

## Self-fulfilling prophecy

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is a prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to become true, by the very terms of the prophecy itself, due to positive feedback between belief and behavior. Although examples of such prophecies can be found in literature as far back as ancient Greece and ancient India, it is 20th-century sociologist Robert K. Merton who is credited with coining the expression "self-fulfilling prophecy" and formalizing its structure and consequences. In his 1948 article *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, Merton defines it in the following terms:

*“The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come true. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.”*

In other words, a positive or negative prophecy, strongly held belief, or delusion—declared as truth when it is actually false—may sufficiently influence people so that their reactions ultimately fulfill the once-false prophecy. Saying that, the prediction we make at the start of something affects our behavior in such a way that we make the prediction happen.

Self-fulfilling prophecy are effects in *behavioral confirmation effect*, in which behavior, influenced by expectations, causes those expectations to come true. It is complementary to the self-defeating prophecy.

The example from [businessdictionary.com](http://businessdictionary.com) has said that “an employer who, for example, expects the employees to be disloyal and shirkers, will likely treat them in a way that will elicit the very response he or she expects.



## Examples of self-fulfilling

### 1. Stereotype

The study of Sociological image has studied the topic of ‘Skull face and the Self-fulfilling stereotype’ shows that people will often act in ways consistent with how they are treated. Therefore, treating someone according to a stereotype will likely produce behavior that confirms the stereotype. This is called a *self-fulfilling stereotype*.

The interview from Rick Genest, he guy who is passionate in getting tattoos, he was always asked why he spent \$4,000 on tattoos that made him look like death which made him hate the world. However, there were another group of people who gave him compliments about how beautiful his tattoos are and took pictures with him. Rick’s attitude has changed to become positive person.

After the interview of Genest was “discovered” and since then he’s done quite a bit of modeling and acting. His life is certainly different now, but the happiness his tattoos brought him didn’t come from the fame and fortune, it came before all that, just from people being friendly.

Saying that this type of self-fulfilling is related to the theory of 'Stereotype threat' which is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their social group. Since its introduction into the academic literature, stereotype threat has become one of the most widely studied topics in the field of social psychology. Stereotype threat has been shown to reduce the performance of individuals who belong to negatively stereotyped groups. If negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group, group members are likely to become anxious about their performance, which may hinder their ability to perform at their maximum level. Importantly, the individual does not need to subscribe to the stereotype for it to be activated. It is hypothesized that the mechanism through which anxiety (induced by the activation of the stereotype) decreases performance is by depleting working memory (especially the phonological aspects of the working memory system).

However, studies showing stereotype threat have been criticized for exaggerating its importance as an explanation of real-world performance gaps and misrepresenting evidence as more conclusive than it is. Several reviews have voiced concerns that the effect has been overestimated and that the field suffers from publication bias. Stereotype threat is a potential contributing factor to long-standing racial and gender gaps in academic performance. It may occur whenever an individual's performance might confirm a negative stereotype because stereotype threat is thought to arise from a particular situation, rather than from an individual's personality traits or characteristics. Since most people have at least one social identity which is negatively stereotyped, most people are vulnerable to stereotype threat if they encounter a situation in which the stereotype is relevant. Situational factors that increase stereotype threat can include the difficulty of the task, the belief that the task measures their abilities, and the relevance of the stereotype to the task. Individuals show higher degrees of stereotype threat on tasks they wish to perform well on and when they identify strongly with the stereotyped group. These effects are also increased when they expect discrimination due to their identification with a negatively stereotyped group. Repeated experiences of stereotype threat can lead to a vicious circle of diminished confidence, poor performance, and loss of interest in the relevant area of achievement. The opposite of stereotype threat is stereotype boost, which is when people perform better than they otherwise would have, because of exposure to positive stereotypes about their social group. A variant of stereotype boost is stereotype lift, which is people achieving better performance because of exposure to negative stereotypes about other social groups.

## **2. Causal loop**

A self-fulfilling prophecy may be a form of causality loop, only when the prophecy can be said to be *truly* known to occur, since only then events in the future will be causing effects in the past. Otherwise, it would be a simple case of events in the past causing events in the future. Predestination does not necessarily involve a supernatural power, and could be the result of other "infallible foreknowledge" mechanisms. Problems arising from infallibility and influencing the future are explored in Newcomb's paradox. A notable fictional example of a self-fulfilling

prophecy occurs in classical play *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus becomes the king of Thebes, whilst in the process unwittingly fulfills a prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother. The prophecy itself serves as the impetus for his actions, and thus it is self-fulfilling. The movie *12 Monkeys* heavily deals with themes of predestination and the Cassandra complex, where the protagonist who travels back in time explains that he cannot change the past.

### **3. Sports**

In Canadian ice hockey, junior league players are selected based on skill, motor coordination, physical maturity, and other individual merit criteria. However, psychologist Robert Barnsley showed that in any elite group of hockey players, 40% are born between January and March, versus the approximately 25% as would be predicted by statistics. The explanation is that in Canada, the eligibility cutoff for age-class hockey is January 1, and the players who are born in the first months of the year are older by 0–11 months, which at the preadolescent age of selection (nine or ten) manifests into an important physical advantage. The selected players are exposed to higher levels of coaching, play more games, and have better teammates. These factors make them actually become the best players, fulfilling the prophecy, while the real selection criterion was age. The same relative age effect has been noticed in Belgian soccer after 1997, when the start of the selection year was changed from August 1 to January 1.

“The reason why I was chosen to do this topic because I asked Professor Bhanupong for a mercy of giving me a good grade on this subject since I almost reach the goal of getting the honor degree. However, I was afraid of the difficulties of this subject that could be the reason of the drop on my GPA. Fortunately, Prof. Bhanupong asked me to research on this topic and let me find out how this prophecy is related to my wish. I would say that I am expecting the honor degree, and Prof. Bhanupong gave this additional assignment for me to do to earn more points which made me feel more relieved since my first assignment was really difficult, so I think I might be able to get higher grade from his help. I am more inspired to study harder for this subject to get higher grade, and make my prediction of getting an honor to come true.”

- Irin

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