CHAPTER 11

Claims and Denials of Bias and Their Implications for Policy

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Objectivity is hard to find. Everyday experience is rife with examples of those around us who seem to lack it completely. We see people self-servingly take credit for collective efforts, we see them defend opinions that are biased by prejudice, and we see them allow personal self-interest to influence their desires for the “greater good.” People, it seems, are susceptible to a host of biases that contaminate their perception and judgments. What is perhaps most surprising, though, is not that people are so biased but that they are so inclined to claim that they are objective. Recent years have brought forth countless examples of this phenomenon. Corporate executives have denied the role of self-serving motives in dishonest accounting practices, doctors have denied the role of financial self-interest in suboptimal patient-care decisions, employers have denied the role of sexism in gender-imbalanced hiring and promotion practices, and politicians have denied the role of ideological bias in their commitments to controversial social policies.

The biases that people display in cases like this can have costly consequences. As illustrated by the above examples, these biases can cause financial peril, compromise the quality of health care, and perpetuate social inequity. In many cases, those negative outcomes could be avoided if people were able to recognize their own commissions of bias. However, people generally have a “blind spot” for their own biases; that is, they show a broad and pervasive tendency to impute bias to others while denying it in themselves. Understanding this phenomenon can help us to devise suggestions for how policy makers and policy consumers can work toward overcoming its costly consequences.

Relevance to Policy

Commissions of bias can have serious consequences in the policy arena (e.g., Bazerman, 2002; Thompson and Nadler, 2000). This chapter concerns something different from those direct consequences of bias. It concerns the consequences of people’s perceptions of their own and others’ commissions of bias; that is, of their perception that their own judgments are relatively free of bias, whereas others’ judgments are relatively susceptible to it. Consider a couple of examples taken from recent events.

A few years ago in Cincinnati, an African American man died during a violent struggle with the police at a White Castle hamburger shop. Many people, particularly members of the police force and their families, friends, and colleagues saw the incident as involving a threatening and massive man who violently resisted arrest and died in the process because he had a heart condition and was high on speed. Many other people, particularly members of the African American community, saw the incident as involving an innocent and unarmed man who was accosted without cause by a gang of racist police officers who subsequently overpowered and fatally attacked him. Following the incident, individuals from both “sides” claimed that their own perspective was the objectively accurate one and that those who defended the opposite view were biased (by racism, in-group favoritism, media-induced misconceptions, etc.). As a consequence, racial tensions erupted because each side felt angered and frustrated by the other’s unwillingness to take a fair and reasonable view.

Much of the profit to be made in the pharmaceutical industry rests on individual physicians’ decisions about what drugs they prescribe to their patients. For this reason, pharmaceutical companies employ legions of representatives to supply physicians with information about their latest drugs. Often that information is accompanied by a personal gift to the doctor being targeted. In some cases the gift might be something small, such as a pen or writing tablet, and in other cases it might be something grand, such as an invitation to attend an all-expenses-paid cruise where one would be educated about the relevant drug. These
gifts generally have an impact, and most doctors recognize that. Importantly, though, most doctors deny that such gifts affect their own patient-care decisions. As a result, they fail to shield themselves from that bias, while also feeling disenchanted with their colleagues whom they view as influenced by it. Because they assume that people are aware of bias when it is affecting them, they also tend to endorse policies that rely on individuals to recognize (and then disclose) their own cases of self-interest.

**Perceptions of Bias in the Self versus Others**

People have a blind spot when it comes to perceiving bias. As reviewed below (and also in table 11.1), this discrepancy occurs for a range of different biases, from those that inaccurately inflate the ego, to those that foster out-group prejudice, to those that compromise rational decision making. In each case, this bias blindness has significant relevance for policy.

### Table 11.1 Real-world examples of the bias blind spot and research evidence for it across various domains of bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Definition of bias</th>
<th>Real-world example of bias blind spot</th>
<th>Research evidence for blind spot</th>
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<td>Self-enhancement bias</td>
<td>Seeing oneself in an overly positive light</td>
<td>People fail to recognize when they are over-estimating their abilities.</td>
<td>Ehrlinger, Gilovich, and Ross, 2005; Friedrich, 1996; Krueger, 1998; Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002</td>
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<td>Self-serving bias (re. responsibility)</td>
<td>Taking credit for success and denying responsibility for failure</td>
<td>People fail to detect their own bias in denying responsibility for failures such as poor job performance. As a result, they feel wronged when blamed.</td>
<td>Kruger and Gilovich, 1999; Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002</td>
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<td>Self-serving bias (re. attribution)</td>
<td>Viewing performance criteria as valid only if one excels on them</td>
<td>People fail to recognize their bias in evaluating performance criteria (e.g., standardized tests). As a result, they resent those who denounce criteria on which they have excelled (and they see those others as biased).</td>
<td>Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002; Pronin and Kugler, 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-interest bias</td>
<td>Judging what is fair or what is best for others according to one's own personal interests</td>
<td>While noting the impact of self-interest on their colleagues, people including doctors, accountants, and journalists fail to recognize the effect of gifts (and other social and monetary incentives) on their own decisions.</td>
<td>Dana and Loewenstein, 2003; Epley and Dunning, 2000; Heath, 1999; Miller and Ratner, 1998</td>
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<td>Prejudice or intergroup bias</td>
<td>Treating in-group members better than members of stigmatized groups or out-groups</td>
<td>People can show biases involving racism and sexism that they deny and are, accordingly, unwilling to try to overcome. Others may exaggerate those biases, leading to feelings of hurt and anger on both sides.</td>
<td>Dovidio and Gaertner, 1991, 2004; Uhlmann and Cohen, 2005; Vivian and Berkowitz, 1992</td>
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<td>Ideological bias</td>
<td>Forming political views based on ideology and partisanship rather than reasoned analysis</td>
<td>Partisan opponents assume that their own political views are the product of objective thinking but that their opponents’ views are biased by ideology. As a result, they are pessimistic about reaching a fair resolution.</td>
<td>Cohen, 2003; Pronin, Berger, and Molouki, 2007; Robinson et al., 1995</td>
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<td>Hindsight bias</td>
<td>Failing to recognize the benefit of hindsight</td>
<td>People evaluating military or political disasters fail to realize that those disasters were hard to predict in advance. Because people are blind to their reliance on hindsight, they blame those in charge for their “obvious” errors.</td>
<td>Fischhoff, 1975</td>
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<td>Correspondence bias</td>
<td>Viewing others’ behavior as a reflection of their internal traits rather than their situation</td>
<td>People judge victims of bad circumstances as responsible for their plight. Unaware of this bias, they view victims’ explanations as mere “excuses.” Victims fear asking for help out of concern that others will show this bias.</td>
<td>Miller, Baer, and Schonberg, 1979; Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002; Van Boven, Kamada, and Gilovich, 1999; Van Boven et al., 2003</td>
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<td>Anchoring bias</td>
<td>Making numeric judgments that are affected by salient but irrelevant or nonuseful numbers</td>
<td>When negotiators try to advocate for their side, they may be biased by the numbers put forth by their opponent or even by irrelevant numbers in the environment. Blind to that bias, they cannot aim to correct for it.</td>
<td>Wilson et al., 1996</td>
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Do so after being taught about the bias and invited to acknowledge its impact on themselves (Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002). When people consider others’ self-ratings, by contrast, they expect others to be overly positive (Friedrich, 1996). This can cause problems that are of concern for policy. People are likely to find themselves in conflict with others when they think that their own hard work, judgment, motivation, and intelligence are beyond reproach but that those with whom they are dealing somehow fall short. That scenario occurs, for example, when opposing negotiators judge themselves as more willing to be fair than their opponent, when team members judge their work ethic on a joint project as greater than their peers’, and when political adversaries judge themselves as more inclined to take the moral high ground.

