Implicit Bias and Moral Responsibility: Does Ingroup Membership Matter?

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Implicit Bias and Moral Responsibility: Does Ingroup Membership Matter?

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Abstract

Implicit bias seems to be at the heart of a number of pressing societal problems. Efforts have been made to reduce bias through spreading information about implicit attitudes and implementing bias training programs. To adequately address these issues, though, greater attention needs to be given to how individuals process and respond to information about implicit bias. The current study explored moral judgments of behaviors stemming from implicit bias judgments, with a focus on gender-based discrimination. We also considered how ingroup status (sharing the same gender as the perpetrator) may affect these judgments. Participants read a short scenario about a man or woman who exhibited either implicit or explicit bias toward the opposite gender; participants then reported their judgments of the perpetrator's moral responsibility. Results revealed that less responsibility was attributed to behavior stemming from implicit (relative to explicit) bias. Implicit bias reduced responsibility regardless of whether or not the perpetrator was an ingroup member (same gender as the participant). Additionally, both male and female participants held the male perpetrator more responsible for his actions than the female perpetrator. This research provides a clearer picture of how people evaluate implicit bias, which is central to understanding why implicitly biased behaviors often result in minor consequences for the perpetrators. Future research should seek to more fully understand how individuals process and respond to information regarding implicit bias in an effort to reduce any potential negative consequences of spreading such information and construct the most effective methods for reducing bias.

Keywords: implicit bias, moral responsibility, ingroup bias

Implicit Bias and Moral Responsibility: Does Ingroup Status Matter?

Psychological research has generated a large body of research examining the phenomenon of implicit attitudes. Researchers have sought to define and describe implicit attitudes (Wilson et al., 2000), and more recently, research has turned to documenting instances of biased behaviors driven by these attitudes and constructing programs to reduce such bias (Lai et al., 2013). These programs aim to educate individuals about implicit biases and implement training procedures to combat them. However, it seems that finding a solution to this issue is not so simple given the recent research that has noted reduced judgments of responsibility when biased behavior is described as stemming from implicit, rather than explicit, bias (Cameron et al., 2010; Daumeyer et al., 2019). The educational efforts that aim to reduce bias may actually reduce judgments of accountability in response to this bias; since increasing accountability has the potential to reduce biased behavior (Nadler et al., 2014), this effect is counterproductive. The current study sought to expand on these previous findings by examining whether or not they would extend to another domain (gender-based bias) and including a consideration of motivated moral reasoning based on ingroup bias (shared gender identity). The goal of this study was to assess the strength of the observed effect. In other words, we hoped to determine if attributing biased behavior to implicit attitudes would also reduce judgments of responsibility in a domain not previously studied and if this effect withstands the influence of other well-documented motivations. The larger goal of such research is to understand how people process information about implicit bias so that programs can be implemented to reduce it without leading to perceptions of reduced responsibility and accountability.

Implicit Attitudes

Implicit attitudes have been conceptualized as associations formed as a result of long-term

exposure to particular concepts. In other words, repeated exposure to paired concepts translates

to a mental representation of the relationship between them. Implicit attitudes are influenced by

information that has not been subjected to higher-order processing, and they seem to be

unaffected by explicit cognition (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Sloman, 1996). Once they

are formed, they are then activated automatically whenever the individual encounters the entities

involved in the learned association. An individual's mere exposure to that object again will

automatically trigger the related concepts (Fazio et al., 1986). Since the development of an

implicit attitude seems to be a long-term process, it is thought that changing such attitudes is also

a long-term process of slow-learning (Rydell & McConnell, 2006). Some researchers maintain

that one defining characteristic of implicit attitudes is that they reside outside of conscious

awareness (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and informational materials developed with the goal of

reducing bias typically describe these attitudes as being unconscious as well (see Kirwan

Institute; UCLA; Project READY).

While explicit attitudes seem to shape more deliberate intentions and behaviors, implicit

attitudes have been found to affect spontaneous behaviors (Rydell & McConnell, 2006).

Sometimes split-second decision-making is guided by implicit attitudes and these decisions have

the potential to cause harmful consequences (Brownstein, 2015). Inspired by real-life, racially

charged events, such as the shooting of unarmed Amadou Diallo, Correll et al. (2002) sought to

examine the relationship between race of the target and the actions of police officers. They found

that participants exhibited a shooter bias in response to Black targets, and they propose that the

implicit association between Black individuals and aggression, which has been formed by exposure to this stereotype, facilitates this effect. The researchers found that individuals who did not explicitly express or endorse racial bias (Study 3) and Black participants (Study 4) still demonstrated implicit bias on this task. There was no significant correlation between explicit prejudice and the shooter bias, meaning it was implicit, and not explicit, attitudes that predicted the behavioral outcomes. While this research was inspired by police brutality, we must note that this sample did not include police officers. A further examination of this effect that utilized a sample of officers found that the effect was diminished due to the officers' expertise (Correll et al., 2014).

