

# How Winning Leads to Cheating

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## *Scientific American:*

We live, for better or for worse, in a competition-driven world. Rivalry powers our economy, sparks technological innovation and encourages academic discovery. But it also compels people to manipulate the system and commit crimes. Some figure it's just easier—and even acceptable—to cheat.

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Similarly, participants who had simply won a lottery did not end up cheating when they reported the outcome of the dice roll but participants who had outplayed their peers in a trivia competition (again, controlled for selection bias) did later overclaim their winnings. “When we win in competition, in particular when we establish we are above others in rank, we will feel more powerful,” says Dacher Keltner, a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley who did not take part in the research. “And dozens of studies have found that the simple feeling of power makes people feel above the scrutiny of others and act in impulsive, self-gratifying and unethical ways. Feelings of power, whether it comes from wealth, a person's position in a hierarchical structure or in this case competition, can indeed lead to various abuses like lying and stealing.”

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Schurr and Ritov attribute the cheating that occurred in their study to a number of possible psychological mechanisms, particularly entitlement. Their study “ties into recent work that relates to the influence of social-economic status and its influence on ethical behavior,” says Shaul Shalvi, a behavioral economist at the University of Amsterdam who was not part of this study. “People who are of higher status would break the rules more often. So, for example, you're more likely to see a very fancy car ignoring the red traffic light compared to the guy in the normal car because they apparently feel entitled. So it's nice that this study links to that, because people of high status have probably had the experience of winning.”

Read the whole story: [Scientific American](#)