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Abstract

This study investigated the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect in a hiring context. A total of 190 participants were told to assume the role of a manager tasked with hiring a new assistant manager. Participants were given a deductive reasoning ability test and told that they either scored low or high on the test, regardless of their actual performance. Then, participants received information about a hypothetical candidate who scored either low or high on deductive reasoning, and they were asked about their likelihood of hiring the candidate. Results showed that candidates high on deductive reasoning received higher hireability ratings than candidates low on deductive reasoning, regardless of participant score. Moreover, participants low in deductive reasoning gave significantly higher ratings to candidates low in deductive reasoning when compared to participants high in deductive reasoning, suggesting that the similar-to-me effect or the self-serving bias may have occurred. These findings imply that listing deductive reasoning as an important ability may have reduced the likelihood of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect occurring when the candidate was high on deductive reasoning but not when the candidate was low on deductive reasoning. Overall, it appears that individuals who are low on a certain ability are more likely to prefer and hire candidates who are similar to them with regards to that ability than individuals high on that ability, suggesting that companies should be aware of the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias when hiring decisions are made.
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Industrial-organizational (I-O) psychologists are involved in many organizational tasks and activities on a daily basis. Of these tasks, personnel selection is one of the most important because hiring the wrong person for the job can lead to great expenses for an organization. I-O psychologists use many predictors to ensure that organizations hire the right person for the job (e.g., interviews, tests). Despite using different predictors and trying to ensure that the best applicant is hired, I-O psychologists are prone to biases.

In order to combat the various biases that may plague selection, it is necessary to examine these biases to gain a better understanding of what they are and how they may be reduced or eliminated. Two biases that may affect the selection process are the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect. Although past research has examined the self-serving bias, most studies could be classified as basic research (e.g., Dunning, Perie, & Story, 1991; Kunda, 1987; McElwee, Dunning, Tan, & Hollman, 2001). Moreover, the few applied studies have primarily focused on how this bias could affect job analyses (Aguinis, Mazurkiewicz, & Heggestad, 2009; Cucina, Martin, Vasilopoulos, & Thibodeux, 2012; Cucina, Vasilopoulos, & Sehgal, 2005). Similarly, although most research on the similar-to-me effect has been applied (García, Posthuma, & Colella, 2008; Graves & Powell, 1996; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears & Rowe, 2003), it emphasized how the similar-to-me effect might influence interviews. The present study expanded on the existing research by examining these biases in a selection context that is
not limited to an employment interview or a job analysis. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to investigate how the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect may influence the hiring process, focusing on ability, as opposed to demographics or personality traits.

**The Self-Serving Bias**

The social and cognitive psychology literatures define the self-serving attributional bias as the tendency for people to “attribute positive events to themselves but dismiss negative events as attributable to other causes” (Mezulis, Abramsom, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004, p. 711). In the I-O literature, the focus has been on the first half of this definition by examining why people attribute their success to themselves, paying less attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors. A meta-analysis by Mezulis et al. (2004) indicates that the self-serving attributional bias is prevalent in the United States and other Western cultures. This effect has been found in several studies (e.g., Cucina, et al., 2005; Dunning et al., 1991; Kunda, 1987; McElwee et al., 2001).

In a series of studies, Kunda (1987) provided evidence of the self-serving bias in a hypothetical academic context. Kunda found evidence of a self-serving bias when participants indicated whether or not a target would be successful in professional school. Participants were given descriptions of individuals who were said to have been part of a study about success and failure in professional school. The descriptions consisted of one of two sets of opposite attributes (e.g., religious views, birth order, and employment status of mother). In addition, individuals were said to have been successful in professional school, unsuccessful in professional school, or given no indication as to whether or not they were successful. Next, participants were asked to rate how each of
the individual’s attributes may have contributed to their performance in professional school. Finally, participants filled out a survey indicating their standing on the various attributes used to describe the above individuals and indicated whether or not they had plans of attending professional school. Participants who had indicated that they were planning on attending professional school or had thought about attending professional school were more likely to engage in a self-serving bias than participants not planning on attending professional school. In other words, participants who had the same attributes as the individuals who were successful in professional school indicated those attributes as contributing to their success. Interestingly, the attributes that Kunda focused on were not outwardly related to success in professional school (e.g., religious views, birth order). The author stated that a possible reason why the self-serving bias occurred is that participants may have wanted to “reassure themselves that they will obtain desired goals or avoid feared outcomes by virtue of the goodness of their attributes” (p. 642). Similarly, individuals making hiring decisions may focus on finding their own attributes in another in an attempt to validate themselves and bolster their self-esteem. These findings indicate that motivational factors may play a role in the appearance of a self-serving bias, such that interviewers may gravitate towards those with similar attributes if they feel that candidates’ performance will be a reflection of their own.

In another series of studies, Dunning et al. (1991) investigated the differences in people’s prototypes of social categories and whether or not these differences are self-serving. As a pretest, participants were given people-oriented and goal-oriented subscales and were classified as either people-oriented or goal-oriented based on the scores they received on these subscales. When describing effective leaders, people-oriented
participants described effective leaders as people-oriented, whereas goal-directed participants described effective leaders as goal-oriented. This effect was thought to occur because the attributes measured were seen as relevant to the domain at hand, namely leadership. However, when the same participants were asked to indicate whether the same traits were necessary for a creative individual, the above effect was not replicated. This was presumably due to the participants not seeing a connection between those particular traits and creativity, as indicated by the responses of the participants. These findings may indicate that the self-serving bias may only occur when the traits under comparison are seen as relevant to the goal at hand. This finding somewhat contradicts Kunda’s (1987) results because Kunda found that participants’ attributes that were not outwardly related to success in professional school were still deemed important for success in professional school.

Finally, McElwee et al. (2001) examined the self-serving bias in an academic setting. Students ranking high in either math or verbal skills rated a list of fictitious incoming first-year students on likelihood of success in college. Verbally proficient participants tended to give higher ratings to verbally proficient students, and math proficient students tended to give higher ratings to math proficient students. This finding might indicate that the participants gave higher rankings to similar students to validate themselves. Another important finding was that participants projected attributes they possessed onto famous leaders and indicated those attributes as conducive to those leaders’ success, regardless of the leaders’ possession of those attributes. Specifically, participants who were people-oriented indicated famous leaders as being people-oriented,
whereas participants who were goal-oriented indicated famous leaders as being goal-oriented. These findings are similar to Dunning et al.’s (1991) results.

In an I-O context, interviewers may project their own attributes onto interviewees they believe will be successful. This may prevent them from gaining an understanding of what those individuals could contribute to the organization with their unique skill sets. As previously mentioned in the I-O literature, individuals engage in the self-serving bias when they indicate attributes that they possess as necessary for successful job performance (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2009; Cucina et al., 2005). Individuals who are successful at their job may conclude that their attributes account for their success, and that anyone else in the same position needs the same attributes to succeed. If these people are involved in hiring, their self-serving bias may blind them to potential job candidates with different skill sets who may also be able to succeed in that position.

Cucina et al. (2005) investigated the impact of the self-serving bias in relation to personality-based job analyses (PBJA). A PBJA differs from a traditional job analysis in a few distinct ways. A traditional job analysis breaks down a job into specific tasks that must be carried out and indicates the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are necessary for that job. A PBJA, on the other hand, is used to identify important personality characteristics necessary for a particular job (Cucina et al., 2005). Cucina et al. used students as subject matter experts (SMEs) when investigating the degree to which scores on a PBJA scale correlated with scores on a personality scale. The Personality Position Requirements Form (PPRF), a measure designed to indicate personality attributes required for successful job performance, was used as the PBJA scale, and modified to be relevant to the position of a student. Personality was assessed using the
International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), a scale designed to measure the Big Five personality dimensions. They found that SME ratings on the PPRF scale significantly positively correlated with scores on the IPIP. Each of the five dimensions of the Big Five correlated with at least one item from the PPRF. In other words, students indicated that self-possessed attributes were conducive to successful academic performance.

