

## Self-serving Anchoring of Self-judgments

**Authors :** Elitza Z. Ambrus, Bjoern Hartig, Ryan McKay

**Abstract :** Individuals' self-judgments might be malleable and influenced by comparison with a random value. On the one hand, self-judgments reflect our self-image, which is typically considered to be stable in adulthood. Indeed, people also strive hard to maintain a fixed, positive moral image of themselves. On the other hand, research has shown the robustness of the so-called anchoring effect on judgments and decisions. The anchoring effect refers to the influence of a previously considered comparative value (anchor) on a consecutive absolute judgment and reveals that individuals' estimates of various quantities are flexible and can be influenced by a salient random value. The present study extends the anchoring paradigm to the domain of the self. We also investigate whether participants are more susceptible to self-serving anchors, i.e., anchors that enhance participant's self-image, especially their moral self-image. In a pre-registered study via the online platform Prolific, 249 participants (156 females, 89 males, 3 other and 1 who preferred not to specify their gender;  $M = 35.88$ ,  $SD = 13.91$ ) ranked themselves on eight personality characteristics. However, in the anchoring conditions, respondents were asked to first indicate whether they thought they would rank higher or lower than a given anchor value before providing their estimated rank in comparison to 100 other anonymous participants. A high and a low anchor value were employed to differentiate between anchors in a desirable (self-serving) direction and anchors in an undesirable (self-diminishing) direction. In the control treatment, there was no comparison question. Subsequently, participants provided their self-rankings on the eight personality traits with two personal characteristics for each combination of the factors desirable/undesirable and moral/non-moral. We found evidence of an anchoring effect for self-judgments. Moreover, anchoring was more efficient when people were anchored in a self-serving direction: the anchoring effect was enhanced when supporting a more favorable self-view and mitigated (even reversed) when implying a deterioration of the self-image. The self-serving anchoring was more pronounced for moral than for non-moral traits. The data also provided evidence in support of a better-than-average effect in general as well as a magnified better-than-average effect for moral traits. Taken together, these results suggest that self-judgments might not be as stable in adulthood as previously thought. In addition, considerations of constructing and maintaining a positive self-image might interact with the anchoring effect on self-judgments. Potential implications of our results concern the construction and malleability of self-judgments as well as the psychological mechanism shaping anchoring.

**Keywords :** anchoring, better-than-average effect, self-judgments, self-serving anchoring

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