Implicit attitudes have also been shown to predict discriminatory behavior as observed in participant-experimenter interactions; individuals who demonstrated greater implicit racial bias as measured using the Implicit Associations Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) were more likely to exhibit negative behaviors, body language, and speech towards a Black experimenter (McConnell & Leibold, 2001). In addition to these research methods typically used to examine implicit bias, Eberhardt et al. (2004) conducted an examination of visual processing. Study 1 demonstrated that viewing Black faces lowered the threshold for detecting crime-relevant objects. Studies 2-4 showed that Black stereotype priming led to biased attention toward Black faces. This occurred in both undergraduate students and police officers. This suggests that while previous research used the typical participant (undergraduate students), racial biases are not limited to this population. It also demonstrates that racial biases can be observed not only in split-second decision-making, but also in the processes of attention and perception.

In line with findings from the research on shooter bias, Project Implicit explains that their data show that members of other stigmatized groups, including gay individuals and older people, demonstrate bias against their own groups as well. Additionally, Ramos et al. (2016) found that women also exhibited implicit gender bias toward women. These findings demonstrate that individuals tend to internalize stereotypes and biases regarding groups to which they belong themselves, providing evidence for the prevalence and strength of implicit biases. This also suggests that findings regarding racial bias will likely emerge for other types of bias as well.

In sum, there is considerable evidence that supports the conceptualization of implicit biases as unconscious associations and demonstrates the behavioral impacts they may have. Studies have shown that implicit measures reveal attitudes not expressed explicitly, and these implicit attitudes can predict individuals' behaviors. Additionally, there have been both empirical studies and applied cases that document the potential consequences of such behaviors. Considering the outcomes that implicit biases may generate, it becomes necessary to consider how the individuals causing such outcomes will be perceived in terms of responsibility and how these views impact judgments of accountability.

Moral Responsibility

Moral responsibility has been a topic of longstanding debate among philosophers and legal scholars (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998). While many factors may play a role in determining one's moral agency, there is some degree of consensus about the conditions that must be met for an individual to be held accountable for their actions. Within the field of philosophy, some argue that the individual must be aware of the moral significance of their actions and must be able to

express themselves as moral agents in order to be considered morally responsible for their

actions (Kelly & Roedder, 2008; Levy, 2014). In other words, people must explicitly understand

the implications and consequences of their actions and possess the ability to control those

actions.

When it comes to assessing responsibility and accountability in a legal sense, the American

legal system has maintained the importance of proving the existence of a "guilty mind" and

"guilty act." The concept of intentionality plays a major role in determining guilt and deciding on

appropriate legal consequences; mens rea, or the mental state of intention, is considered a

necessary element of a crime before an individual can be held responsible for their actions

(Thomas & Bishop, 1987). While the discussion surrounding moral agency and responsibility

has primarily fallen into the domains of philosophy and law, it becomes important to consider

these ideas alongside the findings of continuing psychological research. If we accept these

requirements for accountability, an individual should not be held accountable for actions that

were driven by implicit (unconscious and uncontrollable) attitudes.

While these philosophical and legal discussions involve more formal approaches to moral

responsibility, psychological research has also sought to explore the topic of moral responsibility

in terms of lay theories about moral responsibility. Previous research has found that, in line with

philosophers and legal scholars, people's lay judgments of moral agency emphasize conscious

intentions (e.g., Gray, Young, and Waytz, 2012). Germane to the current investigation, research

has found that explaining an individual's behavior as being a result of implicit, rather than

explicit, attitudes reduces participants' judgments of moral accountability (Daumeyer et al.,

2019). This effect was observed across different domains and biases, and remained consistent

regardless of the level of harm that resulted from the biased behavior. Specifically, in three

different studies, these researchers presented participants with scenarios involving doctors

behaving in a biased manner towards their patients based on their politicized health behaviors

(gun ownership and the use of recreational marijuana) or their age, and police officers behaving

in a biased way towards racial minority individuals. Across all three of their studies, participants

in the implicit bias condition reported less accountability as compared to the participants in the

explicit bias condition, even when this bias resulted in a high level of harm. Furthermore,

research has shown that characterizing implicit attitudes as unconscious and uncontrollable,

rather than simply automatically activated and difficult to control, also creates a difference in

accountability judgments (Cameron et al., 2010). These findings support the idea that one's

awareness and intentions are weighed heavily when it comes to making judgments about their

moral accountability.

Ingroup Bias & Motivated Moral Reasoning

While previous research seems to demonstrate clear ideas about implicit attitudes and

judgment of accountability, questions remain about who is making these judgments and for

whom these judgment patterns emerge. It would be beneficial for research to consider individual

differences in terms of certain motivations in relation to moral reasoning and judgments. For

example, one's internal motivation to respond without prejudice can lead them to hold

perpetrators more accountable (Daumeyer et al., 2019), and individuals may be motivated by

their personal beliefs to utilize certain moral principles to rationalize their judgments (e.g.

liberals were more likely to endorse a consequentialist approach when the victim had a

stereotypically white name rather than a stereotypically Black name; Uhlmann et al., 2009).

Ingroup bias may also act as a powerful motivator; individuals become more defensive when an

ingroup member commits a moral violation than when an outgroup member does (Van Der Toorn

et al., 2015), and they are more likely to justify immoral acts when committed by ingroup but not

outgroup members (Tarrant et al., 2012). Additionally, ingroup bias leads to considering ingroup

members as possessing more morality than outgroup members (LeVine & Campbell, 1972), and

identity fusion, or a strong sense of "oneness" with their group, can lead individuals to engage in

personally costly, pro-group behaviors (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015). Considering these findings

on motivated moral reasoning and the evidence that ingroup bias may function as a powerful

motivator in situations involving morality, it seems reasonable to expect that judgments of moral

responsibility in response to implicitly biased behaviors would also be influenced by individuals'

motivations.

