

# Responsive Philanthropy

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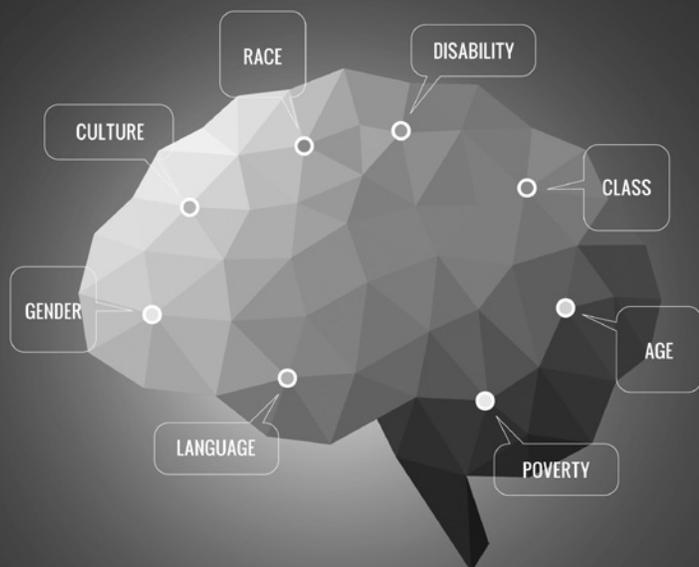
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## Implicit Bias and Its Role in Philanthropy and Grantmaking

Philanthropy has proven itself a powerful mechanism for working toward a more equitable society by challenging oppression and seeking to ensure social, economic and political change. No one can doubt that we have removed important barriers over the years, but new mechanisms for exclusion and marginalization are constantly emerg-

ing. For example, we did not have mass incarceration when the Rev. Dr. King marched in Selma for voting rights, and we have since seen the emergence of new ways to suppress the vote.

Only recently have we begun to understand the complicated ways that race, gender and other nodes of identity can interact with each other, structures and processes of the mind to result in marginalization. This article will focus on the processes of the mind. Even when people explicitly and consciously support fairness, nonconscious processes can undermine their intentions through implicit bias. As we learn more about this complex phenomenon, it is critical that philanthropy

By john a. powell

uses this knowledge to help move us toward greater inclusion and fairness – and that those in philanthropy realize their own susceptibility to implicit bias.

### WHAT MIND SCIENCE TEACHES US ABOUT IMPLICIT BIAS

Studying implicit bias helps us to understand how we can embrace fairness at the conscious level, and yet undermine fairness at the implicit (nonconscious) level. For example, in recent years, a continuation, and in some cases, increase of racial stratification (seen in incarceration rates, health, home ownership, education and life expectancy) have strengthened the claim that race (continued on page 12)



challenging grantmakers to strengthen communities

# Implicit Bias and Its Role in Philanthropy and Grantmaking

(continued from page 1)

still matters in the United States. This lack of improvement exists simultaneously with a general decline in overtly negative racial attitudes. Faced with this contradiction, many simply ignore that conditions haven't improved, or even blame the racial other for being a part of a "dysfunctional culture." There is inadequate attention to how negative racial conditions can be caused and reproduced by structures and unconscious processes.

Mind science can help us to better explain some of the contradictory dynamics between racial and gendered attitudes and conditions. Mind science looks at the intersection of various ways that we process, synthesize and internalize information. Like cognitive science, it is interdisciplinary and can include psychology, anthropology, sociology and neuroscience. Research about implicit bias helps us to better understand that disconnect between our society's ideal of fairness for all people and the continued reality of its absence. As explained in the

first volume of The Perception Institute's indispensable report series, *The Science of Equality*, implicit bias is a diagnosis of perceptual distortions.<sup>1</sup> Implicit bias confirms that race and gender matter – even among those who consider themselves nonracist and nonsexist. For example, the majority of whites consciously report that they do not think about race most of the time and race does not matter. Yet, at an unconscious level, to the majority of whites, race does matter and they exhibit racial bias.

Researchers have begun to recognize that most cognitive and emotional responses to our environment happen without our awareness. Psychologists have known for 100 years that only 10 percent of discrimination can be explained by the conscious mind.<sup>2</sup> Mind science tells us that most of what we believe and process consciously may be directly contradicted by what we experience unconsciously – allowing for socially constructed and unconsciously internalized implicit biases

to underpin our actions. This phenomenon is particularly likely to occur in the context of race and gender.

