**Recognizing Bias in Research Reports**

Tracey read a research report about the psychoanalytic approach to the study of personality. After reading the report, Tracey was convinced that the psychoanalytic approach was the best approach to study personality. The next day in psychology class, however, Tracey was asked to defend her argument in favor of the psychoanalytic approach to the study of personality. Tracey used several quotes form the research report only to realize that each one was referenced to Sigmund Freud. Tracey reread the entire report and realized that it had only quoted Sigmund Freud. The write had not taken into account the viewpoints and research of other psychologists in the study of personality. Upon further investigation, Tracey found the writer had been a student of Sigmund Freud.

When you read a research report, you must be careful to look for signs of bias in what you read. Bias is a viewpoint or an opinion that a writer brings to a research report. A research report may be biased because the writer has a preconceived idea of what he or she wants the research report to show. The research report that Tracey read was written by a person who probably had a preconceived idea that the psychoanalytic approach was the best approach to study personality.

To recognize bias in a research report, evaluate the report by using the following steps:

1. Identify the writer’s purpose in writing the research report. For example, if a behaviorist were to write a research report about whether or not humans have free will to make their own choices in life, you would expect the behaviorist to research and focus on how a person’s actions and choices are shaped by external forces or influences.
2. Examine wording for opinions. Does the writer use words that appeal to an emotion or indicate an opinion? For example, words and phrases such as contemptible, graceful, squeamish, may indicate an opinion. If opinions are used in the research report, they should be supported with facts.
3. Examine wording for negative or positive connotations. Does the writer use words or expressions that suggest approval or disapproval? Does the writer use suggestive, undeserving, or unfair analogies to make a point? If so, this indicates a bias.
4. Examine wording for overgeneralizations. Overgeneralizations often use words such as best, worst, none, all, and everybody.
5. Examine the research report for an imbalance in the presentation. Does the report present only one side of an issue or theory and fail to present other viewpoints or research?
6. Examine the research report for implied beliefs of hidden assumptions. Does the report imply beliefs that are not valid?

*Thinking Skills:*

Read the following excerpts from research reports. Use the steps described above to identify and explain the bias in each concept.

1. In every nation, students are using cell-phones. Many schools have banned their use during the school day. A principle of the Tri-State Area High said, “Cell phones don’t contribute to positive learning and are a potential distraction.” Research about cell phones by psychologists have concluded there are already enough distractions that students need to deal with daily, and using cell phones should not be another.
2. Gabe Smith conducted research on school uniforms. After interviewing multiple students and observing 5 schools (3 with uniforms and 2 without uniforms), Smith made the following conclusion, “School uniforms put a limit on creativity. If all students wear the same thing, individuality and personal expression are severely limited. Clothing does not distract from education; it inspires our imaginations.”
3. Violet Flowers (age 30) conducted research on Erikson’s stages of development. Her research concluded that the stage of Intimacy-vs-isolation is the most difficult stage of development. “Developing loving relationships is so an enormous task”, Flowers stated, “and break-ups are the most difficult thing a person could go through.” Flowers added that she has gone through 5 of the 8 stages, so she also has personal experience to support her argument.
4. Finally, Read the following article found in *Psychology Today.* It is written by Hara Estroff Marano. The article is titled, “The Worst Idea in the World.” Can you determine Marano’s biases? How does she feel about attachment parenting? How does her theory compare to what you have learned in your text? Do you agree with her assertions?

*That most powerful of engines of human development, the emotional* [*attachment*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/attachment) *between parent and child, begins in the earliest days of infancy and endures well into adulthood. But so distorted has child- rearing become in the U.S. that the entire enterprise of attachment has been subverted.*

*Instead of viewing it as* [*nature'*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/environment)*s built-in method for liberating kids, providing a means of security that allows them to explore the world, we have come to find in attachment an excuse for tethering them ever more tightly to Mom. The concept and practice of “attachment* [*parenting*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/parenting)*,” I believe, is one of the worst ideas in the world. It is certainly one of the most unnecessary.*

