



RESEARCH BRIEF

Reducing Implicit Bias

Though the pervasive influence of implicit bias affects all aspects of our social and public interactions, its strength can be diminished.

Introduction

Implicit bias is a name for our unconscious attitudes about one another. These attitudes regulate our judgments of, decisions about, and actions in regard to, each other. We all possess implicit bias. It expresses deep-seated beliefs of which we are not aware. The beliefs are based on our perceptions and judgments about gender, race, class, ability, religion, age, and other characteristics. Research has been conducted on the effects of implicit bias in a variety of fields, including criminal justice, health care, employment, education, and housing. (Staats)

Attention, Studies, and Reports

The pervasive incidence and impact of prejudice operating outside of our conscious awareness has been acknowledged by national law enforcement and political leaders. Its significance was cited in a Supreme Court decision on housing discrimination. Many corporations, large and small, have instituted training on implicit bias as a requirement for employees. There is growing research on the influence of implicit bias in decisions regarding hiring, assignments, promotions, and contracting. Research is being conducted, as well, on how implicit bias affects perceptions and expectations of students and disparate treatment of patients and clients. Increased attention from media includes focus on implicit bias in films, television programming, art exhibits, and news articles. (Staats)

Key Findings

Effective tactics and methods for reducing implicit bias include:

- awareness and training (Dovidio, 1999; Lillis, 2007; Rudman, 2001)
- mindfulness and meditation (Kang, 2013; Lueke, et.al., 2015)
- compelling narratives (Paluck, 2009)
- peer influence (Paluck, 2009)
- diverse contacts and interactions (Aberson, 2004; Dovidio, 1999; Paluck, 2009)
- intergroup collaboration (Dovidio, 1999; Paluck, 2009)
- individuation (Schellhaas, 2016; Xiao, 2015)
- perspective-taking and empathy (Lai, 2014)
- stereotypic response replacement (Johnson, 2016)
- counter-stereotyping (Critcher, 2014; Lai, 2014)

Implications

1. Implicit bias can be managed and reduced. Though our unconscious prejudices are tenacious, they can be altered. Admitting that we hold implicit biases, or that they have a hold on us, is the first step to learning how to manage and reduce them.

2. Reaching across social barriers makes a difference. Our prejudicial biases are based on our perceptions of distinctions between “us” and “them”. Making contact, and establishing relationships, with people whose characteristics, experiences, beliefs, and values differ from our own helps us challenge our stereotypical assumptions.

3. Relating to people as unique individuals is a great breakthrough. For most of us, our habit is to categorize people we meet and then relate to them based on our stereotypes about the group to which we assign them. Instead, we can welcome contact with new people as opportunities for relating to individuals unlike any other.

4. The old saying about walking in someone else’s shoes gets it right. One of the best ways to free ourselves from the limitations of our current perceptions is to see things from a different perspective. The empathy that can result from genuinely listening to someone else may not mean that we will agree with them. We are much more likely, though, to relate to them with the respect that every person deserves.

5. With practice, we can learn to challenge our stereotypes. As we become aware of how we express our implicit biases against others, we can begin to act to change our responses. This includes forming new habits in interacting with others, and replacing our stereotypes with new examples.

Sources

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