A classic self-enhancing bias involves people’s tendency to view tests on which they perform well as good and valid and tests on which they perform poorly as bad and invalid. The policy implications of this bias are significant, given the role of formal tests in selecting among individuals for outcomes ranging from spots in elite colleges to jobs in the local fire department. If individuals denounce tests on which they perform poorly—and if they are unaware of this tendency—they are likely to view even objectively
reasonable tests as unfairly discriminatory. In an experiment by Pronin, Lin, and Ross (2002) on this topic, subjects participated twice at a time, and each took a purported test of social intelligence. The pairs displayed the classic bias—those told they performed well rated the test as more valid than those told they performed poorly. When the experimenter warned the subjects that a self-enhancing bias may have influenced their judgments, they were more likely to suspect that possibility in their fellow participant than in themselves. Although the test in this experiment was fake, similar responses are likely to occur on the part of people (and groups) who do well versus poorly on high-stakes tests in the real world, such as college entrance exams. In such cases, individuals and groups who perform poorly are likely to resent the “obvious bias” on the part of high performers who seek to perpetuate the tests’ gate-keeping role. Meanwhile, high performers are likely to dismiss the complaints of poor performers as reflecting obvious bias on the part of those who have a personal interest in seeing the tests’ demise. Both sides are likely to be blind to the bias in their own views and thus particularly resentful of the other side’s accusations (accusations which, they are likely to believe, apply much better to the accusers themselves). Such asymmetric bias perceptions could contribute to long-standing policy debates about the validity and costs versus benefits of standardized tests.

Self-Interest Biases

When laypeople think of bias, often the first thing that comes to mind is the biasing effect of self-interest. We see people’s views on things ranging from smoking laws to presidential elections as guided by what serves their own self-interest. People view others as heavily biased by self-interest even when they deny that bias in themselves (Miller, 1999).

In one compelling set of experiments, Miller and Rattner (1998) asked people whether their own and others’ decisions to donate blood would be influenced by economic incentives, and whether their own and others’ views on insurance coverage for elective abortions would be influenced by their gender. The respondents also indicated what their actual decisions would be (i.e., whether they would donate blood or support the insurance coverage). The result was that they claimed that financial self-interest would have more of an effect on others’ decisions than on their own. They also assumed that self-interest would have more of an effect on others’ decisions than those others’ self-reports indicated. For example, those who claimed that financial incentives would not affect their own decisions about whether to donate blood nevertheless predicted that those incentives would affect others’ decisions (see also Goethals, 1986).

Other studies have shown similar effects. For example, Heath (1999) asked Citibank employees how much their own and others’ motivation to work hard in their careers was influenced by external incentives involving financial self-interest versus other factors (e.g., intrinsic interest in the work, pleasure of learning). The result was that the bank employees saw their coworkers as more motivated than themselves by financial self-interest. The policy implications of such asymmetries in perceptions of self-interest bias are noteworthy. Those designing incentive systems are likely to place too much weight on pleasing individuals’ financial self-interest at the expense of other factors that those individuals may value more. In the case of securing blood donations, it might be better to appeal more to individuals’ desire to see themselves as kind and generous. In the case of motivating employees to work hard, it might be better to appeal more to their interest in learning new skills (or in garnering the respect of their colleagues; see Tyler, this volume).

Prejudice and Group-Based Biases

People’s perceptions of those around them often are influenced by those others’ social categories, such as their race, gender, or political affiliation. Regardless of whether people intend it, they often display stereotypes against members of minority and stigmatized groups (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1991) and against members of groups other than their own. Researchers have found that even the flimsiest of group distinctions, such as whether people prefer one modern artist versus another, incur favoritism for in-group members at the expense of out-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Consistent with the theme of this chapter, people recognize these group-based biases in others more than in themselves.

People generally prefer members of their own race even when that prejudice lingers below their conscious awareness (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). For example, white people’s self-reports of their own racism poorly predict their actual tendency to display racial stereotypes and to unconsciously favor their own race (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1991, 2004). From a policy perspective, an important instance of group favoritism occurs in the context of employment hiring decisions and other competitive selection procedures. In that context, people have been known to construct ad hoc hiring criteria that disfavor individual applicants from stigmatized groups (Norton, Vandello, and Darley, 2004; Uhlmann and Cohen, 2005). In one experiment, Uhlmann and Cohen asked subjects to indicate whether being “streetwise” or being “formally educated” was a more important criterion for the job of police chief. Male subjects chose whichever criterion they believed was associated with the
male rather than the female candidate. Importantly, they denied the operation of this bias on their hiring preferences—even while they acknowledged that it would influence other people. Interestingly, the more objective they claimed to be, the more biased they actually were.

Another type of group-related bias involves the effect of people's political party memberships on their political attitudes. Most people believe that their views on issues ranging from foreign policy to healthcare reflect their personal analysis, values, and beliefs. But the reality is that people's political views often mimic those of their political party. For example, Cohen (2003; also Pronin, Berger, and Molouki, 2007) showed that when Democrat and Republican students read about alleged welfare reform proposals, they supported whichever proposal was allegedly backed by their own party—even when the Democrat proposal was in fact more conservative than the Republican one (e.g., when it called for fewer entitlements). The participants thought their peers would be swayed by which party backed each proposal, but they themselves denied being influenced by that factor (and instead claimed to be influenced by the proposals' content). In related research, people have been shown to view others as far more influenced than themselves by ideological bias stemming from partisan affiliations (e.g., Robinson et al., 1995; Sherman, Nelson, and Ross, 2003). It is not difficult to imagine how such asymmetries could produce meaningful social consequences. Individuals who believe that their own views reflect reasoned analysis and deeply held values are likely to have little respect or concern for the views of those whom they see as biased by "shallow" or "dogmatic" considerations such as political ideology.

Cognitive Biases

Human judgment and decision making often are subject to biases that arise not from motivational needs or prejudices, but rather from cognitive errors. Accurate judgment often is undermined by people's lack of awareness of these biases and therefore by their failure to correct for them. One such bias involves a "planning fallacy" in people's estimations of how much time it will take to complete work projects—people typically underestimate how much time they will need (Buchler, Griffin, and Ross, 1994). People are unaware of this bias in their time estimations, or they would correct for it (given the harmful costs of running out of time and having to submit poor work or to suffer grueling all-night work sessions). This bias, and people's blindness to it, causes problems not only on a small scale, such as missed work deadlines, but also on a much larger scale, where, for example, the cost of such misestimations can mean wars that cost more time, money, and lives than were ever imagined when the decision to wage them was made.

One of the most well-studied cognitive biases involves people's failure to recognize the power of the situation in influencing human behavior. When observing people's actions, we generally attribute those actions to internal traits of the actor (e.g., "He went to that movie because he likes violence and gore") rather than to aspects of the situation (e.g., "He went to that movie because the other ones were sold out"). This bias has been termed the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) or correspondence bias (Gilbert and Malone, 1995; Jones and Davis, 1965). In a classic demonstration of it, Jones and Harris (1967) asked subjects to read an essay that they were told was written by a student asked to offer "a short cogent defense of Castro's Cuba." Even though subjects were explicitly told that the essay writer had been assigned this pro-Castro view, they nevertheless assumed that the writer held that position in reality. More recent research has shown that although people commit this error unknowingly, they are not ignorant of others' commissions of it. Indeed, people expect—and even overestimate—others' susceptibility to this bias (Miller, Baer, and Schonberg, 1979; Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002; Van Boven, Kamada, and Gilovich, 1999; Van Boven et al., 2003). The implications of this are important. Individuals are likely to be wary of introducing opinions counter to their own or to those of their in-group—even if they think those opinions are worth considering—out of concern that their own position will be incorrectly labeled. Considering the valuable role in policy debates of acknowledging the validity of the other side's views and of playing devil's advocate, this phenomenon is likely to hinder fruitful policy discussion.

Causes of the Asymmetry

The foregoing review describes people's tendency to claim personal objectivity at the same time that they recognize and even exaggerate bias in others. The discussion now turns to causes of this effect. Developing an understanding of these causes is a prerequisite for designing effective strategies for combating the bias blind spot's unfortunate consequences.

Unconscious Bias and an Introspection Illusion

Biases generally operate outside of conscious awareness (e.g., Dawson, Gilovich, and Regan 2002; Wilson, Centerbar, and Brekke, 2002). That is, people often show them without intending to or even being aware that they are doing so. When it comes to
assessing their own bias, people often fail to appreciate this simple fact. They instead overrely on their conscious knowledge about whether they have intended to be (or felt themselves being) biased. In assessing others’ bias, by contrast, people generally prefer to look to those others’ actions or to rely on their own theories about when people are biased. Rather than trusting others’ reports of whether they intended to be biased or felt that they were biased, people look to what those others actually did (e.g., “Did he hire a long string of men for the vice-president job but never a woman?”) and to their own assumptions about people’s bias (e.g., “Most people think only men make good leaders.”). This tendency to overly rely on one’s introspections while giving little credence to those of others has been termed an introspection illusion (e.g., Pronin, 2009).

