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MIND SCIENCES KEY CONCEPTS

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DEFINITIONS

Implicit bias: the brain's automatic, instant association of stereotypes or attitudes toward particular groups, often without our conscious awareness.

- The split-second decisions our brains make (e.g. reactions to or assumptions about someone).

Racial anxiety: the brain's stress response before or during inter-racial interactions.

- For people of color, racial anxiety happens when they fear they will experience bias from someone else, through discrimination, hostile treatment, or invalidation.
- For white people, racial anxiety happens when they fear their actions will be perceived as racist.

Stereotype threat: the brain's impaired cognitive functioning on a task when a negative stereotype is activated.

- When we are worried about confirming a negative stereotype about our identity group, we have a physiological reaction and often end up confirming the stereotype.

INTERVENTIONS

Implicit Bias Interventions

"De-Biasing" – Efforts to Reduce Implicit Bias

Stereotype Behavior Replacement: Recognize when a response is based on a stereotype, label the response as stereotypical, reflect on why the response occurred, and consider how this biased response could be avoided in future. Replace the biased response with one that is consistent with your values.

Individuation: Gather specific information about individuals, to prevent making stereotypic inferences. This strategy helps people evaluate others based on personal, rather than group-based, attributes.

Perspective Taking: Imagine oneself to be a member of a stereotyped group. This increases empathy toward the group and reduces automatic group-based evaluations.

Increase Opportunities for Contact: Seek opportunities to encounter and engage in positive interactions with others. Contact decreases bias by altering mental representations of the group and improving evaluations of the group. Meaningful relationships with others also increase empathy toward other identity groups.

Break the Link Between Bias and Behavior

Doubt Objectivity: Presuming oneself to be objective actually increases the role of implicit bias in decision-making. Acknowledge the presence of bias in order to counter its impact.

Increase Motivation to be Fair: Being internally motivated to be fair, rather than fear of external judgments, tends to decrease biased actions.

Improve Conditions of Decision-making: Think slow: engage in mindful, deliberate processing to prevent implicit biases from kicking in and determining behaviors. Reduce time pressure, load, and multi-tasking: focusing on decisions can help us make more mindful decisions and prevent reliance on unconscious processing. Reduce ambiguity: gathering information prevents the tendency for our brains to “fill in the gaps.” Use clear and fair criteria, develop protocols: adding structure and clarity to decisions can prevent implicit biases from determining our behavior.

Racial Anxiety Interventions

Increase Intergroup Contact: Direct interaction between members of different racial groups can alleviate inter-group anxiety and promote more positive attitudes and expectations for future contact.

Social Belonging: Fostering a sense of belonging, in which individuals feel accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others, can ease fears related to inter-group contact.

Positive Priming: Envisioning a positive cross-racial experience prior to engaging in a new one will help reduce racial anxiety and reset energy for the encounter.

Scripts: Generate consistent language, especially for initial interactions. This helps ease anxiety and allows individuals to focus on making genuine connections.

Stereotype Threat Interventions

Social Belonging: Increase the sense of belonging for individuals in stereotyped groups. This makes social identity less salient as a marker of difference.

In-group Peers and Experts: Connecting to peers of the same identity group can increase the sense of belonging. Relationships with aspirational individuals affirms that such achievements are attainable.

Growth Mindset: Abilities can be conceptualized as either fixed (“you have it or you don’t”) or able to be developed (“you can learn it”). When thought of as fixed, poor performance is equated with inadequacy, but with growth mindset, there is just more work to do.

Wise Criticism: Give feedback that communicates both high expectations and a confidence that the individual can meet those expectations. If feedback is purely critical, it may be interpreted as the product of bias; if feedback is purely positive, it may be interpreted as racial condescension. Wise criticism reduces uncertainty about the reason for feedback.