

DISCUSSION
GUIDE

End Bias

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The of

A Beginning

THE SCIENCE
AND PRACTICE OF
OVERCOMING
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



INTRODUCTION

1. The author argues that the individual who acts with bias is engaging with an expectation, not with reality. “That expectation is assembled from the artifacts of culture: headlines and history books, myths and statistics, encounters real and imagined, and selective interpretations of reality that confirm prior beliefs,” she writes.

Can you think of an instance when you approached someone with a ready-made set of expectations about that person? Is it possible to identify the origins of those expectations?

Did you absorb them from family, media, education, and/or your group affiliation?

2. *The End of Bias: A Beginning* argues that unconscious biased behavior need not be permanent: “It is routine and it is unwanted and unintended. But it is not innate; it is something we learn. And if it’s acquired, it can be cast off. If it’s a habit, it can be broken.” Did you find this argument persuasive? Did your position shift as you read the book?
3. Quoting social psychologist Evelyn Carter, the author says that the most important element of this work is persisting after a misstep. How have you seen shame or guilt interfere with the process of overcoming bias?
4. How do you think the author’s identity as a White woman might have influenced her approach to the subject? What strengths or limitations might this have posed?

CHAPTER 1: THE CHASE

5. The idea of implicit bias suggests a sharp distinction between the prejudiced and the unprejudiced. Research suggests that there might not be such a clear and complete separation between the two. Do you think that unconscious, unintended bias is entirely different from the deliberate kind that one holds as a matter of conviction?
6. “People’s behavior may be shaped by the person with whom they are interacting.” Psychologist Nicole Shelton has called for bias to be researched as a dynamic that happens between people, rather than as a one-way act. Examining prejudice only in individuals is limited, Shelton says, “because both parties respond to each other’s actions; each person exerts pressure on the other’s behavior.” Why might this be so important?

CHAPTER 2: INSIDE THE BIASED BRAIN

7. Individuals risk being disliked for violating a stereotype—this is especially true for women. The result is that people often feel compelled to conform to the stereotype of their own group. Have you found that to be true in your own life and behavior?

CHAPTER 3: HOW MUCH DOES EVERYDAY BIAS MATTER?

8. “Some researchers have concluded that subtle bias can have more detrimental consequences than overt bias because its ambiguity demands more mental and emotional resources.” Do you agree or disagree? Include relevant examples from your own knowledge or experiences.
9. “Bias can erode an individual’s capacity to succeed. Worries about being perceived through the lens of stereotypes, a phenomenon known as stereotype threat, can hijack working memory, derailing a person into underperforming.” Have you personally been affected in this way or have you observed the effect on others?

CHAPTER 4: BREAKING THE HABIT

10. The author describes the tension between paying attention to differences, on the one hand, and not overemphasizing or essentializing them on the other. How do you think this balance is best achieved?
11. One study found that people who believed that gender discrimination was no longer a problem in their field rated a male employee as more competent than an identical female employee, and also recommended an 8-percent higher salary. What might explain this?
12. Have you experienced moments of noticing your own biases, and what does that feel like? What do you do at that point?

CHAPTER 5: THE MIND, THE HEART, THE MOMENT

13. “Chronic stress creates a perfect storm for bias by impeding the brain’s ability to process threats. It also throws off one’s ability to regulate emotions and depletes the mental resources needed to keep bias in check.” Can you remember a time when you responded to stress in this way or you witnessed others doing so?
14. Mindfulness practice seems to help curb the automatic, unconsidered reactions that prompt unintended biased behavior. Why do you think this is the case?

CHAPTER 6: THE WATTS JIGSAW

15. The contact theory holds that if one group of people gets to know another group as equals, false beliefs may be replaced with complex, accurate perceptions. Discuss examples of where this has and has not proven true.
16. The notion that we might benefit from creating more categories with which to perceive others may seem counterintuitive. What do you think of this idea?
17. Chapters 5 and 6 explore two approaches to changing police behavior. Do you find them persuasive, and why or why not?

CHAPTER 7: DESIGNING FOR FLAWED HUMANS

18. In this chapter, the different approaches to removing bias involve changing processes rather than changing people. They are based on identifying the moment in which subjective human judgment may influence decision-making and then introducing a workaround. What are the advantages and limitations of this approach?
19. The idea of “blind auditions” and other masked approaches to reducing bias seems to conflict with the importance of acknowledging and respecting differences. What do you make of this tension?

CHAPTER 8: DISMANTLING HOMOGENEITY

20. “Any field that is dominated by a limited range of human experience will find itself hampered by limited access to human ingenuity.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
21. Where have you seen the limitations of homogeneity in your own life or workplace? Can you imagine how these might be different without homogeneity?

CHAPTER 9: THE ARCHITECTURE OF INCLUSION

22. “An inclusive setting has three features: fair and unbiased practices, a welcoming attitude of and respect for people’s ‘whole selves,’ and the desire to seek different perspectives.” Are these expectations realistic for all environments? Which of these features are missing in your workplace or institution?
23. Mentoring and role models are considered to be proven ways to boost marginalized groups’ success. Have you had experience of either mentoring or being mentored, and what impact did it have on you or on others?
24. Gianmarco Monsellato claims that “people who are *not* like you are the most important to hire. They will challenge you the most, and better decisions come from ideas being scrutinized and then defended.” Do you agree with this statement? Do you see any limitations to this view?

CHAPTER 10: UNBREAKING CULTURE

25. It turns out that public consensus can alter how people act: if people learn that a particular behavior is normal and popular, they engage in it more. Can you think of examples where you have seen this dynamic either reinforce or reduce biased behavior?
26. Psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen have argued that prejudice against children underlies all other forms of oppression, as it “teaches everyone how to be an oppressor.” What do you think about this claim?

CONCLUSION

27. The author describes seeing her own biases as akin to experiencing grief. Does that resonate with you, and why or why not?
28. The author argues that a firm grounding in history can be an engine of change. Can you think of an example of this in your life?
29. Which parts of *The End of Bias: A Beginning* resonated most strongly with you? Were there parts you disagreed with, and if so, why?
30. Having read the book, are you persuaded that unconscious or unexamined bias can be lessened or even eradicated?