In one experiment illustrating the impact of the introspection illusion on bias perceptions, Pronin and Kugler (2007) had students take a purported social intelligence test, told them they performed poorly, and then asked them to evaluate the quality of the test. Later, when those students were asked whether they had been biased in their evaluation of the test (consistent with a bias, their evaluations were uniformly negative), they assumed they had been unbiased since their conscious thoughts and motives yielded no signs of bias. A separate group of subjects did not take the test but instead observed a peer take it. Those observers took a different approach to assessing bias. They looked to the test takers’ behavior and, in particular, whether the test takers disparaged the test right after performing poorly on it. Thus, individuals attended to their own internal motives, but to a peer’s actions, in assessing bias. As discussed in a later section of this chapter (“Ethical Lapses”), this tendency to judge bias by consulting one’s own introspections but others’ actions can create significant problems in the policy arena. Those accused of ethical wrongdoings, such as doctors accused of sacrificing their patients’ best interest in exchange for gifts from drug companies, or financial experts accused of compromising their clients’ best interests in exchange for their own personal gain, may commit these ethical lapses without conscious intent. Thus, while onlookers may readily detect self-interest bias in their behavior, the actors themselves may deny it based on the apparent purity of their conscious motives.

Disagreement and Naive Realism

Individuals’ failure to recognize their own biases derives in part from the nature of human perception. People generally have the feeling that their perceptions of objects and events in the world around them are accurate and direct reflections of what is true in “objective reality” (Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross, 2004; Ross and Ward, 1995). If the grass looks green to us, we believe it is green. Research on naive realism has described the tendency for people to make this same assumption about their higher-level judgments and opinions. Thus, if the new welfare-reform bill seems fair to us, we believe it is fair. Because we are shielded from the influences that nonconsciously bias us toward perceiving things in particular ways, we maintain unwarranted confidence in the directness of our perceptions.

Of course, others do not always share our perceptions. In such cases, we assume that those others must be either ill-informed or (having ruled out that possibility) incapable or unwilling to view things objectively. Experiments have demonstrated people’s tendency to view those whose opinions differ from their own as influenced by biases including self-interest (Reeder et al., 2005), personal affections (Frantz, 2006), political partisanship (Cohen, 2003), and unwavering ideology (Robinson et al., 1995). For example, Reeder et al. (2005) showed that the more people disagreed with President Bush’s decision to invade Iraq the more they saw that decision as biased by the president’s personal self-interest.

In a series of experiments, Kennedy and Pronin (2008) examined the role of disagreement in perceptions of bias regarding the debate about affirmative action. In one study, subjects were presented with the putatively moderate position of an elite university president on that issue. The more they disagreed with that president’s alleged position, the more bias they imputed to her. These results are noteworthy because the subjects all rated the same target with the same position. Thus, even though her position was fixed, participants viewed her as more biased when their position deviated from it. In a second experiment, the university president’s putative position on affirmative action was experimentally manipulated in order to be either similar to the subjects’ own position or considerably divergent from that position. Subjects saw the university president as more biased when they were led to infer that they had a large disagreement with her. Notably, the president’s apparent extremity on the issue did not influence their perceptions of her bias, indicating that their perceptions of bias arose from disagreement rather than from the details of their adversary’s position.

People are more convinced that their own objectivity surpasses that of others when those others disagree with them. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this phenomenon can transform simple disagreements into stubborn conflicts (Kennedy and Pronin, 2008), and it can act as a barrier to resolving conflicts that are already in place (Ross and Ward, 1995).
Self-Enhancement and the Motive to Deny Bias

A final source of the bias blind spot involves people’s desire to see themselves in a positive light (Roese and Olson, 2007; Sedikides, 2007). Because of the undesirable nature of being biased, people may be motivated to deny their susceptibility to bias as a way of protecting or enhancing their self-image. Indeed, research suggests that people are more likely to deny susceptibility to biases that are relatively negative rather than positive (Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002).

People are particularly likely to see their personal traits and abilities in an overly positive light to the extent that circumstances are sufficiently ambiguous to allow for such enhancement (e.g., Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg, 1989). Thus, while it is difficult to self-enhance when it comes to punctuality (one either is on time or one is not), people self-enhance on traits such as generosity, friendliness, and driving ability, since those can be defined in different ways. The circumstances surrounding bias perception offer another such case of ambiguity. Because biases are difficult to prove (the person who has never hired a female vice-president might simply never have had a good one apply) and because they can be defined in multiple ways (e.g., in terms of motives versus outcomes), people often have the judgmental leeway to deny being biased without it being obvious that their denials are themselves biased.

Policy Applications: Three Case Studies

People’s unwillingness or inability to recognize their own biases, even while they acknowledge, to the point of overestimation others’ biases, holds implications for a variety of sociopolitical concerns. Three such concerns—ethical lapses, discrimination, and conflict—are discussed below with respect to how they are affected by the bias blind spot. Understanding the effects of bias perception in these various contexts can inform the implementation of wiser and more effective policies for addressing these concerns. After reviewing these cases, we proceed to a discussion of potential solutions.

Ethical Lapses

People often encounter circumstances in which their motivation to be ethical and their motivation to serve their own self-interest are at odds. Although ethics can prevail in even the most difficult of circumstances, for example, when so-called whistle-blowers risk losing their jobs in order to expose the unethical practices of their employer, there also are many cases in which individuals succumb to self-interest. Scandals engulfing corporations such as Enron and WorldCom have illustrated the large-scale financial damage incurred by fraudulent accounting practices used to achieve personal financial gain. Those scandals have resulted in the losses of hundreds of thousands of jobs and in some of the largest bankruptcies in history. They also led to the downfall of one of the world’s largest accounting firms, Arthur Andersen. That firm was forced to close when its allegedly independent auditing services were found to be biased in favor of the companies who paid them to do those audits. While onlookers saw this as an obvious case of corruption, those responsible denied being criminals. That denial, the present review suggests, reflects more than a simple desire to stay out of legal trouble. Bazerman, Moore, and their colleagues (Bazerman, Loewenstein, and Moore, 2002; Moore et al., 2006) have suggested that it reflects the fact that in some cases auditors were likely biased without being consciously aware of it. Thus, while the presence of bias may seem obvious to observers focusing on the correlation between the auditors’ large paychecks and their approving audits, it may not have been obvious to the auditors themselves who were focusing on their conscious motives and intentions. How might this happen? Ethical lapses in the field of medicine provide an interesting illustration, as discussed next.

Physicians receive numerous incentives from pharmaceutical companies for recommending and prescribing treatment regimens owned by those companies. Those incentives include gifts bestowed as a means of product promotion, free meals with pharmaceutical representatives, paid travel and lodging expenses to exotic locales (for attendance at company-sponsored events), financial payments for referring patients to clinical trials, and opportunities for physicians to serve as medical consultants poised to profit from the scientific results they report. A meta-analysis by Wazana (2000) revealed that physicians typically meet with pharmaceutical representatives four times per month and receive six gifts per year. Not surprisingly, these incentives generally bias their patient-care decisions in a manner consistent with financial self-interest (Dana and Loewenstein, 2003; Wazana, 2000). Moreover, in keeping with the theme of this chapter, most physicians deny that these incentives influence their own medical practices, even though they readily recognize that influence on other physicians (e.g., Dana and Loewenstein, 2003; McKinney et al., 1990; Wazana, 2000).

Patients rely on their physicians to provide objective recommendations. In light of the influence of pharmaceutical companies, policy makers have been called upon to intervene in order to ensure the
integrity of that patient-doctor trust. Unfortunately, as noted by Dana and Loewenstein (2003), most regulatory interventions have been based on the flawed assumption that physician self-interest bias is the result of a conscious choice to succumb to inappropriate influence. Thus, for example, current regulations limit the size of gifts in order to curb conscious temptation, and those regulations also require physicians to disclose conflicts of interest. However, the research reviewed here suggests that limiting gift size will not decrease bias (since even small gifts can have big effects) and that mandating disclosures of conflicts of interest will not ensure such disclosures (since those conflicts often are not consciously recognized). Educational initiatives may succeed in making physicians more aware of the problem (e.g., Agrawal, Saluja, and Kaczorowski, 2004), but that awareness is likely to translate into their seeing their colleagues as biased rather than themselves.

