Mindfulness and bias

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What is mindfulness?

Awareness of the present moment without distraction or judgement:
• your own thoughts and feelings
• physical sensations

Taking breaks from ‘living in your head’
Not operating on autopilot

Mindfulness ≠ meditation
What is unconscious bias?

• A stereotype about a certain group
• Unconscious and automatic process
• Reflects the associations we learn from the culture we grow up in

[Image: XKCD]
Unconscious biases limit people’s potential and prevent us from making the best decisions.
Mindfulness and bias

• Mindfulness meditation caused a decrease in implicit race and age bias as measured by implicit association tests (Leuke & Gibson, 2014)
  • A follow up study showed white participants who did mindfulness meditation were more likely to trust Black people in a ‘trust game’

• Practicing lovingkindness meditation (LKM) reduced bias against homeless people, but discussing the principles of lovingkindness did not (Kang et al, 2014)
  • LKM training made participants five times more likely to offer their seat to a stranger in visible distress than those who had not received LKM training (Condon et al, 2013)

• Mindfulness meditation reduced biased language choices in favour of one’s in-group and against one’s out-group (Tincher et al, 2015)
Mindfulness and bias

• Compassion and non-judgement
• Decreases amygdala reactivity
• Opposite of autopilot
Using mindfulness to interrupt bias

• Incorporate regular mindfulness practices
  • Formal: meditation, yoga
  • Informal: notice every time you stand up from your chair, change where you work or the routes you take

• Do 5-10 minute mindfulness session before making important decisions

• Take a short break between tasks and don’t multitask
Any questions?
Further reading

• Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias: The Role of Reduced Automaticity of Responding (Leuke & Gibson, 2014)

• The nondiscriminating heart: lovingkindness meditation training decreases implicit intergroup bias (Kang et al, 2014)

• Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering (Condon et al, 2013)

• Mindful Attention Reduces Linguistic Intergroup Bias (Tincher et al, 2015)

• Three Ways Mindfulness Can Make You Less Biased

• Can meditation reduce implicit bias? How mindfulness may be an important step for individual reflection