

京大過去問 2010年 第1問

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We have all heard of experts who fail basic tests of sensory selection in their own field: wine snobs who cannot tell red from white wine, or art critics who see deep meaning in random lines drawn by a computer. We delight in such stories since anyone who pretends to be an authority is an easy target. But what if we shine the spotlight on choices we make about everyday things? Experts might be forgiven for being wrong about the limits of their skills as experts, but could we be forgiven for being wrong about the limits of our skills as experts on ourselves?

We have been trying to answer this question using techniques from magic performances. Rather than playing tricks with alternatives presented to participants, we secretly changed the outcomes of their choices, and recorded how they reacted. For example, in an early study we showed our volunteers pairs of pictures of faces and asked them to choose the most attractive from each pair. In some trials, immediately after they made their choice, we asked people to explain the reasons behind their choices.

(1)Unknown to them, we sometimes used a card trick to exchange one face for the other so they ended up with the one they did not choose. Common sense tells us that all of us would notice such a big change in the outcome of a choice. But the result showed that in 75% of the trials our participants were blind to the mismatch, even offering 'reasons' for their 'choice'.

We called this effect 'choice blindness', echoing change blindness, the phenomenon identified by psychologists where a remarkably large number of people fail to spot a major change in their environment. Recall the famous experiments involving three participants X, Y and Z. X asks Y for directions and while Y is struggling to help, X is switched for Z — and Y fails to notice. Researchers are still pondering the full implications, but it does show how little information we use in daily life, and challenges the idea that we know what is going on around us.

When we set out, we aimed to contribute to the enduring, complicated debate about self-knowledge and intention. (2)For all the intimate familiarity we feel we have with decision-making it is very difficult to know about it from the 'inside': one of the great barriers for scientific research is the nature of subjectivity.

(3)As anyone who has ever been in a verbal disagreement can confirm, people tend to give elaborate justifications for their decisions, which we have every reason to believe are nothing more than rationalizations after the event. To prove such people wrong, though, is an entirely different matter: who are you to say what my reasons are?

However, with choice blindness we drive a large wedge between intentions and actions in the mind. As our participants give us verbal explanations about choices they never made, we can show them beyond doubt — and prove it — that what they say cannot be true. So our experiments offer a unique window into the storytelling we do to justify our past actions, which would otherwise be very difficult to obtain.

From Choice blindness: You don't know what you want by Lars Hall and Petter Johansson, New Scientist