Persistence of Racism and Sexism

Despite significant accomplishments in the fight against prejudice and discrimination, those ills are still observable today. Inequalities such as racial and gender gaps in wages are troubling and persistent. Racism and sexism (as well as other forms of discrimination) can result from unconscious and unintended biases; thus, their persistence can be partially attributed to people’s blindness to their susceptibility to those biases. Indeed, much of modern sexism and racism is shown by people who lack conscious prejudice (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004; Son Hing et al., 2005). Many experiments have made clear the role of automatic and unconscious processes in producing responses that favor in-groups and disfavor both out-groups and groups subject to social stigma (e.g., Fazio and Olsen, 2003; Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). The fact that people show such biases without knowing it perpetuates prejudiced practices and also limits people’s efforts to combat their own prejudiced behavior. While people are likely to see the need for reducing prejudice in society as a whole, they are likely to resist policies that would restrict their own freedom of decision making (e.g., by regulating their hiring procedures) because of their perception that they personally are not susceptible to group-based prejudice. Because observers are not likely to share individuals’ confidence in their personal objectivity, social tensions are likely to arise as those accused of prejudice are likely to view those accusations not only as baseless but also as signaling the self-serving (or group-serving) bias of those voicing them.

Such a scenario occurred when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) scrutinized its hiring and promotion practices with respect to women. Their investigation revealed considerable signs of gender disparity. Perhaps most surprisingly, the faculty at the School of Science at MIT included only 22 women out of 274 professors. Further analyses suggested signs of prejudicial treatment. According to a report issued by the school, male professors earned more money, had larger offices and lab spaces, and received more distinctions than their female counterparts (MIT, Committee on Women Faculty in the School of Science, 1999; Miller and Wilson, 1999). In the wake of this report, many wondered how such a prestigious institution could have engaged in such starkly discriminatory practices.

Nancy Hopkins, a biology professor at MIT, initiated the investigation. As a junior professor, Hopkins had perceived what she viewed as the school’s general unfair treatment of women, but she thought she was an exception (Diaz-Sprague, 2003). Then, after struggling to obtain adequate lab space and facing the cancellation of her course in favor of a male colleague’s course, Hopkins began to suspect that the gender bias was more pervasive than she had thought. Together with faculty women across the various science departments, she wrote a letter claiming the presence of “discrimination against women faculty” that was “largely invisible and . . . almost certainly unconscious” (Hopkins, as cited in Diaz-Sprague, 2003). The university president appointed Hopkins as the head of an investigation into possible inequalities. Following the investigation, MIT increased salaries and space for women faculty and in 2004 hired its first female president. Critics of the report responded by calling its findings “bogus” and denying the presence of any bias at MIT (Leo, 2002). Consistent with the tendency for disagreement to induce people to see those on the “other side” as biased, those critics labeled Hopkins herself as biased and claimed that her involvement in the investigation served to introduce bias into it.

The MIT case helps illustrate how striking patterns of discrimination can emerge over time when specific and even slight occurrences of bias go unrecognized. Such slight occurrences often occur unintentionally and unconsciously, thus making it difficult for the relevant individuals to recognize and avoid them. This suggests that the route to overcoming the problem is likely to require the institution of formal policies, and ones that are not reliant on individual awareness of bias. Of course, a problem with instituting such policies is that the individuals in need of them are likely to be resistant because of their confidence in their own objectivity.

Even when formal policies are implemented, that implementation must be done with care in order to
avoid institutionalizing the very bias the policies are designed to overcome. For example, one sort of formal policy involves constructing fixed criteria for hiring decisions in order to avoid the potential for subjective biases to enter into the process. However, as discussed earlier, people tend to set their criteria for what would make a suitable job candidate depending on the qualifications and gender of the applicants (Uhlmann and Cohen, 2005). As a result, policies that implore people to use the same criteria across applicants can backfire—if people are allowed to select those criteria after first viewing the qualifications of the available applicants. This suggests the importance of establishing fixed criteria in advance of knowing how members of different groups stack up; otherwise, the appearance of formal criteria only will lend credibility to a biased procedure.

Modern prejudice may seem relatively harmless when compared to the more overt racism and sexism of the past. However, the consequences of more subtle forms of prejudice include restrictions on economic opportunity and other serious disadvantages that undermine equality (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004). Confronting these problems is especially difficult because implicit prejudice cannot be unearthed via introspection. Thus, fruitful policies need to take into account people’s frequent blindness to their own bias rather than assuming that such bias occurs out of a conscious motive to discriminate. Possible solutions to this problem are discussed below (in the section “Fixing the Problem”).

Conflict

The tendency to see bias in others but not in oneself can play a critical role in the development and escalation of conflict. It also can prevent conflicts from being resolved once they have reached a point of tense escalation. Because people are generally confident in their own objectivity, they tend to view those who disagree with them as biased (Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross, 2004; Ross and Ward, 1995). This reasoning can unleash a spiral of conflict out of mere disagreement that proceeds roughly like this (Kennedy and Pronin, 2008, 2012): Disagreement leads people to perceive those who disagree with them as biased. That perception of bias leads people to infer that their adversaries will not be willing to act fairly and reasonably. Such an inference causes people to lose faith in the possibility of peaceful resolution of their disagreement and to instead opt for a more aggressive approach. By acting aggressively, people induce the other side to view them as biased (since those on that side assume that they are in the right and that therefore no objective person would aggress against them). Once this spiral of conflict is unleashed, resolution becomes difficult, because each side resents the other’s unwillingness to put their biases aside in order to reach a fair agreement.

A useful case study of bias perception in conflict is presented by the cycle of violence involving terrorist attacks and government retaliation for those attacks (or, depending on one’s perspective, unjust government action and terrorist retaliation for that action). Terrorist attacks bring to light the differences in worldview held by the groups that perpetrate those attacks versus those that are victims of them. This stark reminder of those differences can instill a desire to dominate, weaken, and even destroy those on the other side. But, it is not the experience of differences in worldview alone that leads to this desire. People may respond aggressively not only because they disagree with their adversaries but also because they view their adversaries’ position as the product of biased and irrational thinking. In the many terrorism-related conflicts around the world today, a common theme is that each side tends to claim a monopoly on reason and objectivity—on seeing the past and present as they really are. Policy experts point out that even suicide terrorists are not necessarily biased and irrational even though that is how their victims often perceive them (e.g., Pape, 2005). For example, Ehud Sprinzak (2000), a former adviser to Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, once claimed:

The perception that terrorists are undeterred fanatics who are willing to kill millions indiscriminately just to sow fear and chaos belies the reality that they are cold, rational killers who employ violence to achieve specific political objectives.

This quotation makes clear the two divergent views of terrorists. Sometimes, they are perceived as irrational fanatics biased by unbridled hatred, radical ideology, and extreme pressure to conform. Other times, they are perceived as rational warriors whose views are rooted in an objective analysis of their circumstances and of the options they think are available to them. Although both of these perspectives have been put forth in scholarly research and analysis (e.g., Crenshaw, 1998; Margalit, 2003; Merari, 2004; Pape, 2005; Post, 2005), and although the truth is probably somewhere in between, lay citizens’ disagreement with terrorists’ actions and beliefs typically leads them to adopt the “biased fanatic” view. Numerous studies (reviewed earlier) have shown that the more people disagree, the more they perceive those they disagree with as biased. This effect has been illustrated in the context of terrorism. One study was conducted with political activists in Northern Ireland in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement establishing the conditions
for peace in that region (described in Pronin, Lin, and Ross, 2002). Participants in the study reported that the leadership which opposed their position was especially susceptible to a host of biases that compromise fairness and objectivity in negotiation. A different study, conducted with American college students, specifically concerned suicide terrorists (Kennedy and Pronin, 2007). The more the respondents disagreed with suicide bombers, the less they viewed the bombers’ actions as rooted in an objective analysis of their circumstances rather than a biased or fanatical perspective.