Aguinis et al. (2009) replicated Cucina et al.’s findings (2005) in a field study. They used an online sample consisting of government employees, in an effort to make the results more generalizable to the workforce than the student sample previously used in the Cucina et al. study. Similar to the previous study, Aguinis et al. used the IPIP and PPRF to obtain measures of participant personality and PBJA ratings. Additionally, Aguinis et al. found that frame-of-reference training (FOR), a type of training that reduces bias and improves accuracy by providing a common frame of reference for raters to use, was able to mitigate the effects of the self-serving bias by decreasing the correlations between PBJA ratings and self-reported personality. Aguinis et al. stated that “using PBJA ratings is likely to lead to a workforce that is increasingly homogenous in terms of personality but not necessarily a workforce with improved levels of performance” (p. 431). The above statement is emblematic of the harm that the self-serving bias can cause organizations.

Most recently, Cucina et al. (2012) further added to the evidence for the effect of the self-serving bias on job analyses. An archival data set consisting of 57 different clerical and technical occupations was used to study the effects of the self-serving bias on a traditional job analysis, as opposed to a PBJA. Mail-in paper-and-pencil surveys were used to measure participants’ self-rated performance on 31 competencies and the
importance of those competencies to the job. Significant relationships were found between self-rated performance on the 31 competencies and the importance of those competencies. The Cucina et al. study provides further evidence of the self-serving bias when using a traditional job analysis and when using a broader and more generalizable sample than both previously mentioned studies. Additionally, it provides evidence that the self-serving bias may be applicable to KSAs in addition to personality traits. Although the I-O literature has focused on positive attributes, the original self-serving bias definition suggests that the self-serving bias may occur whether a person is high or low on a certain KSA. The current study aims to gain a better understanding of how the self-serving bias may affect KSAs in a hiring context.

The Similar-to-Me Effect

The similar-to-me effect is the tendency for raters to more highly rate job candidates with whom they share similar demographic (e.g., age, race) and attitudinal characteristics (Sears & Rowe, 2003). This construct is well documented in the I-O literature, but based on the current literature review, appears to have been primarily applied to interview ratings (García et al., 2008; Graves & Powell, 1996; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears & Rowe, 2003). The current study expanded the application of this construct from an interview context to a more general selection context.

One factor that has been investigated in the similar-to-me effect literature is gender. Although sex similarity between interviewer and interviewee has been examined, the results seem inconclusive. For example, Graves and Powell (1996) investigated whether sex similarity had an effect on interviewers’ evaluations of applicants and whether interview quality mediated that relationship. The sample consisted of over 250
recruiters who were invited to a college campus to interview students. The interviewers were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding various aspects of their interviews with students during their time on campus, including demographics of both the interviewer and interviewee, interview quality, subjective qualifications, and interview outcome. Data from 680 interviews were obtained, and results showed that sex similarity seemed to influence female recruiters’ ratings more than male recruiters’ ratings, such that female recruiters gave higher ratings to female applicants over male applicants, whereas male recruiters gave comparable ratings to female and male applicants.

García et al. (2008) investigated how similarity, liking, and expectations affect fit perceptions in interviews. A sample of 114 interview-applicant dyads from actual interviews arranged by a university was investigated. Interviewers were given two questionnaires, one given a month before interviews took place to get demographic and human capital data, and one shortly after interviews were conducted which asked about perceived similarity to the applicant, liking of the applicant, performance expectations of the applicant, and whether or not the interviewer would recommend hiring the applicant. Results revealed that perceived similarity seemed to affect both liking and performance expectations. Interestingly, the authors found that, in general, human resources interviewers perceived applicants to be more similar to themselves than line interviewers did. Finally, the study found that demographic similarity (which included sex, age, and racial/ethnic background) does not seem to affect selection decisions.

Rand and Wexley (1975) investigated the similar-to-me effect in regards to biographical data, race, and need for affiliation in simulated employment interviews. Biographical data consisted of a number of “stereotypical” qualities for Blacks and
Whites (e.g., wife’s education was 9th grade for Blacks vs. a bachelor’s degree for Whites, number of children was seven for Blacks vs. two for Whites). Biographical similarity and dissimilarity were determined by the degree to which the participants and job candidates matched on those “stereotypical” attributes. The sample consisted of 80 White males and 80 White females. Participants took measures of racial prejudice, need for affiliation, and propinquity to Blacks. Based on these measures, participants were placed in one of four groups: high affiliation-high prejudice, high affiliation-low prejudice, low affiliation-high prejudice, and low affiliation-low prejudice. The week following completion of the questionnaires, participants were asked to view taped interviews in which the job candidate spoke directly into the camera, simulating the experience of an interviewer for the participant. Of the 40 participants in each group, 10 viewed a White biographically similar applicant, 10 viewed a Black biographically similar applicant, 10 viewed a White biographically dissimilar applicant, and 10 viewed a Black biographically dissimilar applicant. After viewing the tapes, participants were asked to fill out a hiring recommendation scale as well as a scale evaluating the applicant’s intelligence, knowledge of current events, morality, adjustment, likeability, and desirability as a work partner. Results indicated that participants with biographically similar information to applicants gave them higher job suitability ratings, and perceived those applicants as more intelligent, more knowledgeable of current events, better adjusted, and better liked than applicants with dissimilar biographical information. This effect was found regardless of race; however, highly prejudiced participants did rate applicants lower on intelligence and desirability as a work partner. The authors’ thoughts on this finding are represented in the following statement:
It appears that, since most people in our culture are motivated to be logical and need to interpret their environment correctly, the presentation of biographically similar information satisfies this need by providing positive reinforcement as it consensually validates the interviewer. Biographically dissimilar information, however, has the obverse effect since it contradicts the interviewer's perception and interpretation of his environment. (Rand & Wexley, 1975, p. 541)

Sears and Rowe (2003) investigated whether a similar-to-me effect would be found for similarity in conscientiousness, which made it unique, as it investigated the similar-to-me effect with regards to a personality attribute, as opposed to a demographic characteristic. Participants were pre-screened for conscientiousness and placed into two groups: low conscientiousness and high conscientiousness. Next, participants were shown two interviews, one with a low-conscientiousness job candidate and one with a high-conscientiousness job candidate. Finally, participants rated the job candidates on the Big Five personality traits, a competency model, and a hireability scale that tapped into perceived similarity, affect toward the applicant, perceived competence of the applicant, and job suitability. Results indicated that on competence evaluations, highly conscientious raters evaluated candidates who were high on conscientiousness more highly than they evaluated candidates who were low on conscientiousness; however, raters who were low on conscientiousness did not appear to differentiate between candidates who were low and high on conscientiousness (Sears & Rowe, 2003). A similar effect was also found for job suitability ratings, such that highly conscientious raters indicated that high conscientiousness was more suitable for the job; however, raters who
were low on conscientiousness did not differentiate between candidates who were low and high on conscientiousness (Sears & Rowe, 2003).

Sears and Rowe (2003) also discussed theories that have been offered in an attempt to explain why the similar-to-me effect occurs. For instance, Byrne’s (1971, as cited in Frank & Hackman, 1975) theory of interpersonal attraction states that an individual will have more of a chance of receiving validation of his/her own views and opinions with a similar individual. These validations lead to favorable feelings toward that other person (Frank & Hackman, 1975). Once again, this explanation is similar to the one previously offered for why the self-serving bias may occur. Another theory is the ideal-employee schema, which states that the more similar a potential candidate is to the schema of the ideal employee held by the interviewer, the more likely will the interviewer be to rate the candidate highly (Dalessio & Imada, 1984). If the interviewers believe that they possess the traits of the ideal employee, they will compare the traits of the candidate to themselves (Sears & Rowe, 2003).

Dalessio and Imada (1984) investigated the effect of perceptions of applicant similarity to the self versus applicant similarity to an ideal employee on final selection decisions. Results indicated that both applicant similarity to the self and applicant similarity to an ideal employee influenced hiring decisions, but the effect of applicant similarity to an ideal employee was stronger. Dalessio and Imada also stated that the similar-to-me effect may not occur in situations where the interviewer does not have to interact with the interviewee in the future, if hired. As previously mentioned, Byrne’s theory (Frank & Hackman, 1975) states that people tend to have more favorable perceptions of others to whom they are similar, but if interviewers will not be spending
much time with the applicant in the future, it may not matter to them whether the applicant is similar to them.

