Implicit Bias and Microaggressions: Subtle, Unconscious Influences on Performance and Decision Making

Michigan Veterinary Medical Association
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Goals

• Increase understanding of how implicit bias and microaggressions develop

• Increase understanding of how societal norms influence and reinforce particular implicit biases

• Gain an understanding of research related to the impact of implicit bias on assessment and decision-making

• Deepen understanding of personal implicit biases and discuss strategies to decrease implicit bias
Why Commit to Understanding Implicit Bias and Microaggressions

• Contributes to professional success
• Improves climate, morale
• Capitalizes on talent, ideas & collaborative problem-solving
• Reduces conflict
• Strengthens, improves trust
• Enhances physical health and well-being
Why Commit to Understanding Implicit Bias and Microaggressions?

• Strengthens community relationships
• Increases accuracy of gut instincts
• Increases confidence in your actions in- and outside the workplace (and classroom)

All-Inclusive Multiculturalism and Positive Organizational Change
Yap (2010) Relationship Between Diversity Training, Organizational Commitment and Career Satisfaction;
What is culture?
Learned beliefs, values and behaviors that are shared among groups

Includes:
- Thoughts
- Styles of communication
- Ways of interacting
- Views on roles and relationships
- Practices and customs

Shapes how we explain and value the world
Provides the lens through which we find meaning
Rapid Growth of ESL Populations

- Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Americans who spoke a language other than English at home grew by 15.1 million (a 47% increase); and the number with limited English proficiency grew by 7.3 million (a 53% increase).

- Today, 11 million U.S. citizens speak English ‘not well” or “not at all” and more than 21 million speak English “less than very well.” In sum, there are 40 million Americans whose primary language is not English.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
How many different cultures can one person have?

• The same person, can belong to several different cultures depending on his or her birthplace; nationality; ethnicity; family status; gender; age; language; education; physical condition; sexual orientation; religion; profession; place of work and its corporate culture

• Again, culture is the "lens" through which ones views the world. It is central to what one sees, how one makes sense of what is seen, and how one expresses him/herself
Immigrants Bring New Cultural Influences

- Religion: Islam is now the fastest growing religion in the U.S.
- Language: 18.7% of Americans 5 years old and older speak a language other than English at home, with nearly half of those claiming to speak English less than "very well."
- America is now more linguistically diverse than Western Europe.
- 43% of California’s population now speaks a language other than English at home.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Subtle and Unconscious Influences on Performance & Decision Making

- Micro Aggressions
- Implicit Bias
Micro-Aggressions (Dr. Derald Wing Sue)

• Subtle insults, denigrating messages related to group membership

• Targets not only words, but the assumed meaning behind the words

• Can be non-verbal

• Can contribute to anger, frustration & lowered self-esteem

• Cognitive restructuring can help
Definitions: Implicit Biases (*unconscious*)

- Automatic associations, subconscious assumptions, stereotypes and beliefs that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions
  - Can be positive or negative
  - Outside conscious awareness
  - Involuntarily activated/not directly controllable (Blair, 2002; Rudman, 2004a, Kirwan Institute, 2015)
  - Difficult to change when still outside of conscious awareness
Infant Development

• If an infant’s primary caregiver is female, infants prefer to look at female vs. male faces (within weeks)

• Infants able to tell two own-race faces apart compared to two other-race faces (nine months)

• Katie Kinzler (University of Chicago) found that American and French infants when offered toys, reached more often for toys offered by adults speaking the language of their caregiver (ten months old)

Adapted from presentation by Dr. Benjamin Reese, Duke University
IAT In Children & Adults

Seven to Ten Year Olds

- Children at ages 5, 7 and 10 were asked to rate the severity of pain that they believed would be felt by other children of the same gender in different situations, such as bumping their head, or slamming a hand in a door.

- The 5 year olds rated the severity of pain the same, regardless of the race of the child.

- When shown pictures of black children, the 7- and 10-year-olds tended to rate the pain as being less severe than when they were shown pictures of white children.

Treatment of Pain

• Synthesized 20 years of cumulative evidence on racial/ethnic disparities in analgesic treatment for pain in the United States

• Hispanic/Latino … no disparities for treatment of “traumatic/surgical” pain

• Disparities present for “non-traumatic/non-surgical pain”

• For Blacks/African Americans, opioid prescription disparities were present for both types of pain and were starker for “non-traumatic/nonsurgical” pain

Gender Bias ... Starts Early
Boys are doctors.

Girls are nurses.

Boys can eat.

Girls can cook.

Boys invent things.

Girls use what boys invent.
Gender Marketing of Toys … The Past
Gender Marketing of Toys … The Present

- Disney Store website
- 410 toys listed for boys and 208 toys listed for girls
- 90 toys appeared on both lists
- Boy’s Toys: Bold colored toys (red, black, brown, gray, etc.), action figures, building toys, weapons or small vehicles
- Girl’s Toys: Pastel colors (pink or purple), dolls, beauty, cosmetics, jewelry, or domestic oriented toys
- Boy’s & Girl’s Toys: “Gender neutral” in type, but resembled “boy’s toys” in their color palette

Gender Bias in Books

- Janice McCabe, a professor of sociology at Florida State University, examined nearly 6,000 children’s books published from 1900 to 2000. Of those, 57 percent had a central male character compared with only 31 percent with female protagonists. (animals of indeterminate gender led the rest.)

