

UCLA - What is implicit bias transcript

In lesson 1 we learned that schemas apply to people. Without any conscious thought the instant we see someone we assign them to salient and chronically accessible social categories, such as age, gender, race or profession. Once we tagged someone as belonging to a particular group, our brain automatically activates a cloud of information that we've come to associate with that group. These associations then potentially influence how we think about and interact with that person. This cloud of associations includes what social psychologists call attitudes and stereotypes.

An attitude is an association between a category and evaluative valence, either positive or negative. Attitudes are like gut feelings, a general like versus dislike, hot versus cold, thumbs up or thumbs down. We hold attitudes about all sorts of things, for instance, you might have a negative attitude toward large rats, but a positive attitude toward plump hamsters.

A stereotype in contrast is a more specific association, between a category and a particular trait. When you think of the category snakes you probably think of the trait venomous. We know that not all snakes inject toxins when they bite, but there's a strong association nevertheless. Stereotypes also apply to people. Some groups are considered athletic whereas others are assumed to be good at math, some groups are seen as natural leaders, whereas others are seen as natural caregivers. Take me for example, when you see my face or read my last name your brain has tagged me as Asian. And the attitudes and stereotypes you associate with that category, are automatically activated. If you have a positive attitude toward Asians, you might smile at me just a little bit more when I approach you at a lunch table. If you think Asians are good at math, you might be a little more inclined to hire me as your accountant, but not your lawyer. If you think Asians aren't athletic you probably won't choose me for your pickup game of basketball. We call attitudes and stereotypes biases, because they represent information that diverges from some neutral point.

Explicit biases are attitudes and stereotypes that you know you have because you can just ask yourself what your feelings and thoughts are, and get an answer. By contrast, an implicit bias is an attitude or stereotype that you have no direct introspective access to. In other words, asking yourself for an honest answer, doesn't tell you what you need to know. Where do these biases come from? Why do we associate certain attitudes and stereotypes with some groups but not others? Well think about how you learned that snakes are venomous. Or think about why certain smells or foods give you a warm feeling of home. It's through exposure, in a particular context. Sometimes that exposure is through direct contact, other times it's through secondhand or vicarious contact, mediated through stories, books, movies, social media and popular culture. It's no different with people.

Pause for a moment and think about your attitude toward Native Americans. Also what traits do you associate with them? How did you learn all this? Was it through direct interaction? If it was more vicarious, how accurate and representative do you think those exposures were? Because we are aware of explicit bias we're often mindful about checking them for accuracy, appropriateness and fairness. Most of us actually strive to revise our prior attitudes and stereotypes on the basis

of better information. But this sort of self-correction doesn't go on with implicit bias because, we don't even know we have them. Unfortunately, there's increasing evidence that implicit biases, even though they operate invisibly, influence our actions and decision in small but consequential ways.

Still curious? Skeptical? Don't miss lesson three - real world consequences.