Because the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect are similar, it is important to distinguish them from each other. Specifically, the self-serving bias seems more related to people identifying others as being similar to them in order to validate themselves in some way. For instance, interviewers with strong mathematical skills who are involved in the hiring process may look for applicants with strong mathematical skills in order to validate to themselves that those skills are indeed useful and important to have on the job. The similar-to-me effect seems more related to how perceived demographic or attitudinal similarities between applicants and interviewers affect how much the interviewers like an applicant, without necessarily looking to validate themselves in any way. This seems consistent with Dalessio and Imada’s (1984) suggestion that the similar-to-me effect may not occur in situations where the interviewer does not have to interact with the interviewee in the future, if hired.

In summary, the purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect in a hypothetical hiring context. Moreover, this study examined KSAs (focusing on ability) instead of demographics or personality traits. Overall, the current study expanded on past research that has focused on these biases in either an interview or a job analysis context to a hiring context by examining the roles that these biases might play when making final hiring decisions.
Chapter II
Rationale and Hypotheses

As previously stated, the social and cognitive psychology literatures define the self-serving attributional bias as the tendency for people to “attribute positive events to themselves but dismiss negative events as attributable to other causes” (Mezulis et al., 2004, p. 711). In the I-O literature, the focus has been on the first half of this definition by examining why people attribute their success to themselves, paying less attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors. On the other hand, the similar-to-me effect is the tendency for individuals to give higher ratings to those who possess similar demographic and attitudinal variables (Sears & Rowe, 2003). These biases may lead to similar outcomes, such as hiring a candidate who is not suitable for the job or passing over a candidate who may perform well in the job.

Research has found support for the self-serving bias. Dunning et al. (1991) and McElwee et al. (2001) both indicated that individuals indicated personality traits (specifically goal-oriented and people-oriented) as necessary for success to the extent that they themselves possessed the trait. McElwee et al. also found that individuals indicated specific skills as necessary for success (specifically math and verbal skills) to the extent that they themselves possessed those traits. Cucina et al. (2005), Aguinis et al. (2009), and Cucina et al. (2012) found evidence indicating that SMEs in various settings rated personality traits that they possessed as necessary for successful performance. Therefore, the self-serving bias suggests that an individual who is interviewing a candidate with
similar KSAs for a job may be more likely to hire that person because of their similarities. Although the I-O literature has focused on positive attributes, the original self-serving bias definition suggests that the self-serving bias may occur whether a person is high or low on a certain KSA.

The similar-to-me effect is the tendency for raters to more highly rate job candidates with whom they share similar demographic (e.g., age, race) and attitudinal characteristics (Sears & Rowe, 2003). Therefore, this effect suggests that an individual who is interviewing a candidate who is similar to them may be more likely to hire that person because of the similarities they share. Sears and Rowe (2003) found that individuals high in conscientiousness were more likely to find applicants also high on the trait suitable for the job, but individuals who were low on conscientiousness did not differentiate between candidates who were low and high on conscientiousness (Sears & Rowe, 2003).

Research on the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect has primarily focused on attitudinal and demographic variables. The current study focused on a KSA in order to fill this gap in the literature. Specifically, deductive reasoning ability was manipulated, such that participants were told that they either scored high or low on deductive reasoning. Moreover, participants reviewed the profile of a candidate who was either high or low on this ability. It was expected that, overall, the candidate who scored high on deductive reasoning would receive higher hireability ratings than the candidate who scored low on deductive reasoning. However, extending past research findings to abilities, the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect suggest that participants who are told they scored high on this ability should be more likely to hire the candidate who is
high on this ability than participants who are told they scored low on this ability. Along similar lines, both biases suggest that participants who are told they scored low on deductive reasoning should be more likely to hire the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning than participants who are told they scored high on deductive reasoning. Please refer to Figure 1. Hence, the following hypotheses were developed:

*Hypothesis 1:* Candidate score on deductive reasoning will have a significant main effect on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning will receive higher ratings than the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning.

*Hypothesis 2:* There will be a significant interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning will receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning, whereas the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning will receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning.
Figure 1. Hypothesized interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings. DR = deductive reasoning.
Chapter III
Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirteen participants were recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is an online marketplace where people are compensated from completing human intelligence tasks (HITs). To be eligible to participate, participants had to be at least 18 years old, live in the United States, have a HIT approval rate of at least 95%, and have a minimum of 50 HITs completed. Participants were compensated $.25 for taking part in the study, if they completed all the required items and passed the manipulation and quality checks. Twenty-three participants were not included in the study due to failing quality or manipulation checks or failing to complete all required items. Specifically, four failed at least one manipulation check, 17 failed at least one manipulation check, and two failed to complete the survey. This resulted in a sample size of 190 participants.

This study used a 2 (Candidate Score on Deductive Reasoning: Low vs. High) x 2 (Participant Score on Deductive Reasoning: Low vs. High) between-subjects factorial design, resulting in four groups. According to Cohen’s (1992) power primer table, 45 participants were needed per condition for four groups to detect a medium effect with an alpha of .05 and power set at .80. Hence, 180 participants were needed for this study. When the sample size reached 171, an inspection of sample size per group revealed that the random assignment procedure did not yield an equal number of participants per
group, and that the high candidate-low participant and low candidate-low participant conditions did not have at least 45 participants (they had 29 and 42 participants, respectively). Therefore, the last 19 participants were not randomly assigned to one of the four conditions; instead, they were assigned to these groups (16 to high-low and three to low-low candidate groups) in order to ensure the appropriate number of participants was achieved in each condition. This resulted in a total sample size of 190 participants: 48 in high-high, 45 in high-low, 52 in low-high, and 45 in low-low.

Sample size for the following demographic information ranged from 185 to 190; the information reported is based on usable responses, excluding any missing data. Fifty percent were female and 49.5% were male (one person preferred not to respond).

Approximately 79.5% were White, 7.9% were Black, 5.3% were Hispanic or Latino, 4.7% were Asian, and the remaining 2.6% reported their race/ethnicity as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Other. About 2.1% of the participants had below a high school education, 13.2% had a high school diploma or equivalent, 33.2% had some college no degree, 10.5% had an Associate’s Degree, 30.5% had a Bachelor’s Degree, and 10.5% had a graduate degree (1.6% had a doctoral degree). Ninety-five percent of participants indicated that they had been previously employed. At the time of data collection, 47.4% indicated that they were employed full-time, 21.1% indicated that they were employed part-time, and 31.6% indicated that they were not employed. Finally, 43.8% of participants indicated that they have helped make a hiring decision in the past. The average age of participants was 34.17 years ($SD = 12.46$ years). Based on 175 usable work experience responses (unless the response was “0” or “none,” only responses that clearly indicated if the answer was
provided in “months” or “years” were included), the average years of work experience was 13.66 (SD = 11.62 years).

**Materials and Measures**

**Conditions.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. First, they were asked to imagine themselves in a hiring role, and were given information about a hypothetical job candidate applying for Assistant Manager at a large retail organization (please see Appendix A for the instructions). Because gender was not of interest in this study, a gender-neutral name (Taylor) was used for the hypothetical candidate. Participants were also given a few KSAs that were obtained from O*NET for the position of First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers (similar to the position created for this study). Scores on deductive reasoning were manipulated for both the participants and the hypothetical job candidate. Moreover, in all conditions, participants were told that the hypothetical job candidate scored high on the other selection assessments (critical thinking and initial interview). Please see Appendix B for the candidate profiles that were provided.

