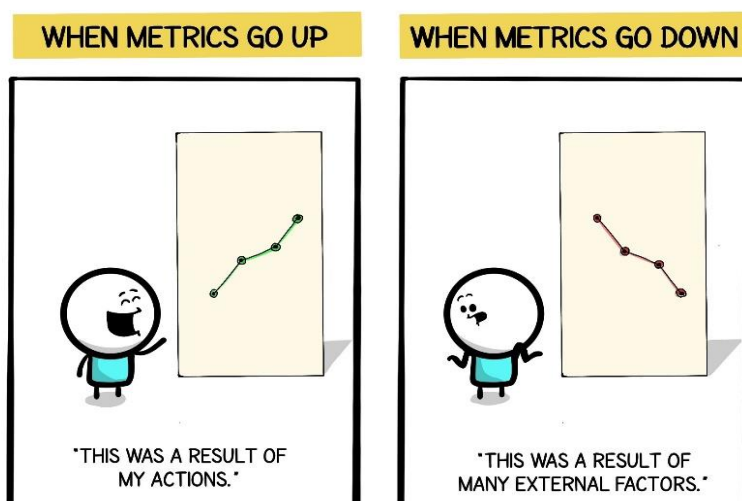


## What is Bias?

*"Human beings are poor examiners, subject to superstition, bias, prejudice, and a great tendency to see what they want to see rather than what is really there."* Morgan Peck, Psychiatrist

The oxford dictionary defines the word "bias" as "the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgement." The truth is, everybody has their own biases. People, no matter how hard we try, are incapable of seeing the world objectively. Our judgement and perception are coloured by past experiences, emotion, cultural norms, and countless other factors. Bias can be found everywhere. Bias in the media, bias in research or scientific studies, bias in the workplace and at home.



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1. Ask and answer the following questions with a partner.

- How does the comic above display bias?
- What are some factors that could create bias in a person?
- Do you think that you have any biases? What are they?
- Do you think the media in your country is biased? Is there any particular newspaper or news program that you think has a left-wing or right-wing bias?
- Have you ever known someone who was obviously biased, or made biased decisions?



## 2. Read about 5 different types of bias and discuss

1. "Confirmation bias" refers to a tendency to seek out and take in information that confirms preconceptions, while ignoring or dismissing information that contradicts or challenges pre-existing beliefs.
2. "The Dunning-Kruger effect" is a type of cognitive bias which results in people believing they are smarter, more capable, or more knowledgeable than they really are.
3. "Survivorship bias" refers to the logical error of only taking information from people or things that made it past a selection process. For example, not including companies that no longer exist in a performance study or market analyses could result in a flawed and overly optimistic outlook on the market.
4. "The sunk cost fallacy" describes the tendency to continue to invest time or money into something simply because we have already invested too much into it to walk away. This bias is closely linked with an inability to "cut your losses".
5. "Intergroup bias" is the tendency to see the actions of someone in your own group or demographic more favourably, and to view their shortcomings or mistakes more sympathetically.



## 3. Match the underlined words or phrases in the text above to their definition.

- a) Accepting that a course of action was a mistake and ceasing that course of action. **Cut your losses**
- b) An idea or opinion formed in the past which colours our expectations and views. **preconception**
- c) A weakness in personality or performance. **Shortcoming**
- d) Fundamentally weak, has serious imperfections. **Flawed**
- e) Related to the process of thinking **Cognitive**



## 4. Read the situations below and decide with a partner which of the 5 types of bias described above are being displayed.

- a) Jackie has been with Jason for 5 years. Every night they argue over the smallest things. They never seem to see eye to eye on anything anymore, and it's been this way for at least a year. Jackie knows she should break up with him, but she doesn't want to "throw the last five years away." **Sunk cost fallacy**
- b) A group of protestors at a political event are asked how well they know the subject they are protesting about. The protestors almost all reply that they have a lot of expertise on the topic. When asked further questions about the topic, it turns out most of the protestors have only superficial knowledge and several misconceptions about the topic. **Dunning-Kruger effect**
- c) Ian believes that Asian people are inherently bad drivers. Every day he drives past

hundreds of Asian people driving perfectly safely, and takes no notice. One day a lady of Asian background cuts him off in traffic. Ian throws up his hands and loudly proclaims "See?? This is what I'm talking about!" *Confirmation bias*

d) Bernie collects watches. He firmly believes that all old watches are better made than new watches. "They don't make 'em like they used to" is his catchphrase while examining a new watch. Of course, Bernie doesn't see the watches that were poorly made in the past, because they broke long before they could make it into his hands. He only sees the ones well-made enough to last all these years. *Survivorship bias*

e) Janet is walking her baby when she hears someone loudly talking on their phone (one of Janet's biggest pet hates). She looks up and sees another mother with a pram, loudly speaking on her headset. Janet smiles at the woman as she passes, she knows what it's like to be a busy mum. *Intergroup bias*



5. Match the underlined words or phrases in the text above to their definition.

- a) Something a person repeats over and over *catchphrase*
- b) To drive suddenly and unexpectedly in front of another car. *Cut (somebody) off*
- c) To be in full agreement. *See eye to eye*
- d) Something that really, really annoys you. *Pet hate*
- e) Only surface level, lacking depth. *Superficial*



6. You are going to watch a video called "The Confirmation Bias"<sup>1</sup> The video contains the following vocabulary. Match the word or phrase on the left to the definitions on the right.

- |                      |   |          |
|----------------------|---|----------|
| a) Atheist           | 1. Something that happens in the same way over and over | <i>B</i> |
| b) Pattern           | 2. An area a long way away from cities or towns         | <i>E</i> |
| c) Narrative         | 3. A very bad snow storm                                | <i>D</i> |
| d) Blizzard          | 4. To think carefully about something                   | <i>H</i> |
| e) Remote wilderness | 5. Someone who does not believe in any god              | <i>A</i> |
| f) Perspective       | 6. A common story structure                             | <i>C</i> |
| g) Pray              | 7. The point from which something is viewed             | <i>F</i> |
| h) Reflect           | 8. To talk to god internally                            | <i>G</i> |

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kho5KvPBDSw>



## 7. Watch the video and answer the questions.

- a) In what situation did the atheist pray? *He was stuck in the remote wilderness in a blizzard*
- b) In the story about the Atheist and the Priest, who do you think is displaying confirmation bias? *There is no technically correct answer for this, but you could argue both.*
- c) In what 2 situations is bias usually strongest? *In emotionally charged issues and when we search for desired outcomes*
- d) In what ways were biases useful in the past? *To make quick judgements in a dangerous world*
- e) What comes next in the sequence: 2....4.....6.....? *The answer could be either 2-4-6-8 or 2-4-6-10 (2+4=8, 4+6=10).....or it could be 2-4-6-357 because "2-4-6" is not enough information to confirm a pattern.*
- f) How do you think this question might demonstrate where biases come from? *It is an example of bias because we see a pattern where there is not enough information to actually confirm a pattern.*
- g) What does the narrator say to do to reduce bias? *To slow down and reflect*