

Unpacking, Understanding and Responding: Implicit Bias in the Classroom



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Our Mission

Wesleyan University is dedicated to providing an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by **boldness, rigor, and practical idealism**.

At Wesleyan, distinguished scholar-teachers work closely with students, taking advantage of fluidity among disciplines to explore the world with a variety of tools.

The university seeks to **build a diverse, energetic community of students, faculty, and staff** who think critically and creatively and who **value independence of mind and generosity of spirit**.

Explicit vs. Implicit

Explicit bias are attitudes that are at the conscious level, are deliberately formed and are easy to self-report.

Implicit bias are attitudes that are at the unconscious level, are involuntarily formed and are typically unknown to us.

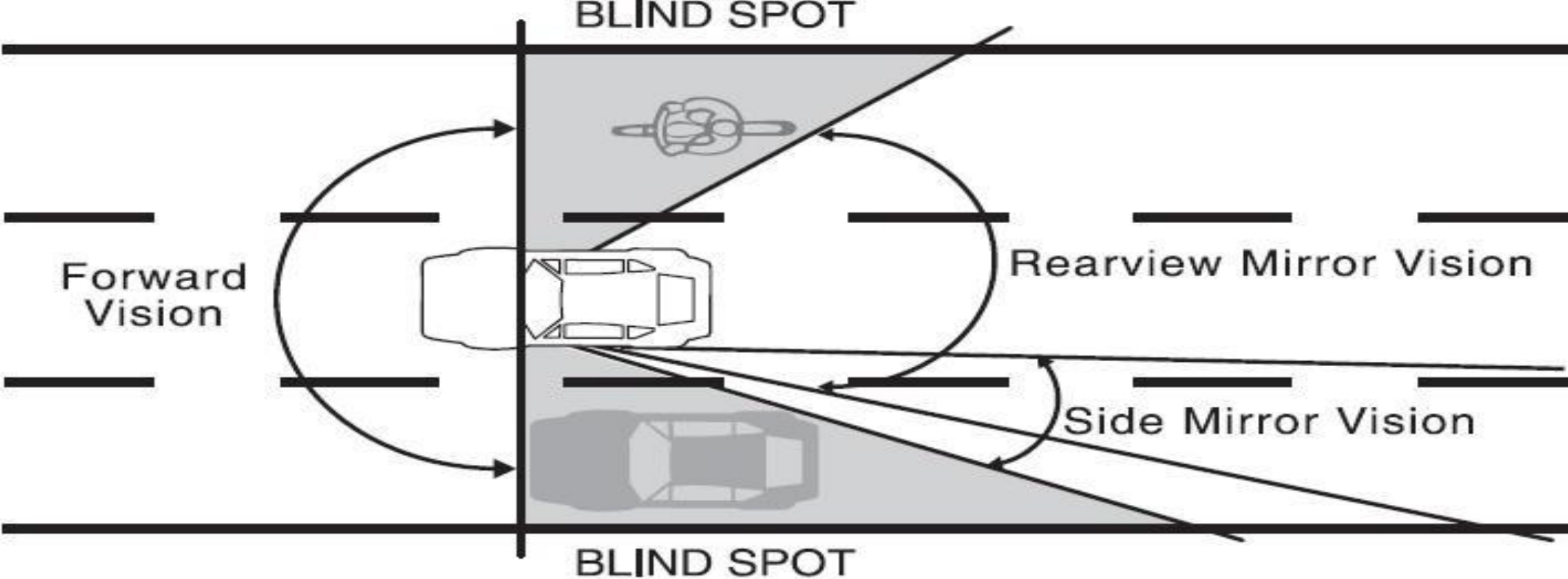
So...why care?

Because implicit bias **impacts student performance**, which puts their success and our **mission in jeopardy**.

Implicit bias

- Refers to unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding.
- In higher education, implicit bias often refers to unconscious racial or socioeconomic bias towards students, which can be as frequent as explicit bias (Boysen, et. al 2009).
- Instructors can hold assumptions about students' learning behaviors and their capability for academic success which are tied to students' identities and/or backgrounds, and these assumptions can impede student growth (Staats, et. al, 2017).
- Instructors can consider a variety of strategies and benefits for revealing and addressing implicit bias, both in themselves and their students.

Implicit Bias = Blindspots



Examples...

- Instructors may assume that certain students know to seek help when they are struggling, although students at higher risk for struggling academically are often less likely to seek help and support.
- Instructors may assume that students from certain backgrounds or social groups have differing intellectual abilities and/or ambitions. For example, an instructor might assume that a student from a certain background will be satisfied with lower achievement levels.
- Instructors may expect students who speak with certain accents to be poor writers.
- Students with substandard writing abilities may be stereotyped as lacking intellectual ability.
- Instructors might treat students with physical disabilities as if they may also have mental disabilities, and thus require more attention.
- Students who are affiliated with a particular identity group may be treated as experts on issues related to that group.
- Instructors may assume that students will best relate to the historical, contemporary, or fictional character who resembles them demographically.
- Students of certain groups may be expected to have certain participation styles (quiet, argumentative, agenda-oriented).

paper activity

Consider this: Initiating Conversations Around Equity & Inclusion

Conversations around the topic of inclusion and equity are *often emotionally charged*; therefore, it is important to establish a common baseline – an understanding from which to further customize definitions and perceptions be utilized.

Consider this: Initiating Conversations Around Equity & Inclusion

Diversity and Equity and Inclusion are NOT the same...

