

The subconscious bias

Business



Even though our conscious bias may be the one we try to control and show, the subconscious bias is the underlying cause of many stereotypes and generalizations. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* touches on many themes related to bias, including the automatic and reflective sides of the mind, and what roles they play in society. The definition of bias has been discussed for years and makes understanding stereotypes easier once the bias is understood. Bias is when your brain associates certain things with each other, and tries to make quick decisions.

Sometimes, these decisions are distorted from our own conscious ideas, causing bias. IAT tests, which determine your underlying bias in your subconscious, were created to find your hidden bias. Our bias is part of a system which controls society, and our brains are to blame for the associations that cause bias. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, a book published in February 2013, and written by a social psychologist from Harvard (Mahzarin R. Banaji) and professor of psychology at the University of Washington (Anthony G.

Greenwald), touches on many themes of bias and how they relate to our brains. The title of the book "Blindspot" is a metaphorical way of referring to the section of the mind that contains our hidden bias. The book shares the experiences of the authors taking Implicit Association Tests (IAT's), and explains the science behind it. The book's purpose is to help the general public understand their mental biases, and adapt themselves to be more fair to the people of society. According to Oxford Dictionary, bias means "prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with

another, usually in a way considered to be unfair". Many people believe that they don't have a bias, whether it is subconscious or conscious.

Racism is a controversial issue, and a lot of the public believe that they are not racist. However, there is a bias that most people have about skin color preference that they are unaware of. This underlying bias that we are unknowing of can be found through a simple Implicit Association Test (IAT). An IAT is a test that was created for determining the level of bias that we have. Harvard developed a racial profiling IAT that gives a series of words and pictures of children of European-American and African-American descent/skin color.

The point of the test is to see how fast you associate each skin color with pleasant and unpleasant words. My results astounded me. I am a person that is against racism wholeheartedly, and I don't believe skin color matters in the grand scheme of things. However, my results of the IAT showed that I have a strong preference for European-American children vs. African-American children. I wondered how I could be so biased on the inside, but not be bias on the outside.

This is where the book *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, played a role. The book talks about how humans have an automatic and reflective side of the brain. The automatic side of the brain is the subconscious side, and the reflective side is the conscious side. My automatic brain has a strong bias towards children of European-American descent, but my reflective brain has no bias towards either. IAT are great for figuring out your subconscious bias and can help in trying to be more fair to society.

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However, is it possible that our subconscious has more of an influence than we previously thought? The subconscious brain is responsible for making us breathe and move, and is controlled mainly by the hypothalamus, located above the brain stem. It is the location of the quick, decision-making part of the brain, and there is no way for it to be controlled. In fact, our subconscious is so secretive, that common things in public influence our way of being without our knowing it. A study done by Yale University tested whether or not subtle things would bring about any different behavior in humans. The studies found that humans were more likely to be tidy if there is a faint scent of cleaning product in the air, or they become more competitive if a briefcase is visible.

These tests not only prove that conscious behavior is affected by the subconscious brain, but that bias can be undetectable! The subconscious and conscious are brought up in chapter four of *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. The book refers to the subconscious as the “automatic” side of the brain, and the conscious side as the “reflective” side. The chapter mentions a situation from the famous sitcom “Seinfeld”. In this situation, Jerry, the main character talks with his friend George in a restaurant and acts like they are a gay couple because a woman is eavesdropping on them. Later, the woman asks to interview Jerry, because he is a well-known comedian.

Jerry does not recognize the woman, but proceeds with the interview. She asks questions for a column she is going to write while George is in the room. After a while, Jerry begins to realize that the woman is from the restaurant, and she is a news reporter. He proceeds to try and convince the reporter

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that they are not really gay, and quickly adds in “ Not that there’s anything wrong with that!”. This situation proves that while Jerry’s conscious “ reflective” side of his brain is gay-friendly, his “ automatic” subconscious side of his brain does not want to be portrayed as gay because of all of the stereotypes that go along with it. Bias is the cause of stereotypes and generalizations, and our subconscious brain is uncontrolled when it comes to issues like these.

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People is a very useful book that helps people try to keep their bias in control and not let it affect their conscious choices. Knowing the difference between the “ opinion” of your automatic and reflective sides of your brain will cause a greater sense of fairness and equality in our community and society. The distortion of the subconscious and conscious brain activity cause problems, and reading the book alone will give you a greater sense of right and wrong. Determining your bias can be done with IAT tests, and can bring you one step close to conquering it. If we can control the systems of bias that are part of our subconscious brain, we can create a more fair society to live in today. BIBLIOGRAPHY: Banaji, Mahzarin R.

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