**Deductive reasoning.** As previously mentioned, scores on deductive reasoning were manipulated. This ability was chosen because it seemed easier to manipulate than other abilities. Specifically, it is unlikely that participants would know the level of their ability on deductive reasoning, and thus, telling them that they scored high or low on it seemed like a realistic and feasible manipulation. The test that was used in this study consisted of 10 syllogisms in which participants indicated whether the statement was true or false (Syllogisms: Deductive Reasoning). The original scale had 17 items, and 10 items that were formatted similarly were chosen for this study. This scale is public
domain; therefore, there was no need to obtain permission to use it. Please see Appendix C for a full list of the syllogisms that were used in this study.

**Hireability.** Hireability was measured using the following item: “How likely are you to hire Taylor, the job candidate you just read about?” Participants were asked to respond using a 5-point response format, with 1 = *Extremely Unlikely* and 5 = *Extremely Likely*.

**Manipulation and quality checks.** There were two manipulation checks that asked participants if they scored high or low on deductive reasoning and if the candidate they reviewed scored high or low on deductive reasoning (please see Appendix D). Moreover, two quality checks were administered to ensure that participants were paying attention during the survey. The first quality check was included at the end of the deductive reasoning test and asked participants to select “False.” The second quality check was included after the hireability item and asked participants to select “Unlikely.” If participants failed a quality or manipulation check, their data were discarded, and they were not compensated for participating. The manipulation checks were referred to as “attention checks” in the informed consent form.

**Procedure**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through Xavier University’s IRB (please see Appendix E for the IRB approval letter). Data were collected using SurveyGizmo. Additionally, to prevent participants from retaking the survey, a setting was activated in Survey Gizmo that only allowed one response per IP address. The survey link was posted on the MTurk marketplace listing (please see Appendix F for the MTurk interface). Upon clicking the survey link, participants first
read the informed consent form (please see Appendix G). Next, participants were assigned to one of four conditions, where they were told to assume the role of a hiring manager tasked with making the decision of hiring a new assistant manager for a large organization. Participants were then given the deductive reasoning test. Then, they were told that they either scored low or high on the deductive reasoning test, regardless of their actual performance. Next, participants were given a candidate profile to review, where they received information about a hypothetical candidate who scored either low or high on deductive reasoning. After viewing the candidate profile, participants were asked about their likelihood of hiring the candidate. Participants also had to complete two manipulation checks and two quality checks. Finally, participants were presented with demographic questions (please see Appendix H). Once participants submitted their responses, they were directed to a debriefing form (please see Appendix I).
Chapter IV

Results

A 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test both hypotheses. The main effect of candidate score on hireability ratings was examined to test Hypothesis 1, and the interaction between candidate score and participant score on ratings was examined to test Hypothesis 2. Please refer to Table 1 for the ANOVA summary table and Table 2 for the means and standard deviations of all four conditions.

Hypothesis 1 stated that candidate score on deductive reasoning would have a significant main effect on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning would receive higher ratings than the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning. This hypothesis was supported, $F(1,186) = 39.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$, such that candidates who scored high on deductive reasoning were given significantly higher ratings ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.73$) than candidates who scored low on deductive reasoning ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.78$). Although not hypothesized, there was also a significant main effect of participant score on hireability ratings, $F(1,186) = 4.38, p = .038, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that participants who were told they scored high on deductive reasoning gave significantly lower ratings to the candidates ($M = 3.82, SD = 0.91$) than participants who were told they scored low on deductive reasoning ($M = 4.04, SD = 0.72$).
Table 1

*Effects of Participant Deductive Reasoning Score and Candidate Deductive Reasoning Score on Hireability Ratings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\eta^2_p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant DR Score</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate DR Score</td>
<td>21.44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.44</td>
<td>39.37</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant DR Score * Candidate DR Score</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>101.29</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* DR = deductive reasoning.
### Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Hireability Ratings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant DR Score</th>
<th>Candidate DR Score</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* DR = deductive reasoning.
Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a significant interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning would receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning, whereas the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning would receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning. As expected, there was a significant interaction, $F(1,186) = 6.08, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .03$, but the pattern of means was partially supported (see Figure 2). Specifically, although candidates low in deductive reasoning were rated higher when the participant was also low in deductive reasoning, as opposed to when the participant was high (as hypothesized), candidates high in deductive reasoning seemed to receive a high score regardless of what participants were told about their deductive reasoning ability.

To further examine this interaction effect, follow-up simple effects analyses were conducted. Specifically, we conducted two independent-samples $t$-tests comparing hireability means between low and high participant conditions at each level of the candidate variable: low and high (see Figure 2). Results showed that there was no significant difference in hireability means between participant conditions when the candidate was high in deductive reasoning $t(98) = 0.27, p = .785$, whereas there was a significant difference in hireability means between participant conditions when the candidate was low in deductive reasoning $t(88) = -3.12, p = .002$. This indicates that only
Figure 2. Interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings. DR = deductive reasoning.
the “low candidate” condition was driving the significant interaction found, and that this interaction qualifies the main effect of participant score. Two independent-samples t-tests comparing hireability means between low and high candidate conditions at each level of the participant variable were also conducted. Results showed that the hireability mean was significantly higher in the high candidate condition than the low candidate condition when the participant was high on deductive reasoning, \( t(91) = 5.79, p < .001 \), and low on deductive reasoning, \( t(95) = 2.89, p = .005 \). These findings mirror the main effect of candidate score, such that regardless of what participants were told about their deductive reasoning ability, they were more likely to give higher ratings when the candidate was high on deductive reasoning, rather than low. However, these results should be interpreted with caution because Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was statistically significant, \( F(3, 186) = 3.29, p = .022 \), implying that the homogeneity of variance assumption has been violated. Given that the last 19 participants were not randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, the main analyses were re-run on a data set that excluded those participants (\( N = 171 \)), and the same pattern of results was obtained, with the exception that Levene’s Test was no longer statistically significant.
Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect on final hiring decisions. It was first hypothesized that, overall, the candidate who scored high on deductive reasoning would receive higher hireability ratings than the candidate who scored low on deductive reasoning. As expected, Hypothesis 1 was supported, showing that the manipulation of candidate deductive reasoning was successful. Participants, in general, rated candidates as more hireable when their deductive reasoning score was high than when it was low. This result makes sense, as it is likely that candidates who have more skills necessary for successful job performance would be preferred over candidates who do not possess the same skills. In this study, “deductive reasoning” was listed as an ability that was recommended for people in this position (please see Appendix A).

Hypothesis 2 was the main focus of this study, as it examined the influence of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect on selection decisions. Specifically, it stated that there would be a significant interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning would receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning, whereas the candidate who scores low on deductive
reasoning would receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning. Although there was a significant interaction, the pattern of means was partially supported (see Figure 2), and follow-up simple effects analyses showed that only the “low candidate” level was driving the significant interaction found, as the differences in hireability means between low and high participant conditions were not significant at the “high candidate” level. Specifically, as hypothesized, candidates who scored low on deductive reasoning were rated higher when participants were also low on deductive reasoning than when participants were high on deductive reasoning. However, when the candidates were high on deductive reasoning, participants rated them more highly in general, whether or not they were told they scored high or low on deductive reasoning.

These findings slightly resemble Sears and Rowe’s (2003) results. In their study, only raters who were high in conscientiousness differentiated between high and low conscientious job candidates, preferring candidates high in conscientiousness, whereas raters low on conscientiousness did not differentiate between high and low conscientious job candidates. In the current study, participants who were told they scored high on deductive reasoning and participants who were told they scored low on deductive reasoning were able to differentiate between candidates who scored high and low on deductive reasoning, preferring candidates who scored high. This suggests that participants viewed deductive reasoning as important regardless of their own standing on the ability. One reason for this could be that deductive reasoning was made more salient by explicitly listing it as a necessary KSA in this study, which was not the case in Sears and Rowe’s study. Additionally, participants’ scores on deductive reasoning were
Self-serving bias, similar-to-me effect, and hiring

Manipulated in the current study by having participants complete a deductive reasoning test under the guise that candidates applying for this position will be required to take such a test, which may have increased the perceived importance of this ability. This was not the case in Sears and Rowe’s study, where participants were pre-screened for conscientiousness and placed in high or low groups based on actual scores.

