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Bias

from *World of Sociology, Gale*

Bias is defined as conscious or unconscious actions executed by a researcher or a group of researchers that affect the outcome of the a study or research project. Bias can occur in research as a result of statistical mistakes. Some statistical mistakes include citing **correlation** as a cause, overgeneralizing, building in bias, faking data, and using data selectively.

A correlation is a relationship between two variables. When data show that variables are correlated, stating that one **variable** causes the other is incorrect. Overgeneralization can occur when a group of people are selected to be studied (for example, people over the age of 70) but the results are generalized to people of all ages. Building in bias can occur, for example, in the following way. In a soft drink taste test sponsored by Soda X, Soda X was served to tasters a few degrees cooler than Soda Y (the competitor). This temperature difference stands for the built in bias that could cause tasters to prefer Soda X. Faking data, one of the most disreputable forms of bias, consists in altering the results of a study or fabricating data. The last of the statistical biases is using data selectively. For instance, a toothpaste company conducts a study that measures how well their product cleans and shines teeth. The findings show that their product makes teeth 25% shinier, but does not clean teeth well, it actually causes people's teeth to decay. If this particular company goes on to reports the data on making teeth shinier but leaves out the negative finding, its presentation of research is biased.

Bias can also occur within the individual researcher. A researcher who believes that **homosexuality** is wrong may put bias into the results of a study on gay marriage. Along the same vein, a researcher from the United States who wishes to study aboriginal Australians may look at them with an ethnocentric eye. The reports of behavior may be slanted by the researcher's American viewpoint. It is virtually impossible to remove all bias from research because people bring

Last modified: Thursday, 10 May 2018, 2:14 PM

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