Current Study

The purpose of this study was to build on previous findings by examining the relationship

between ingroup status and judgments of moral responsibility in response to implicitly biased

behaviors. While this research was inspired by the issue of racial bias and a lack of

accountability for instances of such bias, this study instead focused on gender. The implicit bias

demonstrated in the passages we used was based on gender, and we established ingroup status by

comparing the participant's gender to the gender of the characters in the passages. To our

knowledge, at the time of designing this study, research had not yet included an exploration of

these variables. Previous studies had focused on bias based on age, politicized health behaviors,

and race. We expected that the main effect of bias condition that has been noted in previous

research will extend to the domain of gender as well. We also predicted that participants would

consider perpetrators to be more responsible and express a greater desire to hold them

accountable when they are an outgroup member (and the victim is an ingroup member). This

would likely result from a combination of the tendency to favor ingroup members and the

tendency to demonstrate unfavorable evaluations toward outgroup members. Additionally, just as

previous research has found effects of various motivations on reasoning and moral judgments, it

is expected that an individual's motivation to favor members of their ingroup will moderate the

effect of bias type on judgments of moral responsibility. Specifically, the effect of bias type will

be weaker when the perpetrator in the moral transgression is an outgroup member and the victim

is an ingroup member. To restate, our hypotheses for the current study were as follows:

1. There will be a main effect of bias type on judgments of moral responsibility so that less
   responsibility will be attributed to implicit bias.

2. There will be a two-way interaction between participant and perpetrator genders with
   participants attributing less accountability to perpetrators that share their gender (i.e. an
   ingroup member).

3. There will be a three-way interaction between bias type, participant gender, and
   perpetrator gender demonstrated by a reduced effect of bias type when the perpetrator is
   of the opposite gender relative to the participant (i.e. an outgroup member). We expect
   that judgments of responsibility will be high in both the implicit and explicit bias
   conditions when the perpetrator is an outgroup member, and there will be a larger

difference in judgments between bias conditions when the perpetrator is an ingroup

member.

Method

Design

The current study employed a 2 (bias condition: implicit, explicit) x 2 (participant gender:

male, female) x 2 (perpetrator gender: male, female) between-subjects design. Each participant

was randomly assigned to one of the two bias conditions and one of the two gender conditions.

Each participant was given a passage that describes a male or female demonstrating gender-

based discrimination (toward a member of the opposite sex), which is explained as stemming

from either implicit or explicit bias. Responses to the gender identity question included in the

study reflect the ingroup or outgroup status of the perpetrator relative to the participant.

Participants

The sample consisted of university students, who were recruited from two universities in

the Northeastern United States. Some participants received credit in exchange for their

participation. Any participants that did not complete the study, completed it in a very short time

period, spent an unusually long time on the passages, and/or failed the attention check were

removed from the sample (42 Ps in total). After assessing the demographics of the sample, any

participants that indicated they were non-binary/genderfluid or preferred not to answer the item

regarding gender were also removed (9 Ps). This was done in order to establish firm ingroup/

outgroup status between the participant and the individuals involved in the passage they read.

The final sample consisted of 245 participants. There were 189 participants who identified as female (77.1%), and 56 who identified as male (22.9%). The mean age of the sample was 20.30 years old (*SD* = 2.64; 2 participants did not provide their age). Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 36 years old, but the largest age group was 18-year-olds (27.8%) and the majority of the sample fell between the ages of 18 and 21 years of age (78.4%). The majority of the sample (66.1%) identified as White (see Table 1 for full list of demographic information).

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Gender			
Female	189 (77.1%)		
Male	56 (22.9%)		
Race/Ethnicity			
White	162 (66.1%)		
Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin	32 (13.1%)		
Black or African American	23 (9.4%)		
Asian	12 (4.9%)		
Asian & White	6 (2.4%)		
Hispanic/Latino/of Spanish Origin & White	4 (1.6%)		
American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native & Hispanic/Latino/of Spanish Origin	2 (.82%)		
Black or African American & Hispanic/Latino/of Spanish Origin	2 (.82%)		
Black or African American & White	2 (.82%)		
Age	M = 20.30 (SD = 2.64)	Min. = 18	Max. = 36

Materials

Implicit and Explicit Bias Conditions

The passages used in this study were based on the passages used by Cameron et al. (2010), which were modified to reflect the distinctions that have been made between implicit and explicit attitudes, rather than distinguishing between the unconscious and automatic theories of implicit bias. Each participant received one passage that describes a person in charge of promotions at a company, who behaves in a biased way based on gender. In the implicit bias condition that included a male perpetrator, the passage read as follows:

> "John is in charge of promotions at a major company. He is supposed to decide between various candidates on the basis of merit.
>
> Consciously, John thinks people should be treated equally, regardless of gender. Despite this, John has a sub-conscious dislike for women. He is unaware of having this dislike, but if he knew, he would disagree with this feeling because he sincerely believes in equality. This sub-conscious dislike drives his behavior in ways he does not know about.
>
> When John decides whether or not to promote an employee, he tries to decide only on merit. But because he is unaware of this sub-conscious dislike, he is not always successful at preventing it from influencing his judgment. As a result, John sometimes unfairly denies women promotions."