Another interesting finding was that only the “low candidate” condition showed significantly different ratings in hireability means between low and high participant conditions. Participants low in deductive reasoning rated low deductive reasoning candidates significantly higher than participants high in deductive reasoning. This finding could be representative of the similar-to-me effect. The similar-to-me effect is about individuals preferring those who are similar to them in other ways, such as demographic or attitudinal similarities (Sears & Rowe, 2003). Because there is no reason to believe that participants felt demographically or attitudinally similar to the hypothetical job candidate, one likely explanation is that participants low in deductive reasoning felt more similar to candidates low in deductive reasoning compared to participants high in deductive reasoning, suggesting that the similar-to-me effect can be found in the presence of similar KSAs, in addition to demographic and attitudinal variables. Another explanation could be that participants low in deductive reasoning dismissed negative information when rating candidates low in deductive reasoning because they were both low on an ability necessary for successful performance on the job. As previously mentioned, Mezulis et al. (2004) defined the self-serving attributional bias as the tendency for individuals to “attribute positive events to themselves but dismiss negative events as attributable to other causes” (p. 711). As previously mentioned, although the I-
literature has primarily focused on the first half of this definition by examining why people attribute their success to themselves, the self-serving bias may occur when people are low on certain attributes. Indeed, these findings suggest that the self-serving bias may have occurred, and that I-O researchers should pay more attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors.

Contrary to the “low candidate” condition, there was no significant difference in hireability means between low and high participant conditions in the “high candidate” condition. This finding suggests that the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias may have not occurred when participants were told they scored high on deductive reasoning. In the I-O literature, the self-serving bias refers to individuals preferring those with similar skills because they believe those skills are necessary for successful job performance (Cucina et al., 2005) and to validate to themselves that those skills are important (McElwee et al., 2001), as opposed to the similar-to-me effect which is more related to how these similarities affect how much an individual likes a candidate (Garcia et al., 2008). It was expected that participants high in deductive reasoning would give candidates high in deductive reasoning higher ratings than participants low in deductive reasoning because it has been shown that individuals tend to prefer those with skills similar to their own, as they believe those skills are important for successful job performance (McElwee et al., 2001). Cucina et al. (2012) found that the self-serving bias was more likely to occur if the individual making the comparison identifies the KSA or trait as important for successful performance of the job. However, as previously mentioned, in this study, all participants were led to believe that deductive reasoning was an important KSA for the hypothetical candidate to possess because it was included in the
list of KSAs describing the hypothetical position, and a test assessing this ability was administered, possibly increasing the perceived importance of this ability and making it more salient. Therefore, it seems that by listing deductive reasoning as an important KSA and administering the deductive reasoning test, even those low on deductive reasoning could not ignore the importance of this ability when determining whether to hire a candidate who scored high on deductive reasoning.

Also worth mentioning is that participants were told that the candidate scored high on the other selection assessments in both the low and high candidate conditions (i.e., critical thinking and an initial interview score; please see Appendix B), thus increasing the likelihood of overall higher ratings. In other words, this may have caused scores in the “high candidate” condition to be high because the candidate scored high on all selection criteria. As for the “low candidate” condition, participants who scored low on deductive reasoning may have given more weight to critical thinking and interview scores and less weight to deductive reasoning scores because of the similar-to-me effect or the self-serving bias, as opposed to candidates who scored high on deductive reasoning.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The results of the current study expanded upon the literature by examining the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias in a hiring context. Past studies investigated how the self-serving bias affected different types of job analyses (Aguinis et al., 2009; Cucina et al., 2005; Cucina et al., 2012) as well as how the similar-to-me effect influenced the interview process (Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears and Rowe, 2003). Moreover, this study added to the literature by focusing on KSAs, as opposed to
demographic or attitudinal variables that have been the focus on prior research (Garcia et al. 2008; Graves & Powell, 1996; Rand & Wexley, 1975). Results showed that these biases may occur with KSAs (specifically, abilities) when individuals are asked to make final hiring decisions.

In the current study, the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias seem to have occurred only in the low candidate condition. This finding suggests that individuals who are low on a certain KSA may recommend hiring candidates who are also low on that KSA. This could be problematic if that KSA is one that is extremely important for the position. Companies should make sure that individuals making hiring decisions know the importance of all KSAs, especially if those decision makers might be low on certain KSAs. This could be accomplished by having updated job descriptions. Additionally, this study showed that neither bias seemed to occur in a situation in which decision makers knew what KSAs were necessary for successful job performance and when the candidate scored high on that KSA. These findings suggest that if decision makers are given clear instructions regarding the necessary KSAs required for successful job performance, these biases may be reduced. Once again, this could be accomplished by having and referring to up-to-date job descriptions prior to making hiring decisions. These findings are somewhat similar to the results of Aguinis et al. (2009) that showed that the self-serving bias in a job analysis context was less likely to occur when participants went through frame-of-reference (FOR) training. Although listing a KSA as important for a job and FOR training are different, both give decision makers more objective information in an attempt to help them make better decisions.
Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The current study has a few limitations that should be mentioned. First, this study recruited participants using MTurk. However, the decision to utilize MTurk was made in order to increase the likelihood of having participants who have work-related experience, which is less likely when using a student sample. For example, 95% of participants stated that they had been previously employed, and 43.8% stated that they have helped make a hiring decision in the past. Using MTurk samples for work-related research has also been recommended by other researchers (Barger, Behrend, Sharek, & Sinar, 2011). This makes the results more generalizable, given that the focus of the study was on selection decisions.

Another limitation related to MTurk is that it is possible that the quality of participant responses suffered because participants were paid to take part in the study and were likely trying to complete many paid surveys in a short period of time. However, quality and manipulation checks were included to increase the likelihood of obtaining high-quality data. These various checks should have made participants more attentive when participating in the survey. Moreover, if participants failed any checks, their responses were discarded prior to running the analyses.

Moreover, because participants were told that they received either high or low scores on deductive reasoning and they were not scored based on their actual answers, participants who were assigned a score different from their perceived ability in deductive reasoning may have become suspicious, and their responses may have become compromised. However, given that most people are not aware of their deductive reasoning ability, this is not expected to have occurred. The decision to “manipulate”
ability scores was made to enhance the feasibility of conducting the study, but future studies could measure actual deductive reasoning ability. Future research could also examine other KSAs.

Finally, the hypothetical context of the study is another limitation, as it may have affected the external validity of the results obtained. Moreover, in an actual hiring context, there would be more consequences to making a hiring decision than in a hypothetical selection context. However, the experimental nature of the study enhanced the internal validity of the findings. Specifically, other confounding variables that may affect hiring decisions in a “real” setting were controlled using an experimental design. Nevertheless, future research could examine the research questions addressed in this study in a “real” hiring context.

There are also several future research suggestions that could be examined. Future research could investigate if the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect might interact with certain personality traits or job characteristics when making hiring decisions. For instance, both biases might be reduced if people are high on competitiveness because those people may be less attracted to others with similar skills for fear that they may perform better than them. This might also be especially apparent in highly competitive jobs (e.g., sales).

Dalessio and Imada (1984) suggested that those making hiring decisions may choose to hire individuals with similar skills because they will have to interact with them in the future, assuming that these future interactions will be more pleasant if their new colleague is similar to them. This suggests that people making hiring decisions may focus less on their similarities when making their decisions if they know that they will not have
to frequently interact with this candidate in the future. Therefore, future research should examine if future interaction with new hires may reduce the similar-to-me effect during the hiring process.