- As for the animal kingdom, males are central characters in nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of children’s books published each year, while female animal characters figure prominently in only 7.5 percent.

How does bias impact your behavior with others? What if I’m unaware of my bias?

- Level of service (excellent, good, adequate)
- Length of time you spend with the person
- Interactions (telephone or in person)
- Other examples
Implicit Bias is like a Virus…

• Viruses: Disliked, but normal and ordinary
• The ways we perceive, judge, and remember are often filled with errors.
• Feeling confident ≠ being accurate
• What we already know affects what we see.
  • Preconceived expectations influence current judgments

Where Does Implicit bias come from?

- Direct and indirect messages
- Evident at a very young age
- Exposure to media and news programming, or family (may be distorted, but reinforced over time and internalized)
Selected Research
Priming

- Implicit memory effect in which exposure to one *stimulus* influences a response to another *stimulus*.

- Often there is little or no conscious awareness of the impact of one stimulus on another.
Priming
Video
Selected Research

Educated Black Men Are Remembered as Having Lighter Skin Than Is Actually the Case

• Subjects briefly exposed to one of two words subliminally: “ignorant” or “educated,” followed by viewing a photograph of a Black male.

• Later, participants were shown seven photos that depicted the same face, along with three photos where the face was darker skinned and three faces with lighter skin tones. They were asked to match the face to the original.

• Participants primed with the word “ignorant” selected a face that was darker as a match to the original face. Those primed with the word “educated” recalled a face that was lighter.

Selected Research

Perceived Stereotypicality of Black Defendants Predicts Capital-Sentencing Outcomes

• Examined cases of imprisoned Black men

• Categorized those Black men as being more or less stereotypically Black (complexion, nose, lips, hair texture, etc.)

• When the victim was White… the more stereotypically Black the defendant, the more likely they were sentenced to death (24.4 % v. 57.5%)

• No significant difference when the victim was Black (45% v. 46.6%)

Selected Research

Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal?

• Identical resumes sent out in response to want-ads in Boston and Chicago (sales, admin. support, clerical svcs. and customer svc.)
• Some resumes had the names, ”Emily” or “Greg”, while others had the name “Lakisha” or “Jamal”.
• The resumes with the names “Emily” and “Greg” received 50% more callbacks for interviews
• Improving the quality of resumes increased the callbacks for “Emily” and “Greg”, but made little difference for “Lakisha” and “Jamal”.

Selected Research

Bias in Access to Mental Health Care?

• Three hundred and twenty psychotherapists each received voicemail messages requesting an appointment. The call came from either,
  • a black middle-class help seeker
  • a white middle-class help seeker
  • a black working-class help seeker
  • a white working-class help seeker

• Middle-class help seekers had appointment offer rates almost three times higher than their working-class counterparts.

• Black men were called back only 13% of the time. Black women had their calls returned 21% of the time

Kugelmass, Heather (2016); “Sorry, I’m Not Accepting New Patients: An Audit Study of Access to Mental Health Care; Journal of Health and Social Behavior vol. 57 no. 2 168-183
Faculty More Likely to Respond to White Males

- Would-be graduate students sent letters to faculty members expressing interest in professor’s work and asking about research opportunities (6,548 professors at 259 U.S. institution)
- Letter asked for a 10-minute discussion
- Names on letters: Brad Anderson, Keisha Thomas, Raj Singh, Mei Chen or Juanita Martinez
- Lower response rate to women and minorities than to white men
  - Health Services: 57% v. 71%
  - Life Sciences: 61% v. 72%
  - Natural and physical sciences and math: 64% v. 73%

Selected Research

Science Faculty’s Subtle Gender Biases Favor Male Students. Reaction to male or female name.

- Applications for lab manager position
- Application material from students randomly assigned a male or female name
- Science faculty from research intensive universities in U.S. rated application material
- Male applicants rated as significantly more competent and hireable than the (identical) female applicant
- Offered higher starting salary to male applicant

Explicit Biases

- Clear Preferences
- Prioritized over others
- Intentionally Privileges
- Marginalizes others

Implicit Biases

- Unspoken
- Hidden
- Links that have the same outcome as conscious biases that we neither anticipate nor plan.

Biased Outcomes

- The unconscious choices that our minds make can affect how we relate to people.
- When these choices are made in our interaction with others, our automatic preferences shape our relationships --although we would never know.
- We judge ourselves by our intent. Others judge us by our impact.
Characteristics of Implicit Bias

- Pervasive and robust
  - Everyone possesses them
- May contradict our declared beliefs
- Impacts our behaviors
- Tends to favor our own group
  - However, marginalized group members often share the same implicit biases
- Starts developing from birth—maybe earlier!
Learned associations can act like viruses, infecting you and your behavior without any awareness.

