Neuroscience and Racism

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Outline

• Introductions
• Implicit Imagery exercise
  – Response/ Reflection
• Empirical Studies
  – How the brain responds and reacts to race
• Experiential Exercise
• Debrief- comments/ discussion
• Further Questions
Forms of Racism

- Explicit Racism
- Implicit Racism
  - Micro-aggressors, some types of institutional racism
  - Implicit Association Test (IAT)
- Explicit and Implicit attitudes about race are not the same:
  - Implicit attitudes are formed by more development events, whereas explicit attitudes were created by more recent events (Rudman, Phelan, & Heppen, 2007).
  - Implicit attitudes are developed more through associative learning, whereas explicit attitudes develop from a reflective learning process (Smith & Decoster, 2000)
Baron & Banaji, 2006

• Implicit Attitudes toward race

• Explicit Attitudes toward race
IS YOUR BABY RACIST?
EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF DISCRIMINATION
FROM 'NURTURESHOCK'
BY PG BRONSON & ASHLEY MERRYMAN

PLUS:
A DIPLOMAT'S POST-9/11 DIARY
THE GEOPOLITICS OF GOLF
'FRANKENSTEIN' REVISITED
Implicit Attitudes Towards Race

• Asking if your baby is racist seems like a silly question, unless we understand that racial bias can develop without one’s conscious consent.

• Children’s attitudes towards race develop by being absorbed into social norms around them.

• We are all exposed to images like the following:
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Average results in 1-3 weeks of daily use, based on clinical testing. In home use testing, consumers noticed visible improvement after 1 week. Photos show select clinical improvement at 3 weeks.
Implicit Attitudes Towards Race

- Attitudes about race appear to have a valence different than other categorical stereotypes
  - Gender and Race attitudes in children with Williams syndrome (Santos, Meyer-Lindenberg, Deruelle, 2010)
- Williams Syndrome: A neurodevelopmental disorder marked by an absence of social fear
  - intact gender stereotypes
  - no racial stereotypes
Developing Racial Bias

• It appears race elicits fear unlike other stereotypes
• Racial attitudes likely develop through associative learning
  – A process similar to fear conditioning
• Our environment consists of many implicit images with the theme: MINORITIES = FEAR
• Fear conditioning is the strongest type of conditioning (Öhman, & Mineka, 2001).
FEELING GOOD IS VERY IMPORTANT.}

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Reactions

- What emotions are evoked when you see these images?
- How might younger children interpret these images?
Implicit Stereotypes

– Research breaks down into implicit stereotypes down into two categories (Amodio, 2008, Amodio & Devine, 2006)

  • Non-evaluative: Cognitive based
    • Activates Left posterior prefrontal cortex (PFC)

  • Evaluative: Emotionally based
    – Makes good/bad judgments
      • amygdala activation
Dual Processing Theories

- Two brain systems simultaneously exist for processing material (Lieberman, Jarcho, & Satpute, 2004)
- C system: more reflective, thoughtful, cognition based, expresses explicit attitudes
  - Uses: lateral PFC, posterior parietal cortex, and the hippocampus
- X system: more reflexive, emotion based, expresses implicit attitudes
  - Uses: ventromedial PFC, basal ganglia, and amygdala

C-system regions displayed are the lateral prefrontal cortex (C1), hippocampus and medial temporal lobe (C2), and the posterior parietal cortex (C3). X-system regions displayed are the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (X1), nucleus accumbens of the basal ganglia (X2), amygdala (X3) and the lateral temporal cortex (X4).
In Group & Out Group Effect

• Associating races with fear and stigma creates an in grouping and out grouping effect
  – When certain races are seen as bad, and we want to disassociate ourselves from them
  – Kenneth and Mamie Clark dolls study

• These groupings change the way we empathize others
  – Social exclusion of friend -
    – Dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) activated
  – Social exclusion of other -
    – Ventral Medial PFC activated (Meyer et al., 2012)
  – Empathy circuitry which involves the anterior cingulate cortex and anterior insula shows increased activation when same race individuals are in pain vs. other race individuals (Xu et al., 2009)
    – Indicating that we have less emotional empathy for those in our out groups
  – Thus creates an environment where the in group race has less empathy for the out group race
We are quicker to associate a black face with a gun and a white face with a tool (Payne, 2006).