These perceptions of bias can perpetrate a spiral of conflict. In one experiment (Pronin, Kennedy, and Butsch, 2006), subjects were led to adopt one of two views of suicide terrorists by virtue of exposing them to an alleged New York Times article on the terrorist mind. Half of subjects were exposed to an article suggesting that terrorists come to their decisions via an objective analysis of the facts available to them, and the other half read an article suggesting that terrorists come to their decisions via a biased worldview. The result was that perceiving terrorists as biased versus objective powerfully affected subjects’ opinions about how to combat terrorism (fig. 11.1). Those led to view terrorists as biased advocated bombing and ground attacks over negotiation and diplomacy. Those led to view terrorists as objective voiced the opposite preference.

In post–September 11 America, terrorism and the war against it are constantly subject to political debate and media sensationalism. Research on perceptions of bias makes clear that the tendency for people to view terrorists as irrational fanatics (and for terrorists to view their victims as self-serving infidels) is likely to beget a cycle of violence that cannot be easily abated. This research suggests that efforts to find diplomatic and cooperative solutions need not require both sides to see eye to eye, but rather that such efforts will require both sides to recognize that the eyes of those on the other side are no more clouded by bias than their own. If adversaries can recognize each other’s potential for clear-headed thinking (as well as recognizing their own potential for biased thinking), they will be more inclined to pursue diplomatic approaches rather than viewing violence as the only option.

Fixing the Problem: From Hazardous Approaches to Promising Solutions

As illustrated by the above case studies, the policy consequences of the bias blind spot can be serious. Because biases often operate unintentionally and without awareness, averting them can be difficult. Unfortunately, many of the intuitively appealing remedies for curbing the negative effects of bias are unlikely to help and, in some cases, are likely to hurt. The remainder of this chapter will explore three prevalent and intuitively appealing approaches, with a focus on the problems with those approaches and on strategies for overcoming those problems (see table 11.1). The aim of this portion of the chapter is to offer lessons that can inform the design and implementation of policies in which bias perceptions play a role. Fortunately, a more psychologically informed perspective is likely to be effective in restricting the negative effects of the bias blind spot.

Mandating Disclosure

To the extent that individuals are inclined to deny their own biases, one obvious solution is to formally require them to openly acknowledge those biases. That solution is frequently implemented in the form of mandatory disclosure guidelines. Such guidelines are based on the premise that even if individuals do not personally have a problem with their own biases, those who interact with them may feel differently and therefore should be fully informed of such biases. Based on this premise, disclosure is one of the more common measures implemented to combat the problem of bias. Physicians are required to disclose payments received for patient referrals, stockbrokers are required to disclose if they have a financial interest in companies whose stock they recommend, and researchers are required to disclose funding sources that have a stake in the outcome of the results.

THE PROBLEM WITH MANDATING DISCLOSURE

Unfortunately, disclosure may not work for a number of reasons that primarily arise from people’s lack
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of solution</th>
<th>Basic idea</th>
<th>Possible pitfalls</th>
<th>Making it work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandating disclosure</td>
<td>Advisors disclose potential conflicts of interest.</td>
<td>Advisors cannot disclose conflicts that they are unaware of.</td>
<td>Educate advisors and advisees about the unconscious nature of bias so they can detect conflicts of interest.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Those being advised use this knowledge to make better decisions.</td>
<td>Advisees may view disclosures as indicating the advisor’s objectivity.</td>
<td>Require disclosures for major sources of bias other than large financial ones.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>The duty to disclose also may motivate advisors to avoid conflicts of interest.</td>
<td>Advisors may act more biased in order to moderate the impact they expect their disclosures to have.</td>
<td>Have disclosures originate from a credible source other than the advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging perspective-taking</td>
<td>People attempt to see the situation through the eyes of their adversaries.</td>
<td>Perspective-taking can lead people to a focus on the possible biases (e.g., self-interest) of their adversaries.</td>
<td>Use more direct perspective-taking techniques such as visualizing things through the other side’s eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This leads them to understand their adversaries’ perspective.</td>
<td>As a result, it can lead people to act more self-interestedly in order to counter the other side’s self-interest.</td>
<td>Consider what valid reasons might underlie the other side’s perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairer judgments result.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consider how you would respond if you supported the other side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding objectivity</td>
<td>People are directly asked to be objective.</td>
<td>People are blind to their bias and thus assume they already are objective.</td>
<td>Educate people about the unconscious nature of bias so that they do not assume they would be aware if they were biased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This leads them to abandon or to correct for their biases.</td>
<td>Demands to focus on objectivity can increase people’s confidence in their objectivity without curing their bias.</td>
<td>Encourage people to try to prevent bias before it occurs rather than to try to detect its occurrence after the fact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More impartial judgment results.</td>
<td>That confidence may license people to act yet more biased.</td>
<td></td>
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be particularly impressed by her objectivity in providing that disclosure. Even if one is aware that such a disclosure is required by law, one may nevertheless view it as signaling more about the stockbroker's integrity than about the requirements of the law. As discussed earlier, people display a powerful tendency to discount the importance of situational constraints in guiding others' behavior and instead tend to attribute that behavior to others' internal traits (Gilbert and Malone, 1995; Jones and Davis, 1965; Ross, 1977). Thus, the act of disclosing can have the perverse effect of making the discloser seem more trustworthy rather than more susceptible to bias (Cain, Loewenstein, and Moore, 2005).

Another problem with disclosure requirements is that they may have the ironic effect of making people's behavior more biased (Cain, Loewenstein, and Moore, 2005). Consider the case of an admissions officer evaluating an applicant who is the daughter of a close friend. Whereas he might think that the candidate should objectively be ranked in the top 20% of candidates, he might be inclined to instead rank her in the top 10% if he knows that he will have to disclose his potential for bias. That is, he might assume that others will discount the favorability of his view and that he should therefore offer a yet more favorable view in order to counterbalance that response. An experiment by Cain, Loewenstein, and Moore (2005) offers support for that hypothesis. Subjects were to estimate the monetary value of jars of coins and be rewarded for their accuracy. Before offering an estimate, each subject was able to quickly see the jars and also to avail him or herself of the advice of an “advisor” subject who had been given a far better look at the jars. The advisors were rewarded not for the estimators' accuracy but rather for how high the estimators’ estimates were. The result was that the advisors suggested higher estimates (i.e., ones that were more biased toward their own self-interest) when they were required to disclose their conflict of interest. Moreover, their disclosures actually harmed those whom they advised, because those advisees actually made less profitable estimates than their peers, who also received biased advice but without such disclosures.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Research and theory regarding the bias blind spot and disclosure suggest that disclosure may backfire by inducing advisors to maintain their biases while paradoxically giving those whom they advise more confidence in their ethics and professionalism. Although solutions other than disclosure are probably necessary, some amendments to disclosure policies can help ensure that their benefits accrue to the individuals they aim to protect, rather than the experts who advise them.

EDUCATE DISCLOSERS

Disclosure policies should educate those subject to the requirement about the potential for unconscious bias in their judgments. Part of the problem is that disclosers typically are incapable of accurate self-assessment of their own biases (i.e., what must be disclosed). This applies to would-be disclosers including stockbrokers, real estate agents, judges, doctors, and scientific researchers. People need to understand that the requirement to disclose does not reflect the fact that people are aware of the factors that bias them, but rather that people often are not aware of the impact of those biasing factors. Because disclosers typically assume that bias involves an overt promotion of one's own self-interest, this alternative understanding must be taught for disclosers to understand the scope of information that is relevant to disclose.

INTRODUCE PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAVVY DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

The belief that one is objective is so powerful that educating people about unconscious bias may not be enough to get disclosers to reveal all of the relevant information. Moreover, disclosers often have practical reasons for limiting the extent of their disclosure, such as avoiding bureaucratic hassles or the loss of valuable business (or, in a more beneficent case, a doctor worrying about being unable to persuade a patient to adopt the best therapy). To overcome these natural tendencies of disclosers, it is important to mandate the disclosure of specific information, not generic conflicts of interest. For example, doctors should be required to list the pharmaceutical companies from which they have received monetary compensation (and the approximate amounts involved), not just the relationships that might compromise their prescribing decisions. An added benefit of such a just-the-facts approach to gathering disclosure-relevant information is that it mitigates the tendency of the discloser to frame the information so as to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest (or, in an open-ended text disclosure, to obscure the relevant information in technical language).