*“Attachment parenting” is odious from the get-go because it brands parenting. It creates two classes of parents: parents, and that higher breed of parent, attachment parents. It sets the stage for the outrageous judgmentalism that marks discussions of parenting issues in the U.S. Unless you're practicing attachment parenting—“wearing” your baby,* [*sleeping*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/sleep) *with your baby in your bed, and, as reflected in a recent Time magazine cover story, breast-feeding until a child is 3 or even older—you're not demonstrating sufficient* [*love*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/relationships) *for your child. It's become an instrument with which highly educated women bludgeon each other in pursuit of the top prize in the parenting sweepstakes.*

*Further, it suggests that parents have to do something special to form an attachment to a child and the child to them, as if babies and parents didn't arrive at their very first meeting with* [*neural*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/neuroscience) *and emotional incentives to attend to each other. As if attachment doesn't normally happen on its own, when in fact the means are tucked inconspicuously into the mundane routines of caring for an infant.*

*How did the human* [*race*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/race-and-ethnicity) *possibly survive the millions of years before some doctor—a doctor! —foisted the notion of attachment parenting on a nation of women already worried about doing all in their power to guarantee the future success of their children?*

*But most of all “attachment parenting” is odious because it completely misconstrues the function of attachment. The whole purpose of attachment—and the condition under which its existence can be verified—is separation. The goal of attachment is to provide a strong enough sense of security so that the child can go off and explore the world on his own. In fact, the attachment system isn't even activated unless separation occurs.*

*While the bond of mother to child normally gets off to a quick start—propelled internally by* [*hormones*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/hormones) *as well as externally by holding and feeding and eye contact with an adorable creature—the attachment of child to parent forms over the first year of life. First in physical reality, gradually in an internalized image, the attachment figure becomes for the infant a source of security, a bona-fide source of comfort in times of* [*stress,*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/stress) *and a resource of stability and support enabling him to gradually move out into a wider world.*

*In the beginning, physical proximity is necessary for the child to get his needs met. But as the child grows, physical proximity is progressively less necessary.*

*If there is magic to attachment, it is that it swings into gear completely on its own, without much fanfare. It doesn’t require custom-made nursery furniture or cashmere swaddling blankets. It grows unceremoniously, spontaneously, naturally while other things are going on—a warm hand placed comfortingly on a baby’s belly as her diaper is changed, a gaze of affection during feeding, a smile or an expression of surprise elicited and returned. The reliability of care gets engraved into the nervous system and becomes the cornerstone of a child’s sense of security.*

*The importance of this transformation can’t be overstated. The internal representation of the* [*caregiver*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/caregiving) *has powers that a real parent could not possibly have. It is portable, therefore potentially always present. It is flexible, applicable to all kinds of uncomfortable situations. And it can be conjured on*

*demand. In fact, it must be, for development to proceed. Eventually, the internal representation is even more important than the actual parent. It is the secret agent of* [*resilience*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/resilience) *in the face of future adversity.*

*But for it to be engaged, for this ever-present parent-within to do the critical work that needs to be done, separation is absolutely necessary. Internal representation is an ingenious way of continuing the parental relationship while according the child freedom to move about the world. It is the long leash of development. Separation isn’t merely a test of attachment; it’s the goal, the raison d’etre.*

*Attachment parenting encourages parents to misread a child’s cues. It fails to recognize the baby’s need for experiences of her own, for mini-tastings of independence. It puts the parent’s desire for continued closeness ahead of the child’s needs for independent exploration. Breastfeeding looks good at age 5 because it kept a child close at 9 months. Through the misguided idea of attachment parenting, American parents overvalue eternal proximity.*

*A lot of ink has been spilled on the big stall called, abominably, adultescence, the failure of young people to make the leap into independent adulthood. But parents are at least equally stuck, unwilling to let kids make that leap. It's time to abandon the idea of attachment parenting.*

Marano, Hara Estroff. "The Worst Idea in the World." Psychology Today. Sussex Publishers, LLC. , 11 July 2012. Web. 30 Dec. 2016. <https://[www.psychologytoday.com/blog/nation-](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/nation-) wimps/201207/the-worst-idea-in-the-world>.