Implicit Biases

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#LetsTalkImplicitBiases

Let’s talk about human biases affecting our perceptions and behavior and impeding our ability to be fair, impartial and effective every day.

Did you know that even well-intentioned people have biases? Yes, YOU & I, have biases! I don’t want to bore you with the information so let me take you on a quick journey where we can all be on the same page. Click on the video attached and we will further analyze once you’re done watching it. As you watch this video, think about the judges’ and audience’s reactions to Susan Boyle; think about your reaction when you first saw it.

Susan Boyle- Britain’s Got Talent

Welcome back! See, that wasn’t so bad! Ask yourselves these questions:

1. Why were people surprised when she began to sing? What was it about her that led us, the judges, and the audience to think that she was not going to be a good singer?
2. Was the immediate reaction of the audience and the judges’ justified?

What does Susan Boyle’s video tell us about human bias? It demonstrates the fundamental concepts of human bias.

- Bias is a normal human attribute; everyone, even well-intentioned people, are biased.
- Biases are often unconscious or “implicit”
- Implicit biases are sometimes incompatible with our conscious attitudes.
- Implicit biases can influence our actions.
Understanding how implicit bias affects perception and behavior is the first step toward developing our skills to “override” our implicit biases. So let’s take a deeper look at what we just experienced with Susan Boyle and what it says about the thinking process and implicit bias.

- Who are we most likely to prejudge?
- What determines the characteristics we attribute to them?
- Do we know when we are pre-judging people?

Humans tend to prejudge people on sight! We attribute characteristics to them based on appearance and behavior. We prejudged Susan Boyle on sight, made conclusions about her ability to sing based on her appearance/behaviors on stage.

We are more likely to prejudge the people we don’t know. Because we don’t know the person, because this person is what scientists call an “ambiguous stimuli” we are inclined to “fill in” what we don’t know about the person.

What are some bases on which people may be stereotyped and that could lead to differential behavior on the part of others in our society?
- Income
- English language abilities
- Gender
- Age
- Religious affiliation
- Profession
- Sexual orientation/identity

Addressing Our Implicit Biases
So what do we do about our implicit biases? There are two “remedies” for our implicit bias affliction:

1. We can try to reduce our implicit biases;
2. We can recognize our biases and thwart their impact on our behavior.

And you’re probably saying, “OK!? And how do I do that!??” Good thing you asked! If I asked you to go to a Home Depot or Lowes’ and locate the Head Electrician in the Electrical Department without asking anyone, who exactly would you be looking for? Will you walk past the “Head Electrician” because they don’t “fit” what YOU envision a Head Electrician to look like!? Things that make you go hmmmmmm… Or will you begin challenging your implicit biases and walk up to the older female in the electrical department wearing a store apron. She may not be the Head Electrician, but what if she is!?

All I am saying is we need to begin recognizing our implicit biases and ensuring they are not manifesting themselves when our children are watching and picking up on these subtle cues that are helping shape who they are and become. So what can you do to ensure you’re not communicating biases to your child?
What parents can do:

- Recognize that because we live in a society where many biases exist, we must counteract them, or else we will support them through our silence.
- At home or at school, give children messages that deliberately contrast stereotypes by providing books, dolls, toys, wall decorations, TV programs, and records that show: men and women in nontraditional roles, people of color in leadership positions, people with disabilities doing activities familiar to children, and various types of families and family activities.
- Show no bias in the friends, doctors, teachers, and other service providers that you choose, nor in the stores where you shop.
- Remember what you do is as important as what you say.
- Make it a firm rule that a person’s appearance is never an acceptable reason for teasing or rejecting them. Immediately step in if you hear or see your child behave in such a way.
- Talk positively about each child’s physical characteristics and cultural heritage. And, help children learn the differences between feelings of superiority and those of self-esteem and pride in their own heritage.
- Provide opportunities for children to interact with other children who are racially/ culturally different from themselves and with people who have various disabilities.
- Respectfully listen to and answer children’s questions about themselves and others. Don’t ignore, change the subject, or in any way make the child think she is bad for asking such a question.
- Teach children how to challenge biases about who they are. Give them tools to confront those who act biased against them.
- Use accurate and fair images in contrast to stereotypes, and encourage children to talk about the differences. Help them to think critically about what they see in books, movies, greeting cards, comics, and on TV.
- Let children know that unjust things can be changed. Encourage children to challenge bias, and involve children in taking action on issues relevant to their lives.

Building a healthy self-identity is a process that continues all our lives. Help children get a head start by teaching them to resist bias, and to value the differences between people as much as the similarities.

Want to have an educational “Kitchen Table Talk” with your child on implicit biases? Watch a segment of the show “The Voice.”

I have attached a video for your convenience that will demonstrate how a famous singer and song writer allowed his implicit biases to manifest themselves on a tv show. Want to challenge the conversation a bit more? Play the audio only and allow your child to physically describe the image of the singer based on what they hear.

https://youtu.be/Ey3CdREfvug

If you are looking for other ways to support conversations on race, racism and resistance clicking here may assist in your search.