

The End of Bias: A Beginning: The Science and Practice of Overcoming Unconscious Bias

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The End of Bias is an eye-opening read with realistic examples and analogies. The bias referenced in the title primarily focuses on racism and sexism. This text contains relatable analogies to help explain scientific concepts to readers. The examples presented throughout the text are both interesting and support the learning of the various concepts presented by the author. Nordell aims to present strategies based on their research in which bias has been successfully curtailed and uses those strategies to recommend ways to reduce bias in other environments.

The introduction of *The End of Bias* is attention-grabbing and pulls the reader in, providing real-life examples of people affected by bias. The introductory chapter imparts first-hand experiences coupled with compelling examples and statistics. This primes the reader and humanizes the statistics, drawing further into the book. The author discusses the experience of a transgender man who noticed significant changes in how others treated him after he transitioned. This explanation of the transgender man's experience is a first-hand example of sexism and how an individual experienced the advantages and disadvantages of bias and prejudice. Beyond the introduction, the text is divided into three parts.

Part 1: How Bias Works consists of the first three chapters. These chapters lay the foundation for the text by providing the reader with information on the history of the study of prejudice, the human brain, and bias. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding that bias is not one, two, or even three individual incidents. Bias is a series of ongoing incidents that cause impact over time. In Chapter 1, the history of research on the topic of racial prejudice is outlined, giving critical context to the remainder of the chapters and the parts of the book. The first chapter begins with the story of graduate student Patricia Devine, who is working on her dissertation research on bias and prejudice. In her research, Devine observes what initially seems like white people “lying.” What Devine means by this is that white people were saying they were against racism, but their actions communicated differently, ultimately aligning with racist behaviors. Through dissertation research, Devine concluded that prejudice and bias are subconsciously learned behaviors and habits. This finding by Patricia Devine is the basis for understanding prejudice and how bias works. The author notes in the first chapter that bias creates both advantages and disadvantages, presenting an interesting topic of discussion for readers.

In Chapter 2, the author explains that our brains prefer “to be right,” which is why the human brain stereotypes. The human brain automatically categorizes things because that is how it is designed. While this is helpful in certain instances, it also creates an easy pathway to bias and discrimination. Bias behaviors are learned and retained by the brain, so when we see someone who fits into a category our brain has created, our brain also assumes the stereotype associated with that person. We unknowingly digest information, and then our brain uses that information in future situations. Categorization and stereotyping help us and our brains make sense of the world around us. In Chapter 3, the reader learns that bias is not one, two, or even three individual occurrences. Bias is a series of incidents over time, creating a feedback loop of misinterpretations by multiple parties. The author explains that no longitudinal studies on bias and prejudice exist in research. Previous research has focused on singular instances or instances within a short period of time. The author, Jessica Nordell, and a computer science professor, Kenny Joseph, created a simulated longitudinal study called Norm Corp. The findings presented in Chapter 3 are fascinating and enlightening on the impact of bias.

Part 2: Changing Minds is a collection of three chapters outlining various programs and scenarios where different tactics impacted the overall approach, resulting in positive change. The chapters present real-life scenarios and the outcomes of trying something new in police departments, communities, and schools to improve bias. Chapter 4 described Devine and Cox’s workshop, The Madison Workshop, which was designed to reduce biased behavior. The Madison Workshop consists of three parts: Awareness, Motivation, and Replacement Strategies. Whether intentional

or unintentional, *The End of Bias* follows a similar format to the book's three parts. Devine and Cox point out that denying our differences perpetuates bias and increases discrimination. The point of The Madison Workshop is not about determining who is to blame or finding someone at fault for bias but about doing better and reducing bias.

Chapter 5 is one of the most impactful chapters of the book. The chapter focuses on police officers and how the stress, exhaustion, and constant risk of this particular job impact their ability to react to situations correctly. The author does not excuse police brutality or violent force, but this chapter helps the reader understand how situations may occur based on how the brain works and processes fear. The author explains how the stress caused by the experiences of police officers over time could play a role in how they respond to situations at any given time. Fear induced by subconscious bias and racism can create panic or a false sense of danger based on emotions and not intellect. Therefore, the unconscious expectation of danger may influence the actions taken by police officers. The author revisits a real scenario of perceived danger and violent force throughout the chapter. The references throughout the chapter align with the science and psychology of perceived fear and danger and how humans respond to the perception of danger. This chapter brings attention to the fact that our police force is not well due to chronic stress, exhaustion, and the risk of doing their jobs every day. Mindfulness is being tested and researched to reduce chronic stress and help police assess situations. While they are in the early stages of research on mindfulness in high-stress jobs, the research is promising. Chapter 6 continues the theme of police by looking at the LAPD, which civil rights attorney Connie Rice studied in the early 2000s. This chapter discussed gangs and the Community Safety Partnership, where police officers were asked to focus on building rapport and trust within the community instead of making arrests. The author also provides several examples that help the reader process how impactful it can be to have meaningful contact with others.

