



*The Lucifer Effect* by Philip Zimbardo

## **Self-Serving Biases May Be at Work**

Most of us construct self-enhancing, self-serving, egocentric biases that make us feel special-never ordinary, and certainly "above average." They enable us to explain away failures, take credit for our successes, and disown responsibility for bad decisions, perceiving our subjective world through rainbow prisms. For example, research shows that 86 percent of Australians rate their job performance as "above average," and 90 percent of American business managers rate their performance as superior to that of their average peer.

Yet these biases can be maladaptive as well by blinding us to our similarity to others and distancing us from the reality that people just like us behave badly in certain toxic situations.

We take risks. In the extreme version of these biases, most people believe that they are less vulnerable to these self-serving biases than other people, even after being taught about them.

That means when you read about the Stanford Prisoner Experiment, you might well conclude that you would not do what the majority has done, that you would, of course, be the exception to the rule. That statistically unreasonable belief makes you even more vulnerable to situational forces precisely because you underestimate their power as you overestimate yours. You are convinced that you would be the good guard, the defiant prisoner, the resistor, the dissident, the nonconformist, and, most of all, the hero.