

the same way as entertainment broadcasting.”

“Viewed as an economic transaction, what matters is accuracy *as judged by the consumer*,” Mullainathan says. “It’s not accuracy with a capital A, as in some objective measurement. Economically, the ones who count are the viewers or readers in your market segment. CBS news viewers feel that CBS is accurate and Fox News is biased—and vice versa.”

The researchers also make a deeper point about the nature of competition. Mullainathan draws the analogy of a long beach occupied by swimmers enjoying the sun. An ice-cream vendor arrives. If all the swimmers are at one end of the beach, the vendor would set up the stand there. But if customers are spread out along the entire beach, the single vendor should locate in the middle of the beach to offer easy access to the most customers.

“Think of that beach as the political spectrum,” Mullainathan says. “If there is one seller, you locate in the middle—just as a monopoly newspaper will lo-

cate itself in the center of the political spectrum to draw the most readers. But if a second seller sets up in the center, the two newspapers will just be competing on price. So instead they segment the market, with one paper going to the right-hand side of the beach, the other to the left.” One paper might even go to the extreme right end of the beach, where it can charge a higher price to readers who don’t want to make the long walk to the left. “As two firms move farther out from the center,” Mullainathan says, “they insinuate themselves more with their customers.” In just this way, the researchers write, “Newspapers locate themselves in the product space through their reporting strategies (i.e., how they slant).” Bias is not a product defect, but a feature.

For the average consumer, who takes in but one source of news, competition “tends to polarize beliefs, and increases the slanting of individual media sources, and the bias of the average reader,” the authors write. But for a hypothetical conscientious reader who consumes news

from a wide variety of media, the different biases “tend to offset each other, so the beliefs of the conscientious reader become more accurate than they are with homogeneous readers. Our central finding is that heterogeneity plays a more important role for accuracy in media than does competition.”

It is different with generally noncontroversial subjects. After September 11, for example, hardly anyone in America was asking whether U.S. actions had led to the attacks. Similarly, in the realm of criminal justice, public interest in incarceration far outweighs that in rehabilitation. For topics like these, “You could watch both liberal- and conservative-slanted media and still not get all the facts,” Mullainathan says. But whatever the coverage, he notes, “Every consumer will feel like his or her news is not biased. That’s the power of bias. You still think you’re getting accurate news.”

—CRAIG LAMBERT

SENDHIL MULLAINATHAN E-MAIL ADDRESS:
mullain@fas.harvard.edu

OTHERLY LOVE

The Law of Dissimilars

HUMANS HAVE a natural propensity to distrust the “other.” The classic social-psychology experiment in which individuals are randomly assigned group identities—the red dots versus the blue dots, for instance—and left in a room to resolve conflicts has shown that we quickly revert to adversarial tendencies, pitting “us” against “them.” Politicians throughout history have exploited this to horrific ends; recent wars in the Balkans, Rwanda, and Sudan are among the chilling examples.

But what might the world look like if leaders saw an advantage in promoting not simply tolerance but *liking* of other groups? This question has fueled a multi-layered research initiative headed by Todd L. Pittinsky, Ph.D. ’01, assistant professor of public policy at the Kennedy

School of Government and a core faculty member at its Center for Public Leadership. Pittinsky, who admits he has “a track record for liking to turn things around,” coined the term *allophilia* from Greek roots meaning “love or like of the other” after he was unable to find an antonym for prejudice in any dictionary. “Social scientists have long observed intergroup dislike and hatred, and they have become quite sophisticated at piecing together that puzzle,” he explains. “To help solve some of our most pressing domestic and global public problems, social scientists must develop an equally sophisticated understanding of intergroup liking and love.”

Pittinsky wondered whether *allophilia* might provide an alternative to conventional leadership strategies for reducing intergroup conflict. Encouraging positive

intergroup feelings might add an important missing piece, he felt, to existing tactics such as prejudice reduction, intergroup contact, individuation, and the introduction of transcendent goals and identities. Prejudice reduction, for instance, aims only to achieve a state of tolerance. But tolerance, Pittinsky notes, is but a midpoint between prejudice and positive intergroup relations—it is not the *opposite* of prejudice. When objective conflicts arise, people are likely to slip back to their adversarial positions. Ensuring peace demands something stronger than tolerance: namely, the promotion of favorable attitudes toward members of “out groups,” i.e., *allophilia*.