Disclosure requirements need to include not only obvious cases of high stakes financial self-interest but also less obvious potential causes of bias. One example is the seemingly trivial gifts to doctors, such as pens with drug names on them. While doctors are indeed unlikely to be influenced by the economic value of the pen, psychological research suggests that repeatedly seeing the drug name is likely to unconsciously increase liking for, and prescribing of, the drug. Another
example is the potentially biasing effect of friendship. For example, Justice Scalia elected not to recuse himself from the case of Cheney v. United States District Court for the District of Columbia despite a close personal friendship with Vice President Cheney, claiming that the requirement for recusal did not apply in this case—that is, that his “impartiality [could not] reasonably be questioned.” Without doubting the sincerity of Justice Scalia’s belief in his own impartiality, the capacity to fully escape the unconscious biasing effects of friendship is a lot to expect.

As these examples illustrate, obtaining an accurate list of disclosures requires an understanding on the part of those who mandate them of the myriad of ways that bias can operate. These include not only the large sums of money that would be the key information from a standard economic perspective, but also social relationships, nonmonetary incentives, and personal beliefs not grounded in professional knowledge (e.g., religious or cultural values). Fortunately, psychologists have now itemized many of these factors, providing the requisite scientific knowledge for developing robust and effective disclosure requirements.

EDUCATE RECIPIENTS

Disclosures can only be effective to the extent that those who receive them understand how bias operates and what effect it can have. Medical patients and financial investors who themselves rely on inaccurate theories of bias (e.g., Only big amounts of money could bias a well-paid doctor.) are unlikely to benefit from disclosures that rely on an accurate understanding of bias. Consequently, an important component of disclosures to clients (e.g., patients, investors) should involve not just a statement of the interest, but also a disclosure of the fact that interests of that sort have been found to bias advisors' guidance.

USE THIRD-PARTY DISCLOSERS

Another problem with disclosures is that they typically are provided by the individual whose bias is in question. Thus, that individual benefits from the appearance of integrity and honesty afforded by that openness. For this reason, disclosures could be more beneficial if they came from a third-party source rather than from the potentially biased actor him or herself. Being told by a third party that one’s physician has a financial stake in one’s medical care could have a greater impact than being told that same thing by one’s physician.

Consider, for example, the process of enrolling patients in clinical trials of new drugs. Often doctors receive a financial payment from the sponsoring pharmaceutical company for each patient that they enroll. Efforts (driven in large part by Senator Charles Grassley) are underway to mandate disclosure of all such payments in a central government database. For the disclosures to have maximum benefit, one would want to have the government (perhaps via email or automated phone calls or both) notify every patient considering participating in such trials of the financial benefit to their doctor. In contrast to disclosure by the doctor, which might make the doctor seem open and honest, the governmental notification could encourage the patient to reconsider the merits of the trial or to seek a second opinion. The disclosure is likely to be particularly helpful if it is accompanied by information about potential consequences of the relevant bias for the advisor’s advice, as well as suggestions for alternative courses of action (such as seeking guidance from an independent physician).

MAKE DISCLOSURES READABLE AND TRANSPARENT

One of the biggest problems with disclosures is that they are not transparent. Usually they are in tiny, almost unreadable print. Even if the type is readable, the meaning is often obscured by technical language or legalese. The underlying problems are twofold: first, disclosures can legitimately be complicated and extensive, and second, the disclosure statements are typically written by someone aiming to protect the discloser, not the client, resulting in the motivation to obfuscate (or to “overprotect” to the point of obscuring the most critical concerns). One approach to mitigating these problems is to mandate a short, nontechnical summary of the most important issues that is written not by the discloser but by a third-party clearinghouse or watchdog group. For understanding the full benefits and costs of complex products like mortgages or insurance policies, however, such a summary is bound to be insufficient. An alternative involves machine-readable disclosure (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). The idea is that the disclosure is provided in a standardized computational form that allows third-party websites to compete so as best to reveal the key buried information. For example, if a consumer were choosing between two mortgage brokers, the computer could highlight only the relevant differences, greatly facilitating the client’s ability to make an informed selection. Such standardized disclosures also deal with the discloser’s lack of motivation to be transparent.

ACCEPT THAT DISCLOSURE OFTEN WILL NOT BE ENOUGH

Disclosures should generally be viewed as a first step, not a complete solution. Sometimes disclosure is necessary for identifying a conflict of interest but does nothing to remedy it. For example, judges ultimately make decisions, and when their reasoning
is susceptible to bias, mere disclosure provides no assurance that bias will not impact their decisions. Accordingly, the appropriate solution is recusal. For stockbrokers, while disclosure gives the client a chance to avoid taking actions driven by the advisor’s bias, stronger precautions are typically needed in practice. For example, when a stockbroker has a stake in selling a particular stock, it may be acceptable for the broker to recommend the stock along with disclosure of the bias. However, prudent rules might prevent that broker from actually processing the client’s transaction, which should instead be handled by another broker with no relationship to this one and no conflict of interest. Such a safeguard would prevent the client from being driven into a poor decision by social pressure. For doctors, bringing in a third party may also be useful. This is already done to a limited extent, for example, when a pharmacist recommends the generic form of a branded medication prescribed by a doctor. Having pharmacists phone or email doctors to check whether a patient could equally benefit from the least expensive of a set of comparable medications could also be beneficial. For more major medical decisions where the potential for bias exists, the best remedy is encouraging patients, as part of the disclosure, to obtain a second opinion.

Perspective Taking

The bias blind spot contributes to a host of important problems in the policy arena. Separate from the problems that it causes for disclosure (due to advisors’ failure to recognize their own unconscious biases), another problem involves its propensity to exacerbate conflict and act as a barrier to effective negotiation. When people are convinced that objectivity is on their side, they are likely to resist compromising with those who disagree and instead prefer a more aggressive response. One obvious solution, then, is to encourage people to consider others’ perspectives. Trying to understand the opposing side’s point of view, or to imagine the perspective one would take in that position, seems promising as a way to reduce the impact of the bias blind spot. For example, if Israelis could effectively understand the perspective of Palestinians, and vice versa, this could mitigate each side’s propensity to see themselves as uniquely victimized and as having a monopoly on what constitutes an objectively fair resolution to their plight. Without that perspective, each side instead may feel justified in acting violently against a foe whom they view as too unreasonable to be negotiated with. Another example involves negotiations over legislation that impacts multiple interest groups (e.g., health-care reform, zoning laws). If each group feels that its position is objectively correct, each group will be ill-disposed to making compromises. Consideration of the other groups’ perspectives may open up new avenues to reaching agreement, including “win-win” arrangements that effectively meet multiple parties’ needs.

THE PROBLEM WITH PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Successful perspective taking has been shown to have a variety of positive effects relevant to conflict. It can increase people’s altruism toward others, improve relationship satisfaction, decrease stereotypes about other groups, reduce self-serving judgments about what is fair, and produce more effective negotiation outcomes (e.g., Coke, Batson, and McDavis, 1978; Epley, Caruso, and Bazerman, 2006; Franzoi, Davis, and Young, 1985; Galinsky and Moskowitz, 2000; Neale and Bazerman, 1983; Savitsky et al., 2005). Unfortunately, solutions aimed at perspective taking can be difficult to implement successfully. For various psychological reasons, inducing people to successfully take others’ perspectives is easier said than done. When the perspective taking is done poorly, its consequences can be worse than if efforts to do it were absent. A primary cause of this problem derives from individuals’ naïve realism, whereby they have difficulty separating their own subjective perceptions from what is true in objective reality. That tendency, combined with biased assimilation (people’s inclination to carefully scrutinize, and ultimately reject, information that contradicts their prior beliefs) and self-serving biases (people’s inclination to protect their ego even at the expense of accuracy), can make the process of thinking about adversaries’ viewpoints result in people’s becoming yet more convinced of the rightness of their own views (and the wrongness of their adversaries’ views). Even worse, as a result of having made the effort to consider an adversary’s perspective, one is likely to feel all the more righteous in championing one’s own position. Consider the example of a conflict over land, such as that between the Israelis and Palestinians or between local groups involved in a zoning dispute. As each group makes the effort to consider the other side’s perspective, they may be struck by the lack of “good reasons” for that side’s position. As a consequence, their perspective-taking effort may lead them to feel even more strongly about their own position (i.e., to become more biased toward their own side)—even while their willingness to take the others’ perspective makes them yet more convinced of their own objectivity.

