Do Implicit Racial Biases Matter in Autism?

Brian Boyd, PhD
Professor & Director

Juniper Gardens Children's Project
University of Kansas
Overview

• Provide a general overview of implicit bias and its impact on behavior
• Present preliminary findings on relationship between implicit bias and outcomes of autistic children and youth
• Engage in a discussion about how this work can inform future research directions
DIAGNOSIS

- Delayed or misdiagnosis for Black children
- Under-identification and delayed diagnosis for Latinx children

ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Fewer and lower quality services
- More service deserts
- Lack of coordinated care or medicinal home
- Less access to services post-high school

PHENOTYPIC DIFFERENCES

- More severe symptom presentation for Latinx children
- Increased likelihood of Black children having a co-occurring ID
60% of American Indian, Black and Latinx children live in low-income households compared to 30% of white and Asian children. Low-income racial minorities are more likely to live in and attend lower-resourced, racially segregated neighborhoods and schools.
Racial, Ethnic Wealth Gaps Have Grown Since Great Recession

Median net worth of households, in 2013 dollars

Notes: Blacks and whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Chart scale is logarithmic; each gridline is ten times greater than the gridline below it. Great Recession began Dec. '07 and ended June '09.
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of Survey of Consumer Finances public-use data

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
• Autism ("disability") + Racial/Ethnic Minority
• Autism + LGBTQIA+

Identity Cannot be Dissected

"Multiply minoritizing identities" impact outcomes
Role of Societal Forces

- Systemic factors of racism, wealth inequality, residential segregation, unequal resource allocation
- Implicit racial bias
Racial attitudes of White Americans have become gradually less biased.
Job applicants:
Percentage called back

Pager, 2003
Percentage called back

Pager, 2003
How can both be true?
- **Implicit bias** = mental associations linking social groups to stereotypic attributes. They are involuntary, often unconscious thoughts and actions.
- Implicit biases may lead to stereotypic thoughts, or implicit bias may form if one is exposed to persistent stereotypes about a particular group.
- Implicit biases are normal to have and almost everyone has them.
- Implicit biases are present even when people actively reject explicit biases (e.g., overt prejudicial attitudes).
Mental Associations...

- Come to mind voluntarily.
- Do not care whether you agree with them or like them.
- Can shape action.
Am I biased?
Implicit bias is not a euphemism for racism

Implicit bias is a side-effect of normal cognitive processes rather than character flaw

- categorization, generalization, association

- Controlled, conscious, explicit info processing
- Automatic, unconscious, implicit info processing
IMPLICIT BIAS IS ASSOCIATED WITH BEHAVIORAL PERFORMANCE

Implicit bias based on race is related to:
- friendly interactions with a Black conversational partner
- less positive patient-doctor interactions
- biased sentencing among jurors and judges
- discriminatory hiring for jobs

HAVING MORE FORMAL EDUCATION IS ASSOCIATED WITH LESS EXPLICIT PREJUDICES BUT EDUCATION IS NOT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLICIT BIASES
Biased people or biased environments?
Geographical correlations with disparities are strong.

Social environments
STATES/COUNTIES WITH HIGHER AVERAGE IMPLICIT BIAS HAVE:

- Larger health disparities in cardiovascular disease
- Larger race disparities in infant health
- Larger race disparities in upward mobility
- More google searches for racial slurs
- More residential segregation
- More school segregation
How is implicit bias measured?
IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST (IAT)

- The IAT is administered via computer and requires users to rapidly sort words/attributes ("emotional") into two target categories ("male" vs. "female").
- Primary DV is reaction time
  - Poor reliability (internal consistency & test-retest)
  - Questions over predictive validity
- [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)

AFFECTIVE MISATTRIBUTION PROCEDURE (AMP)

Primary DV is the difference in how often an attribute is selected for one category vs. the other (e.g., how often is the word unpleasant chosen when "viewing" a Black vs. White face?)
Project Implicit Association Test (IAT)
Association between enslaved population and implicit bias

Payne, Vuletich, & Brown-Iannuzzi, 2019
Systemic racism links historical racism to today's implicit bias

PROPORTION
ENSLAVED, 1860

SYSTEMIC RACISM
• Segregation
• Disparity in poverty
• Disparity in mobility

IMPLICIT BIAS

Payne, Vuletich, & Brown-Iannuzzi, 2019
Implicit bias & ASD

OBEID ET AL (2020) HAD 493 COLLEGE STUDENTS COMPLETE THE RACE IAT

STUDENTS ALSO EVALUATED VIGNETTES DEPICTING AN AUTISTIC CHILD OR A CHILD WITH CONDUCT DISORDER THAT WAS PAIRED WITH A PHOTO OF A BLACK OR WHITE CHILD

WITHIN GROUP RACIAL BIASES WERE FOUND

• White college students were more likely to associate autism with White children and conduct disorder with Black children
• Black college students did the opposite
What does implicit bias look like in Kansas?
Project
Implicit data in the Kansas City Metro

Darker purple is indicative of increased pro-white implicit bias
Sample size

81
BLACK OR LATINO CHILDREN

107
WHITE CHILDREN
Implicit bias was...

- Positively associated with school referrals ($r=0.22; p=0.05$), a child having an IEP ($r=0.30; p=0.01$) and the total number of school services ($r=0.25; p=0.02$) the child received.
- Negatively associated with a child’s primary care provider being a pediatrician ($r=-0.25; p=0.03$),
All interventions to change individual's implicit bias have failed (because implicit bias is not a stable attitude to begin with).

Changing the situation is more powerful.

What Can We Do About Implicit Bias?
Public policy and social norms matter.

Anti-gay implicit bias decreased nationally following legalization of same sex marriage in 2015.

In states that legalized same sex marriage earlier, anti-gay implicit bias changed earlier.
Conclusions

- Racial / ethnic disparities in autism persist
- Those disparities may reflect larger structural inequalities in society
- Solutions to these disparities will take more than individual behavior change
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