

Blindspot – Banaji & Greenwald

Overall Concept: Understanding Unconscious “Mindbugs”

Hermann von Helmholtz “unconscious inference”: the mind creates from physical data the conscious perceptions that define our ordinary and subjective experiences of “seeing”. (6)

Anchoring: the mind searches using whatever information is immediately available as a reference point or “anchor” and then adjusts. (12)

Vividness makes some information more readily available in memory. (14)

The social group to which a person belongs can be isolated as a definitive cause of the treatment he or she receives. Social mindbugs stem from psychologically and socially meaningful human groups of all sorts. Some are more magnetic than others in drawing us toward them as explanations of behavior. (17)

Stereotypes can be harmful not just to the others we assess and evaluate but also to ourselves. Staying away from those who were different or strange may one have been a safe strategy. No, it can be financially costly. (19)

Lies that help with impression management:

White lies: Considered harmless lies, because they benefit the receiver of the lie. (22) For example, does this dress make me look fat?

Gray lies: Motivated by the desire to spare feelings, however these answers are shaped more by the desire to spare one’s own feelings than by the intention to spare someone else’s. (23) For example, do you have any spare change?

Colorless lies: The things people keep from themselves. For example, how many drinks do you consume per day?

Red lies: Potentially confer survival and reproductive benefits to the teller. For example, do you love me (before deciding to sleep with a partner)? (26)

Blue lies: More essentially truthful than the actual truth. For example, did you read the full homework assignment (when you read all but the very last section.)? (27)

Impression management: Using lies to justify ourselves with how we present ourselves to others. However, it is typically a more charitable view than is totally truthful. (27). Impression management lies steer in the direction of being younger, lighter, taller, and smarter than may actually hold true.

Implicit Association Tests (IAT): Shows when categories linked to each other via shared goodness or badness (called valence) is given an emotional value. The mental glue that can allow two categories to combine into one corresponds with the concept of mental association. (39)

Various IAT Tests that showed tester bias:

Asian=Foreign (109) Black=Weapon (111) American=White (111)
Female=Home (112)

Male=Career (112) Romantic partner=Fantasy hero (116) Male=math Science=male (119)

Almost 75 percent of those who take the Race IAT show an automatic White preference, even among those who describe themselves as racially egalitarian. (47)

Dissonance persists when the person is aware of the contradiction occurring outside conscious awareness. (58). Cognitive dissonance: becoming aware of conflicts between beliefs and actions, or between two simultaneously coexisting beliefs, violates the natural striving for mental harmony, or consonance. (59)

Experts agree that the ability to have conscious access to our minds is quite low. For that reason, some humility about self-insight is in order. (61) Automatic preferences serve as navigational devices. (62)

80 percent of Americans have a stronger young = good than old = good association. Only 6 percent hold the reverse preference. (67) Many of the elderly achieve a harmonious resolution of the dissonance between their reflective and automatic attitudes toward old age by simply not allowing the label to apply to themselves. (69)

Stereotype came into English in the late 1700s as the name for a printer's metal plate that could hold an entire page of print. Drawing on a "identical copy." Almost every stereotype is true in some way; Also, any stereotype is at least partly false. Nevertheless, we can say that some stereotypes are more valid than others. For example, feminist = female is more valid than Boston driver = aggressive. (74)

Group stereotypes typically consist of traits that are noticeably more negative than those we would attribute to our friends. (78) Gordon Allport's concept of 'homo categoricus' emphasizes the importance of mental categories. (78) Orderly living depends on the use of categories. For example, you pass your credit card over to a salesperson without concern about identify theft; stripping naked into a gown for a medical exam. In other context, nakedness and fraud might be areas of worry. Context helps form orderly thinking/behaviors.

Default characteristics often occur because they are characteristics of Americans who you see, hear, and read about in everyday life. The default attributes that we add are so taken for granted and so automatic that, without thinking about why we do this, we are usually careful to specify a different set of attributes when the default ones don't apply. For example, rarely do we say "White American" but we might say "Asian American". We rarely say "male taxi driver" but we might say "lady cab driver." (84)

Presently adaptive theory states that stereotypes allow us to rapidly perceive total strangers as distinctive individuals. The authors argue, however, that stereotypes actually undermine, rather than facilitate, our ability to perceives strangers as individuals. (90)

Stereotypes are not distributed equally. If you can be described by the default attributes of your society – the attributes that don't need to be mentioned because they are assumed unless explicitly stated otherwise – you will be subject to less stereotyping than others. The stereotypes applied to a group are sometimes self-applied by members of the group to themselves, and in that case the stereotypes may act as self-undermining and self-fulfilling prophecies. (92)

Dissociation represents a state in which a person possesses conflicting attitudes, one reflective, and one automatic. (97) One must decide if there is a distinction between knowing and endorsing in the context of automatic beliefs. (98) For example, the higher the education level, the lower the endorsement of the association between Blacks and weapons on the reflection self-report answers. However, on the test of automatic stereotypes, the IAT, education level matters not a whit. (105) For example, people recognize faces from their own racial/ethnic group more easily than other-race faces. (107)

Stereotypes do not take special effort to acquire. Quite the opposite – they are acquired effortlessly, and take special effort to discount. Discounting stereotypes is not easy, because of the value of the general mental processes into which stereotypic thinking is embedded. (109)

