**Research and Confirmation Bias**

**PACING:** Time needed for full lesson – At least three classes (presuming students complete some of the following information sheet as homework). Possibly four + classes.

**Day One** – introduction of the concept of confirmation bias, reading articles and watching TED talk. Respond to questions about the articles and TED talk in writing. Discuss.

**Day Two** – Brainstorming topic ideas and sketching out a point and counterpoint along with declarative statements and rationale for each.

Introduce students to databases: CQ Researcher, Points of View (Ebsco).

Brainstorm list of possible topics. Begin completing sheet – point and counterpoint.

**Day Three -** Watch TED talk on Beware of Online Filter Bubbles. Academic Search Premier (Ebsco), and Nexis Uni. Find two sources, ideally the neutral sources. Complete that part of the handout.

**Day Four** – Focus on sources supporting your point and counterpoint. Work on those parts of the handout.

**Homework:** Finish the sheet and bring findings to next class for presentation.

**Day Five:** Presentation of findings.

**Opening question:** Let’s dust off some cobwebs. What do you remember from our last class? What was the TED talk about?

**Next question:** What is confirmation bias? First, share your understanding of what confirmation bias is. Explain how the story in the TED talk represented motivated reasoning/confirmation bias: Also, what were its connections to the Bobby Dunbar story?

### confirmation bias

#### *from*[*The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*](https://search-credoreference-com.marshall.idm.oclc.org/content/title/penguinpsyc)

The tendency to seek and interpret information that confirms existing beliefs. It is seen both in social situations, where information that disconfirms one's beliefs is often ignored or misinterpreted, and in cognitive tasks like problem-solving, where people frequently test hypotheses that, if true, confirm already held beliefs rather than entertain hypotheses that would disconfirm those beliefs.

"confirmation bias." *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, Arthur S. Reber, et al., Penguin, 4th edition, 2009. *Credo Reference*, https://marshall.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/penguinpsyc/confirmation\_bias/0?institutionId=3309. Accessed 19 Feb 2018.

Sources we may consider as we discuss the concept of confirmation bias:

* Howgego, Joshua. "WE ONLY BELIEVE WHAT WE ALREADY THINK. (Cover Story)." New Scientist, vol. 227, no. 3034, 15 Aug. 2015, pp. 28-30. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=108982300&site=ehost-live.>
* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/science-choice/201504/what-is-confirmation-bias>
* <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>

**VIDEO**

* <https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_galef_why_you_think_you_re_right_even_if_you_re_wrong> \*We watched this previously
* <https://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_on_being_wrong> \* We watched this before the Bobby Dunbar assignments
* <https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_shermer_the_pattern_behind_self_deception> We will watch this in a later class.

Sometimes it’s not our fault. Search engines “feed” us what they think we want:

[**https://www.ted.com/talks/eli\_pariser\_beware\_online\_filter\_bubbles**](https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles)

\*We will watch this in Thursday’s class as we begin research in earnest.

Important takeaway points – there are information desserts vs information vegetables. Which ones will you consume most? Keep in mind that technology-based algorithms/filters are not the same as human filters, like human editors who, ideally, are guided by journalistic ethics.

**Introduction:** We will listen to an episode of *This American Life* that is all about confirmation bias, our tendency to look for information that confirms what we already believe.

**Next step:** Now think about some of the “controversial” topics that surround us – in your community, in your state, in the United States, and in the world.

**Make a list. If you need some examples to help you brainstorm, take a look at:**

**Points of View Reference Center – browse by category:**

<http://muezproxy.marshall.edu:2088/pov/search/basic?vid=0&sid=5ebc91bf-475b-4673-9e2a-1e351f008fb4%40sessionmgr4010>

**CQ Researcher – browse reports by topic:**

<http://muezproxy.marshall.edu:2114/cqresearcher/toc.php?mode=cqres-topic>

From that list**, select (circle**) one topic that you find interesting but that you HAVEN’T made your mind up about YET. Select a topic that you are on the fence about, so to speak.

**Point:** Now, in sentence form, outline what the issue is. State what your belief is. State WHY you believe this.

**Counterpoint:** Then state what you think someone with a differing opinion is. WHY do you think someone might believe this?