Participants in the explicit bias condition with a male perpetrator instead received the following passage:

> "John is in charge of promotions at a major company. He is supposed to decide between various candidates on the basis of merit.

Upon reflection, John thinks men may be better suited for such promotions. John sometimes finds that he has a gut feeling of dislike toward women. He is aware of having this dislike, and does not strongly or sincerely believe in equality. This feeling of dislike drives his behavior in ways that he sometimes has difficulty controlling.

When John decides whether or not to promote an employee, he is supposed to decide only on merit. But because he has this conscious dislike and it can be difficult to control these feelings, he is not always successful at preventing them from influencing his judgment. As a result, John sometimes unfairly denies women promotions."

The participants assigned to the female perpetrator/male victim conditions were given the same passages, but "John" was simply changed to "Jane" and any gendered language included in the passages reflected this change.

Moral Responsibility Scale

Following the passage, judgements of moral responsibility, accountability, blame, and punishment were measured using the Moral Responsibility Scale established in previous research (Cameron et al., 2010). The scale, which has a 5-point Likert-type scaling (from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), includes the following items:

"John is morally responsible for his treating women unfairly"

"John should be held accountable for treating women unfairly"

"John should not be punished for treating women unfairly" (reverse coded)

"John should not be blamed for treating women unfairly" (reverse coded)

Again, the gendered language was modified for participants in the female perpetrator conditions.

The internal reliability of this scale was found to be acceptable (Cronbach's α = .65). For our

analyses, we utilized average responses across the four items.

Ingroup Identification

Immediately following the Moral Responsibility Scale, the extent to which each

participant identifies with the victim and perpetrator was measured with the following items that

were counterbalanced among participants (scored 1 = Not at all to 5 = Very much so):

"To what extent do you feel you could identify with/relate to the females [or males] that

faced discrimination in the passage?"

"To what extent do you feel you could identify with or relate to the female [or male] that

exhibited discrimination in the passage?"

We determined ingroup status based on gender and included these items to assess whether

participants would explicitly report ingroup bias in their sense of identification with the

characters. We expected that individuals would report greater identification with the perpetrator

or victim when those characters were ingroup members.

Measure of Sexism

Participants' sexism was assessed using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick &

Fiske, 1996; See Appendix A). For our analyses, we planned to use participants' total scores from

this scale rather than analyzing their scores from both subsections. In order to bring some

attention away from gender-related beliefs, these items were interspersed with several filler

questions that asked participants about their beliefs regarding other prevalent social issues (See

Appendix B).

Attention Check

Also included in the questionnaire was an attention check, which read "Please respond

'Somewhat Agree' to this item." This, like the filler questions, was set to appear randomly

alongside the ASI items. Any participants who failed the attention check by not responding in

line with this request were removed from the final sample.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study online either through our university's SONA website or

through an anonymous link, which both brought them to our survey on Qualtrics. There they

read one passage about an individual committing a moral violation, which was described as

being based on either implicit or explicit bias (see Materials). The terms "implicit" and "explicit"

were not used in the passages, but the passages explained that the individual was either aware

(explicit bias condition) or unaware (implicit bias condition) of their own bias. The perpetrator in

the passage was identified as male or female. Following the passage, participants responded to

measures that assessed beliefs about responsibility, accountability, punishment, and blame

regarding the biased behavior. They were also asked to indicate to what extent they identify with

or relate to the victim and perpetrator in the passage they read. These items served as a

manipulation check to see if ingroup status led to increased feelings of identification with the

characters. After responding to these measures, participants completed the Ambivalent Sexism

Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This scale was included so that our analyses could account for

the potential sexist beliefs that each participant may have held upon entering the study since the

biased behavior involved in our research was based on gender. Finally, each of the participants

then answered a few questions about their demographics. They were asked to indicate their age,

gender, race, and religious affiliation. Responses to the question about gender identity were used

to determine whether the perpetrator in the given scenario would be considered an ingroup or an

outgroup member in relation to the participant.

Results

Main Analysis

A factorial ANCOVA was conducted to examine the effects of participant gender,

perpetrator gender, and bias type on judgments of moral responsibility with ASI total scores as a

covariate (see Table 2 for an examination of ASI scores). The ASI scores were included so that

we could assess judgments of responsibility for instances of gender-based bias while controlling

for participants' explicit sexism. This analysis showed no significant effect of total ASI scores on

judgments of moral responsibility, $p = .228$.

The factorial ANCOVA revealed a main effect of bias condition, $F(1, 236) = 23.17$, $p <$

.001. Comparing the estimated marginal means from the post-hoc Bonferroni showed that, as

expected, judgments of moral responsibility were higher when the discrimination was described

as stemming from explicit bias (M = 4.02, SE = .073) as compared to implicit bias (M = 3.52, SE

= .074). This replicates previous findings and supports our first hypothesis. However, our second

hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant main effect of participant gender and no

significant interactions between these variables. Unexpectedly, there was also a main effect of

perpetrator gender, F (1, 236) = 19.90, p < .001. Upon further inspection of estimated marginal

means, it was shown that judgments of moral responsibility were higher when the perpetrator

was a male and the victim was a female (M = 4.00, SE = .072) as compared to a female

perpetrator and male victim (M = 3.54, SE = .075). A factorial ANOVA was also conducted, not

accounting for ASI scores, and the patterns remained, so we only present the ANCOVA results

here (see Tables 3 and 4 & Figures 1a and 1b).

