



February, 2019 *In The Know* Summary

Subliminal

How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior

by Leonard Mlodinow

Discussion Facilitator: [Laura Mendelow](#)

About the Book

Subliminal is a book that truly blows your mind! It presents scientific data and facts that challenge our fundamental understanding of “What is reality?” and truly opens your eyes to bias in everyday experiences. The author, Leonard Mlodinow, is a physicist and is incredibly skilled at translating complex scientific studies to plain English. The book is full of insights into how our minds work and how this impacts human interactions and relationships.

Why subliminal?

The word “subliminal” = below threshold. That is, what is not in our conscious minds. Our unconscious minds are active, purposeful and independent. There is a lot going on that is independent of conscious thought. (Freud was onto something!)

What is “reality?”

In the unconscious mind, there is information that we cannot access now. Some of it comes to conscious mind, and that is where we can access it. We simply cannot “make sense of” everything. In numbers: The sensory system sends out 11 million bits of information per second. Of it, we can process 16-50 bits.

- On the one hand, we are so self-focused that we create our reality to protect ourselves...
- On the other hand, we are so aware of others that we can't live without them!

“We all hold dear the idea that we're the captain of our own soul, and we're in charge, and it's a very scary feeling when we're not. In fact, that's what psychosis is—the feeling of detachment from reality and that you're not in control, and that's a very frightening feeling for anyone.” (John Bargh, pg. 17)

What do we actually remember?

- Our brains are not simply recording a taste or experience, they are creating it. We tend to remember the gist of something. People have a bad memory for the details. Yet people truly believe the memories (that they make up).
- Application for the workplace: Go into a conversation saying – “This is what I believe,” vs. “This is what is true.”
- Are memories more accurate regarding what you SEE versus what you HEAR? Experiment: Listen to a conversation in which someone coughs mid-sentence. Try to pinpoint where the cough happens. It is incredibly hard to do!
- Memories can be distorted and the power of suggestion is strong. Coaches: Be aware of what you are putting out there when you make suggestions or inferences about the past. Inflated self-assessment. People tend to believe they are more competent/intelligent than others. People with not inflated sense of self are depressed.

Three sides to every story – yours, mine, and what really happened.

Discussion Highlights

- **Vision** | One third of brain is dedicated to processing vision. It is the most important sense that shapes our understanding of the world around us. If you compare what we actually see versus what a camera captures, it's apparent that humans have blind spots.
- **Artificial Intelligence** | In AI, algorithms are made by humans. We have to remember that there is bias built into the coding. (“Garbage in, garbage out.”)
- **Pain** | Social pain hurts just as physical pain does. When you experience social pain, it activates the same receptors in your brain as physical pain.
- **Kindness** | Kindness is embedded in our DNA. The brain response is positive, when we do an act of kindness.
- **Social Living** | We are social beings. At some point in human evolution, we started working together (i.e., becoming social) and at that point we began to work together with others to hunt dangerous animals. Prior to this point in human evolution, hunting was limited to safe animals. Also, it is when we started working socially that we see the first vestiges of cultural artifacts, including art.

Related Resources

- Mlodinow's website <http://leonardmlodinow.com/leonard-mlodiinow-books/subliminal/>
- Implicit Association Test (IAT) <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

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