Diversity:

Individual differences (e.g., personality, learning styles, and life experiences) **and group/social differences** (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations) **that can be engaged in the service of the mission.**

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Diversity and Equity and Inclusion are NOT the same...

Equity:

The creation of opportunities for **historically underrepresented populations** to have **equal access** to and participate in programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in employee recruitment, retention, and promotion.

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Inclusion:

The **active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diverse people and with communities** (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect - in ways that increase one's awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within [and change] systems and institutions.

"Diversity asks, 'Who's in the room?' Equity responds: 'Who is trying to get in the room but can't? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?'

Inclusion asks, 'Have everyone's ideas been heard?' Justice responds, 'Whose ideas won't be taken as seriously because they aren't in the majority?'

Diversity asks, 'How many more of [pick any minoritized identity] group do we have this year than last?' Equity responds, 'What conditions have we created that maintain certain groups as the perpetual majority here?'

Inclusion asks, 'Is this environment safe for everyone to feel like they belong?' Justice challenges, 'Whose safety is being sacrificed and minimized to allow others to be comfortable maintaining dehumanizing views?'" — Dafina-Lazarus Stewart

Recommendations

Understand messages

- Micromessages are those subtle – and sometimes not-so-subtle – nonverbal messages that people send through body language, tone of voice and the way they inflect words.
- Micromessages signal at an immediate gut level how people feel about each other. You can use nice words when speaking to other people, but if at the same time you inadvertently send out negative micromessages, those nonverbal signals will have a more enduring impact than anything you say.
- Managers, supervisors and other leaders should become avid students of their own facial expressions, styles of personal engagement, body language and other nonverbal communicative attributes. Then they should try to send positive micromessages, not harmful ones that breed resentment and undermine performance.

Micromessaging

- Micromessages can be positive or negative
- Our background informs how we send & interpret micromessages
- Self-monitoring is an everyday thing
- Difference triggers microinequities
- Similarity triggers microaffirmations
- **You have choice** in sending microaffirmations or microinequities

Recommendations

Cultivate Inclusivity

Instructors can work to develop an [inclusive classroom climate](#) and [inclusive teaching practices](#), which can mediate potential biased attitudes, and support developing sensitivity and deepening self-awareness.

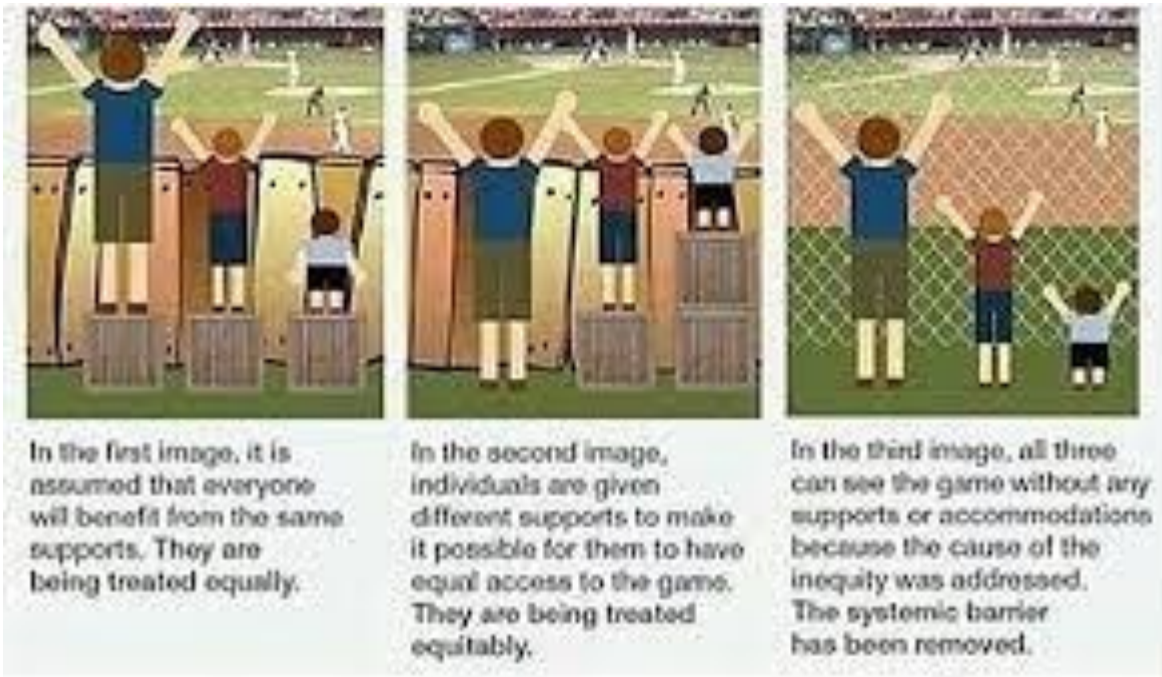
- **Solicit Feedback from Outside Observers** - Instructors can set up their own [teaching inventory or observation protocol](#) with a colleague or peer, or [request](#) a colleague to visit their classroom, observe their student-teacher interactions, and provide feedback.
- **Solicit Feedback from Students** - Instructors can also use feedback from students, via [midterm course evaluations](#), [end-of-term evaluations](#), or [small group feedback sessions](#), to assess whether their unconscious biases manifest in their classroom interactions.

Recommendations

Assess ourselves...

- **Harvard Implicit Association Test**
- Background on IAT:
 - Mahzarin Banaji, Harvard University
 - Brian Nosek, University of Virginia
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RSVz6VEybk>
- **Take the test:** <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Inclusion and success...



I am not your
stereotype