**Introduction to research**

What is the antidote to confirmation bias? Information Literacy!

Beware of finding only what you want. ;) Remember the perils of confirmation bias!

Show students how to access and search library databases, specifically:

CQ Researcher, Points of View (Ebsco), Academic Search Premier (Ebsco) and Lexis Nexis Academic. <http://libguides.marshall.edu/az.php?t=12944>

**Research** – time to find some sources related to this topic.

Your task is to find six sources:

* Two sources should be neutral, objective, unbiased.
* Two sources should align with your point of view.
* Two sources should align with the point of view with which you disagree. (A professor once told me that she asks her students to search for information that counters/refutes their opinions “with more vigor” than they do for information with which they agree.)

Use the following to find these articles/information sources.

MU Libraries Databases:

* CQ Researcher
* Academic Search Premier (Ebsco)
* Points of View (Ebsco)
* Lexis Nexis

Google – only two of your sources may come from a Google/basic Internet search.

Some helpful definitions via Dictionary.com:

**Assertion:** “a confident and forceful statement of fact or belief.” Synonym = declaration

**Justification**: “the action of showing something to be right or reasonable.” “good reason for something that exists or has been done.” Synonym = rationale, evidence, reasoning

**Grade: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**FYS 100: Research and Confirmation Bias**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

When does your class meet? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Some helpful definitions via Dictionary.com:

**Assertion:** “a confident and forceful statement of fact or belief.” Synonym = declaration

**Justification**: “the action of showing something to be right or reasonable.” “good reason for something that exists or has been done.” Synonym = rationale, evidence, reasoning

Select one topic that you find interesting but that you HAVEN’T made your mind up about YET. Select a topic that you are on the fence about, so to speak.

**Your topic:** (Animal Testing, Gun Control, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Point:** A. In sentence form, outline what the issue is from one particular point of view. You could call this the “pro” side. Phrase it as an assertion/declaration. B. Now, state WHY one side might believe this. This is the justification/rationale for the assertion.

Assertion:

Justification:

**Counterpoint:** Then state what you think someone with a differing opinion would say. What is an alternate point of view? You could call this the “con” side. Phrase it as an assertion/declaration. B. Now, state WHY one side might believe this. This is the justification/rationale for the assertion.

Assertion:

Justification:

Metacognitive Thinking/Metacognition: Thinking about your own thinking. Reflecting on what you think, why you think this way and considering what other points of view one might have on a given issue.

**IF I APPLY (source evaluation tool created by MU Librarians)** <https://libguides.marshall.edu/IFIAPPLY>

**I = Identify** emotions attached to the topic.

* What do you already know about the topic?
* How do you feel about the topic?
* Why do you think you feel this way? Where do those feelings come from?

**Two neutral, objective, unbiased sources**

Source One

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. How do you know this article/information is neutral, objective, unbiased?

Source Two

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. How do you know this article/information is neutral, objective, unbiased?

**POINT: Two sources should align with the “pro” side.**

Source One

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. Credibility – how credible is this source? Why?
8. Relevance - What convinced you that this article/information aligns with this point of view?

Source Two

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. Credibility – how credible is this source? Why?
8. Relevance - What convinced you that this article/information aligns with this point of view?

**COUNTERPOINT: Two sources should align with the point of view of the “con” side or alternate viewpoint.**

Source One

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. Credibility – how credible is this source? Why?
8. Relevance - What convinced you that this article/information aligns with the this point of view/the counterpoint?

Source Two

1. Source: (Example – Time, Newsweek, etc.):
2. Database or where you found it:
3. Author:
4. Date of publication:
5. Length (page numbers):
6. Summary:
7. Credibility – how credible is this source? Why?
8. Relevance - What convinced you that this article/information aligns with this point of view/the counterpoint?

**Final Step: Class Presentation of your findings**

Be prepared to present your research to the class by answering the following. Yes, you need to write your responses below:

* Talk us through the information you found. Which sources would you use and why?
* Has your opinion about the issue changed? Why/why not?
* If not, what would it take for you to change the way you see this issue?