A Glimpse into the World of Implicit Bias Research: Understanding the Dynamics of Unconscious Associations

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get R.E.A.L. National Network Webinar Series
Thursday, January 22, 2015
Today’s Conversation

• Background on the Kirwan Institute

• Introduction to implicit bias
  • Implicit Association Test

• Research findings & initiatives

• Guarding against bias
The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity

- 2003
- Interdisciplinary and engaged research institute
- Our research is designed to be actively used to solve problems in society.
- Staff: 17 full time, 10 grad students, interns
Mission & Model

We work to create a just and inclusive society where all people and communities have the **opportunity** to succeed.
Policy Law & Civil Rights
- Policy Recommendations
- Advocacy
- Law Research & Commentary

Mapping Analysis & Engagement
- Participatory Research & Surveys
- Opportunity Mapping
- Data-Driven Decision Making

Communications & Engagement
- Communications & Outreach
- Leadership Development & Civic Engagement
- Teaching & Training
Kirwan Institute’s *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*

2013
- Education
- Criminal Justice
- Health / Health care

2014
- Employment
- Housing
Implicit Bias: Introduction
Defining Implicit Bias

Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an **unconscious** manner

- Automatic & involuntary
- Outside of our awareness
The Unconscious Mind

Conscious Mental Processing (System 2)

Unconscious Mental Processing (System 1)
I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclty uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg.
Aocdrcnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtsy, it deosn't mttae in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Amzanig, huh?... and I awlyas thuhogt slpeling was ipmorantt.
According to a researcher at Nottingham University, it doesn’t matter what order the letters in a word are in, the only important thing is that the first and last letter be in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole.

Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Ntotingahm Univervtsy, it deosn't mtaer waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are in, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.
Red, Blue, Orange, Brown, Green, Blue, Orange, Brown, Green, Blue, Orange, Brown, Green, Blue, Orange, Brown, Green, Blue, Orange.
The Dynamics of Implicit Bias

- Pervasive and robust
- Real-world effects on behavior
- Malleable
Origins of Implicit Bias

• Originate from direct and indirect messages we receive starting at a very young age

  • Exposure to media and news programming

  • “hearsay, media exposure, and by passive observation of who occupies valued roles and devalued roles in the community” (Dasgupta 2013, p. 237)

Why Is This Important?

- Explicit self-reports of biases are unreliable
  - Willing – impression management, social desirability concerns
  - Able – weak introspection, unconscious dynamics

- Implicit attitudes may be better at predicting and/or influencing behavior than self-reported explicit attitudes.
Why Is This Important?

- Our conscious/explicit biases do not always align with our implicit preferences.

### Distributions of Responses on Explicit (Self-reported) and Implicit Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Compared</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th></th>
<th>Implicit</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks/Whites</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians/Whites</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay/Straight</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Percentages represent the percent biased in favor of group.
Measuring implicit associations: the Implicit Association Test (IAT)

• Measures the relative strength of associations between pairs of concepts

• Stronger implicit associations – less time to pair, and fewer matching errors

Dr. Anthony Greenwald

Photo source: http://faculty.washington.edu/agg/bio.htm
Implicit Association Test (IAT)

http://implicit.harvard.edu
## Example Types of IATs Available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Gender – Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender – Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>Weapons – Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://implicit.harvard.edu](http://implicit.harvard.edu)
Gay - Straight IAT

Data source: Project Implicit
Anti-Ingroup Implicit Bias

• We can hold implicit biases against our own ingroup.

• Evidence of this with respect to sexual orientation attitudes varies:
  o Jellison et al., 2004
    – Gay and straight men held strong implicit and explicit ingroup preferences.
  o Anselmi et al., 2013
    – Straight and bisexual respondents implicitly preferred straight over gay. Gay respondents implicitly preferred gay over straight.
  o Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009
    – “the absence of ingroup bias” for LGB participants
Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Regarding Sexuality, By Age Decade

MTV’s Anti-Bias Initiative

• “empower America’s youth to better recognize bias in themselves and their surroundings, challenge it when they see it and help create a future with more equal opportunity “

• Multi-pronged approach:
  • Shows
  • PSAs
  • Social media engagement
  • “innovative digital tools”

www.lookdifferent.org
Guarding Against Implicit Bias
1) Know Your Own Implicit Biases

• It’s important to be aware of any discrepancies that exist between your conscious ideals and any non-conscious automatic biases.

• Take the Implicit Association Test:

  http://implicit.harvard.edu
Awareness matters... but isn’t enough.

• Being aware of implicit bias is not enough to remove, overcome, or dismantle its effects on decision-making.

• Ignoring our biases or denying them is ineffective.
2) Know When You Are Susceptible

• Conditions that can lead to reliance on implicit biases:
  
  • Ambiguous or incomplete information
  
  • Time constraints
  
  • Compromised cognitive control
    • High cognitive load
    • Fatigue

Mindfulness

Mind Full, or Mindful?

Image credit: http://mindfulnessinschools.org/courses/b-for-teens/
3) Take Action to Debias

- Central to debiasing is creating new associations and making them chronically accessible

- Example strategies:
  - Intergroup contact
  - Taking the perspective of others
  - Counterstereotypical exemplars
Counterstereotypical Exemplars

• Surround yourself with people / images that defy stereotypes

Final Points

• Our cognitive functioning relies on implicit associations.

• Recognizing our biases gives us the opportunity to override them.

• Intention, attention, and time
“If you asked me to name the greatest discoveries of the past 50 years, alongside things like the internet and the Higgs particle, I would include the discovery of unconscious biases and the extent to which stereotypes about gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age deprive people of equal opportunity in the workplace and equal justice in society.”

-- Dr. Nancy Hopkins, from Boston University’s 141st Commencement Baccalaureate Address, “Invisible Barriers and Social Change,” on May 18, 2014
Recommended Book

*Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*

By Mahzarin R. Banaji & Anthony G. Greenwald

February 2013

Delacorte press