Future research could also manipulate the amount of information provided about the candidate. For example, the self-serving bias and the similar-to-effect may be more likely to occur in situations that have limited or ambiguous information. Therefore, future research could investigate how these biases may interact with the amount of information provided about the candidate. Finally, future research could also further examine the “negative” side of the self-serving bias. As previously mentioned, although the I-O literature has primarily focused on why people attribute their success to themselves, the current findings suggest that researchers should pay more attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the current study had two major findings. First, overall, candidates high in deductive reasoning received higher hireability ratings than candidates low in deductive reasoning, regardless of participant score. Second, participants low in deductive reasoning gave significantly higher ratings to candidates low in deductive reasoning when compared to participants high in deductive reasoning. The second finding suggests that the similar-to-me effect may have occurred because both the participant and candidate were low on deductive reasoning. Alternatively, the self-serving bias may have occurred because participants low in deductive reasoning could have dismissed negative information when rating candidates low in deductive reasoning because they were both low on an ability necessary for successful performance on the job. These findings suggest
that listing deductive reasoning as an important KSA may have reduced the likelihood of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect occurring when the candidate was high on deductive reasoning but not when the candidate was low on deductive reasoning.

Overall, it appears that when making hiring decisions, individuals who are low on a certain KSA are more likely to prefer and hire candidates who are similar to them with regards to that KSA than individuals high on that KSA, suggesting that companies should be aware of the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias when hiring decisions are made.
Chapter VI

Summary

Despite using different predictors and trying to ensure that the best applicant is hired, industrial-organizational (I-O) psychologists are prone to biases. To combat the biases that may plague selection, it is necessary to examine these biases to gain a better understanding of how they may be reduced. Two biases that may affect the selection process are the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect.

Although past research has examined the self-serving bias, most studies could be classified as basic research (e.g., Dunning, Perie, & Story, 1991; Kunda, 1987; McElwee, Dunning, Tan, & Hollman, 2001). Moreover, the few applied studies have primarily focused on how this bias could affect job analyses (Augunis, Mazurkiewicz, & Heggestad, 2009; Cucina, Martin, Vasilopoulos, & Thibodeuax, 2012; Cucina, Vasilopoulos, & Sehgal, 2005). Similarly, although most research on the similar-to-me effect has been applied (García, Posthuma, & Colella, 2008; Graves & Powell, 1996; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears & Rowe, 2003), it emphasized how the similar-to-me effect might influence interview ratings. This study expanded on the existing research by examining these biases in a selection context that was not limited to an employment interview.
The Self-Serving Bias

The social and cognitive psychology literatures define the self-serving bias as the tendency for people to “attribute positive events to themselves but dismiss negative events as attributable to other causes” (Mezulis, Abramsom, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004, p. 711). Kunda (1987) provided evidence of the self-serving bias in a hypothetical academic context. Participants were given descriptions of individuals who were said to have been part of a study about success and failure in professional school. In addition, individuals were said to have been successful in professional school, unsuccessful in professional school, or given no indication as to whether or not they were successful. Next, participants were asked to rate how each of the individual’s attributes may have contributed to their performance in professional school. Finally, participants filled out a survey indicating their standing on the attributes used to describe the above individuals and indicated whether or not they had plans of attending professional school. Participants who had indicated that they were planning on attending professional school or had thought about attending professional school were more likely to engage in a self-serving bias than participants not planning on attending professional school. These findings indicate that motivational factors may play a role in the appearance of a self-serving bias, such that interviewers may gravitate towards those with similar attributes if they feel that candidates’ performance will be a reflection of their own.

Dunning et al. (1991) investigated the differences in people’s prototypes of social categories and whether or not these differences are self-serving. When describing effective leaders, people-oriented participants described effective leaders as people-oriented, whereas goal-directed participants described effective leaders as goal-oriented.
This effect was thought to occur because the attributes measured were seen as relevant to the domain at hand, namely leadership.

McElwee et al. (2001) examined the self-serving bias in an academic setting. Verbally proficient participants tended to give higher ratings to verbally proficient students, and math proficient students tended to give higher ratings to math proficient students. Another important finding was that participants projected attributes they possessed onto famous leaders and indicated those attributes as conducive to those leaders’ success, regardless of the leaders’ possession of those attributes.

In the I-O literature, individuals engage in the self-serving bias when they indicate attributes that they possess as necessary for successful job performance (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2009). Cucina et al. (2005) investigated the impact of the self-serving bias in relation to personality-based job analyses (PBJA). The researchers used students as subject matter experts (SMEs) when investigating the degree to which scores on a PBJA scale correlated with scores on a personality scale. They found that SME ratings on the PBJA scale significantly positively correlated with scores on the personality scale. In other words, students indicated that self-possessed attributes were conducive to successful academic performance.

Aguinis et al. (2009) replicated Cucina et al.’s findings (2005) in a field study. They used an online sample consisting of government employees, in an effort to make the results more generalizable to the workforce. Cucina et al. (2012) further added to the evidence of the self-serving bias in job analyses. They measured participants’ self-rated performance on 31 competencies and the importance of those competencies to the job. Significant relationships were found between self-rated performance on the 31
competencies and the importance of those competencies. Their findings provide evidence of the self-serving bias when using a traditional job analysis, and suggest that the self-serving bias may be applicable to KSAs in addition to personality traits. Although the I-O literature has focused on positive attributes, the original self-serving bias definition suggests that the self-serving bias may occur whether a person is high or low on a certain KSA.

**The Similar-to-Me Effect**

The similar-to-me effect is the tendency for raters to more highly rate job candidates with whom they share similar demographic and attitudinal characteristics (Sears & Rowe, 2003). García et al. (2008) investigated how similarity, liking, and expectations affect fit perceptions in interviews. A sample of 114 interview-applicant dyads from actual interviews was investigated. Interviewers were given two questionnaires, one given a month before interviews took place to get demographic and human capital data, and one shortly after interviews were conducted which asked about perceived similarity to the applicant, liking of the applicant, performance expectations of the applicant, and whether or not the interviewer would recommend hiring the applicant. Results revealed that perceived similarity seemed to affect both liking and performance expectations, but that demographic similarity (which included sex, age, and racial/ethnic background) did not seem to affect selection decisions.

Rand and Wexley (1975) investigated the similar-to-me effect in regards to biographical data, race, and need for affiliation in simulated employment interviews. Biographical similarity and dissimilarity were determined by the degree to which the participants and job candidates matched on “stereotypical” attributes. The sample
consisted of 80 White males and 80 White females. Participants took measures of racial prejudice, need for affiliation, and propinquity to Blacks. Based on these measures, participants were placed in one of four groups. The week following completion of the questionnaires, participants were asked to view taped interviews in which the job candidate spoke directly into the camera, simulating the experience of an interviewer for the participant. After viewing the tapes, participants were asked to fill out a hiring recommendation scale as well as a scale evaluating the applicant’s intelligence, knowledge of current events, morality, adjustment, likeability, and desirability as a work partner. Results indicated that participants with biographically similar information to applicants gave them higher job suitability ratings than applicants with dissimilar biographical information. This effect was found regardless of race.

Sears and Rowe (2003) investigated whether a similar-to-me effect would be found for similarity in conscientiousness. Participants were pre-screened for conscientiousness and placed into two groups: low conscientiousness and high conscientiousness. Next, participants were shown two interviews, one with a low-conscientiousness job candidate and one with a high-conscientiousness job candidate. Finally, participants rated the job candidates on the Big Five personality traits, a competency model, and a hireability scale that tapped into perceived similarity, affect toward the applicant, perceived competence of the applicant, and job suitability. Results indicated that on competence evaluations, highly conscientious raters evaluated candidates who were high on conscientiousness more highly than they evaluated candidates who were low on conscientiousness; however, raters who were low on
conscientiousness did not appear to differentiate between candidates who were low and high on conscientiousness. A similar effect was also found for job suitability ratings.

**The Current Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect in a hypothetical hiring context, focusing on KSAs. In this study, deductive reasoning ability was manipulated. Moreover, participants reviewed the profile of a candidate who was either high or low on this ability. It was expected that, overall, the candidate who scored high on deductive reasoning would receive higher hireability ratings than the candidate who scored low on deductive reasoning. However, the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias suggest that participants who are told they scored high on this ability should be more likely to hire the candidate who is high on this ability than participants who are told they scored low on this ability. Along similar lines, both biases suggest that participants who are told they scored low on deductive reasoning should be more likely to hire the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning than participants who are told they scored high on deductive reasoning. Please refer to Figure 1. Hence, the following hypotheses were developed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Candidate score on deductive reasoning will have a significant main effect on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning will receive higher ratings than the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning.

