



hard parts of tasks, said Ehrlinger, a WSU assistant professor of psychology. But people who hold a growth mindset—meaning they think intelligence is a changeable quality—spend more time on the challenging parts of tasks, she said. Consequently, their levels of confidence are more in line with their abilities.

Ehrlinger's research, conducted with Ainsley Mitchum of Florida State University and Carol Dweck of Stanford University, appears in the March edition of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

"A little bit of overconfidence can be helpful," said Ehrlinger, "but larger amounts of overconfidence can lead people to make bad decisions and to miss out on opportunities to learn." The researchers note that overconfidence is a documented problem for drivers, motorcyclists, bungee jumpers, doctors and lawyers.

In the first of three studies for their recent paper, Ehrlinger and her colleagues found that students who hold a fixed mindset about intelligence were more overconfident about their performance on a multiple-choice test than those with a growth mindset. A second study found that students with fixed mindsets devoted less attention to difficult problems and, consequently, displayed more overconfidence than those with growth mindsets.

"By focusing on aspects of the task that were easy and spending as little time as possible on more difficult parts of the task," Dr. Ehrlinger said, "fixed theorists felt as if they had performed very well relative to their peers. In contrast, growth theorists weren't threatened by challenging parts of the task and didn't feel the need to bask in the glow of the parts that were easy. This more balanced way of completing the task left growth theorists with a better understanding of how well they did."

Further evidence for this conclusion came from a third study, which



showed that forcing fixed theorists to really look at the difficult as well as the easy parts of an intellectual task shook their confidence, inspiring more accurate impressions of their performance.

The study fits in with WSU's Grand Challenges initiative stimulating research to address some of society's most complex issues. It is particularly relevant to the challenge of "Advancing Opportunity and Equity," which, among other things, will look at the causes and consequences of inequal opportunity and ways to improve education.

"We know that students' beliefs about <u>intelligence</u> are very consequential in the classroom and that interventions that teach students a growth mindset lead to improvements in their grades," said Ehrlinger. "We also know that being overconfident keeps people from learning. You have to understand and acknowledge what you don't yet know in order to truly learn. This research suggests that part of why growth mindsets improve learning might be because they lead people to better understand what they do and what they do not know."

"Education is perhaps the best way to advance opportunity," she said, "and emerging evidence suggests that the benefits of teaching a growth mindset for improving grades are particularly strong for students in stigmatized groups based on race or gender."

More information: Joyce Ehrlinger et al. Understanding overconfidence: Theories of intelligence, preferential attention, and distorted self-assessment, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2016). DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2015.11.001

Provided by Washington State University



Citation: Overconfidence linked to one's view of intelligence (2016, March 7) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <u>https://phys.org/news/2016-03-overconfidence-linked-view-intelligence.html</u>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.