Table 2

Assessment of Ambivalent Sexism Inventory Scores

	Total Sample	Male Participants	Female Participants
Average Total Score	1.55 (*SD* = .73)	1.82 (*SD* = .74)	1.47 (*SD* = .71)
Average Hostile Score	1.24 (*SD* = .90)	1.75 (*SD* = .96)	1.09 (*SD* = .82)
Average Benevolent Score	1.85 (*SD* = .85)	1.90 (*SD* = .91)	1.84 (*SD* = .83)

Note: Male participants scored significantly higher than female participants on the total score, t(243) = 3.26, p = .001. For the hostile sexism subsection, again the males scored higher, t(243) = 5.03, p < .001. There were no significant differences on benevolent sexism scores.

Table 3

Factorial ANCOVA: Effects of Participant Gender, Perpetrator Gender, and Bias Condition on Moral Responsibility

Source	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Participant Gender	2.15	.144	0.01
Perpetrator Gender	19.90	.000	0.08
Bias Condition	23.17	.000	0.09
Participant Gender x Bias Condition	2.52	.114	0.01
Participant Gender x Perpetrator Gender	0.71	.400	0.003
Perpetrator Gender x Bias Condition	0.79	.376	0.003
Participant Gender x Perpetrator Gender x Bias Condition	0.02	.892	0.000

Table 4

Estimated Marginal Means for Effects of Bias Condition & Perpetrator Gender on Moral Responsibility

	Mean	Standard Error	95% CI: Lower Bound	95% CI: Upper Bound
Bias Condition				
Implicit Bias	3.52	0.07	3.37	3.67
Explicit Bias	4.02	0.07	3.88	4.16
Perpetrator Gender				
Male	4.00	0.07	3.86	4.14
Female	3.54	0.08	3.39	3.69

