



Self-deception

"Five senses; an incurably abstract intellect; a haphazardly selective memory; a set of preconceptions and assumptions so numerous that I can never examine more than a minority of them—never become even conscious of them all. How much of total reality can such an apparatus let through?"

- C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

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Social benefits of self-deceptive confidence

Confidence impacts the way others perceive and treat us. Confident people are believed more often [e.g. 18], have more influence in groups or when giving advice [19,20], and appear more knowledgeable [21]. Most germane to our review, inaccurate (and self-deceptive) overconfidence often carries social benefits: in one study, overconfidence increased peers' judgments of competence, resulting in higher social status [25]. Similarly, overconfidence correlates with others' mistakenly high expectations: following an unstructured interaction in preparation for a class, students predicted their next grades and relative ranking in the group and the grades and relative rankings of others. Self-deceptive overconfidence was positively correlated with fooling others: students who had overly high expectations for themselves inspired overly high expectations from others [22*]. Note, however, that as being perceived as lying to others is costly, so being perceived as self-enhancing can also come with costs: whereas actual self-enhancers were rated by others as emotionally stable, socially attractive, and socially influential, those who observers also *perceived* to be high self-enhancers (those whom observers 'saw through') were perceived as emotionally unstable and socially unstable — though they remained socially influential [23*]. These results align with the 'optimal margin of illusion' perspective [24]. Self-deception can come with social benefits, but those benefits are not guaranteed.

CITATION

Chance, Zoë, and Michael I. Norton. "[The What and Why of Self-deception.](#)" Special Issue on Morality and Ethics edited by Francesca Gino and Shaul Salvi. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 6 (December 2015): 104–107.

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Cognitive Distortions

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

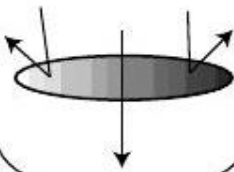
Over-generalising

"everything is always rubbish"

"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

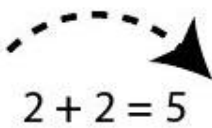
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.