Understanding Bias: Challenges & Opportunities for Diversity & Inclusion

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Overview

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• Who is Biased?
  • Explicit & Implicit Associations
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• How Bias Affects Us
  • Perceiver and Target Perspectives

• Conclusion
  • What to do and why?
Definitions

DEFINING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL COGNITION
Definitions

• Social Psychology
  – The scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context.
    • Real or imagined presence of other people

• Social Cognition
  – The study of how people make sense of themselves and others
    • Focus on process in addition to content
    • Informed from research in cognitive psychology
The ABCs of SP&D

• **Stereotypes**
  – Endorsed or unendorsed knowledge about the attributes associated with a group of people.

• **Prejudice**
  – An positive or negative attitude toward others based on group membership.

• **Discrimination**
  – Unjustifiable negative behavior toward others based on group membership.
An Example

MEASURING IMPLICIT ASSOCIATIONS
Two “Modes” of (Social) Cognition

AUTOMATIC PROCESSING
• Fast
• Unconscious
• Mandatory
• Efficient

CONTROLLED PROCESSING
• Slow
• Conscious
• Optional
• Effortful
Implicit Associations

• Associations like these are everywhere
  o Age, Race, Gender, Political Affiliation, etc…

• They might be inconsistent with how you think about yourself
  • I’m not biased

• They are pervasive
  o We are usually unaware but they can influence real judgment and behavior
    o Not just knee-slapping
How Bias Affects Us

PERCEIVER & TARGET PERSEPECTIVES
Why are stereotypes and prejudice pervasive?

- Implicit and explicit stereotypes guide:
  - What we perceive
  - What we remember
  - How we explain behavior
  - What we believe about ourselves
  - How we act towards others

...and they are self-reinforcing
Resumes
(Betrand & Mullainathan, 2004)

• “Are Emily & Greg More Employable than Lakisha & Jamal?”

• How many résumés to get a callback?
  – White-sounding names: 10
  – Black-sounding names: 15

• Having a White name = 8 years of additional experience on the résumé
Interviews
(Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974)

• White participants interview White and Black “candidates”

• With Black candidates, interviewer...
  – spends less time
  – maintains more physical distance
  – makes more speech errors

• Race-based expectations and sentiments can create a “self-fulfilling prophecy”
The Target’s Perspective

• Stereotype Threat
  – Debilitating concern over confirming a negative group stereotype through one’s own behavior.
  – Implications for performance
    • Leads to impaired performance on stereotype-relevant tasks.

• Attributional Ambiguity
  – Uncertainty about whether treatment (feedback) is based on group or personal attributes
  – Implications for self-knowledge
    • Uncertainty about aptitude and abilities
Consequences for Targets of SP&D

The Obvious
• Perceived and evaluated inaccurately through the lenses of stereotypes and prejudices.
• Negative implications for societal relationships and achievement.

The Not-So-Obvious
• Creates a context that can shape your actions and reactions
• Slowly shapes you to fit into the world that surrounds you.
Conclusions

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?
What can **you** do about it?

- Potential strategies
  - Colorblindness?
    - Not realistic
  - Suppression?
    - Comes back to haunt you

✓ Consciousness raising
  - Increase the awareness of how bias can operate
Interpersonal Strategies

• Consciousness Raising
  – Consider where bias can creep into your work and personal activities/interactions.

• Intergroup Anxiety can be diffused
  – Call out the “elephant in the room”
  – Recognize when it’s alright to notice and talk about differences

• Stereotype Threat can be counteracted
  – Self-affirmation techniques
  – External attribution of anxiety
Institutional Strategies

• Work to create a diverse, welcoming environment reflecting active participation
  – Composition – critical mass
  – Climate – consider the context
  – Inclusion/Engagement – proactive efforts
  – Achievement – consider your metrics for success

• Assess your efforts
  – Use data to determine whether or not something is working. If not…try something else!
Thank You!

Questions?