Figure 1a

Effects of Bias Type on Judgments of Moral Responsibility

Bias Type
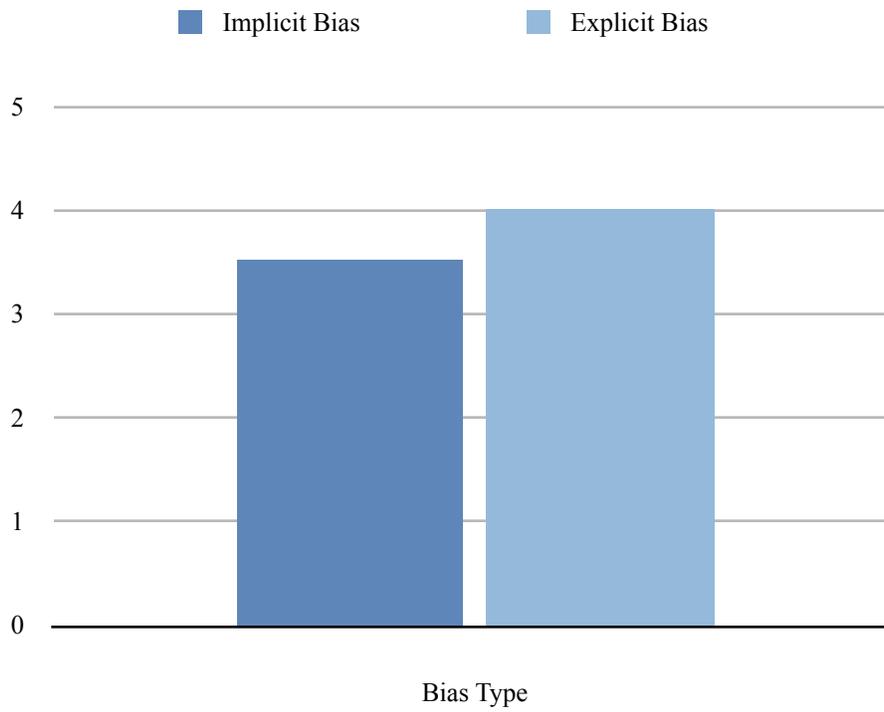
Figure 1b

Effects of Perpetrator Gender on Judgements of Moral Responsibility

Perpetrator Gender
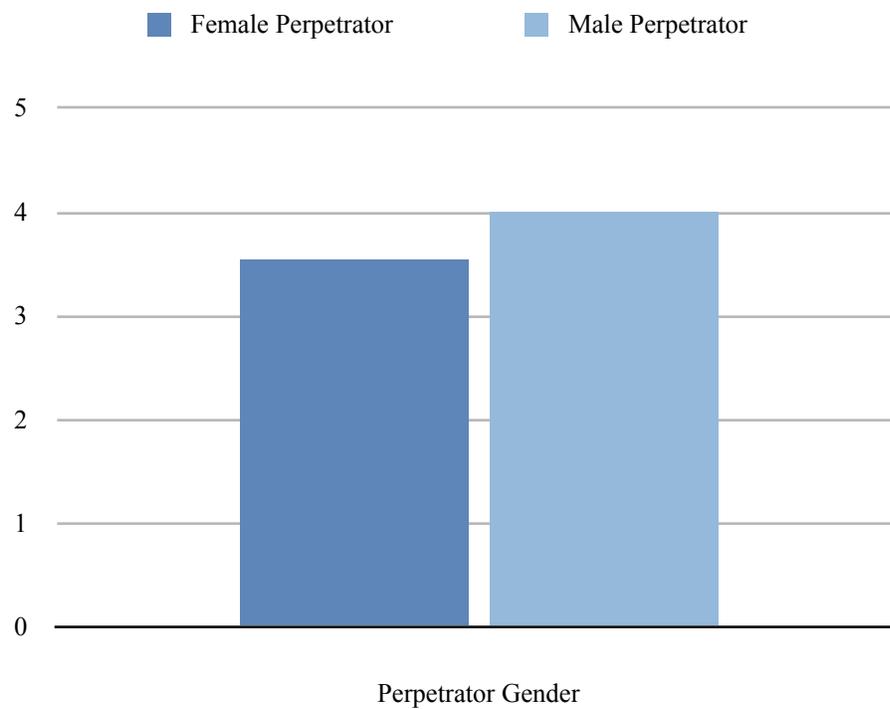
Ingroup Identification

An ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of participant gender on identification

with the perpetrator and victim in the passage. Since one goal of this study was to examine

potential ingroup bias in judgments of moral responsibility, we included items to assess whether

or not participants would explicitly report greater identification with the characters who were

ingroup members (i.e. those who shared their gender). Each participant read one passage that

described a male or female perpetrator (with victims being of the opposite gender), and then they

received one item regarding the perpetrator and one item regarding the victim from the passage

they read that tapped into feelings of shared identity. Only participants who read the passage

detailing a male perpetrator received an item assessing identification with the male perpetrator

and an item regarding a female victim. Among participants who were asked about their

identification with the male perpetrator, we did not observe any significant differences between

male and female participants, $F (1, 60) = .068$, $p = .796$. For the item that asked about

identification with the female victim, which was given alongside the previous item, there also

were no significant differences based on participant gender, $F (1, 60) = .011$, $p = .918$.

Participants who read the passage with the female perpetrator received items assessing their

identification with the female perpetrator and the male victim described in that passage. This

analysis did not reveal significant differences between male and female participants for

identification with the perpetrator, $F (1, 63) = 2.542$, $p = .116$. Lastly, the question that was

paired with this item, which asked about identification with the male victim, also did not reach

significance, $F (1, 63) = .392$, $p = .534$. This analysis showed that ingroup status (shared gender

identity) did not lead to greater feelings of identification with the perpetrator or victim for male

or female participants (see Table 5).

Table 5

Effect of Participant Gender on Identification with Perpetrator & Victim

Target of Identification	Male Participants	Female Participants
Male Perpetrator	M = 1.56, *SD* = .89	M = 1.63, *SD* = .90
Female Victim	M = 3.06, *SD* = 1.24	M = 3.02, *SD* = 1.39
Female Perpetrator	M = 2.36, *SD* = 1.45	M = 3.06, *SD* = 1.46
Male Victim	M = 2.57, *SD* = 1.22	M = 2.80, *SD* = 1.23

Discussion

The current study was designed with three goals in mind: it aimed to replicate previous

findings regarding the effects of bias type on moral judgments, to examine whether or not these

findings would extend to gender-based bias, and to assess the possible moderating effects of

ingroup bias. The first goal was accomplished. We found that people again demonstrated reduced

judgments of moral responsibility and accountability when the biased behavior they observed

was attributed to implicit bias. We did not, however, find the expected results in terms of ingroup

bias. There were no significant effects of ingroup/outgroup status on judgments of moral

responsibility. Furthermore, a pattern emerged that we had not fully expected. While we did not

find significant differences based on participant gender, we did find an effect of perpetrator

gender as participants consistently provided increased judgments of responsibility when the

perpetrator was a man.

During the preparation of this manuscript, a similar study was published (Daumeyer et al.,

2020), which allowed for an insightful point of comparison for our own work. The lack of a main

effect of participant gender that we had found was interesting, given that their study did

document such effects for gender-based discrimination. Additionally, our finding regarding

perpetrator gender, which was not a prediction outlined prior to data collection, was not one that

was found in their research. We suspect these differences may be due to potential differences

between the populations from which we recruited participants. It is possible that differences in

political ideology between the two populations and the different ways that value is placed on

moral foundations may have played a role in their perceptions and reactions to these moral

violations (Graham et al., 2009). However, we do not have the information to confirm nor deny

this speculation. The only difference that we are aware of is a difference in the average age

between the samples; our sample had an average age of 20.30 years, while their average age of

their samples was approximately 36 years of age. This may be indicative of contrasting political

views or other generational differences, but, again, we do not have the data to make any

conclusions about this.