There is another, related, potential downfall of perspective taking. People’s efforts to consider another party’s perspective can lead them to focus on and thereby exaggerate that party’s biases and self-interest
(Epley, Caruso, and Bazerman, 2006). Consider the case of a contract negotiation between labor and management. If the manager attempts to take the perspective of the labor leader before sitting down for the negotiation, that manager might imagine that the labor leader will only think about making more money for the union workers and not at all about the financial needs of the firm. As a consequence, the manager’s perspective-taking may make him yet more inclined to take a hard-line stance against wage increases out of concern that such a stance will be necessary in order to reach any reasonable middle ground. Thus, perspective-taking could lead one to take action that is more biased toward one’s own side, if that perspective-taking leads one to believe that such selfish action is needed in order to counteract the bias of the other side and to thereby achieve an equitable outcome. Studies by Epley, Caruso, and Bazerman (2006) support this notion. In their studies, subjects were told to imagine the perspectives of different parties with interests contrary to their own or to consider their own perspective in a multiparty conflict over the allocation of scarce resources. The perspective-taking exercise was successful in that those who engaged in it thought it was fair for them to take less of a limited resource than did those who focused on their own perspective. Importantly, though, and inconsistent with those judgments, the subjects who engaged in perspective-taking behaved in a manner that was more biased than their peers: they took a larger portion of the scarce resource.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Simple instructions to consider the perspective of the other side can elicit perverse effects. However, more psychologically savvy efforts to encourage perspective taking can elicit desirable effects. A number of possible approaches are discussed below.

ENCourage COOPERATIVE NORMS

Perspective-taking instructions are likely to be more effective when they are accompanied by a norm of cooperativeness rather than competitiveness (Epley, Caruso, and Bazerman, 2006). Because perspective taking changes people’s opinions about what is fair in a direction that departs from their self-interest, having a norm that encourages fair behavior (rather than looking out for oneself) can capitalize on the benefits of perspective taking. A key challenge is how to institute this norm. Because adversaries are likely to enter a negotiation with differing motives and prior beliefs, it will typically be up to a third-party mediator to institute the cooperative norm. One possibility is for the mediator to provide incentives for cooperation.

For example, in a contract negotiation, the two parties might agree in advance to an approach known as final-offer arbitration (which is used in major-league baseball negotiations). In it, each party proposes a solution, and the third-party arbitrator selects the more cooperative of the competing proposals, whose terms are then final. Another strategy for promoting cooperative norms involves framing by the third-party mediator. For example, in bringing together groups of influential Israelis and Palestinians for the purpose of working on conflict resolution, Herbert Kelman (e.g., Rouhana and Kelman, 1994) framed their task not as “negotiation” to resolve a “conflict,” but rather as “joint problem solving.” By using the “problem solving” frame, Kelman subtly introduced a norm that the parties’ task was to cooperate rather than to aggressively advocate for their own side.

MANIPULATE VISUAL PERSPECTIVE

The simplest perspective-taking instruction for third-party mediators to give is to tell adversaries to take each other’s perspective. Because this simple instruction can backfire, it often is up to third parties to offer more nuanced perspective-taking instructions. For example, mediators might induce successful perspective taking by having adversaries imagine the visual perspective of those on the other side of the table from them, or even by having them take on that visual perspective by showing them a videotape of how that side is seeing the negotiation. This strategy involves inducing people to literally see the world from the other’s perspective. Such manipulations of visual perspective have been shown to be powerful in changing people’s judgments of others’ personalities and behavior (e.g., Storms, 1973; Taylor and Fiske, 1975), and it is likely that those effects would extend to the domain of negotiation.

USc CAREFULLY WORDED INSTRUCTIONS

Effective perspective-taking instructions might induce people to imagine not how the other side sees the world, but rather what valid reasons there might be for them to see it that way (e.g., Puccio, 2003). As with the above strategy involving visual perspective taking, this method has the promise of eliciting perspective taking without immediately prompting adversaries to focus on the other side’s bias. Because perspective-taking instructions can lead people to focus on their adversaries’ bias, another solution is to lead people to instead focus on their adversaries’ potential for objectivity. Since those on each side are likely to have preconceived notions about the other’s bias with respect to the particular issue of their dispute, it may be more feasible to alter people’s perceptions of the general objectivity of their adversary.
Table 11.3 Financial benefits of seeing one's negotiation adversary as capable of objectivity rather than as biased

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Objective” adversary</th>
<th>“Biased” adversary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial wage offer</td>
<td>$10.19</td>
<td>$10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days of negotiating</td>
<td>9 days</td>
<td>15 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial expense</td>
<td>$4.6 million</td>
<td>$7.0 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Differences between conditions were significant at the p < .01 level. Differences in management’s initial wage offer mediated the effect of experimental condition on the financial expenses management incurred.

as a person, rather than to take aim directly at people’s perceptions of their adversary’s objectivity with respect to the conflict at hand. Kugler and Pronin (2007) tested that strategy. Subjects engaged in a wage contract negotiation where they represented management and their partner (unknowing to them, actually a computer algorithm) represented labor. They were told that they would not be meeting their partner because the study concerned negotiation at a distance. Before beginning their negotiation, subjects were shown the results of a personality test allegedly taken by their adversary and designed to induce them to perceive that adversary either as prone to thinking about things objectively or as prone to bias (where the bias manipulation simply induced the same bias perceptions that normally arise in adversarial contexts). Subjects then began their negotiation by initiating the first round of bargaining. Bargaining continued until a wage agreement was reached, with substantial strike costs accruing to management for every “day” (i.e., round) without an agreement. The benefit to subjects of perceiving objectivity in their adversary was high (table 11.3). Had they been negotiating with real money, it would have amounted to $2.4 million.

How did this happen? Subjects who believed in their adversary’s potential for objectivity opened the negotiation with a fairer offer (their peers started with a lowball, highly competitive stance). As a result, they reached an agreement more quickly.

Limit Counterarguing

When adversaries present their perspectives to each other, they often have difficulty truly hearing what the other is saying. The reason is that people generally listen to their adversaries in a way that involves actively counterarguing those adversaries’ reasoning rather than listening with an open ear and mind (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Lord, Ross, and Lepper, 1979). Such counterarguing listening involves activities such as judging the problems and weaknesses in the other’s position as he or she is stating it, thinking about ways in which one’s own position is superior, and preparing counterarguments that can be leveled when it is one’s chance to reply. While third-party mediators typically are motivated to listen with an open ear and mind, adversaries typically are motivated to devote their mental and verbal energy to discrediting orcountering the points made by their adversary, even though this strategy prevents effectively hearing the other’s perspective. Thus, third-party mediators could encourage better perspective taking by inducing adversaries to listen without counterarguing. In a recent experiment, Kennedy and Pronin (2009) aimed to elicit such listening with a simple instruction. Participants were faced with a fellow student who held a different position from their own on a campus issue (one involving academic grading practices). Those in the condition designed to reduce counterarguing listening were told that after hearing from their adversary, they would be asked to accurately repeat, in their own words, the details of their adversary’s position on the issue—such that their adversary would agree that his position was “accurately captured and represented.” The experiment revealed that those faced with this task came to view their adversary as less biased, and more objective, than did those left to counterargue their adversary as they listened.

