Holding Experts to Excessive Epistemic Standards

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Author Note

The authors made the following contributions. Samuel H. Borislow: Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft Preparation, Writing - Review & Editing; Geoffrey P. Goodwin: Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision.

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Abstract

De Freitas and Johnson (2018) found that people are blamed for making suboptimal decisions, even under circumstances in which an optimal decision cannot reasonably be expected (De Freitas & Johnson, 2018). They termed this phenomenon "optimality bias," and stated that it depended only on a reference to the relevant agents' choices, making no reference to their mental states. More precisely, they stated that suboptimal decisions are seen as more difficult to explain and are, therefore, also perceived to be more deserving of blame. However, what if the cause of this bias is instead an overassessment of the decision makers' abilities (thus, making reference to their mental states)? In a series of three studies, we examined whether thinking that an agent "should have known better" predicts blame judgments better than thinking an explanation was needed for their suboptimal behavior, as well as whether this effect is only found when judging experts. From our first study, we discovered that the sentiment that an agent "should have known better" explains optimality bias better than De Freitas and Johnson's proposed explanation. From our second study, we found evidence that expertise affects the potency of optimality bias, which again opposes De Freitas and Johnson's non-mentalistic explanation for the bias. And from our third study, we found evidence that eliminating an agent's potential to acquire greater knowledge impacted optimality bias—a finding which we replicated in a follow-up study—providing further support for our more mentalistic explanation for the bias.

Keywords: optimality, moral judgment, theory of mind, lay decision theory

Word count: X

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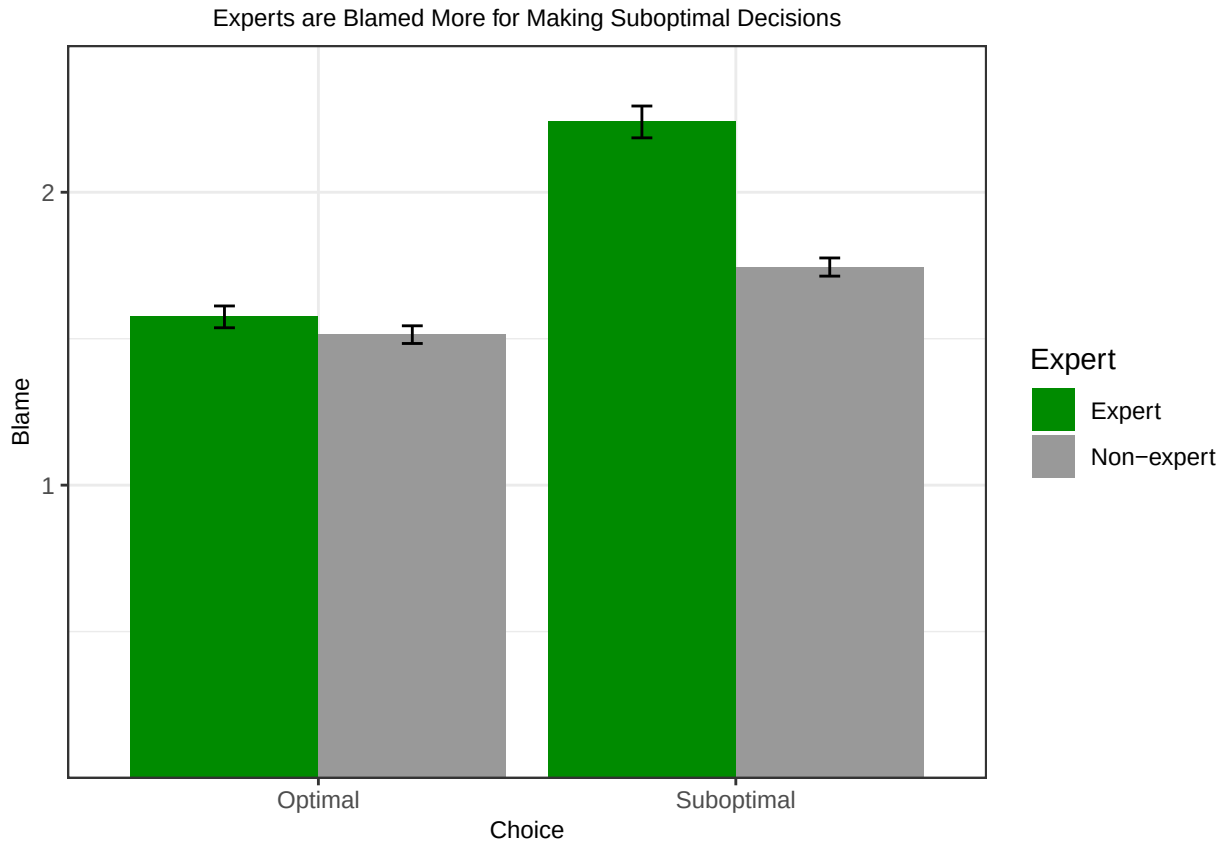

