



Bias: What Comes to Mind When You Hear the Word “Disability”?

Introduction

Some people like pineapple on pizza. Some people don't like pineapple on pizza. When choosing whether or not to buy a ham and pineapple pizza, each of these groups will be *biased*, or influenced, towards their own opinions of whether or not to buy the pizza because of the pineapple. This is known as explicit bias, or people's conscious preferences that affect how they view the world and choices they make (Nikolopoulou, 2023a).

What is bias – explicit and implicit?

Explicit bias is defined as conscious preferences, or things that we do and say on purpose, that affect how people view the world and choices they make. These conscious preferences, or things that we do and say on purpose, can be harmful because they can cause harm to others (Nikolopoulou, 2023a).

While explicit bias is conscious preferences, or things that we do or say on purpose that may cause harm to others, implicit bias is *unconscious* preferences that affect the things that people do and say (Nikolopoulou, 2023b). Implicit bias can cause us to say or do things that are harmful to others without us realizing it. An example of implicit bias is when people do not treat individuals with developmental disabilities age-appropriately. This example of implicit bias occurs because people assume that individuals with developmental disabilities

are incapable of having age-appropriate experiences due to their disability.

Both explicit and implicit bias can be harmful because they can both affect how we treat others and cause harm (Nikolopoulou, 2023b). Implicit bias is usually related to identity traits like race and ethnicity age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and more (“How to Identify and Overcome Your Implicit Bias,” n.d.).

Implicit bias about disability can also be called *ableism*, which “refers to bias, prejudice, and discrimination against people with disabilities” (Villines, 2021).

How do you recognize implicit bias?

Everyone has implicit bias! Having implicit bias does not make you a bad person. The important thing to do is to reflect on how your perspectives and beliefs might influence what you do and say without realizing it. Research shows that even healthcare professionals like doctors and nurses have high implicit bias towards people with disabilities (Vanpuymbrouck et al., 2020).

One of the best ways to recognize implicit biases is to take one of the Implicit Association Tests through Harvard (“How to Identify and Overcome Your Implicit Bias,” n.d.). The American Academy of Family Physicians give



8 great tips to recognize implicit bias, and they spell out “IMPLICIT” (“Eight Tactics to Identify and Reduce Your Biases,” n.d.). One of their tips is the use of perspective-taking; it’s

- I ntrospection
- M indfulness
- P erspective-taking
- L earn to slow down
- I ndividuation
- C heck your messaging
- I nsitutionalize fairness
- T ake two

important to look through the lens of someone being stereotyped. One of the best ways to be perspective-taking is to educate yourself by using different

types of materials (“Eight Tactics to Identify and Reduce Your Biases,” n.d.). Implicit bias is everywhere, but if it can be recognized then it can be limited.

Conclusion

Overall, it is important to be aware of explicit and implicit bias. As a reminder, explicit bias is any conscious preference and implicit bias is any unconscious or subconscious preference (Nikolopoulou, 2023b). When people are not aware of their own biases, it can cause harm to others around them. If you want to check and work on your biases, then use some of the suggestions in this fact sheet to recognize your biases!

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