

they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions. In politics our frames shape our social policies and the institutions we form to carry out policies. To change our frames is to change all of this. Reframing is social change.

You can't see or hear frames. They are part of what we cognitive scientists call the "cognitive unconscious"—structures in our brains that we cannot consciously access, but know by their consequences. What we call "common sense" is made up of unconscious, automatic, effortless inferences that follow from our unconscious frames.

We also know frames through language. All words are defined relative to conceptual frames. When you hear a word, its frame is activated in your brain.

Yes, in your brain. As the title of this book shows, even when you negate a frame, you activate the frame. If I tell you, "Don't think of an elephant!," you'll think of an elephant.

Though I found this out first in the study of cognitive linguistics, it has begun to be confirmed by neuroscience. When a macaque monkey grasps an object, a certain group of neurons in the monkey's ventral premotor cortex (which choreographs actions, but does not directly move the body) are activated. When the monkey is trained *not* to grasp the object, most of those neurons are inhibited (they turn off), but a portion of the same neurons used in grasping still turn on. That is, to actively *not* grasp requires thinking of what grasping would be.

Not only does negating a frame activate that frame, but the more it is activated, the stronger it gets. The moral for political discourse is clear: When you argue against someone on the other side using their language and their frames, you are activating their frames, strengthening their frames in those who hear you, and undermining your own views. For progressives, this means avoiding the use of conservative language and the frames that the language activates. It means that you should say what you believe using your language, not theirs.

Reframing