Though real-world examples of *allophilia* don’t exactly abound, the phenomenon may be commoner than supposed. Pittinsky points to college students and Fulbright scholars who fall in love with foreign cultures that they experience or study. Martin Luther King Jr., he notes, explicitly stressed the need to move beyond tolerance to positive inter-

group attitudes, and concluded that love could be a “potent instrument for social and collective transformation.” And in the case of those who sheltered and protected Jews from the Nazis, Pittinsky says, “Tolerance—the absence of prejudice—is unlikely to fully explain these brave acts. While it is possible that social justice motives, rather than al-
lophilia, may have motivated their first steps, love for the beneficiaries of these courageous acts may have come to sustain many of the individuals who brought them about.”

To help define the components of al-
lophilia, Pittinsky and postdoctoral research fellow Seth Rosenthal, Ph.D.

’01 (see “Self-Esteem, Real and Phony,” September-October, page 18) conducted a recent survey by questionnaire that collected 3,500 statements describing various facets of al-
lophilia. Their “snowball sample,” seeded with 15 college students (10 from Harvard), yielded an international cohort of 281 respondents (54 percent from outside the United States) who ranged in age from 18 to 74, and were two-thirds female and one-third non-white. A statistical factor analysis identified four salient components of al-
lophilia: *admiration* (believing members of the group have desirable traits); *trust* (believing members of the group are dependable and moral); *connection* (feeling similar to members of the group); and *engagement* (desiring to interact with members of the group).

In a subsequent study, the researchers measured these attitudes and checked their persistence. Subjects’ responses remained stable over a one-week period, with a very high correlation (.96) in a test/retest experiment. Research to date does not suggest any differences between genders in al-
lophilia levels, but levels do vary significantly among individuals. This suggests that al-
lophilia measures may be effective ways to record people’s



real sentiments and likely behaviors. (By contrast, Pittinsky observes, measures of racism and sexism show minimal variance among individuals and are of limited social-scientific value because research subjects tend to give socially desirable responses, not wanting to admit to prejudice.)

Pittinsky hopes that the concept of al-
lophilia will be applied to a wide range of problems across disciplines. Currently, Anna Chen ’06, a psychology concentrator, is using the al-
lophilia scale in her honors thesis, which will examine the

conditions under which foreigners’ attitudes toward U.S. political leaders positively or negatively affect their feelings for the American people. Al-
lophilia may also have relevance for education. Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America, an organization that places recent college graduates in economically disadvantaged and racially diverse public schools, is collaborating with Pittinsky on a study of how teachers’ al-
lophilia for their students may affect student achievement.

Pittinsky is prepared for skeptics who may question the wisdom of substituting one kind of group thinking for another. “Humans have organized, and always will organize, their social world into groups, and categorize others,” he says. “The study of al-
lophilia shifts us away from the negative aspects of these tendencies, toward their potentially positive aspects.”

—ASHLEY PETTUS

TODD PITTINSKY E-MAIL ADDRESS:

todd_pittinsky@harvard.edu

ALLOPHILIA WEBSITE:

www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/allophilia/

RAY S BAN

Light Blitzes Plaque

FAST FORWARD a decade and imagine what a drugstore shelf might hold. A pill containing an entire day’s nutrients? A gadget that confers the benefits of aerobic exercise as you sit in your armchair? Among such items it’s possible, even likely, that you’ll find a little blue light that you pop briefly into your mouth each day to prevent gum disease. Two researchers at the

Harvard-affiliated Forsyth Institute have developed a prototype of just such a device after discovering, wholly by accident, that blue light kills the bacteria that are the prime cause of periodontal disease.

Associate clinical professor of periodontal medicine J. Max Goodson, the institute’s director of clinical research, was using intense blue light (its wave-