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# Implicit Bias and Moral Analysis: Continuing to Traverse the Moral Terrain of Community Development

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# Objectives

- Identify the relevant questions of moral analysis and moral reasoning in the context of community development.
- Examine sources of implicit bias in the context of distributing limited goods.
- Discuss methods by which to identify and remedy implicit bias in the context of serving others.
- Distinguish between caring for a person with needs and caring for the needs a person has.



# Relevant Questions of Moral Analysis

- “What?” (Veracity)
- “Why?” and “How?” (Beneficence, Nonmaleficence)
- “Who?” (Dignity, Autonomy)
- “When?” and “Where?” (Justice, Privacy, Confidentiality)
- “What if...?” (Prudence)
- “What else?” (Fidelity, Courage)

# Relevant Questions of Moral Reasoning

1. What are we attempting to do? (Is our plan for serving persons in need ***ethically, legally, and practically reasonable?***)
2. Why are we attempting to do it? (Is our plan for serving persons in need focused on ***the overall well-being of those in need?***)
3. How are we attempting to do it? (Is the method of serving persons in need ***proportionate*** to the goals we had for serving them in the first place?)
4. What do we intend in attempting to do it? (Is our plan for serving persons in need emerging from a place of ***benevolence?***)
5. In sum: Is our **plan** for serving; **method** of serving; ethical, legal, and professional **reasoning**; and professional **intention-in-acting** consistent with what is: (a) *objectively* in the best interests of persons in need and (b) expected of us in our moral obligations to uphold the professional standards of community development?

# The Ontology of Bias

- Our fundamental way of looking at and encountering the world is driven by a hard-wired biological pattern of making unconscious decisions about others based on what feels safe, likeable, valuable, and competent.
- Scientists estimate that we are exposed to as many as 11 million pieces of information at any one time, but our brains can only functionally deal with about 40.
- We develop a perceptual lens that filters out certain things and lets others in, depending upon certain perceptions, interpretations, preferences and, yes, biases that we have adapted throughout our life.

# The Ontology of Bias, cont.

- Consider the following questions as a case in point:
  - When you or your partner was pregnant, did you notice how many more pregnant women you saw all of a sudden?
  - When you began driving your current car, how often did you suddenly start to see that car in commercials and on the street?
- Our perceptive lens enables us to see certain things and miss others, depending on the focus of our unconscious. It filters the evidence that we collect, generally supporting our already held points-of-view and disproving points of view with which we disagree.

# The Emergence of Implicit Bias Studies

- Social psychologists Mahzarin Banaji and Tony Greenwald first coined the term *implicit bias* in the 1990s.
- In 1995, Banaji and Greenwald published their theory of implicit social cognition, which asserted that individuals' social behavior and biases are largely related to unconscious, or *implicit*, judgments.
- The term grew in popularity in 1998, when Banaji and Greenwald developed the well-known Implicit Association Test (IAT) to confirm their hypothesis.
- The IAT test assessed the strength of unconscious biases through a computer program. Subjects were asked to observe a screen that displayed a series of faces from different racial backgrounds and a series of positive and negative words.

# The Moral Psychology of Implicit Bias

- Also known as implicit social cognition, *implicit bias* refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
- Implicit biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control.
- Residing deep in the subconscious, implicit biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness.



# The Moral Psychology of Implicit Bias, cont.

- Implicit biases are not accessible through introspection: the implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance.
- These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages.
- In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations.

# Characteristics of Implicit Bias

- Implicit biases are **pervasive**. Everyone possesses them, even those with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are **related but distinct mental constructs**. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold **do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs** or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that **favor our own in-group (i.e., confirmational behavior)**, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our ingroup.
- Implicit biases are **malleable**. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.

# Forms of Implicit Bias

- *Halo and Horns* – Shorthand for positive or negative first impressions.
- *Affinity Bias* – Favoring people who share the same social background, who look and sound like “one of us,” and ignoring the faults of people we like while noticing the faults of those we don’t.
- *Confirmation Bias* – Noticing or looking only for evidence which confirms our ideas, good or bad, and ultimately reinforces our original viewpoint.
- *Social Comparison Bias* – Having feelings of dislike and competitiveness with someone, or groups of people, that are seen as physically, or mentally, better than you.