The difference we observed between judgments for male and female perpetrators may be

due to traits that are differentially ascribed to men and women. For example, previous research

has demonstrated that men are perceived as being more agentic while women are seen as more

communal (Williams & Best, 1982). Given the expectation that men possess greater agency,

individuals may then enforce stricter rules for men when it comes to judging their responsibility

and accountability. While being seen as a responsible moral agent typically requires one's

conscious understanding of the implications and consequences of an action and the ability to

control their actions, the idea that men are generally agentic may override this thought process.

People may have higher expectations for a man's ability to exert control over his actions and this

may be the reason for the harsher judgments of responsibility and accountability. On the flip

side, the perception that women are more communal may have also contributed to this effect.

Individuals may experience a greater desire to hold individuals accountable for committing

moral violations against women or feel less compelled to hold women accountable due to their

perceived communal nature. A further examination of why differences between our study and

other research has emerged as well as what variables may account for the differences between

judgments for male and female perpetrators would be beneficial. We suggest including scenarios

in which the perpetrator and victim are of the same gender identity to get a better sense of what

is driving the observed effects.

Finally, contrary to our hypotheses, participants did not provide increased judgments of

responsibility when the perpetrator was an outgroup member, and there was no interaction

between bias type and ingroup status. We speculate that this may be due to the fact that

participants did not seem to strongly identify with the characters in the given story, as shown by

our analysis of the manipulation check. This was slightly surprising given the many studies that

have documented the power of ingroup bias effects, even with the use of the minimal group

paradigm (Tajfel, 1970). It is possible that this was a result of subtyping, in which people do not

identify with particular subgroups within their ingroup because they do not confirm stereotypes

about the group (Richards & Hewstone, 2001). In this case, the woman in the given scenario may

have challenged gender norms and stereotypes by working at a major company, potentially

leading female participants to not view them as true ingroup members. Previous research has

also noted that individuals who exhibit outgroup derogation are less likely to display ingroup

bias towards ingroup members who affiliate with the outgroup (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2015). A

woman in a major company, which people may assume to be run mostly by men and includes a

sexist man in charge of promotions, may be seen as affiliating with the outgroup. However, this

explanation does not account for the lack of ingroup bias effects for male participants.

We would like to note one study that may help to explain both the main effect of

perpetrator gender and supplement our above explanation in regards to the lack of ingroup bias

effects. Rudman & Goodwin (2004) found that favoritism was stronger between women than

men. This difference in bias may have contributed to the differences we observed based on

perpetrator gender. We did not find a main effect of participant gender, but we did find that

participants provided harsher judgments of responsibility when the perpetrator was a man.

Women may have wanted to hold men more accountable for their discrimination since the target

was a fellow woman, but men may not have felt compelled to favor another man.

This area of research would benefit from further examination of the ways in which this

difference in bias could manifest. To further address the concern about participants' identification

with the ingroup members presented to them, perhaps ingroup status would affect judgments if

the ingroup/outgroup distinction was made based on an aspect of identity with which people

would feel more strongly. It is possible that gender is not generally a factor on which people

draw strong ingroup/outgroup lines. For the current work, we simply asked participants to

indicate their gender identity and we included only those who responded with "male" or

"female" in our final sample. This was done to establish clear ingroup boundaries, but it may have been helpful to gather more information and give further consideration to this. More specifically, questions that assessed whether or not participants have given much thought or attributed much value to their gender identity may have been beneficial. Additionally, if we had specifically recruited participants that have such experiences, we may have found more ingroup bias effects. Related to this, research has found that ingroup bias seems to emerge in minimal group situations only when individuals are dependent on the target in some way (Karp et al., 1993). Perhaps this interdependence can be achieved when individuals deeply identify with their gender and, therefore, care deeply about how other members of that gender may influence the group's reputation. It's also possible that participants failed to identify with the characters due to their limited life experience rather than an issue with using gender as an indicator of ingroup membership. Perhaps the passages and identification measures were too context-dependent and students simply couldn't relate to the characters since they likely have not personally experienced the workplace discrimination described in the passage. Future research could examine how ingroup favoritism may emerge in incidents of implicitly biased behavior for certain groups of people. The fact that the findings persisted regardless of ingroup status in our study strengthens the case surrounding the effects of attributing discrimination to implicit bias, though.

Limitations

As with any psychological research, there were some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, our sample consisted of mostly women. This meant that the conditions

that involved a female perpetrator considered an ingroup member or a male perpetrator

considered an outgroup member were quite similar in sample size (46-50 participants in each of

these four conditions), while the conditions that involved a male perpetrator that was an ingroup

member or a female perpetrator that was an outgroup member were also similar to each other in

terms of size but much smaller than the other conditions (12-15 participants in each of these four

conditions). Secondly, as with many studies, our sample consisted of undergraduate students.

This could be viewed as a limitation in that it may not generalize to other populations, but it is

possible that it has actually contributed to our further understanding of the studied phenomenon

since our results differed from a similar study that utilized a different method of participant

recruitment. However, given that we do not have extensive information on participant beliefs, we

can only speculate on the reasons why the findings differed between samples. As in other recent

research (Daumeyer et al., 2020), we did not find the expected ingroup bias effects. Our study

would have benefitted from piloting and modifying materials to ensure that this was because bias

type was strong enough to override other motivations rather than a simple lack of identification

with the characters in the given scenarios.