Implicit or unconscious biases affect not only our perceptions, but also our behavior, policies and institutional arrangements. As *The Science of Equality* says, "Implicit bias and perception are often seen as individual problems when, in fact, they are structural barriers to equality."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the power and efficacy of philanthropic work may be limited by subconscious processes that work to reinforce structural barriers to equality. Our unconscious beliefs simultaneously help to form and are formed by structures and the environment. Implicit biases therefore influence the types of outcomes we see across a variety of contexts: school, employment, housing, health, criminal justice system, research and so forth. These racialized outcomes subsequently reinforce the very stereotypes and prejudices that helped create the stratified outcomes and conditions.

## Strategies to Reduce Bias

The philanthropic community can establish practices to prevent inherent bias from seeping into their work and the way funding is distributed.<sup>13</sup>

**Doubt objectivity:** Seeing yourself as objective actually tends to increase the role of implicit bias; teaching people about nonconscious thought processes ultimately allows us to guard against biased evaluations.

**Increase motivation to be fair:** Seeking fairness, rather than being driven by fear of external judgment, tends to decrease biased actions.

**Improve conditions of decision-making:** Implicit biases are a function of automaticity. Engaging in mindful, deliberate processing prevents our implicit biases from kicking in and determining our behaviors.

**Count:** Implicitly biased behavior is best detected by using data to determine whether certain patterns of behavior lead to racially disparate outcomes. Once one is aware of such a link, it is then possible to consider whether the outcomes are linked to bias.<sup>14</sup>

**Monitor and improve the environment:** Because your environment both primes and helps create bias associations, it is important to continuously monitor and improve it.

**Collect data and monitor outcomes:** Because implicit bias cannot be reliably self-reported, it is important to set goals and collect data to see if they are being met.

**Involve a cross-section of decision-makers:** Research shows that including a critical mass of underrepresented groups in the decision-making process reduces bias.

**Create institutional mechanisms to reduce bias:** In the context of school suspension, having very clear and objective criteria reduces bias.

**Affirmatively state and pursue inclusive outcomes:** Focus on changing outcomes.

As important as these interventions are, we will not completely end implicit bias and that should not be our aim. The goal is not to end all bias but to change behavior and outcomes. We must continue to look for better interventions and engage the structure and social context where decisions are being made.

## HOW IMPLICIT BIAS IS REFLECTED IN GRANTMAKING AND PHILANTHROPY

The influence of implicit biases in grantmaking and philanthropic work is of critical concern. Gender bias has been the most frequently investigated of the varying types of biases discussed in connection with grantmaking peer review.<sup>4</sup> A frequently cited study found that female postdoctoral fellowship applicants “had to be [two-and-a-half] times more productive than the average male applicant to receive the same competence score.”<sup>5</sup> A paper to be published in *Academic Medicine* used automated text analysis to show that there are gender biases in reviewers’ critiques of R01 grant applications.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of race, recent findings have shown that white researchers receive National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants at nearly twice the rate Black researchers do.<sup>7</sup> This stark statistic stirred NIH Director of the Center for Scientific Review, Richard Nakamura, to consider the role of unconscious prejudice in grant reviews. Nakamura, while not considering himself racially biased, found that he harbored a slight unconscious bias against minorities after taking a race association test.<sup>8</sup> This prompted his hypothesis that grant reviewers may be similarly or more deeply affected by implicit biases. Even small bias can have a large consequence in the world.

There is also an allocation bias in terms of philanthropic funding. Women’s groups are among those that continue to be underfunded, and only a small percentage of philanthropic monies go to organizations led by racial minorities, despite the high needs in these communities. According to a Greenlining Institute report, less than 5 percent of the charitable donations from more than 72,000 U.S. foundations are granted to communities of color.<sup>9</sup> Research also has found that funding pertaining to Native American causes

and concerns remains among the lowest, amounting to less than 1 percent of total giving.<sup>10</sup>

Further, “relatively few nonprofit institutions serve the poor as a primary clientele.”<sup>11</sup> Smaller and midsized nonprofits – those more likely to serve the poor – continuously lack access to reliable funding sources to help them cover their full operating costs. For smaller nonprofits, the restrictions that come with grant money spending is often prohibitive.

Implicit bias in philanthropy affects not just which groups get funded but also who sits on the boards of philanthropic organizations (mostly white

males), how grantmaking foundations set priorities, how decisions are made, who makes those decisions and even who gets hired.

In 2008, a Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) study found “a pronounced disconnect between the ways in which grantmakers are supporting nonprofits and what nonprofits say could contribute to their success.”<sup>12</sup> The philanthropic community must ensure that implicit biases do not betray the conscious values at the root of philanthropic work. Achieving true transformative change requires people from diverse backgrounds to come together as a community, manage difficulties and undertake complex inquiries. This necessitates building mutual trust and respect among the researchers, members and stakeholders of the philanthropic community itself and the communities it serves. Accordingly, the philanthropic community must combat inequity by taking into account both inherent bias and a historical analysis of long-standing structural barriers.

