

Grawemeyer Awards

Unskilled people often overrate themselves, say 2023 psychology prize winners by Denise Fitzpatrick

Are you as good at doing things as you think you are?

Maybe not, according to David Dunning and Justin Kruger, two social psychologists who today were named cowinners of the 2023 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Psychology for identifying a cognitive bias that causes people to overrate their own competence.

Their idea “Unskilled and Unaware of It,” also known as the [Dunning-Kruger effect](#), shows that people tend to have overly flattering opinions of their ability to perform tasks compared to what objective evidence shows.

“Ironically, people who are the least skilled are often the most confident because they can’t judge their own skills accurately, and those who are the most skilled fail to see how much their skill surpasses others,” they said.

For example, in a recent study of whether vaccines and autism are linked, participants who knew the least about autism were most likely to claim they knew as much as doctors and scientists. Studies with gun owners, emergency responders, chess players, budget officials, debate teams and wine tasters have produced similar results.

Dunning and Kruger first described the effect in a 1999 paper inspired by a news story about a bank robber who spread lemon juice over his face thinking it would make him invisible to security cameras. Since then, their finding has been cited in more than 8,500 scholarly publications and mentioned regularly in popular media discussions of issues ranging from national politics to education policy.

“The Dunning-Kruger effect has always been an important finding, but the idea is likely to have even more impact in the years ahead as information and misinformation become more available to us and our society struggles with when and how to trust experts in a variety of domains,” said Nicholas Noles, psychology award director.

[Dunning](#), a University of Michigan psychology professor who previously worked at Cornell University, holds a doctorate from Stanford University. [Kruger](#), a senior research scholar at New York University’s Stern School of Business who previously worked at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, holds a doctorate from Cornell.