- Some concepts automatically go together because we’ve learned these associations simply by being immersed in society.
- The process is fast, automatic, and requires no conscious thought…
Harvard’s Implicit Association Test (IAT)

- Web based, measures strength of biases
- Measures associations between concepts
- Ex. Implicit preference for straight people relative to gay people if categorize words pairing Gay & Bad faster than pairings for Gay & Good
Project Implicit: FINDINGS

• Implicit biases are pervasive.

• People are often unaware of their implicit biases.
  • Ordinary people harbored negative associations while honestly believing they were bias-free.
Project Implicit: FINDINGS

- Implicit biases predict behavior.
- People differ in levels of implicit bias.
  - Implicit biases vary from person to person
    - One’s group memberships
    - Dominance of a one’s group in society
    - Consciously held attitudes
    - Current bias levels in the immediate environment

From http://www.projectimplicit.net/generalinfo.php
Learn More about the Implicit Association Test (IAT)

To learn more about Implicit Association and/or to take the IAT visit:

- https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
- https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/iatdetails.html
Microaggressions

Microaggressions: small subtle, often unspoken and unconscious behaviors that communicate dispositions, attitudes, biases, and sentiments.

- Body language, voice tone, and facial expressions can impact positively or negatively, putting some within the organization at a disadvantage and others at an advantage
Microaggressions

Racial Microaggressions
• A Black male student is complimented by a faculty member as being articulate and extremely bright.
• A US born Asian American is complimented by a student for speaking such “good English.”

Gender Microaggressions
• A female administrator is part of a issues team and is asked if she is providing support for the team and if she will take notes
• Males in private refer to a female supervisor as a “ ” and hard to get along with; while the male supervisor is described as “able to make good decisions, and fewer problems getting the job done.”

Adapted from Derald Wing Sue (March 2013)
Microaggressions

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

• Students in class refer to a fellow straight student as “gay” (“That’s so gay!”) who is socially ostracized.

• A lesbian client reluctantly discloses her sexual orientation to a heterosexual counselor by stating that she was “into women.” The counselor indicates he is not shocked by the disclosure because he once worked with a client who was “a convicted pedophile”
Microaggressions

Other Group Microaggressions

- When encountering a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, a passerby says to the her “you look like a terrorist!”

- A student in a wheelchair reports that the professor and fellow students raise their voices when speaking to him in class and insist on pushing his chair when he is navigating the classroom space. He responds by saying “Please don’t raise your voice; and I don’t need your help.”

Adapted from Derald Wing Sue (March 2013)
Microaggressions

Persons of color and women often

• experience the campus/workplace climate as isolating, alienating, extremely stressful, risky and invalidating

• more likely experience being “the only one” that leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness

• lack mentors who possess knowledge of the “minority experience”
Microaggressions

• **Persons of color and women often**
• have their racial or gender identities assailed
• experience elevated levels of stress and distress
• are subjected to biased evaluations & decisions
• as faculty in higher education have their research and scholarship devalued and considered illegitimate; and
  • have many more students and colleagues question their qualifications or credentials to hold the status of “Professor

Derald Wing Sue (March 2013)
Debiasing

“The key isn’t to feel guilty about our [implicit] biases—guilt tends toward inaction. It’s to become consciously aware of them, minimize them to the greatest extent possible, and constantly check in with ourselves to ensure we are acting based on a rational assessment of the situation rather than on stereotypes and prejudice.” ~Kirwan Institute, 2015
What Helps Diminish Implicit Bias?

- Understand the research (education)
- Increase conscious awareness of how subtle bias operates (education)
- Engage in open and direct discussion of the potential for implicit bias and stereotyping at the beginning of decision making processes and at critical points
- Restructure systems … e.g., in hiring process have more explicit selection criteria (increase objectivity … decrease ambiguity)
- Awareness of prevailing societal stereotypes
Recommendations: Reducing Bias

• Know your biases (take the IAT)
• Know how it influences your behavior
• Recognize impact of:
  • Ambiguous or incomplete information → increase bias
    • our brain relies on pre-existing information based on life experiences
  • Time constraints – Quick decisions → increase bias
  • Fatigue & High Emotion → increase bias
  • When we have a lot on our minds, we tend to default to unconscious response/reaction → increase bias
Recommendations: Reducing Bias

- Training – awareness not enough, learning to remove, overcome, or dismantle bias and its influence on us
- Intergroup Contact – Studies have shown that intergroup contact acts as a debiasing mechanism
- Taking the perspective of others – research involving subjects assigned different roles (Israelis and Palestinians) reduces bias
- Counterstereotypical Exemplars – success is mixed, can also lead to increased stereotyping
Future Research/Important Questions

• To what degree are individuals “responsible” for their implicit biases?

• How do we delineate which implicit cognitions/behaviors constitute bias?

• What other strategies diminish implicit bias?

• What are other reliable measures of implicit bias?

• How might implicit bias operate in the classroom, lab/research contexts?

• How does implicit bias operate with individuals who are bisexual or biracial?
THANK YOU!

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