# Forms of Implicit Bias, cont.

- *Stereotype Threat* – Fearing being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype and of doing something that would confirm it.
- *Gender Bias* – Including being viewed as less competent, over protection, and asserting dominance over.
- *Ego Depletion* – The idea that self-control or will power is exhaustible. Emotional, cognitive, and physical effort draws on mental energy. When mental energy is low, self-control is typically impaired.

# Triggers of Implicit Bias

- Ambiguous evidence.
- Emotional overload (stress, anger, frustration).
- Cognitive overload (complex decision making).
- Fear of threat (most common trigger).
- Emotional and cognitive resources are depleted (tired, low blood sugar).
- Short on time.

# Ways to Avert Implicit Bias

- Recognize that we all have bias, and that this has deep-seated biological origins.
- Learn to question your first impressions.
- Don't ignore difference; be curious.
- Challenge negative assumptions and stereotypes.
- Don't consciously try to suppress bias, but calmly recognize, name, and correct it when it arises.
- Don't be too hard on yourself – the emotional impact makes bias more likely.



# Ways to Avert Implicit Bias, cont.

- Seek positive examples and role models.
- Enjoy what you do and care deeply for the people you serve.
- Keep processes simple, where possible.
- Schedule demanding cognitive or emotional work separately from making final decisions that will affect individuals' lives.
- Measure levels of trust, openness, and honesty, especially in yourself.
- Practice self-care. (You cannot pour from an empty cup.)

# Reflective Management of Implicit Bias

- Notice your emotions (which apprehend what we value) and ask:
- What am I feeling? (Is it rational?)
- Why am I feeling it? (Is it properly ordered?)
- Where does it emerge from? (Is it just?)
- What else should I consider? (Is it thoughtful?)
- How should I respond? (Is it helpful?)
- When should I respond? (Is it time-sensitive?)



# Practical Management of Implicit Bias

- In his book, *Everyday Bias* (2014), Howard Ross discusses what he calls the need for *constructive uncertainty* to help overcome the risks from our fast, reflexive biases.
- Ross argues that, in a culture that values certainty so much, it is immensely important to find ways to be more uncertain and engage conscious thoughtfulness.
- We need to be able, Ross says, to pause and evaluate the circumstances we are in.



# Practical Management of Implicit Bias

- To this end, Ross uses the word PAUSE as an acronym to act as a reminder:
- **P** – Pay Attention to what’s happening beneath the judgement (event vs. interpretation).
- **A** – Acknowledge or identify your reaction, interpretation, and judgements.
- **U** – Understand other possible reactions, interpretations, and judgements.
- **S** – Search for the most constructive, empowering, or productive way to deal with the situation.
- **E** – Execute your action plan (act consistently with what makes most sense).

# Practical Management of Implicit Bias in Resource Allocation

- Allow for flexibility in terms of screening and selecting, where possible.
- Consider your language, and avoid “group think” or terminology.
- Examine your evaluation tools, and have a clear list of relevant criteria.
- Look for non-traditional evidence, such as the capacity to overcome adverse hardship.



# Practical Management of Implicit Bias in Resource Allocation, cont.

- Take your time and reduce distractions; most people can't perform several complex tasks at one time.
- Consider adding diversity to your decision-making process.
- Consult suppliers and agencies, and consider the potential bias of the agencies who provide support to you.
- Beware of the power of an innocuous comment.



# Leadership Virtues to Combat the Vices of Implicit Bias in Community Development

- Ensure that everyone is heard.
- Make it safe to propose novel ideas.
- Give all team members decision-making authority.
- Share credit for success.
- Give actionable feedback.
- Implement feedback from the team.

# Test Yourself: *Project Implicit* (Harvard Univ.)



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## Weapons IAT

**Weapons ('Weapons - Harmless Objects' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.

## Race IAT

**Race ('Black - White' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin. It indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.

## Age IAT

**Age ('Young - Old' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to distinguish old from young faces. This test often indicates that Americans have automatic preference for young over old.

## Gender-Science IAT

**Gender - Science.** This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.

## Native IAT

**Native American ('Native - White American' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Native American faces in either classic or modern dress, and the names of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.

## Religion IAT

**Religion ('Religions' IAT).** This IAT requires some familiarity with religious terms from various world religions.

## Gender-Career IAT

**Gender - Career.** This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.

## Skin-tone IAT

**Skin-tone ('Light Skin - Dark Skin' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to recognize light and dark-skinned faces. It often reveals an automatic preference for light-skin relative to dark-skin.

## Sexuality IAT

**Sexuality ('Gay - Straight' IAT).** This IAT requires the ability to distinguish words and symbols representing gay and straight people. It often reveals an automatic preference for straight relative to gay people.

