Before outlining the essay, the term mindset will first be operationalized as a person’s preconceived notions or framework on how the world is or should be. Note that such mindsets are not defined to be inherently negative or positive. This essay will discuss how such mindsets influence research by dividing their effects into three categories: expectancy bias, lack of awareness, and guidance. These three categories will be explained by using examples from psychology.

In the previous paragraph, expectancy bias was the first category of mindset’s influence on observation. This is where one sees a correlational/causal relationship due to certain assumptions or expectations. An example of this can be seen in Doyen et al.’s inability to replicate Bargh’s original study about the priming effect—where it found that people primed with “elderly words” tended to walk significantly slower than those who were not (Bargh, 1996). Doyen et al. argues that the original study’s handheld timers and experimenters’ knowledge of which priming words the subjects received, led to an expectancy bias. Hence, the observations on the subject’s walking speed reflected the expectations of the experimenters (Doyen et al., 2012).

Another way mindset influences observation is through lack of awareness. This can be explained as the overlooking of confounding variables or alternative measurements. Note that this differs from expectancy bias since that involves the assumption of the result, while this category specifically focuses on one’s unawareness of variables. Recent research revealing better-than-expected infant cognition is a product of past lack of awareness. Previous mindset on cognition measurements were adult centered, involving complex motor and language skills, this led to infants unable to perform most cognitive tasks. As the mindset moved to include infant friendly methods such as gaze-time (Aslin, 2011) and EEG, the observations about infant cognitions have also changed (Saini, 2013).

Despite the two previous categories underlining the negative impacts of mindset on observations, the third category will focus on the positives. As constricting and blinding as our mindsets may be, some aspects of mindsets provides us with a guideline. It gives us structure to evaluate and operationalize seemingly random variables we receive through observation. An example of this mindset is folk psychology. Through this mindset, which involves how people behave and social patterns, humans can predict and analyze certain scenarios with surprising accuracy and timeliness (Dennett, 2008).

In conclusion, this essay examined how mindsets can influence observations in negative and positive ways: through assumptions, omissions, and providing guidelines.
Bibliography