The more strongly women associated the idea of a romantic partner with the idea of Prince Charming, the less they aspired to status and power for themselves. Remarkably, male and female respondents were equally willing to give up a chunk of salary for the pleasure of having a male boss, even though they had sworn to having no such preference. (117)

The strength of the ‘math = male’ stereotype predicted SAT math performance among women – the stronger the stereotype, the lower their math test scores. Automatic stereotypes don’t just engage the neurons in our heads and the thoughts in our minds and remain there. They have impact on behaviors such as the intellectual pursuits we select. (119)

The preponderance of boys with high SAT math scores has gone from a 10.7:1 ratio favoring boys in the 1980s to 2.8:1 in the 1990s. The ratio favoring boys was nearly four times as large a mere decade earlier. Such a rapid closing of the gap between groups that used to be strikingly different should be surprising to those who favor a largely genetic explanation for gender differences in math ability, because genetically based differences could not be reduced so dramatically in such a short period of time. (121)

Here's another fact: Some countries show large gender differences, others show smaller differences, and yet others show no differences at all. If gender differences in mathematical ability are largely the result of genetic causes, one would be hard-pressed to explain why such differences vary so much across societies; gender differences should be more universally observed. (121)

When we want to understand anything, we must try to get to the moment of its beginning. Imprinting = stamping in. (125) Animals survive by ensuring that it attaches itself very early to a protective caregiver. A “preparedness” to favor the familiar is a fundamental property of all animals. We are similar to many other species in the way we form attachments, and we are different from other species in the flexibility the process affords. (127)

Foundation = identity, and unique as each individual is, identity is deeply bound to the characteristics that are true of “us” as a group and differentiated from “them”. (130)

Once language comes into play, the sheer force of words can rapidly “stamp in” the meaning of group identities. (131)

Create an arbitrary connection between a person and a group and provide the mere suggestion that there are others who lack this connection to self, and the psychology of “us” and “them” rushes in to

fill the void. Lines are drawn, whether or not the basis for the groups makes any sense, and discrimination follows. (136)

“Because there is no physical sensation whatsoever to let her know that different brain regions are being invoked depending on whom it is she’s thinking about, she cannot possibly be aware of how this selective neural activation may influence her decisions.” (139)

Blindspots hide both discrimination and privileges, so neither the discriminators nor the targets of discrimination, neither those who do the privileging nor the privileged are aware. (144)

After the adoption of blind auditions, the portion of women hired by major symphony orchestras doubled – from 20 percent to 40 percent. In retrospect it is easy to see that a ‘virtuoso = male’ stereotype was an invalid but potent mindbug. The fix was simple and cheap – a piece of cloth. Sometimes there are effective solutions for outsmarting stereotype mindbugs. (147)

Data shows that hidden-bias mindbugs could be weakened by relatively minimal interventions, e.g. exposure to counter stereotyping images, building up associations counter to stereotypic ones that are strengthened in the rest of daily life. (152) This type of exposure creates elastic changes. The associations modified in these experiments likely soon return to their earlier configuration. Such elastic changes can be consequential, but they will require reapplication prior to each occasion on which one wishes them to be in effect. Such suppression of mindbugs can be useful, but it is not the equivalent of eradication. (152)

For the time being, it appears necessary to find workarounds for mindbugs – outsmarting the “machine.” That possibility of outsmarting, rather than eradicating, has served well in many other places, especially dealing with incurable diseases. (153) More generally, the successful method of outwitting one mindbug has limited ability to deal with others. More methods are needed. (157)

Uncomfortable egalitarians have no awareness that they are doing anything discriminatory. Uncomfortable egalitarians may be the prototypical “good people” who have hidden biases. They see themselves as helpful, but it turns out that their helpfulness is selective, caused in part by their discomfit in interracial interactions. Their discriminatory behavior consists of being selectively ready or able to help only or mostly those who are like them. (160)

Overtly prejudiced people are only a minority of Americans, quite likely a small minority. In-group favoritism is the norm. (162)

Mindbugs, we direct towards ourselves are every bit as durable as those we direct toward others. (164)

Gradually increasing opposition to government to African Americans was shown between 1960-2000, while at the same time these White Americans were expressing steadily increasing support for racial integration. (177) Various explanations: principled conservative view = The US now provides a level playing field that affords equal privileges and opportunities to Black and White Americans. As such, there is no justification for government intervention to benefit those who are less well off. Covert bias = Many Americans who express egalitarian views in public, continue to quietly harbor, in private, racial bias that remains potent sources of discrimination. (179)

Responsibility principle: Those responsible for creating a problem should be responsible for fixing it.
Group-responsible theories = Biological form (race-associated genes shape behaviors); Cultural form (culture shapes behaviors)

Seven Conclusions from the Research:

1. Black disadvantage exists.
2. The disadvantage experienced by Black Americans is at least partly due to race discrimination.
3. Social differentiation exists.
4. Attitudes have both reflective and automatic forms.
5. People are often unaware of disagreements between the reflective and automatic forms of their own attitudes and stereotypes.
6. Explicit bias is infrequent; implicit bias is pervasive.
7. Implicit race attitudes (automatic race preferences) contribute to discrimination against Black Americans. (208)