

Gendler on Implicit Bias

Gendler's central claim: Living in a society structured by social categories you disavow carries epistemic costs (i.e. costs related to acquiring and spreading knowledge). More specifically, either you must:

- Pay the epistemic cost of failing to encode certain sorts of base-rate or background information about these categories, or
- Expend epistemic energy regulating the inevitable associations that which that information – encoded in ways to guarantee availability – gives rise.

Her Two-Component Background Theory of Cognition

1. Categorization

We have an innate and important tendency to classify things into categories. This simplifies navigating the world, generalizing from past instances, and allows us to assume that objects share properties with others of the same category. (Reminder: Tenenbaum and Tufas) When we classify, we then tend to:

- Accentuate intracategory similarity and inter-category differences
- Apply these categories in a top-down way – maybe directly in perception, definite in directing attention.
- Eventually automatize our classifications: we just classify automatically, and unconsciously.

2. The Implicit Mind

Reminder: system 1 vs. system 2 as two kinds of processes.

Gendler adds: aliefs vs. beliefs as two types of states in a cognitive system. Aliefs are the states that result from system 1 processes, beliefs from system 2 processes.

Aliefs are automatized, associative, affective. They are composed of a representation, an affective component, and a disposition to behavior/motor routine. The Grand Canyon transparent walkway example.

Example:

- Representational Component:
- Affective Component:
- Behavior:

Application to racism (generalizable to sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.)

1. Our culture has racial categories with rich content, and which are central to our society.
2. Because these categories are central to our society, and learned early, racial categorization becomes automatized. [add Mandelbaum here to make this point stronger]
3. Because racial categorization becomes automatized, cultural associations that are part of the rich content of these racial categories turn into aliefs, which are automatically activated and have an affective component.
4. Aliefs and beliefs (explicit endorsement) can come apart: you can disavow these associations, but they are now built into routines in your implicit mind.
5. The result: we get disavowed racism.

Group activity. Gendler identifies four phenomena related to social categorization and implicit cognition that lead to social and epistemic costs. These are: (1) difficulties in cross-race face identification, (2) stereotype threat, (3) cognitive depletion following inter-racial interaction, and (4) base rate neglect to avoid problematic implicit cognition. For one of these, answer:

Phenomenon: _____

- a. What are the epistemic costs?
- b. What are the social, political, and moral costs?
- c. What is the causal mechanism behind the phenomenon?
- d. How can we address this phenomenon? (i.e. how can we interfere with the causal mechanism?)