Americans to the stress of persistent, effortful coping in the face of socioeconomic challenges, a parallel to the experience of the fictional character John Henry, who outpaced the steam drill but died soon thereafter from the exertion. Like John Henryism, the stress of everyday overachieving may also have adverse health implications.

Ironically, overachievement can serve to enhance rather than diminish self-doubt in one's natural talent. The effort of overachievers provides an alternative explanation to natural ability for any success they achieve. Moreover, these shaky assessments of ability generalize to shaky expectations of future potential. Sadly, overachievers may reap success beyond objective expectations but still doubt their own ability to reproduce success without enormous effort. Overachievers may ultimately enter a vicious cycle in which they cope with self-doubt by, once again, expending heroic effort to ensure that they can perform successfully again and again. High achievement and overachievement in the context of a group might even enhance self-doubt about an individual's personal contribution, and produce shaky judgments about one's individual talent and personal value to the group. The increased pressure to perform successfully in a public arena has been shown in research many times.

Some individuals experience high self-doubt without having the intense concern over performance that characterizes the overachiever. At a behavioral level, the lower concern with performance leads these individuals to employ a very different strategy than overachievers. These individuals may cope with self-doubt by employing the seemingly paradoxical strategy of deliberately sabotaging, or handicapping, their own performance. Like the overachiever, self-handicappers experience chronic self-doubt. Unlike the overachiever, however, self-handicappers are more concerned about the implications of failure as it relates to judgments about their ability; they worry that failure will be an indication (to themselves or others) that they lack ability. Thus, whereas the overachiever will expend heroic effort to avoid failure, the self-handicapper is willing to embrace failure (i.e., withdraw effort) to protect a basic perception of personal competence. They undermine their own performance in order to make the cause of their (perhaps failing) behavior ambiguous. Examples include alcohol use and abuse, procrastination, laziness, and any other behavior that could excuse failure.

Though speculative, the distinct psychological style of subjective overachievers can be traced to their early learning history. The budding overachiever may come to internalize the parental message that only successful performance can guarantee continued love and support. These early beliefs may lead overachievers to assign higher significance to successful outcomes than to exploring their actual talents.

Subjective overachievement has been distinguished in research from high achievement motivation (people show the same concern over successful performances, but seek achievement for personal satisfaction), perfectionism (people display intense preoccupation with successful performance, but do not necessarily experience self-doubt), and the imposter phenomenon (where self-doubt is present, but success is seen as unearned or illegitimate because it is due to luck, not effort).

**SEE ALSO** *Achievement; Underachievers*

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# OVER-ATTRIBUTION BIAS

The over-attribution bias, also known as "correspondence bias," occurs when people attribute human behavior to whichever causal factor is most available to them. Behavior often "engulfs the field," and people draw dispositional inferences that correspond to the behavior. When a person freely expresses a certain attitude, others assume that the person believes it. The same inference is biased, however, when observers know that a powerful other asked the person to express that attitude. The bias is most striking when it is the observers themselves who constrain the respondent's behavior.

The common interpretation of the correspondence bias is that it constitutes a "fundamental attribution error"

(Ross 1977). This interpretation holds that people fail to fully discount the influence of a person's internal disposition as a cause of behavior. The error interpretation has been influential in social psychology because it implies that people are incapable of understanding the power of the typical social-psychological experiment, which is to demonstrate that subtle changes in a person's situation can dramatically change behavior.

Upon review, the idea that people fail to appreciate the power of social situations needs to be tempered. The correspondence bias reverses, for example, when people who know a person's disposition are asked to judge the strength of the situation. They continue to attribute behavior in part to the situation even when the behavior is freely chosen. Hence, the correspondence bias is generic rather than purely dispositional. People attribute behavior firstly to whichever causal factor they happen to be focused on, be it a property of the person or the situation, and then modulate this inference by considering the other, less salient causal factor. Because the former process is likely intuitive and automatic, whereas the latter is deliberate and controlled, the bias is larger when people are unmotivated or unable (e.g., because of distraction) to process all available information.

Most models of causal attribution are hydraulic in that they regard the total causal force directing behavior as a zero-sum quantity. As one causal factor is being favored, another one must yield. On this view, the correspondence bias reflects a failure to fully discount the primary and salient cause when the secondary cause is sufficient. For the explanation of everyday behavior, the hydraulic model is sometimes inadequate. For example, people often attribute aggressive behavior to an aggressive disposition. To do so, however, they require the presence of a facilitating stimulus, such as an insult or a threat. Whereas a hydraulic model suggests that inferences about an aggressive disposition should be stronger in the absence of provocation, an interactionist model recognizes that a situational cause (provocation) is necessary for a dispositional attribution. On this view, theories of personality that seek to capture individual differences by merely counting trait-related acts are likely contaminated by the researchers' correspondence biases.

The common tendency of attributing correspondence bias to people's dispositional failure to think logically may itself be an example of the very same bias. Correspondence biases are, after all, experimentally evoked when investigators limit the salience of the situational causes of behavior. Hence, it may be sufficient to attribute respondents' preference for dispositional inferences to the nature of the experimental situation.

**SEE ALSO** *Attribution*

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# OVER-CONTROL

**SEE** *Farsightedness.*

# OVEREATING

*Overeating* is a relative term, defined as food consumption that exceeds energy expenditure. Chronic overeating typically results in obesity and is not uncommon. In fact, obesity is at epidemic proportions for all age groups, and is seen as a growing health threat not just in Western societies but also in much of the world. Risk for obesity increased markedly during the 1980s, an increase that is attributable to a complex combination of environmental, sociocultural, genetic, and behavioral factors.

Overeating can be either active or passive. Active overeating is largely the consequence of a convergence of sociocultural factors that most notably include aggressive mass marketing of energy- or calorie-dense foods (foods high in fat, refined carbohydrates, and sugar) and disproportionately large portions of food relative to individuals' actual caloric needs. Not coincidentally, such foods are easily accessible, widely available, relatively affordable, and highly palatable. Unsurprisingly, society has fallen prey to marketing influences, and consumption of such foods is on the rise. It is noteworthy that, as of 2006, the highest rates of obesity and obesity-related disorders in the United States are found in lower-income groups for whom the marketing of energy-dense, low-cost foods is most pervasive.

Active overeating is also part of the symptom complex of conditions such as bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. With bulimia, individuals experience a sense of being unable to control what and how much they eat, and they engage in recurrent episodes during which they very rapidly consume an abnormally large quantity of