# Earning Trust with Constituents

What is trust?

Trust is a willingness to risk the degree of confidence one has in a situation of vulnerability.

Trust has five faces:

1. BENEVOLENCE.
2. RELIABILITY.
3. COMPETENCE.
4. HONESTY.
5. OPENNESS.



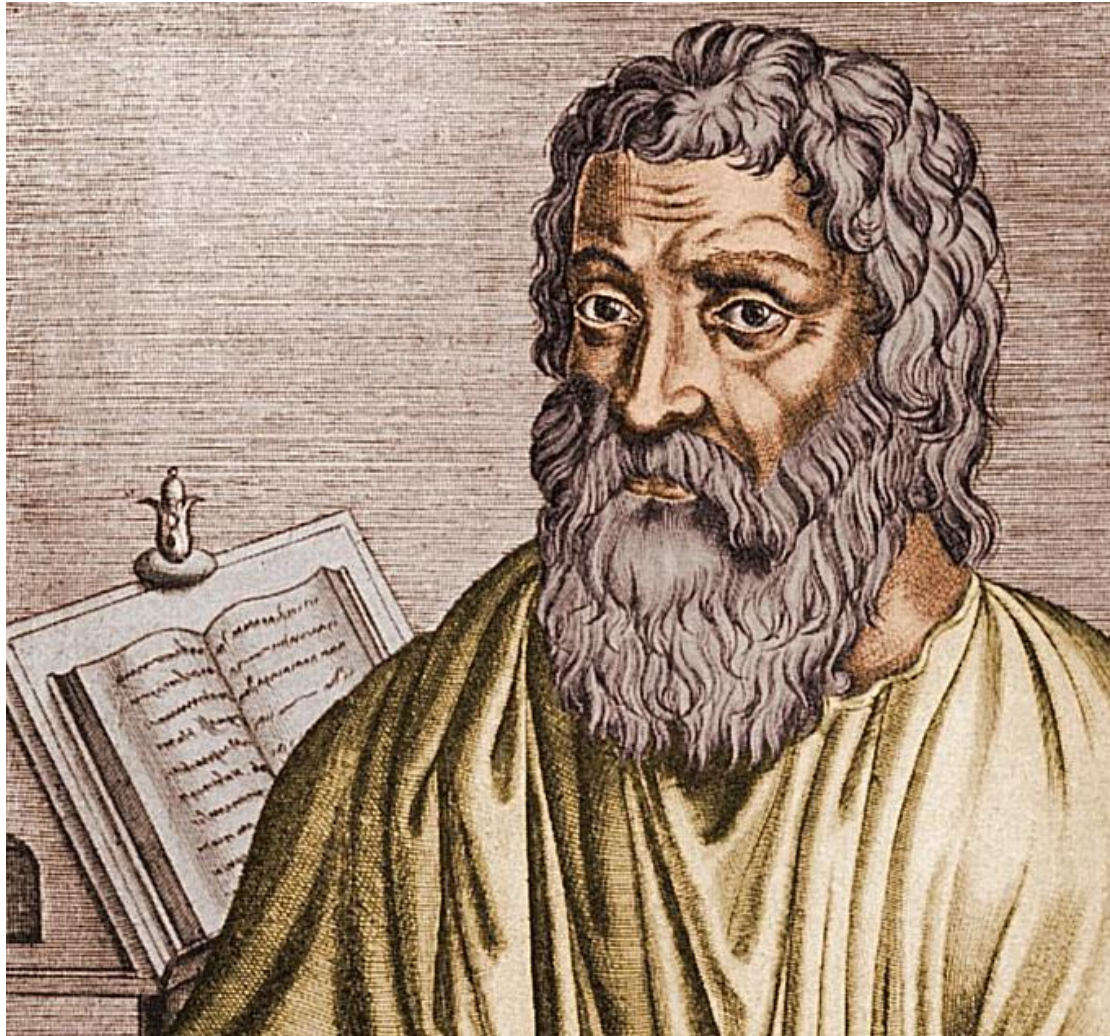


# Reminder 1: Distinguish Between Sacrificing What You Have and Sacrificing Who You Are





# Reminder 2: Care for the Person with Needs, Not Simply the Needs a Person Has



# Reminder 3: Provide What is Needed, Not What is Deserved



# Open Floor: Questions and Comments



# Thank You

Have an ethics question, concern,  
consult, or request?

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