Influence of Optimism and Locus of Control on the Desirability Bias

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Problem or Purpose
The purpose of this study was to measure how optimism and locus of control affect the desirability bias. Desirability bias refers to how individuals tend to judge that they are more likely to experience positive events when they have a desire for these outcomes to occur. Desire affects our judgment in such a way that, when judging the likelihood of future events, our predictions are often biased in the direction of our desire (Klar et al., 1996).

Procedure
College students will be informed that they will be entered into a raffle with the prize being a Cardinals hat. Each participant will be randomly assigned to either the control or the earning condition by the flip of a coin. The control group will be informed that they will automatically have one ticket entered into the raffle. The earning condition group will be informed that they can earn one to five tickets depending upon performance on a task. Participants will then fill out a questionnaire including questions regarding desire of prize, judgment regarding likelihood of winning raffle, internal vs. external locus of control, and pessimistic vs. optimistic personalities. Participants will be given 20 mazes and will be rewarded with a certain amount of tickets based on the number of mazes completed in 5 minutes.

Results
My prediction is that the desirability bias will be more evident in individuals who are optimistic and possess a strong desire for a positive outcome. Optimists are more likely to face a situation whereas pessimists are more likely to avoid any obstacles (Scheier et al., 2001). Therefore, optimism can lead individuals to experience desirability bias as optimistic individuals tend to judge desirable outcomes as more likely to occur because they are often willing to face challenges to achieve desired results. Additionally, I hypothesize that the desirability bias will be stronger in individuals in the earning condition when these individuals possess an internal locus of control. The individuals can make the greatest impact on their outcomes and have a better chance of achieving their desired results.

Conclusions and Implications
If the results of the study are as predicted, people will recognize that developing higher levels of optimism and an internal locus of control can lead to higher goal satisfaction.