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a significant interaction between candidate deductive reasoning score and participant deductive reasoning score on hireability ratings, such that the candidate who scores high on deductive reasoning will receive
higher ratings when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning, whereas the candidate who scores low on deductive reasoning will receive higher ratings when participants are told they scored low on deductive reasoning than when participants are told they scored high on deductive reasoning.

**Method**

**Participants**

Two hundred and thirteen participants were recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). To be eligible to participate, participants had to be at least 18 years old, live in the United States, have a HIT approval rate of at least 95%, and have a minimum of 50 HITs completed. Participants were compensated $.25 for taking part in the study, if they completed all the required items and passed the manipulation and quality checks. Twenty-three participants were not included in the study due to failing quality or manipulation checks or failing to complete all required items, resulting in a total of 190 participants. Fifty percent were female, and 49.5% were male (one person preferred not to respond). Approximately 79.5% were White, and the average age was 34.17 years ($SD = 12.46$ years). About 95% indicated that they had been previously employed.

**Materials and Measures**

**Conditions.** Participants were assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, and were given information about a hypothetical job candidate (see Appendix A for instructions and Appendix B for the candidate profiles).
**Deductive reasoning.** Scores on deductive reasoning were manipulated. The test that was used consisted of 10 syllogisms in which participants indicated whether the statement was true or false (Syllogisms: Deductive Reasoning; see Appendix C).

**Hireability.** Hireability was measured using the following item: “How likely are you to hire Taylor, the job candidate you just read about?” Participants responded using a 5-point *Extremely Unlikely* to *Extremely Likely* response format.

**Manipulation and quality checks.** Two manipulation checks (please see Appendix D) and two quality checks were also administered.

**Procedure**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through Xavier University’s IRB (see Appendix E). The survey link was posted on MTurk (see Appendix F). Participants first read the informed consent form (see Appendix G). Participants were then given the deductive reasoning test, and were told that they either scored low or high on the test, regardless of their actual performance. Next, participants were given a candidate profile to review, where they received information about a hypothetical candidate who scored either low or high on deductive reasoning. Then, participants were asked about their likelihood of hiring the candidate. Participants also had to complete two manipulation checks and two quality checks. Finally, participants were presented with demographic questions (see Appendix H). Once participants submitted their responses, they were directed to a debriefing form (please see Appendix I).

**Results**

A 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test both hypotheses (see Tables 1 and 2). *Hypothesis 1* was supported, $F(1,186) =$
39.37, \( p < .001, \eta^2_p = .18 \), such that candidates who scored high on deductive reasoning were given significantly higher ratings (\( M = 4.25, SD = 0.73 \)) than candidates who scored low on deductive reasoning (\( M = 3.58, SD = 0.78 \)). Regarding Hypothesis 2, although there was a significant interaction, \( F(1,186) = 6.08, p = .015, \eta^2_p = .03 \), the pattern of means was partially supported (see Figure 2). Specifically, although candidates low in deductive reasoning were rated higher when the participant was also low in deductive reasoning, as opposed to when the participant was high (as hypothesized), candidates high in deductive reasoning seemed to receive a high score regardless of what participants were told about their deductive reasoning ability.

To further examine this interaction, follow-up simple effects analyses were conducted. Results showed that there was no significant difference in hireability means between participant conditions when the candidate was high in deductive reasoning \( t(98) = 0.27, p = .785 \), whereas there was a significant difference in hireability means between participant conditions when the candidate was low in deductive reasoning \( t(88) = -3.12, p = .002 \). These findings indicated that only the “low candidate” condition was driving the significant interaction found, and that this interaction qualified the main effect of participant score.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect on hiring decisions. As expected, Hypothesis 1 was supported, showing that the manipulation of candidate deductive reasoning was successful. This result makes sense, as it is likely that candidates who have more skills necessary for successful job performance would be preferred over candidates who do not
possess the same skills. In this study, “deductive reasoning” was listed as an ability that was recommended for people in this position.

_Hypothesis 2_ examined the influence of the self-serving bias and the similar-to-me effect on selection decisions. Although there was a significant interaction, the pattern of means was partially supported, and follow-up simple effects analyses showed that only the “low candidate” level was driving the significant interaction found, as the differences in hireability means between low and high participant conditions were not significant at the “high candidate” level. As hypothesized, candidates who scored low on deductive reasoning were rated higher when participants were also low on deductive reasoning than when participants were high on deductive reasoning. However, when the candidates were high on deductive reasoning, participants rated them more highly in general, whether or not they were told they scored high or low on deductive reasoning.

These findings slightly resemble Sears and Rowe’s (2003) results. In their study, only raters who were high in conscientiousness differentiated between high and low conscientious job candidates, preferring candidates high in conscientiousness, whereas raters low on conscientiousness did not differentiate between high and low conscientious job candidates. In this study, participants who were told they scored high on deductive reasoning _and_ participants who were told they scored low on deductive reasoning were able to differentiate between candidates who scored high and low on deductive reasoning, preferring candidates who scored high. This suggests that participants viewed deductive reasoning as important regardless of their own standing on the ability. One reason for this could be that deductive reasoning was made more salient by explicitly listing it as a necessary KSA in this study, which was not the case in Sears and Rowe’s study.
Another interesting finding was that only the “low candidate” condition showed significantly different ratings in hireability means between low and high participant conditions. Participants low in deductive reasoning rated low deductive reasoning candidates significantly higher than participants high in deductive reasoning. This implies that participants low in deductive reasoning may have felt more similar to candidates low in deductive reasoning compared to participants high in deductive reasoning, suggesting that the similar-to-me effect can be found in the presence of similar KSAs, in addition to demographic and attitudinal variables. Another explanation could be that participants low in deductive reasoning dismissed negative information when rating candidates low in deductive reasoning because they were both low on an ability necessary for successful performance on the job, suggesting the possibility of the self-serving bias occurring (Mezulis et al., 2004). Although the I-O literature has primarily focused on why people attribute their success to themselves, these findings suggest that researchers should pay more attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors.

Contrary to the “low candidate” condition, there was no significant difference in hireability means between low and high participant conditions in the “high candidate” condition. This finding suggests that the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias may have only been present when the candidate was low on deductive reasoning. It was expected that participants high in deductive reasoning would give candidates high in deductive reasoning higher ratings than participants low in deductive reasoning because it has been shown that individuals tend to prefer those with skills similar to their own, as they believe those skills are important for successful job performance (McElwee et al., 2001). In this study, all participants were led to believe that deductive reasoning was an
important KSA for the hypothetical candidate to possess because it was included in the list of KSAs describing the hypothetical position, and a test assessing this ability was administered, possibly increasing the perceived importance of this ability and making it more salient.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The results of the current study expanded upon the literature by examining the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias in a hiring context. Past studies investigated how the self-serving bias affected different types of job analyses (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2009; Cucina et al., 2005) as well as how the similar-to-me effect influenced the interview process (Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears & Rowe, 2003). Moreover, this study added to the literature by focusing on KSAs (specifically, abilities), as opposed to demographic attitudinal variables that have been the focus on prior research (e.g., Garcia et al. 2008; Graves & Powell, 1996).

In this study, the similar-to-me effect and the self-serving bias seem to have occurred only in the low candidate condition. This finding suggests that companies should make sure that individuals making hiring decisions know the importance of all KSAs, especially if those decision makers might be low on certain KSAs. This could be accomplished by having updated job descriptions.

**Limitations and Future Research Suggestions**

The current study has a few limitations that should be mentioned. First, this study recruited participants using MTurk. However, the decision to utilize MTurk was made in order to increase the likelihood of having participants who have work-related experience. Using MTurk samples for work-related research has also been recommended by other
researchers (Barger, Behrend, Sharek, & Sinar, 2011). This makes the results more
generalizable, given that the focus of this study was on selection decisions.

