

THE TRUTH, THE INTERPRETED TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT WHAT YOU THINK IS THE TRUTH

Adapted from an exercise in *The Next IQ* by Arin N. Reeves

A patient walks into a physician's office twenty five minutes after the scheduled appointment time. The receptionist points out the number of people sitting in the crowded waiting room and gruffly tells the patient that, because of the patient's tardiness, the doctor may or may not be able to keep the appointment. The patient apologizes and explains the transportation difficulties encountered in getting to the office. The receptionist brushes off the explanation as an excuse. The doctor agrees to see the patient because the patient had missed the last appointment and the test results needed to be conveyed immediately. The nurse, frustrated and in a rush, gets blood pressure and vitals and robotically asks how the patient has been doing. The doctor comes in to examine the patient and communicate the diagnosis.

- In what kind of neighborhood is the physician's office located?
- What kind of transportation did the patient take to get to the office?
- What race was the patient?
- What gender was the patient?
- What race and gender were the receptionist, nurse, and doctor?
- Was the diagnosis that the physician was going to deliver positive or negative?

This narrative and its related questions illustrate how, as cultural beings, we are incapable of not seeing context, identity, and detail even when we are not given the specifics of a situation. When we are not provided the details needed in order to know how to interpret the information we are being given, we fill in the gaps with details from our own mind.

This process by which we fill in our own details is the process through which cognitive biases enter our thinking processes. We cannot read the story with blank faces for people, so our brains provide what we believe to be the most probable details. Even if we try, we cannot be colorblind or gender blind because our brains can't think that way...no matter how much we tell them to.