

Does High Intelligence Mean Low Cognitive Bias?

by Winston Sieck - August 23, 2013

<https://www.globalcognition.org/intelligence-and-cognitive-bias/>

In thinking through any complex issue, there are going to be different possible solutions and perspectives.

Ideally, a smart and critical thinker would reason through the pros and cons of the different possibilities and come to a balanced view of the issue.

Yet a great deal of research finds that people tend to just consider what they favor about one side. We see this "myside bias" all the time in the real world.

It's also easy to produce in the lab. This cognitive bias has been found in research on [critical thinking](#), [argumentation](#), [overconfidence](#), and [confirmation bias](#).

But highly intelligent people reason better than the rest, don't they? They are less susceptible to cognitive biases like the myside bias – aren't they?

Keith Stanovich of the University of Toronto, and his colleagues Richard West and Maggie Toplak have tried to find out.

They reviewed the research linking intelligence to the myside bias. Their paper, [Myside Bias, Rational Thinking, and Intelligence](#) was published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.

A number of studies have now been conducted on intelligence and the myside bias. I'll just share a couple of brief examples from the review to give the idea.

In one study, subjects read about a controversial issue, such as whether or not people should be allowed to sell their own organs. Then, they wrote their thoughts about it. The researchers found the typical myside bias.

People mostly wrote arguments favoring their own position. They did not tend to integrate arguments across different perspectives, which would indicate [critical thinking](#).

The researchers also assessed intelligence. They found that people who scored more highly on the intelligence test showed just as much of the cognitive bias as the rest. They found no link between intelligence and myside bias.

In a second study, subjects evaluated arguments, rather than writing them out. They were again shown controversial issues, such as abortion and lowering the drinking age.

For each issue, the researchers had put together short position papers. Some of these positions were one-

sided. For example, all of the arguments would be for lowering the drinking age, or all would be against. Others integrated the different perspectives, and were completely balanced.

One interesting finding was that people preferred the one-sided positions regardless of the direction. They didn't like the more integrated perspectives. The researchers also did find the strong cognitive bias in favor of the person's own side. Finally, neither of the previous findings was related to intelligence.

People with high IQ reasoned just like everyone else.

In everyday discussion, intelligence and rational thinking are often treated as "close cousins," or even as one and the same thing. Yet, that does not appear to be the case in actual assessments of intelligence and cognitive bias.

That is, [whatever it is that intelligence tests actually get at](#), they do not measure the extent of a person's cognitive bias or rationality.

Balanced, rational thinking may well be at least as, if not more important than IQ to what it really means to be smart in the modern world.

Image Credit: futureatlas.com

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