ETHICS UNWRAPPED

McCOMBS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS™
The University of Texas at Austin

Implicit Bias

This video introduces the behavioral ethics bias known as implicit bias. Implicit bias exists when people unconsciously hold attitudes toward others or associate stereotypes with them. People's implicit bias may run counter to their conscious beliefs without their realizing it. Implicit bias is also known as *unconscious bias* or *implicit social cognition*.

In teaching implicit bias, it may be a good idea to send your students to Harvard's Project Implicit website so that they themselves may take one or more of the tests that provide some (not all) of the academic evidence for implicit bias: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/. Be aware that while there is widespread acceptance of the phenomenon of implicit bias, there is criticism of the evidence coming from this particular set of tests. Two of the academics behind Project Implicit, Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald wrote Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People (Delacorte Press 2013), which is a very accessible book on the topic. Another very accessible source is a March 27, 2018 article in Scientific American by psychologists Keith Payne, Laura Niemi, and John Doris entitled "How to Think about "Implicit Bias," at https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-think-about-implicit-bias/.

Accepting the fact of implicit bias should not be too difficult if you view our Concepts Unwrapped videos on several other kinds of bias generated by the human brain, including the Conformity Bias, the Self-Serving Bias, and the Overconfidence Bias.

An important issue in the ethics of "Big Data" and artificial intelligence has to do with the implicit bias that might affect the creating of algorithms and the analysis of data. Cathy O'Neil discusses this at length in her book Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy (Broadway Books 2016). A quick search of the internet on the topic "implicit bias and artificial intelligence" will bring up many sources for a fruitful discussion of this important topic. One controversial example is the fact that some versions of facial recognition software seem to be much more accurate when assessing white male faces than black female faces. This can have significant consequences when such software is deployed in the real world by police officers, insurance companies and others. An interesting article is WGBH News "Addressing Gender and Racial Bias in Facial Recognition Technology, available at: https://www.wgbh.org/news/2018/03/21/science-and-technology/addressing-gender-and-racial-bias-facial-recognition-technology.

The "Meet Me at Starbucks" case study that accompanies this video seems to be an informative example of implicit bias in action and an inspiring example of a company trying in good faith to at least begin to address the problem.

Discussion Questions

1. In a presentation, Professor Will Cox shows two news photos published in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. One shows a young black man walking through swirling water holding a carton of soda. The other shows a white couple in similar water, holding a

bag of bread. The caption for the photos read, respectively: "A young man walks through chest-deep water after looting a grocery store" and "Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda." Do you think the writers of these captions thought of themselves as racist?

2. Studies show that Latinos receive less pain medication than similarly-situated white patients, that elderly women receive fewer life-saving interventions than elderly men, and that obese children are more likely to be assumed by teachers to be less intelligent than slim children. Are these examples of implicit bias?

3. Can you think of examples of implicit bias?

4. Do you think that implicit bias is a serious problem? If so, is it more serious than explicit bias?

Additional Resources

The latest teaching resource from Ethics Unwrapped is an article, written by Cara Biasucci and Robert Prentice, that describes the basics of behavioral ethics, introduces the videos and supporting materials along with teaching examples, and includes data on the efficacy of Ethics Unwrapped for improving ethics pedagogy across disciplines. It was published in *Journal of Business Law and Ethics Pedagogy* (Vol. 1, August 2018), and can be downloaded here: "Teaching Behavioral Ethics (Using "Ethics Unwrapped" Videos and Educational Materials)."

For more resources on teaching behavioral ethics, an article written by Ethics Unwrapped authors Minette Drumwright, Robert Prentice, and Cara Biasucci introduces key concepts in behavioral ethics and approaches to effective ethics instruction—including sample classroom assignments. The article, published in the *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education,* may be downloaded here: "Behavioral Ethics and Teaching Ethical Decision Making."

A detailed article by Robert Prentice with extensive resources for teaching behavioral ethics, published in *Journal of Legal Studies Education,* may be downloaded here: "Teaching Behavioral Ethics."

An article by Robert Prentice discussing how behavioral ethics can improve the ethicality of human decision-making, published in the *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy*, may be downloaded here: "Behavioral Ethics: Can It Help Lawyers (And Others) Be their Best Selves?"

A dated but still serviceable introductory article about teaching behavioral ethics can be accessed through Google Scholar by searching: Prentice, Robert A. 2004. "Teaching Ethics, Heuristics, and Biases." *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 1 (1): 57-74.

Transcript of Narration

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"Implicit bias" exists when we unconsciously hold attitudes towards others or associate stereotypes with them. For example, we often harbor negative stereotypes about others without consciously realizing that we do so.

Implicit bias, also called "unconscious bias" or "implicit social cognition," is a prejudice that is deep-seated within the brain, below the conscious level. Studies have demonstrated implicit bias against racial groups, genders, LGBTQ, and other marginalized groups. We may even be prejudiced against our own group, although we tend to favor our in-group with positive stereotypes and disfavor out-groups with negative stereotypes.

Implicit bias often runs counter to people's conscious, expressed beliefs. Few physicians espouse racially discriminatory views, yet doctors tend to recommend less pain medication for black patients than for white patients with the identical injury. In other words, people can be explicitly unbiased, yet implicitly biased, according to psychologist Daniel Kelly and colleagues.

Implicit bias has been found in a large array of studies using various tests, but much of the evidence for the phenomenon comes from Harvard University's Project Implicit website, home of the Implicit Association Test, or the IAT. Literally millions of people have visited this site and taken various tests that ask them to respond rapidly to questions that require them to associate blacks or whites, or males or females, or young or old, etc., with positive or negative words. Professor Nosek and colleagues tested more than 700,000 subjects and found that more than 70% of white subjects more easily associated white faces with positive words and black faces with negative words, concluding that this was evidence of implicit racial bias. In fact, additional evidence indicates that measures of implicit bias better predict people's conduct than measures of explicit bias.

Here is some good news. Various scientists have criticized the IAT. They point out, for example, that individuals who take the test on different dates often score substantially differently. Even IAT supporters admit that implicit bias, at least as demonstrated by the test, is widespread *but relatively minor and has only a small impact upon people's real-world actions.* In other words, the results of the test are not strong enough to predict particular behaviors by individual people.

However, let's not get too comfortable. Even if the IAT cannot predict the future conduct of any one individual on a given occasion, it still indicates how groups of people will act *on average*, and that is worrisome.

For example, few people openly advocate for discrimination in hiring, but white applicants receive 50% more responses from potential employers than do black applicants with the same resume. Likewise, college professors are substantially more likely to answer student e-mails if the students' names indicates that they are probably white than if the names sound like they belong to black students. And in one study online course instructors were 94% more likely to respond to discussion posts by white male students than by other students.

Because implicit bias operates at a mostly unconscious level, it is difficult for individuals to overcome. No existing training regime has proven particularly effective at de-biasing implicit bias. But, fortunately, some research shows that stereotypes can be unlearned and that safeguards can be put in place to minimize their impact. For example, women used to make up only a relatively small percentage of the musicians in orchestras. But when orchestras began holding blind auditions where the applicants played behind a curtain and their genders were unknown to the judges, the percentage of women chosen to play in symphony orchestras doubled.

Perhaps we can put a dent in implicit bias after all.