Implicit Bias: U.S. & Global Perspectives

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The Brain and Othering

- Human brain: process 11 million bites of information in a second
  - Consciously aware of any 40 of these, at best

- Only 2% of emotional cognition is available to us consciously

- Messages can be framed to speak to our unconscious

- The process of Othering occurs in our unconscious network: this can lead to racial, ethnic, or language bias,

The Circle of Human Concern

- Citizens
- Children
- Mothers
- Elderly
- LGBTQ persons
- Undocumented immigrants
- Black and Latinos
- Felons

Non-public/non-private space
Implicit Bias or I/B

- The mind naturally makes association: this is intelligence and human

- I/B is negative associations that people unknowingly hold, which can be inconsistent with conscious beliefs
  - Developed in 1995 by Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji

- I/B influences our feelings, judgments, and perceptions

- Implicit Association Test (IAT) introduced in 1998

- Since 1998, over 4.5 million people have taken the IAT online in 34 different countries
  - Currently there are 15 IATs

Religion, Presidents, Skin-tone, Race, Asian, Sexuality, Weapons, Gender-Career, Arab-Muslim, Native, Gender-Science, Weight, Disability, Age
Awareness Test
Our Brains in Action: Creating Associations

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Our Brains in Action: Filling in the Gaps

What shapes do you see?
Our subconscious fills in the lines for us, to form a shape we are familiar with.
Another Way to Think About the Unconscious Mind at Work: Habits

- **Habits** (or mental pathways) are behaviors that we engage in without thinking.

- Like schemas, individual habits are created and influenced by our **environment**.

While habits can come from the structures & systems we occupy, those structures also have **their own habits** – the “way things are done.”
Putting It All Together

- Automatic categorization, learned associations, and “filling in the gaps” act in concert to comprise **schemas**

- Schemas are like the **filters** or **frames** through which our subconscious manages the 11 million bits of information we receive every second

- They are **learned** and **acquired** in childhood and in our adult lives

- When we encounter things that don’t fit within the schemas that we already have, we experience **cognitive dissonance**
Where Do Schemas Come From?

- Schemas are **social**. They exist in our environment, language, metaphors, etc.
  - The unconscious is not just an individual or internal phenomenon
  - The unconscious is **social** and **interacting with the environment**
- Because we still live in a highly segregated nation, many of us have **limited social contact** with people of other races
  - The media—“local” news, television shows, radio, magazines—mediate many people’s experiences of other races
What Does This Have to Do with Racial Equity?

- **Social categories** (race, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation etc.) comprise some of the most powerful schemas operating at the subconscious level.
- These schemas give rise to *implicit bias*. 
The subconscious mind uses **three processes** to make sense of the millions of bits of information that we perceive:

1. Sorting into categories
2. Creating associations between things
3. Filling in the gaps when we only receive partial information

These three processes together add up to schemas, which are the "**frames**" through which our brains help us understand and navigate the world.
“More Americans have attitudes that are both implicit and explicitly racist than when the same survey was conducted four years ago...

When measured by an implicit racial attitudes test, the number of Americans with anti-black sentiments jumped to 56%, up from 49% during the last presidential election.”

— Paul Harris, *The Huffington Post* (2012)
Global Perspectives on Gender: Implicit Bias cont.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
(National Academy of Sciences, 2009)

- International study with more than half a million participants in 34 countries: 70% harbor implicit stereotypes associating science with males more than females
  - Highest in Mainland China, Romania, and the Netherlands

- In countries whose citizens stereotyped most strongly, boys achieved at a higher level in eighth-grade science and math

- Implicit stereotypes may contribute to continuing underachievement and under-participation among girls and women in science compared to their male peers
Stereotypes and Biases: Cognitively, We Cannot Avoid Them!

- Intelligence is **associational** and **emotional**
- We cannot live without schemas
- Having biases and stereotypes, however, do not make us racist; it makes us **human**
- Working for **equity** and **justice** requires engaging at three levels:
  1. The subconscious
  2. The conscious
  3. Structural/environment
How do we ensure that our everyday work it is **not** hindering transformative change, but rather **supporting** it?
RACING TO JUSTICE

transforming our conceptions of self and other to build an inclusive society

john a. powell

For more information, visit:
http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/catalog/806639
Acknowledging Having Biases is Human

- Efforts to be colorblind can increase racial anxiety and tension.
- Create positive associations and experiences
- Constructive name anxieties
- Pay attention to structures and the work they are doing. Make them work for us.

Research has confirmed that instead of repressing one’s prejudices, if one openly acknowledges one’s biases, and directly challenges or refutes them, one can reduce them. (p. 70)

Cognitively, we cannot avoid stereotypes and biases.

- The nature of intelligence is associational, emotional
- We cannot live without schemas
- Having biases and stereotypes do not make us racist
  - It makes us human

Working for racial equity requires engaging at three levels
- The subconscious
- The conscious
- Structural
Reshaping subconscious “habits”

- Although our subconscious schemas & habits are deeply ingrained, we may have an indirect effect by creating new associations.

- As with habits, creating new associations first requires unlearning old ones. This takes time!

- Because schemas & habits are so strongly shaped by the structures we inhabit, they must be addressed at the structural level.
Three ways of “not knowing”

1. **Information is beyond our capacity to know**
   - When neurons are firing in our brain
   - What our blood pressure is without measuring it

2. **We are not actively interested in the information**
   - What color was the car in front of you at the first stoplight this morning

3. **We are interested in the information, but we don’t want to know**

Our interest in STRUCTURES falls somewhere between numbers two and three.
Expanding the Circle of Human Concern

- Social interactions with a common purpose

- Humanizing the “other”

  - Sharing perspectives:
    - The Elephant & the Blind Men parable
Global Perspectives on Race: Implicit Bias & Othering

1. Work-related prejudice against Arab-Muslims in Sweden (Agerström & Rooth 2008)

2. Blaming tactics of the Greek financial crisis (Theodossopoulos 2013)
   - Greek Panamanians blame austerity measures on mainland Greeks for “lazing around” and “relying on subsidies”

3. Prejudice against Italy’s Cécile Kyenge (Povoledo 2013)
   - Increasing multicultural nature of Italian society vs. undercurrent of racism/xenophobia (immigrants as scapegoats for high unemployment numbers)

4. Burma’s political debate over ethnicity and religion (Latt 2013)
   - “Mixed-blood” as default category for Burma’s Muslim population (4-10%)
   - Demonized as “terrorists and troublemakers” who foment violence
Other Resources

- Thinking Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahnemen
- Whistling Vivaldi by Claude Steele
- Stranger to Ourselves by Timothy Wilson
- Harvard Implicit Association Test url: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/
- American Values Institute url: http://americansforamericanvalues.org
- Shades of White by Pamela Perry
- Blind spot Banaji and Greenwald
Appendix: Resources

**Websites**

1. **Implicit Association Test**: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo)
2. **Project Implicit**: [http://www.projectimplicit.net](http://www.projectimplicit.net)
Appendix: Resources cont.

**Bibliography: Implicit Bias Internationally**