Part 3: Making It Last includes the final four chapters that present implementations of strategies to reduce bias. Chapter 7 outlines healthcare inequities due to racial and gender differences. Throughout history, assumptions have been made about pain tolerance levels based on race and gender. Men, especially white men, are given higher doses of pain medication and are believed when describing their health condition and pain levels. Whereas women and people of color are assumed to have a higher pain tolerance and suffer more from "stress" than actual medical conditions, prolonging correct treatment. One method used to reduce biased hospital decisions was using checklists to address patient care and concerns. Chapter 8 opens with a discussion regarding Twitter and how the social media platform is a breeding ground for abuse. The chapter continues with an example of how increasing diversity aids in reducing bias in various environments. The example in this chapter is the relationship between female faculty and students at MIT.

The author posits in Chapter 9 that inclusion is a challenging goal to accomplish because inclusion is not fully and specifically defined. Diversity is promoted as a value in today's society, but the author discusses an example of the illusion of diversity. In this example, the organization made it clear to a woman of color that they only wanted to seem and look diverse as opposed to actually embracing diverse perspectives and minds. The author tells the story of an Italian lawyer who changes the landscape and productivity of a law firm with his approach that subsequently reduces bias in the firm. In Chapter 10, the author argues that to reduce bias, individuals' minds, hearts, and habits must be changed. In addition, changes must be made to organizations' processes, structures, and cultures to reduce bias. This final chapter provides several impactful examples of how cultures were changed in order to reduce bias. In the conclusion, Nordell gives her readers a personal ending that is both humbling and vulnerable. The author explains that reducing and ending bias is not the responsibility of individuals but that large systemic changes must occur to reduce and end bias. The text is truly a beginning and a strong starting point to begin the process of reducing bias.

Critical Review

The End of Bias opens the door to discuss how humans subconsciously learn bias and how to address and potentially reduce it. The text posits the habitual nature of bias and how strategies have been applied in certain environments to reduce it. While this book is a great starting point to help recognize bias and work towards reducing it, the title provides a false sense of hope of ending bias. Until everyone understands the impact of bias and the importance of ending it, bias will not end. Institutions of higher education are prime communities to start discussions on bias. This section provides a critical review of the text and how it could be utilized on college campuses.

CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

From a first-year transitions programming perspective, *The End of Bias* may be a challenging common read for first-year students with no space to process what they are reading in real time. While this book may not be the best fit for first-year students, it would be an excellent common read for student leaders or graduate students in student affairs. This text could be beneficial for starting conversations on college campuses among student leaders on how to reduce bias on campus and within student-led programs. Higher education and student affairs professionals would benefit from using this text as a professional development or professional learning series to assist in identifying areas of improvement to reduce bias on campus.

CONCERNS/THINGS TO CONSIDER

While insightful and informative, the contents of this text would be more easily digestible in a course over a semester for undergraduate students. This text is heavy

and sometimes reads like an academic textbook. There are points in the text where students can relate and make connections, but it is academic in nature. Allowing students to read the text in smaller sections and engage in group discussions as they read would allow more effective processing of the information presented in the text.

WAYS TO INCORPORATE THE BOOK INTO ACADEMIC COURSES

Social justice mission-focused institutions may be able to utilize this text for a new student reading program. However, the text would be better suited for a social justice or equity and diversity course for upper-level undergraduate students, graduate students in higher education and student affairs master's programs, or higher education and student affairs professionals. If utilized in an upper-level undergraduate course, reading the text over a long period or over the course of a semester would aid in the digestion of the information presented in the book. The author acknowledges and identifies gaps in research on bias. The lack of research on bias beyond racism and sexism provides readers the opportunity to research other types of bias. Instructors of academic courses could use this gap in the research as a prompt for an assignment to conduct research on a lesser-known type of bias.

DISCUSSION AND PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

This text is the perfect starting point for discussions on how to eliminate bias. However, the author suggests that reducing bias is not only the responsibility of individuals but also the responsibility of organizations. *The End of Bias* does not give all the answers to how we can reduce bias. Reading this book and engaging in discussion will help to create a pathway for how we can work to reduce bias individually and as a group.

Conclusion

The End of Bias is a powerful text and starting point to reduce bias. It helps the reader understand that bias is habitual, but the habit of bias can be broken with recognition, education, and applied action. The author suggests that while bias and prejudice are not necessarily our fault or a conscious choice, we have the responsibility and the ability to rewire our brains and change our habits for the better. *The End of Bias* helps readers understand that bias is normal and habitual. However, bias is a habit that can be broken, and allowing bias to continue is unacceptable.