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## PRIMER FOR ADDRESSING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS: “DEBIASING” AND PREVENTING EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS, RACIAL ANXIETY, AND STEREOTYPE THREAT

### “Debiasing” and Preventing Effects of Implicit Bias

The research on reducing implicit bias or “debiasing” is fairly new, however, researchers have conducted recent studies finding some success. Most significantly, Patricia Devine and her colleagues have combined interventions devised by other research and successfully reduced implicit racial bias, as well as increased awareness of personal bias and concern about discrimination. These strategies are listed below.

- ◆ **Stereotype replacement:** Recognizing that a response is based on stereotypes, labeling the response as stereotypic, and reflecting on why the response occurred creates a process to consider how the biased response could be avoided in the future and replaces it with an unbiased response.
- ◆ **Counter-stereotypic imaging:** Imagining counter-stereotypic others in detail makes positive exemplars salient and accessible when challenging a stereotype’s validity.
- ◆ **Individuation:** Obtaining specific information about group members prevents stereotypic inferences.
- ◆ **Perspective taking:** Imagining oneself to be a member of a stereotyped group increases psychological closeness to the stereotyped group, which ameliorates automatic group-based evaluations.
- ◆ **Increasing opportunities for contact:** Increased contact between groups can reduce implicit bias through a wide variety of mechanisms, including altering their images of the group or by directly improving evaluations of the group.

These data “provide the first evidence that a controlled, randomized intervention can produce enduring reductions in implicit bias.” The findings have been replicated and further studies will be in print in 2015.



### Preventing Implicit Bias from Affecting Behavior

To the extent that debiasing is an uphill challenge in light of the tenacity of negative stereotypes and attitudes about race, institutions can also establish practices to prevent these biases from seeping into decision-making. Jerry Kang and a group of researchers developed the following list of interventions that have been found to be constructive:

- ◆ **Doubt objectivity:** Presuming oneself to be objective actually tends to increase the role of implicit bias; teaching people about non-conscious thought processes will lead people to be skeptical of their own objectivity and better able to guard against biased evaluations.
- ◆ **Increase motivation to be fair:** Internal motivations to be fair, rather than fear of external judgments, tends to decrease biased actions.
- ◆ **Improve conditions of decision-making:** Implicit biases are a function of automaticity (what Daniel Kahneman refers to as “thinking fast”). “Thinking slow” by 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 patterns of behavior are leading to racially disparate outcomes. Once one is aware that decisions or behavior are having disparate outcomes, it is then possible to consider whether the outcomes are linked to bias.

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### Interventions to Reduce Racial Anxiety

The mechanisms to reduce racial anxiety are related to the reduction of implicit bias – but are not identical. In our view, combining interventions that target both implicit bias and racial anxiety will be vastly more successful than either in isolation.

- ◆ *Direct intergroup contact:* Direct interaction between members of different racial and ethnic groups can alleviate intergroup anxiety, reduce bias, and promote more positive intergroup attitudes and expectations for future contact.
- ◆ *Indirect forms of intergroup contact:* When people observe positive interactions between members of their own group and another group (vicarious contact) or become aware that members of their group have friends in another group (extended contact), they report lower bias and anxiety, and more positive intergroup attitudes.

### Stereotype Threat Interventions

Most of these interventions were developed in the context of the threat experienced by people of color and women linked to stereotypes of academic capacity and performance, but they may also be translatable to whites who fear confirming the stereotype that they are racist.

- ◆ *Social belonging intervention:* Providing students with survey results showing that upper-year students of all races felt out of place when they began but that the feeling abated over time has the effect of protecting students of color from assuming that they do not belong on campus due to their race and helping them develop resilience in the face of adversity.

- ◆ *Wise criticism:* Giving feedback that communicates both high expectations and a confidence that an individual can meet those expectations minimizes uncertainty about whether criticism is a result of racial bias or favor (attributional ambiguity). If the feedback is merely critical, it may be the product of bias; if feedback is merely positive, it may be the product of racial condescension.
- ◆ *Behavioral scripts:* Setting set forth clear norms of behavior and terms of discussion can reduce racial anxiety and prevent stereotype threat from being triggered.
- ◆ *Growth mindset:* Teaching people that abilities, including the ability to be racially sensitive, are learnable/incremental, rather than fixed has been useful in the stereotype threat context because it can prevent any particular performance from serving as “stereotype confirming evidence.”
- ◆ *Value-affirmation:* Encouraging students to recall their values and reasons for engaging in a task helps students maintain or increase their resilience in the face of threat.
- ◆ *Remove triggers of stereotype threat on standardized tests:* Removing questions about race or gender before a test, and moving them to after a test, has been shown to decrease threat and increase test scores for members of stereotyped groups.

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