Conclusion

The increasing interest in research on implicit bias in recent years reflects the widespread

prejudice and discrimination that still exists in the present day. As Daumeyer et al. (2017)

explain, "[R]ather than looking toward implicit bias as a cause of societal inequality, perhaps this

model will encourage us to think of implicit bias more like a barometer of inequality—a canary

in the coal mine, so to speak, alerting us to the toxic, suffocating levels of inequality in our

environments." While real-world cases of overt discrimination have seemingly declined

(Schuman et al., 1997), instances of more covert discrimination have not decreased (Sue, 2010),

and split-second decision-making that exhibit the still-relevant prejudice in our society have been

permeating the media (Rogers, 2020; Luscombe, 2019; Desmond-Harris, 2016; Walton, 2015).

This has caused the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice, and implicit bias to come to the forefront.

As expressions of prejudice have shifted, psychological research has also moved away from

examining only explicit bias. Instead, researchers have worked to assess the causes and

consequences of unconscious, implicit attitudes (Kirwan Institute, n.d.). Despite the fact that

research regarding implicit attitudes and judgments of morality is somewhat limited, the findings

seem to point to a consistent set of effects. Individuals have consistently judged perpetrators less

accountable when their moral transgressions are described as being driven by unconscious and

uncontrollable implicit attitudes. This pattern even holds up against ingroup bias and has been

observed in several different domains.

This research has been innovative and informative, yet questions remain. Considering

these elements in a real-world context with real-world legal consequences does not necessarily

point to a simple answer. While it may seem that individuals who engage in behaviors based on

implicit bias cannot or should not be seen as morally responsible and held accountable for their

actions, this is a problematic conclusion. It seems less than ideal to simply merge the

requirements for accountability that have been outlined by philosophers and Western law with

the idea that implicit attitudes are unconscious and uncontrollable; this can become a slippery

slope. Indeed, the majority of killings committed by police never led to any charges against the

police (Mapping Police Violence, 2020), and as evidenced by the current social unrest (see

Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021), a lack of accountability for such implicitly biased

behaviors is not sufficient. Psychological research that works to isolate these different elements

has the potential to offer insight that purely philosophical definitions do not. Working to educate

individuals and construct training programs to reduce implicit biases is certainly an admirable

endeavor, but it is one that may benefit from first taking a step back to better understand how

individuals respond to this information and these programs. All in all, we do not wish to assert

that access to this information is necessarily bad or should be discouraged. Instead, we simply

encourage careful consideration when it comes to spreading information and attempts to reduce

bias. As researchers work to gain greater insight into how individuals make judgments of moral

responsibility in response to implicitly biased behavior, professionals can develop more informed

methods of educating the general public. The goal is to teach people about implicit bias without

creating beliefs that allow individuals to avoid accountability for their biased behavior in the

hopes that education and accountability will work to reduce bias.

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Appendix A

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

Relationships Between Men and Women

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale: 0 = disagree strongly; 1 = disagree somewhat; 2 = disagree slightly; 3 = agree slightly; 4 = agree somewhat; 5 = agree strongly.

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman. B(1)

2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality." H

3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men. B(P)*

4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. H

5. Women are too easily offended. H

6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex. B(I)*

7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men. H*

8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess. B(G)

9. Women should be cherished and protected by men. B(P)

10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them. H

11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men. H

12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores. B(I)

13. Men are complete without women. B(1)*

14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work. H

15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash. H

16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against. H

17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man. B(P)

18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances. H*

19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility. B(G)

20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing in order to provide financially for the women in their lives. B(P)

21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men. H*

22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste. B(G)

Key: H = Hostile Sexism, B = Benevolent Sexism, (P)= Protective Paternalism,

(G)=Complementary Gender Differentiation, (I) = Heterosexual Intimacy, * = reverse-scored

item.

Scoring: The ASI may be used as an overall measure of sexism, with hostile and benevolent

components equally weighted, by simply averaging the score for all items after reversing the

items listed below. The two ASI sub-scales (Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism) may also be

calculated separately. For correlational research, purer measures of HS and BS can be obtained

by using partial correlations (so that the effects of the correlation between the scales is removed).

Reverse the following items: 3, 6, 7, 13, 18, 21.

Hostile Sexism Score = average of the following items: 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21.

Benevolent Sexism Score = average of the following items: 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 22.

Appendix B

The thirteen filler questions that were randomly interspersed with the ASI items consisted of the

following:

"Education has suffered because of the COVID-19 pandemic."

"SUNY New Paltz is handling the pandemic in an effective manner."

"Children need to return to school in-person now before they start to fall behind."

"College students are generally being responsible when it comes to following COVID

guidelines."

"Police departments are implementing effective training programs and procedures in

response to the issue of racially charged police brutality."

"There is not enough being done to combat racism among police officers."

"The issues that the Black Lives Matter movement is bringing attention to is really just a

matter of a few 'bad apples.'"

"There is no such thing as 'reverse racism.'"

"There should be more attention given to the opioid epidemic."

"There is no longer an issue with opioids in our nation."

"As a society, we have overcome the issue of stigma surrounding mental health."

"Health coverage does not adequately take care of mental health."

"Climate change is a real problem that deserves more attention."