Black faces as opposed to white faces cause an initial elevation in amygdala activity:
- Greater startle activity in response to black faces.

Then followed by activity in the dorsolateral PFC (BA 9) and the ACC (BA 32) area:
- These areas are considered important for modulation of amygdala activity (Cunningham et al., 2004).
- Implicit racial bias = activity in the dorsolateral PFC and ACC.
- Possibly controlling for the initial amygdala response (Richeson et al., 2003).
Neural Correlates of Seeing Race: Two Systems

- This system helps us inhibit our fear reactions to race

From:
Controlling Bias

• Not a conscious process: individuals are unaware of their control of their implicit racial bias
  – Many assume they have no bias
  – Yet most individuals do hold an implicit racial bias

• Problems of the “post racial society” (see Klein, 2009)
  – Refers to a society were racial inequalities don’t exist
  – Denial of implicit racial bias

• Marilyn Davenport’s (Orange County CA, politician) response to racist e-mail she sent:
  – “Oh, come on! Everybody who knows me knows that I am not a racist. It was a joke. I have friends who are black. Besides, I only sent it to a few people–mostly people I didn’t think would be upset by it.”
Shame Limits Change

• Holding racial bias is not social accepted
• Most of us would prefer to assume that we hold no racial bias
• Actual self (bias) - expected self (no bias) = shame
• When faced with shame we engage in self denial- which is exactly where our “post racial society” has left us
Changing Bias

Race based preference

Avoid experiences

Shame

Denial

No shame

Create experiences to change bias

Changes in race based preferences
Changing Attitudes Toward Race

• Take a multicultural class? (Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001)
  – Education: presentation of material
    • Changes - explicit racial attitudes
    • No change - implicit racial attitudes
  – Experience: having a black professor and classroom peers
    • No Change- explicit racial attitudes
    • Change - implicit racial attitudes
Changing Attitudes Toward Race

• Changing implicit attitudes towards race has little to do with providing individuals information on race and discrimination, and is more about providing positive experiences with different races
Person of the Group Therapist (Abernethy, 1998)

- Cultural Background
- Personal Journey
- Countertransference Issues
- Training Socialization
- Models
Critical Questions

• Are groups often afraid to address the topic of race in therapy?
  – What can we do as therapists to facilitate this process?
  – What preparation is helpful for leaders and members?
Questions for Consideration (Dalal, 1993)

• What does the patient gain or avoid by focusing on race?
• What is being communicated by highlighting this difference?
• What does the leader resist by considering solely and internal dynamic interpretation?
• What does the leader gain?
• Why might it be hard for the leader to hear this communication?
Questions for Reflection (adapted from Pinderhughes, 1999)

• What is your ethnic background?
• What do you like about your ethnic group?
• What do you dislike about your ethnic group?
• What is your first experience with feeling different? Please think of a specific situation.
Opportunities

• Prepare for a culturally diverse group
• Vigilance for strong prejudices
• Importance of diverse voices and assess tolerance
• Broad norms that take cultural values into account (e.g., parental involvement in adulthood, openness, and directness)
• Respect for religious, ethnic, and racial background

Abernethy (2002); Salvendy (1999)
Questions for Reflection (adapted from Pinderhughes, 1999)

• Please share your earliest images of race or color?
• What information were you given about how to deal with racial issues?
• Who is the most powerful influence on how you deal with racial issues?
• What do you feel might be most helpful to you in addressing your implicit racial bias?
References


References (Cont.)


