

What Lies Beneath: Implicit Bias in Healthcare

As much as we, as healthcare professionals, believe in and support the concept of equity in the care we provide, we are just as saddled with deeply embedded stereotypes as anyone else. We all carry implicit biases – learned but unconscious views about particular people. To provide better patient care and improve outcomes, we can learn to recognize and reduce our unintentional preconceptions.

This CE course is relevant to all healthcare professionals. It was originally published by Elite Learning in video format. The following transcript of the podcast has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Episode 1 – What Is Implicit Bias?

In parallel to our conscious efforts to provide high-quality, equitable care to all patients, there's something else going on: an unconscious tendency toward stereotyping people. How does this happen? When does it start? An expert explains.

Guest

Benjamin D. Reese, Jr., PsyD

- Clinical psychologist
- More than 50 years' experience working on issues of race, diversity, and implicit bias
- President and CEO of BenReese, LLC, a global diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism company
- Former Vice President for Institutional Equity and Chief Diversity Officer, Duke University and Duke University Health System

Host

Juliette Blount, MSN, ANP

- Experienced speaker and educator in the areas of racial health disparities and health equity
- Adult nurse practitioner with more than 30 years of clinical experience
- Alumna, Duke-Johnson & Johnson Nurse Leadership Program
- Community education volunteer on empowering healthcare consumers

Reviewer

Lisa Simani, APRN, MS, ACNP

- Editor, Nurse Regulatory/Compliance Planner for Elite Learning
- 20 years of publishing experience
- Lead author of peer-reviewed articles for print- and web-based nursing continuing education provider companies

Episode Key Points

Implicit bias in healthcare is historically rooted in pseudoscience (1:53)

- African slaves were considered property and rated by any physical defects.
- Slaves in America:
 - Believed to be less than human
 - Believed to inherently have thicker skin, thicker skulls, fewer nerve endings, diminished lung capacity, and greater libido than White people
 - Believed to be capable of enduring more pain than White people
 - Subjected to abusive healthcare experiments with little attempt to manage pain
- Subtle, implicit notions about Black people continue to be deeply embedded in American culture.
- Other subtle, implicit notions about gender, sexual orientation, and cultural differences are also embedded in American culture.

Definition of implicit bias (8:19)

- Also called unconscious bias
- Learned automatic stereotypes about characteristics such as:
 - Race
 - Complexion
 - Height
 - Weight
 - Perceived sexual orientation
 - Actions
 - Manner of speaking
- Deeply ingrained from past experience
- Potential to influence behavior
- Can be managed or reduced
- Often exists:
 - Beneath conscious awareness
 - Contrary to conscious beliefs
 - Occurs in parallel with explicit bias
- Implicit bias is:
 - Unconscious
 - Effortless
 - Out of awareness
 - Automatic
 - Activated involuntarily
 - Uses associative memory
- Explicit bias is:
 - Conscious
 - Effortful
 - Controlled
 - Aware
 - Deliberative
 - Intentional

Foundation of implicit bias (10:48)

- Begins with differential preferences developed during infancy
 - 4 weeks: Female over male
 - 9 months: Same complexion over different complexion
 - 10 months: Same language over different language
- Subtlety communicated by adults to children by such values as:
 - The way someone looks
 - The way someone sounds
 - Body type

Implications for healthcare (26:29)

- Research indicates potential impact on:
 - Choice of provider
 - Patient-provider communication
 - Treatment (high-discretion procedures)
 - Assumptions of compliance with provider recommendations
 - Work and learning environment

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Resources

[National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing](#)

[Institute for Healthcare Improvement: How to Reduce Implicit Bias](#)

[Project Implicit – Harvard Implicit Association Test](#)

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