

HOW IMPLICIT BIAS CAN MAKE PHILOSOPHY CLASSES UNWELCOMING (AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT)

Matthew Kopec Ph.D., *Northwestern University*

Part I: Starting Assumptions

- A1. Philosophy would be better off if we had more women, racial/ethnic minorities, and students from working class backgrounds.
- A2. Current demographics aren't entirely "voluntary" and thus can be changed.
- A3. Current demographics are similar to STEM disciplines for similar reasons.
- A4. Philosophers are also humans.

Part II: The Biases

(1) Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is a cognitive association between members of one conceptual category and some positive or negative characteristic.

Take the test: www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/

Some Studies:

- Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) [Matthew vs. Darnell]
- Moss-Racusin (2012) [Science undergrad lab assistant applicants]
- Correll et al. (2002) [Shooter studies]

Some likely effects:

- Lopsided discussions (Sadkar et al. 2009)
- Differential interruption rates
- Co-opting of insights without proper attribution
- Differential encouragement and mentoring
- Grading biases

Interventions:

IB1: Admit that we typically harbor implicit biases and can't wish them away.

- In fact, those who believe they are above average in their own objectivity and fairness are more susceptible to implicit bias. (Uhlmann & Cohen 2007)
- And simply trying to be less biased can sometimes increase its effects. (Stewart & Payne 2008)

IB2: Talk about implicit bias, and create a culture of spotting it and calling it out.

- It's crucial we all accept that implicit biases aren't morally blameworthy – they are rarely one's own fault! (Kelly & Roedder 2008).

IB3: Provide counter-stereotypical exemplars. (ST1)

- Blair (2002)

IB4: Define criteria for success ahead of time.

- Police chief study by Uhlmann & Cohen (2005)

IB5: Provide justification for decisions based on these criteria.

(2) Stereotype Threat

When a group is stereotypically less capable at a task, members of that group often underperform when their group membership is made salient. Psychologists believe it is largely due to anxiety over confirming the stereotype. (See Steele 2010 for an overview)

Some Studies:

- Ambady et al. (2001) [Study on Asian elementary school girls]
- Franceschinin et al. (2014) [Implicit math bias seems to play a role]

Interventions:

[<http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/>]

ST1: Provide counter-stereotypical exemplars. (IB3)

ST2: Talk about stereotype threat.

ST3: Reframe the task (so it's not about intelligence).

ST4: Provide external attribution of difficulty.

ST5: Emphasize incremental view of intelligence.

Part III: Pedagogical Interventions

(1) Inclusive Course Design

Providing counter-stereotypical exemplars helps to mitigate BOTH implicit bias and stereotype threat.

IC1: Make sure there are female and non-white authors on your syllabi.

IC2: Provide images of women and non-white authors.

IC3: Videoconference with women and non-white authors.

(2) Inclusive Discussions

ID1: Talk about implicit bias and tell students to hold everyone accountable.

- It is easier to spot biased behavior in others than in ourselves. (Ponin et al. 2013)

ID2: Gender and ethnicity balance class participants.

- Watch faces, not hands.
- Learn the names of white males last.
- Do the next two things on the list...

ID3: Employ an interruption check mechanism.

- I use the three-count rule for myself.
- Talk about this effect with students - they do hold each other accountable.

ID4: Inflate praise and encouragement for members of groups you are biased against.

- If you are implicitly biased against certain groups, you're likely to undervalue their contributions (especially when under stress).

ID5: Be aware of tendencies to co-opt insights without proper attribution.

- Heilman & Haynes (2005)

(3) Inclusive Assessments

IA1: Make grading as anonymous as possible.

IA2: Produce a rubric before grading – make sure assessment isn't about how smart, clever, sharp, etc. the student is.

- Hand the rubric out ahead of time if possible.
- (And, unless grading blind, don't change the rubric along the way.)

IA3: Talk about stereotype threat before logic or formally-oriented exams.

- Discuss the phenomenon on practice exam day and review sessions.
- Report no past association between grades and gender.
- Two pencil trick on the day of exam.
- If female students performed better, report that, and ask the class if that's what they'd predict.

IA4: Take steps to increase perceived grade security.

- Never give "GOTCHA" exams, intended to test how clever a student is.
- Give randomly chosen practice exams.
- In logic, later exam improvement supersedes.
- At least one rewrite in writing-based courses.
- Seeing a rubric ahead of time helps.

IA5: Encourage all of your best students to continue on in philosophy.

- Doing this increased fourth year female participation at one university from 20% to 50% (Saul forthcoming).

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