Moreover, because participants were told that they received either high or low
scores on deductive reasoning and they were not scored based on their actual answers,
participants who were assigned a score different from their perceived ability in deductive
reasoning may have become suspicious. However, given that most people are not aware
of their deductive reasoning ability, this is not expected to have occurred. The decision to
“manipulate” ability scores was made to enhance the feasibility of conducting the study,
but future studies could measure deductive reasoning ability as well as examine other
KSAs.

Finally, the hypothetical context of the study is another limitation, as it may have
affected the external validity of the results. However, the experimental nature of this
study enhanced the internal validity of the findings. Nevertheless, future research could
examine the research questions addressed in this study in a “real” hiring context.

Future research should also investigate if the self-serving bias and the similar-to-
me effect might interact with certain personality traits or job characteristics when making
hiring decisions. Moreover, Dalessio and Imada (1984) suggested that those making
hiring decisions may choose to hire individuals with similar skills because they will have
to interact with them in the future; therefore, research should examine if future interaction
with new hires might reduce the similar-to-me effect. Finally, future research could
further examine the “negative” side of the self-serving bias. Although the I-O literature
has primarily focused on why people attribute their success to themselves, these findings
suggest that researchers should pay more attention to why people attribute their failures to external factors.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study had two major findings. First, candidates high on deductive reasoning received higher hireability ratings than candidates low on deductive reasoning, regardless of participant score. Second, participants low on deductive reasoning gave higher ratings to candidates low on deductive reasoning than participants high on deductive reasoning, suggesting that the similar-to-me effect or the self-serving may have occurred. Overall, it appears that individuals who are low on a certain KSA are more likely to hire candidates who are similar to them with regards to that KSA than individuals high on that KSA, suggesting that companies should be aware of these two biases when selection decisions are made.
References


doi:10.1037/h0087182


http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/syllogisms.pdf
Appendix A

Instructions

Imagine you are a hiring manager tasked with making a final decision on whether or not to hire an individual for the position of Assistant Manager at a large retail organization. You will then be asked to complete a short test that is representative of the type of tests candidates applying for this position will be required to take. You will then be presented with a profile for the candidate under consideration for this position. After reviewing the profile, you will be asked to indicate how likely you would be to hire the candidate.

In order to help you better understand this position, a few Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities that are recommended for people in this position are included below, and they were obtained from the Occupational Information Network (O*Net).

**Knowledge:**
- Customer and Personal Service
- Sales and Marketing
- Administration and Management
- Personnel and Human Resources

**Skills:**
- Critical Thinking
- Service Orientation
- Time Management
- Complex Problem Solving

**Abilities:**
- Deductive Reasoning
- Speech Clarity
- Problem Sensitivity
- Mathematical Reasoning
Appendix B

Candidate Profiles

High Deductive Reasoning

Taylor Smith

Taylor is among our top 10 candidates for this position. Taylor graduated from Minnesota State University with a bachelor’s degree in Business Management. Taylor has 3 years of experience working in retail in various roles, including team leader and department supervisor.

Below is information regarding how Taylor scored on all of our assessments:

- *Deductive Reasoning: High*
- Critical Thinking: High
- Initial interview: High

Low Deductive Reasoning

Taylor Smith

Taylor is among our top 10 candidates for this position. Taylor graduated from Minnesota State University with a bachelor’s degree in Business Management. Taylor has 3 years of experience working in retail in various roles, including team leader and department supervisor.

Below is information regarding how Taylor scored on all of our assessments:

- *Deductive Reasoning: Low*
- Critical Thinking: High
- Initial interview: High

*Note.* The italicized parts represent the two levels of the “candidate score on deductive reasoning” variable. The italicized parts are the only difference between the two profiles.
Appendix C

Deductive Reasoning Test

Initial instructions: Below is a test that candidates applying for this position will be required to take. In order to help you better understand what a score of “low” or “high” is when you review the candidate profile later on, you will be told how you score on this test immediately after you complete it.

The original deductive reasoning test had 17 syllogisms, which can be found at: http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/syllogisms.pdf.

Ten syllogisms that were formatted similarly were chosen for this study. Please contact the author of this thesis or the thesis chair to inquire about the 10 syllogisms used in this study.
Appendix D

Manipulation Checks

1. Did you score high or low on the deductive reasoning test?
   - High
   - Low

2. Did Taylor, the candidate you just read about, score high or low on the deductive reasoning test?
   - High
   - Low
Appendix E

IRB Approval Letter

May 7, 2014

Harrison Sibert
Xavier University
ML 6511

Re: Protocol #13-091, The Effects of the Self-serving Bias and Similar-to-me Effect on Hiring Decisions

Dear Mr. Sibert:

The IRB has reviewed the materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research, and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

Please contact our office if you have any questions. We wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University
Appendix F

Demographics

Please respond to the following items regarding information about yourself.

Age ______

Gender
• Male
• Female
• Prefer not to respond

Race/Ethnicity
• White or Caucasian
• Black or African American
• American Indian or Alaska Native
• Asian
• Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
• Hispanic or Latino
• Other ____________
• Prefer not to respond

Level of Education
• Below High School
• High School Diploma or equivalent
• Some college, no degree
• Associate’s Degree
• Bachelor’s Degree (e.g., BA)
• Graduate Degree (e.g., MBA)
• Doctoral Degree (e.g., PhD)

Have you ever been previously employed?
• Yes
• No

Are you currently employed?
• Yes, employed full-time
• Yes, employed part-time
• No

Have you ever helped make a hiring decision?
• Yes
• No
Overall work experience; please state if your answer is in months or years by writing either the word “months” or “years” after the number you provide: ________________

Please type your unique worker ID to receive payment: ________________
Appendix G

MTurk Interface

Please note that you will have to enter your unique ID TWICE, once HERE and once at the END of the study in order to be compensated, if eligible.

1. Please enter your unique identifier located on the MTurk Dashboard. You must enter your MTurk ID HERE:

[Box for ID number]

Also, please SAVE your unique identifier because you will be required to enter it once again AT THE END OF THE STUDY.

2. Please click the following link in order to access the survey. After you complete the survey, click the “Submit” button below.

[Survey Link]

[SUBMIT]
Appendix H

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Harrison Sibert at Xavier University. The purpose of this study is to examine selection decisions.

In this study, you will read a short scenario describing a job selection process. You will then take one short assessment to give you an example of what the hiring process is like. Afterwards, you will be presented with a profile of a hypothetical candidate and asked to indicate your likelihood of hiring that candidate. You will also be asked to respond to a few demographic items. The total time to complete this task will be approximately 15 minutes, but you will be given 1 hour to complete the entire survey.

There are no known risks associated with this study. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from Xavier University. You will be paid $.25 for participating in this study. **However, please note that if you do not complete all required items or if you do not pass the quality AND attention checks, you will not be eligible for compensation.** You have to be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

Although you will be required to enter your MTurk unique worker ID at the end of the survey to receive compensation if eligible, the researchers will not be able to access any identifying information you provided to Amazon or MTurk. Moreover, the researchers will not release any of your survey responses to Amazon or MTurk, and only the researchers conducting this study will have access to your responses. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. Finally, no analyses of any kind will be conducted prior to the removal of all MTurk ID numbers from the data set.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the principal investigator, Harrison Sibert at sibert@xavier.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Dalia Diab at diabd@xavier.edu. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at 513-745-2870.

By clicking “Next,” you agree to the following statement: I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to ask questions and to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I freely give my consent to participate in this research project.
Appendix I

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in our research project. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the self-serving bias or similar-to-me effect influence the decision to hire a potential job candidate.

**Please note that the deductive reasoning test you took was not actually scored, as you were randomly assigned to receive either a high or a low score regardless of the answers you chose.** This deception was necessary to examine the research questions of interest in this study. Moreover, only a few KSAOs that were obtained from O*Net were provided instead of providing the full list.

Please do not discuss the specifics of our study with anyone or distribute this form to any potential participants, as data collection is ongoing. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to inquire about the results of this study, please contact the principal investigator, Harrison Sibert at sibert@xavier.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Dalia Diab at diabd@xavier.edu.