

Are people aware of biases in their judgment and decision-making? A rigorous large-scale test

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Abstract

People exhibit systemic biases in their judgment and decision-making, and these biases are often presumed to operate outside of awareness. Nevertheless, there are surprisingly few direct empirical examinations of this question. Here, in two studies (total $N = 727$), we test participants' awareness of 11 classic biases. Participants completed a series of tasks, each inducing one bias (e.g., the anchoring effect, decoy effect, halo effect, etc.), and then reported whether and how they believed they were influenced by each bias. We found that, aggregating across tasks, participants' reports tracked how much they were actually influenced by each bias (with correlations between 0.3 - 0.45), indicating significant awareness. There were also substantial individual differences, with many participants exhibiting near-perfect awareness. This research argues against the notion that people are inherently unaware of their decision-making biases, and instead supports views that place conscious processing closer to the center of human decision-making.