Encourage People to “Consider the Opposite”

A different strategy for inducing more effective perspective-taking has been called the consider the opposite strategy (Lord, Lepper, and Preston, 1984). That strategy does not ask people to consider events from the other side’s perspective but rather it induces them to do so. One experiment testing that strategy was conducted in the context of the polarizing issue of the death penalty. The experiment was inspired by earlier research showing that people exposed to mixed evidence about the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent generally come to feel yet more strongly for their own side (Lord, Ross, and Lepper, 1979). In order to induce people to take a less biased and more evenhanded view of such evidence, the researchers sought to induce them to take the opposing perspective on that evidence. However, rather than directly asking them to look at things from the other side’s point of view, they instead asked them to read each piece of evidence and “ask yourself at each step whether you would have made the same high or low evaluations had exactly the same study produced results on the other side of the issue” (p. 1233). With this instruction, the subjects no longer showed the usual bias toward their own side. In a simple control condition where they received no instructions, and in a comparison condition where they were instructed to be objective and unbiased, they instead showed the usual bias effect.
Demanding Objectivity

Instructions to be objective and unbiased would seem to be a straightforward way to encourage that behavior. They do not rely on individuals' ability to perspective take, and they attempt to remove people's biases rather than to simply have people disclose them. However, research studies (including the one described in the preceding paragraph) have shown that simple pleas for objectivity do not work and can even induce perverse effects (Frantz and Janoff-Bulman, 2000; Lord, Lepper, and Preston, 1984; Wilson et al., 1996).

THE PROBLEM WITH DEMANDING OBJECTIVITY

The problem with demanding objectivity rests on the unconscious nature of bias. Because people are not typically aware of their biases, they are not in a position to respond to instructions to consciously eliminate those biases. Indeed, such instructions may instead have the opposite effect of causing people to be more biased; that is, individuals are likely to respond to those instructions by looking inward for signs of bias and, upon finding none, feeling yet more confident in their own objectivity. That confidence is apt to make them become more biased by preventing them from feeling the need to engage in the sort of questioning and examination that might help them understand the views of the other side.

In a series of studies by Uhlmann and Cohen (2007), subjects primed to feel personally objective (by completing a scale in which they were able to assert their characterological objectivity) were more likely to show gender-biased discrimination in the context of a hypothetical hiring decision. A series of studies by Frantz and Janoff-Bulman (2000) also support the hypothesis that feelings of objectivity do not guarantee actual objectivity and in some cases can be indicative of increased bias. In those studies, subjects read various conflict scenarios that manipulated the likeability of those on opposing sides of a conflict. To the extent that participants liked one of the individuals more than the other, they tended to claim that the individual whom they liked was on the right side of the conflict. Importantly, instructions to be objective only exacerbated this bias. Apparently, the subjects had an automatic (and nonconscious) tendency to view the likeable person in the scenario as the objectively correct one. As a result, the instruction to be objective only led them to feel more strongly in favor of the side that they viewed as objectively correct. Taken together, these two sets of studies illustrate that in both social conflict and employment-discrimination settings, people view their biased perspectives as objective and become more biased as their confidence in their own objectivity is raised.

Despite these findings, instructions to be objective continue to be common. For example, in the legal arena, judges typically provide instructions to jurors such as: "Do not allow sympathy or prejudice to influence you. The law demands of you a just verdict, unaffected by anything except the evidence, your common sense, and the law as I give it to you" (U.S. District Court, 8th Circuit, 2007). Such instructions are liable to augment, rather than mitigate, the impact of juror biases on overall jury decisions. Judges, in turn, in deciding whether to recuse themselves, are required to ask themselves whether they can be objective with respect to a particular case; that is, whether their impartiality could reasonably be questioned. When one's answer is in the negative, despite the presence of unconscious bias, the very process of deciding that one is objective enough to hear a case may tend to magnify one's bias. In light of these concerns, Judge Richard Posner of the U.S. Court of Appeals (2008) argued against the wisdom of criteria that rely on judges' ability to internally assess their own bias.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The problem with encouraging people to be objective is that they generally already take for granted that they are being just that. Accordingly, the first solution discussed below involves educating people about the unconscious nature of bias. Other solutions can be used in conjunction with such education, or on their own, in order to lead people to exhibit increased objectivity.

EDUCATE ABOUT UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

A starting point is to teach people that bias typically operates outside of conscious awareness. Doing so can help people to recognize their susceptibility to bias by preventing them from relying excessively on introspective evidence of bias. Furthermore, it can reduce the bias blind spot by helping people realize that they are not likely to be any less biased than those around them. It also can inspire people to engage in efforts to overcome their biases. Research by Pronin and Kugler (2007) has suggested the promise of this strategy. In one experiment, subjects either read an article informing them about the role of unconscious processes in judgment and about people's lack of awareness of being influenced by those processes, or they were in a control condition in which they did not read that article (both groups also read a filler article masking the researchers' true interests). Then, in an allegedly separate experiment, participants were asked to indicate their personal susceptibility relative to
their student peers to a variety of different judgmental biases. The result was that participants who had been educated about unconscious processes (and about the perils of relying on introspection) saw themselves as no more objective than their peers, unlike those in the control condition. The two conditions differed significantly from each other, indicating that the intervention reduced the bias blind spot.

**Reduce Exposure to Biasing Information**

Given that bias typically operates nonconsciously, it is preferable to avoid exposure to biasing information rather than to try to correct for such exposure after the fact. For example, it would be next to impossible for a teacher to grade the papers of a very nice and not-so-nice student objectively, without over- or undercorrecting for the impact of the student's niceness. It would be straightforward, however, to grade the papers blindly, thereby removing the risk of bias. Similarly, when watching an orchestra musician play on stage, it might be difficult to judge his or her musicality without being biased by appearance and gender. The now widely used practice of having such musicians audition behind a curtain successfully removes this risk of bias (and, not incidentally, has led to dramatic advances for female orchestra players). Similar logic underlies the FDA's requirement for double blind methods (i.e., for both health-care professionals and their patients) in the clinical trials required for drug approval. When we choose to grade papers blindly, to judge musicians blindly, or to conduct clinical trials blindly, we do so not because we can feel our expectations biasing our grading, or our gender stereotypes biasing our judgments of musicality, or our desires for drug approval biasing our clinical evaluations, but rather because we recognize that the lack of those feelings does not necessarily signal a lack of bias.

**Demand Behavior That Would Appear Objective to an Outsider**

To the extent that exposure to biasing information cannot be avoided, a modified form of the standard demand to be objective has merit. That modification involves asking people not to be assured of their own objectivity, but rather to be assured that others will see them as objective. Thus, the instruction could be something like: strive to make your behavior look objective to an outside observer. Such a strategy is used, for example, when individuals coaching people who are dealing with ethical dilemmas advise them to ask themselves whether they would be happy with their decision being reported on the front page of the newspaper. This instruction is intended to lead people to evaluate the ethicality of their decisions not by looking inward to determine whether they have been biased by self-interest, but by looking outward to determine whether others would have that opinion. The difference between striving to be objective versus striving to be viewed as objective by an outsider is a key one, because the former involves assessing the presence of bias by looking inward to conscious thoughts and motives, whereas the latter involves looking to observable actions to make that determination of bias. Due to the unconscious nature of bias, strategies that involve looking inward are likely to miss bias when it is present, whereas strategies that involve looking to outward behavior are more likely to catch it. Finally, the impact of this sort of objectivity instruction could be further enhanced by reminding people that this instruction is not as strange as it might initially sound—since while one may be inclined to judge one's own objectivity based on what's in one's head, the rest of the world will judge it by looking at one's actions.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Over the past several decades, psychologists have documented a wide range of biases that influence people's thoughts, judgments, and behavior. In addition to the problems that these biases can cause, more recent evidence has highlighted the problems associated with people's biased perceptions of their own (and others') biases. People show a bias toward recognizing bias more in those around them than in themselves. This bias blind spot can elicit and exacerbate a range of policy-relevant problems. Policies that target problems in domains varying from ethical lapses to discrimination to conflict can be informed by knowledge about this asymmetry in people's perceptions of bias.

The human mind is unlikely to free itself of the biases that take hold of it. Indeed, those biases can sometimes serve valuable functions such as allowing people to maintain healthy self-esteem and to form judgments quickly with a minimal expenditure of mental resources. And, to the extent that these biases are beneficial, it may be just as well that individuals maintain a blissful lack of awareness of their commissions of them. However, this lack of awareness becomes a problem when individuals would be better off correcting for or warding off their biases, and when individuals impute bias to others that they deny in themselves. At a collective level, people's shared blindness to their biases can exert particularly damaging effects because entire institutions can succumb to biases of which each individual contributor is unaware. In such cases, individuals might benefit from recognizing that their own minds are unlikely to be free of the biases that they so readily observe taking hold of the minds of those around them.
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