



## Prejudices are much more far-reaching than we might think. And there is a biological reason for this.

We all know about prejudices - and of course personally, they affect us less than others. And that is not a rash judgment. Hardly any prejudices, neither against the opposite sex nor against the new "third sex". Not against Muslims, vegans, residents of the neighboring city, Porsche drivers, permanent campers, fast food junkies, light beer drinkers or soap opera fans.

I hate prejudices! Especially against women. They are already having a hard enough time because they can't drive.

Not only did you smile, you also felt caught? And do you have the same opinion that prejudices can be overcome pretty well? All you need to do is take Londoners to Birmingham and they will overcome their prejudices! Unlikely.

I must admit that I was not very optimistic about this issue as a brand psychologist and I constantly find myself feeling a signal of demarcation within myself. But I was surprised how deeply this bias is rooted in us through neurons.

We are talking about an evolutionary ingroup vs. outgroup bias. For thousands of years, we had better chances of survival when we stayed under the protection of our group (ingroup) and were suspicious of all outgroups at the same time.

Actually, this evolutionary remnant is of no use today. For a well-organized cooperation, there are rules and police. But now, there comes a new study from a very experienced research <sup>team1, Abstract2</sup>.

To put it very simply, they have measured the level of prejudice in test subjects using a reaction time-based method. And then, with the help of a non-invasive method, particular areas of the brain are "switched off" (magnetic field principle) and tested to find out whether the bias disappears when that certain area of the brain is temporarily "shut down". For example, the relationship between obese/slim and lazy/beautiful or Arab and terrorist.

"Social beliefs reflect associations that strongly ingrained in our brains, and changing them will likely entail the reconfiguration of their underlying biological processes". Says the lead author of the study, Maddalena Marini, formerly of the Department of Psychology, Harvard University. "No behavioral interventions designed to shift social beliefs so far -- such as empathy training -- have produced robust and long-lasting effects."



And once again, because it is so impressive: Our tendency to be prejudiced against outgroups is the result of a biological process that has an after-



effect from evolution and that cannot be easily eliminated with behavioral training or awareness.

As marketers, we are also affected by the ingroup vs. outgroup effect. For example, we are fascinated by personality-based target group models, whether archetypes, milieus, limbic types, Myers-Briggs and many others. Our bias tells us that there must be totally different target groups (outgroups) that behave in very different ways. But why is it so hard to find these quite different types in reality? (see also the last BrainCandy 47: Big Data and artificial intelligence find new personality types).

In reality, market research requires complex statistical analysis methods to define these types. And those who take a closer look at the data will notice that the differences between the groups are often far too small to have any real importance for brand positioning. But where does abstract truth benefit us if our feelings tell us something impressively different? What makes it even more fatal is the fact that the relationship between personality and behavior tends to be very weak. Our spending behavior is far more strongly determined by our life experience and our social contexts.

But we can make good use of the ingroup/outgroup bias - if we understand it. Example: We live in a time of diversity. How is one supposed to make a decision? Mostly not based on personality. Rather by habit. And recently more and more often for the local offers. Seems like a rational decision. Because of less environmental impact. Seems so. But from the ingroup perspective, the local trend is much more reasonable neuronally. Because 'local' is a type of ingroup.



In our bias, the local farmers are automatically more trustworthy than those who are further away. Perhaps they even speak my dialect? In the same way that the real beer always came from the brewery, which one could see from the church tower.

The feeling of "my" ingroup makes the decision more efficient in the overwhelming product diversity. Of course, "local" can also have a suprarregional effect - if it is a place of longing (i.e. a desired ingroup). For example, dairy products from the natural Irish regions or Whiskey from the Highlands.

Our customers in the pharmaceutical industry also know the effect on doctors. In new therapies, doctors create early adopter ingroups quickly, which allow their patients to benefit early.

Confucius knew already: "By nature, all people are the same, only their habits differ".



Sources:

1. Maddalena Marini, Mahzarin R. Banaji, Alvaro Pascual-Leone. **Studying Implicit Social Cognition with Noninvasive Brain Stimulation.** *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2018; DOI: [10.1016/j.tics.2018.07.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.07.014)
2. Short version of this study by the homosexual author Christopher Bergland, who positioned himself as Ironman Barbie as an out-group, being a top athlete in his time.: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201810/the-unconscious-mind-perpetuates-us-vs-them-bias>

## Book Recommendations

By Ralph Ohnemus:

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