

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



396 Confirmation Bias – We All Have It

Have you ever heard of confirmation bias? What if I said you are affected by it? What if I said you are afflicted with it? I'm Jerry Roberts and today we'll take a look under the hood and see how confirmation bias impacts all of us. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

Confirmation bias. You can define that we — that's you and me — interpret facts to confirm our beliefs. Wait, "I'm totally open-minded," you say? "I accept the world as it is," you say? Let's look closer.

I'm like you and believe that my beliefs are logical, rational, and completely impartial. Further, these positions are based on years of experience, weighing and balancing the facts which are available. Other people are biased, I'm not biased. Get out of here with that.

Then I saw this line in an article and it got my attention. In reality, our beliefs are often based on paying attention to the information that supports them while at the same time tending to ignore the information that challenges them. What, me, I do that? It turns out we all do.

Confirmation bias is favoring information that confirms a previously existing belief. This was first highlighted in the 1960s by psychologist Peter Cathcart Wason.

In the opinion of many, speeding vehicles along Marine Corps Drive are almost always driven by people of a certain ethnic group, certain gender, and certain age group. Can you identify the group I'm referring to?

A large number of Guam residents believe that Crime on our island has increased over the last several years, and it is mostly caused by people in certain ethnic group, and usually when they are involved in a specific activity. What group am I describing, and what's the activity?

Every time we hear about a speeder in the group I spoke of, or crime committed by a person in that group I referenced, it serves to reinforce our beliefs. According to Catherine Sanderson, author of *Social Psychology*, our confirmation biases also confirm stereotypes that we have about people.

Confirmation biases impact how we gather information, as well as how we interpret that information. People who take a position on a particular issue will generally accept data to support it, and we reject or at least ignore the data that challenges our belief.

Take any issue of the day: abortion, gun control, the legislative budget, cannabis, rollback of the 5% business privilege tax, how you feel about our elected leaders. When we read or hear about stories that deal with these topics and the people involved, we filter them in a way that supports our existing belief.

If we believe in a certain politician we'll easily accept information that supports him/her, and likely scrutinize that which is critical.

It can also affect how we approach dating, marriage, our boss, the way we raise our kids, and every other aspect of our lives.

We all have confirmation bias. So, what to do about it? If we accept that it does exist, we can make a better effort to see issues and beliefs from another perspective and, if nothing else, not automatically dismiss them.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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