“How Facts Backfire”
by: Joe Keohane

Summary:
Joe Keohane is a writer from New York and editor whose work has appeared in the New York Times Book Review and Washington Post. He was a columnist and writer for Boston Magazine and
“Facts don’t necessarily have the power to change our minds”. Keohane goes to prove this multiple times over throughout the essay with case studies and real world examples of how facts can “backfire”. “Backfire” is perhaps the entire concept of this essay. It means that any individual has his or her own opinions about certain things regardless of if they’re right or wrong. In order for something to “backfire” an individual whose opinion about a fact was proven wrong gets defensive and believes they’re even more right than before. An example of this is in the essay is when Keohane describes a situation when a group of people were asked if they believed there were WMDs in Iraq. Those who answered that they believed there was WMDs in Iraq would not accept that this was in fact a lie to by President Bush but rather believed WMDs were in Iraq even more, regardless of the correction.
The reason that people naturally defend themselves and put up that wall is because of their ignorance. (A cognitive justification of their acts and opinions.) People twist facts to better fit their preconceived notions. For example, “the political ignorance of the American voter is one of the most well documented data in political science”. You would think people who didn’t know anything wouldn’t vote but in fact those with questionable information and who draw conclusion from rumors are in fact the highest percentage of voters.
Another factor as to why facts backfire is self-esteem. Those with more self-esteem are more willing to accept new information whereas someone with lower self-esteem would less open minded.

The Big Ideas:
(1) How self esteem can affect one’s opinions and views
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(2) Its our own responsibility to be well informed and well balanced

(3) They believe in the “invisible pink unicorn” rather than what’s in front of them

(4) Post modernism

(5) You have to tell people what to think rather than ask them

Connections to “White Privilege and Male Privilege” and “Nerds and Male Privilege”:

(1) The idea that its hard to change peoples views on women in video games just as it is difficult to change the mind’s of people already set in their ways. Males already have their male privilege, so when people try and counter their feelings on their privilege are just further reinforced.

(2) Just like how people refuse to admit fault with opinions and idea’s those who are privileged are hesitant to admit such privileges. We are unaware of what preciously exists in our “invisible knapsacks.”

Quotes:

“We often base our opinions of our beliefs, which can have an uneasy relationship with facts”.

“If we believe something about the world, we are more likely to passively accept as truth any information that confirms our beliefs and actively dismiss information that doesn’t.”