We can gain a better understanding of the dynamics that produce and exacerbate inequity – as well as learn how to overcome them – by applying the insights of mind science to race, gender and other areas subject to implicit bias. By recognizing and addressing the role of implicit bias in its work, the philanthropic community will be better able to understand the past; engage, appraise and transform the present; and more effectively influence the future. ■

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## Notes

1. Rachel D. Godsil, et al., *The Science of Equality, Vol. 1: Addressing Implicit*

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FOUNDATIONS INTERESTED IN ADDRESSING IMPLICIT BIAS

### PERCEPTION INSTITUTE

[www.perception.org](http://www.perception.org)

In November 2014, the Perception Institute released *The Science of Equality, Volume 1: Addressing Implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety, and Stereotype Threat in Education and Health Care*. This landmark report synthesizes hundreds of studies, providing a comprehensive picture of the role of implicit bias in discrimination.

### KIRWAN INSTITUTE

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

The Kirwan Institute has released a new *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* (<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-review/>) every year for the past two years. The original 2013 report applies the implications of implicit bias to education, health and criminal justice. The 2014 report builds on this by delving into employment and housing.

### RESEARCH BY JERRY KANG

<http://jerrykang.net/>

Jerry Kang is vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion at UCLA. He has written extensively about the role of implicit bias in civil rights and race. See:

On discrimination in evaluation:

*Seeing through Colorblindness: Implicit Bias and the Law* (<http://jerrykang.net/research/2010-seeing-through-colorblindness/>)

On affirmative action and race consciousness:

*Fair Measures: A Behavioral Realist Revision of Affirmative Action* (<http://jerrykang.net/research/2006-fair-measures/>)

On media policy:

*Trojan Horses of Race* (<http://jerrykang.net/research/2005-trojan-horses-of-race/>)

*Bits of Bias* (<http://jerrykang.net/research/2012-bits-of-bias/>)

On personal responsibility and culture:

*New Cultural Defense* (<http://jerrykang.net/research/2011-new-cultural-defense/>)

On the science of automatic processing:

"TEDx – Immaculate Perception?" (<http://jerrykang.net/2013/12/11/tedx-immaculate-perception/>)

- Bias, Racial Anxiety, and Stereotype Threat in Education and Healthcare*, Perception Institute, November 2014, [http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ScienceofEquality\\_web.pdf](http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ScienceofEquality_web.pdf).
- John A. Powell, *How Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization Can Move Us Toward Social and Personal Healing*, University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service & Center on Community Philanthropy, 2013, <http://clintonschool.uasys.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Clinton-School-Compendium-2013.pdf>; also see Walter Matthews, *Human life from many angles*, Goodwill Publishing Company, 1922.
- Id.*
- Lutz Bornmann, et al., "A multilevel meta-analysis of studies reporting correlations between the *h* index and 37 different *h* index variants," *Journal of Informetrics*, February 2011.
- Christine Wenneras and Agnes Wold, "Nepotism and Sexism in Peer Review," *Nature* 387, May 1997, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v387/n6631/abs/387341a0.html>.
- Molly Carnes, et al., *Exploring the Science of Scientific Review*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin, forthcoming.
- Sara Reardon, "NIH to probe racial disparity in grant awards," *Nature* 512, August 2014, <http://www.nature.com/news/nih-to-probe-racial-disparity-in-grant-awards-1.15740>.
- Id.*
- Avis Atkins and Orson Aguilar, *A Promise to Diverse Communities: Summary of the Foundation Coalitions Efforts*, Greenlining Institute, June 2012, <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/PDCreport.pdf>.
- Foundation Funding for Native American Issues and Peoples*, The Foundation Center, 2011, <http://www.nativephilanthropy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2011-Foundation-Funding-for-Native-American-Issues-and-Peoples.pdf>
- Charles Clotfelter, *Who Benefits From the Nonprofit Sector?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 22.
- Nancy Burd, *On the Money: The Key Financial Challenges Facing Nonprofits Today – and How Grantmakers Can Help*, 2009, [http://www.socialimpactexchange.org/sites/www.socialimpactexchange.org/files/publications/On\\_the\\_Money\\_v2.pdf](http://www.socialimpactexchange.org/sites/www.socialimpactexchange.org/files/publications/On_the_Money_v2.pdf).
- This list was formulated by Jerry Kang and a group of researchers, detailed in *The Science of Equality*, in the context of judicial decision-making, but can be applied to the similar process of grant-making. See Godsil.
- Id.*