

Making Observations of Psychological Processes in Everyday Life [Student Handout]**[03] Neuroscience****A. Introduction**

Everyone has a brain, we use them all the time and we use most of them most of the time—but we do so with no idea of what they're doing or even (mostly) that they're doing anything at all. In fact, using our brains tends to feel like we're doing nothing at all. Learning, remembering things, taking actions—such things both use our brains and alter them (making memories involves altering brain circuits). But they happen imperceptibly and things seem to pop into our heads when we notice them at all. Type 2 thinking, starting when Type 1 thinking fails, knows as little where it comes from or how it works, setting us up to imagine we're on top of things when we're not.

Such facts encourage us to imagine we can either be unaffected by things we notice or—more dangerously—that we can compensate for their effects (virtually) completely, so that when the Judge asks you when you're called for jury duty if you can be objective and base your conclusions solely on the facts most people don't bat an eye when they reply they can. Psychology tells us nothing could be farther from the truth, and worse, that saying such things more often than not simply blinds us to our preconceptions. In the same manner, the way real brains really work suggests that there are—or at least, there *ought not to be*—any real problems in translating our thoughts directly into actions. Inevitably this encourages us to imagine we can impose our will on things (and are deficient or defective when we fail to do so) and that any problems with executing our intentions are due to our personal inabilities.

B. Questions to Guide Your (Re)Search

[1] How often do you observe people speaking and acting as if there are no real or significant problems to turning their ideas directly into actions? That is, how often do people in daily life, in the media or other kinds of public life talk as if the mere assertion of a plan is sufficient to accomplishing it?

[2] How might reminding ourselves that everything (and anything) that people do is done using their brains change how we think about things? How does it alter how we think about what we see others do? How might it alter how they might think about how things work for them?

[3] Psychology tells us that everything that people think, feel or say is the product of complicated mental processes. One implication is that we *never* know anything *directly*. Brains mediate everything, and everything is an *interpretation*. By adulthood, such interpretations are well educated guesses honed by experience—but they are guesses nonetheless, and so are sometimes wrong, despite what we feel about them. As you observe other people in daily life, the media, the movies, etc, what can you observe about people being wrong? How often does it happen? How difficult is it for them to notice it? How might reminding ourselves that our thoughts are guesses help us?

Key Concepts

- Mapping
- Embodied mind
- Functional brain studies (fMRI, etc)
- Receptors, Neurotransmitters
- Psychoactive drugs