Figure 1. Mean ratings, based on choice, differ between experts and non-experts.

Introduction

This is the introduction[1]

Methods

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study.

[1] It would also be desirable to test whether improved measures of negligence mediate the optimality bias, not merely whether they moderate the bias. De Freitas and Johnson (2018) tested moderation only.

Table 1

Mean and SD of Blame

choice	expert	M_blame	SD_blame	n.models
Optimal	Expert	1.57	1.18	249
Optimal	Non-expert	1.51	0.96	251
Suboptimal	Expert	2.24	1.72	255
Suboptimal	Non-expert	1.74	0.98	248

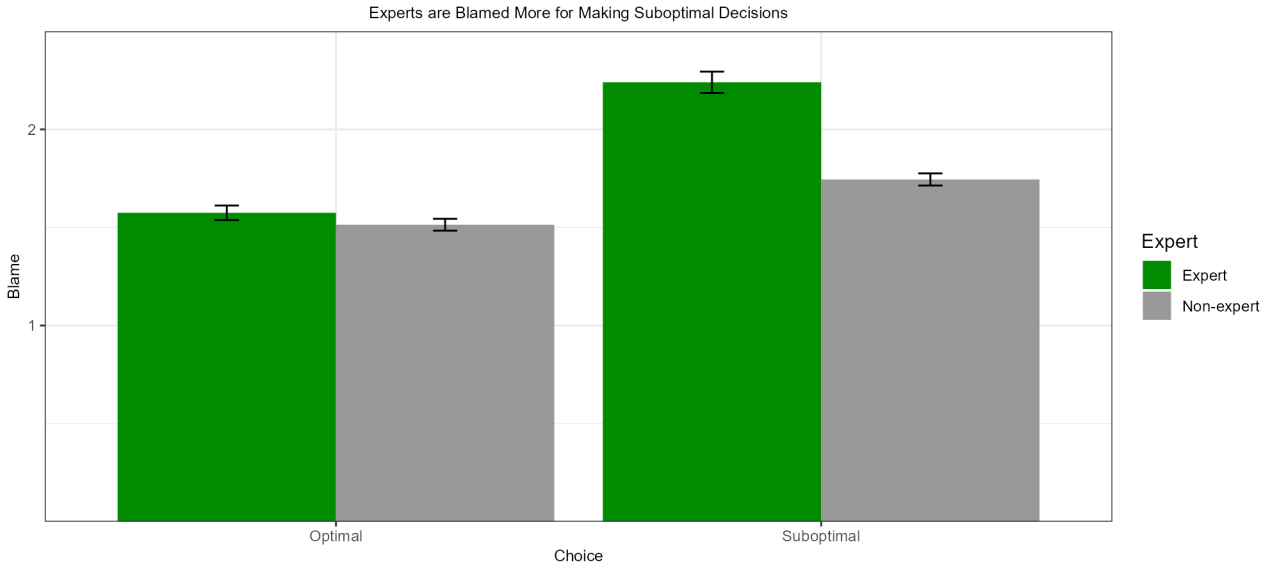

Figure 2. This is a smaller bar chart.

Participants

Material

Procedure

Results

These are the bar chart results (Figure 1). This is the bar chart but smaller (Figure 2). This is the table with blame means and standard deviations (Table 1).

Discussion

45

References