

1/20/14

Bias Profile

How do systems change the world? This is the thoroughly thought out question that we, the students, were asked to answer this quarter. The first thought that came to mind when I heard it was, “*What? Did we even talk about systems this quarter?*” We did. Systems meaning biases, propaganda, advertising. To me, the question was so broad. It’s the kind of question that follows with a million others like, “*Well what’s considered a system? A Nintendo Wii? Your morning routine? What the hell is a system?*” So I looked it up:

- **Dictionary.com:** an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or unitary whole: *a mountain system; a railroad system.*
- **Google.com:** 1. a set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole, in particular.
2. a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized scheme or method.
- **Merriam-Webster.com:** 1. a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole

I did my research. Systems are everything; the way we perceive others, the way we study in school, the way we’re taught to “do things correctly.” What’s correct to us was also created by us. We’re taught to eat soup with spoons held in our hands because that’s the efficient way to do it as a human. It’s a system, and they surround us every day with each step we take and each thing we do. We live by systems.

I decided to use my parents who are married and have them take the same IAT. I chose them not for convenience, but because they have strongly differing opinions on certain matters. In my

household we've never had a full blown discussion about thoughts on homo or heterosexual preferences. When I say this I mean in terms of anyone being homophobic or not. Just like in any average home with your family, when we host parties and my dad has "the guys" over, they've made gay jokes, but nothing so ridiculously rude or offensive that they needed to leave. It's just always been little comments or remarks that they can all laugh at because they're all heterosexual men. It's the "straight thing to do" when you're knocking back a beer with the guys and laughing with each other. So just from living with him and observing his behavior over the years, my dad has always preferred being in the company and environment containing heterosexual people over homosexual people.

Studies have shown that men who feel hostility toward homosexuals often have these feelings because it's reassurance to them about their own sexuality. Now of course I'm not saying my dad's a hostile homophobe, but the fact that he seems to prefer the company of heterosexual people as opposed to homosexual people can stem from the same reasoning. Or maybe it's just because he can better relate with straight people as opposed to gays, but I don't think I'd ever ask.

My mom's a very different story from my father. She has both homosexual and heterosexual friends. Every year she attends the "pride" parade in Philadelphia with her close friend Donna, and Donna's partner Cheryl. She cheerleads for the Philadelphia Roller Girls, a team of women majority of whom are homosexual. Sometimes she *does* take offense when my dad or my brother make a "gay joke" because she feels it's disrespectful toward her friends. I keep this in mind, but also think about her heterosexual friends as well. Her best friend Dawn is heterosexual. When she goes out, it's usually with her female friends that are also straight. I'd say my mom spends about as much time with each people of both sexual orientation, but I predict that when she takes the IAT, she will have a preference toward homosexual people just based off of her personality and observing her peers over the years.

On Monday, I sat down with my mom and explained to her what an IAT test was and how it worked. An IAT or an Implicit-Association Test is used to show the strength of the automatic association a person has to real life things or concepts. So I asked her what she thought her results would turn out to be on an IAT regarding sexual orientation and she said she thinks she'll have a preference for gay people. When I asked her why she thought this, she told me that it's just something she's always known about herself.

As my mom was taking the test, she told me that she didn't like it. I asked her why and she told me that it felt like she was being brainwashed. It took about 5-10 minutes until she was finished and her results were as follows:

Your Result

Your data suggests a strong automatic preference for Gay People compared to Straight People.

The results meant my mom responded faster when she had to match up good words with gay instead of good words with straight. She was also right about her prediction and wasn't surprised at all with what she got. Then she continued blowing her nose not knowing she was about to have a bad case of the flu in a few more hours.

That same night a little while later, my dad got home. Mind you, his brother (my uncle) was in town from Florida where he and his family had recently moved this past summer, so he had just got back from an outing with his brother and the guys. These outings usually consist of going to a bar or a pub in Old City and trying out different IPA's, lagers, and God knows what else. We call it, "out being beer snobs". So it was justified for him to come home a little intoxicated given that it had been about 5 months since he'd seen his brother. As he was walking by my room I asked him to come in. I explained to him my benchmark and asked him if he would take the IAT for me. I asked him what he thought his

results would be and he said “straight”.

As he began to take the test he laughed and said “Oh this test is going to make me seem like some kind of homophobe!”. When he finished the test his results were as follows:

Your Result

Your data suggests a strong automatic preference for Gay People compared to Straight People.

When he read his results he chuckled, then exclaimed, “I’m not a homophobe!”. I said “Eh, I guess. But you’re also drunk... Maybe I’ll just have you take it again tomorrow.” He laughed and said “It’ll say the same thing tomorrow! Why? Do you think I’m a homophobe?” I replied, “Sometimes I think you are.” Shocked, he said “Really? I work in a school. I meet tons and tons of gay kids all the time.” I said, “I don’t think you hate gay people, but sometimes you make homophobic comments and jokes.” He said, “Really? Like what? Give me an example.” I responded, “The way you and Mike use gay in a derogatory way sometimes when you’re joking.” and he murmured, “Hmm, yeah I guess. Anyway, I’m not a homophobe!” and walked away with a smile.

So after having both of my parents take the IATs, I was surprised to see them have the same results. Had my father not been slightly intoxicated, I wonder if his results would’ve turned out differently. Both of my parents had expressed to me their dislike for the test saying that they felt like the results would only tell you if you’re a homophobe or not. I failed to tell them that there was a neutral option, but I don’t think their views would have changed. My mom and dad both have a bias for homosexuals which I think is a great thing. Society’s been evolving with their views toward homosexuality. I think living with two people who have shown a preference toward them says a lot about where we are today compared to 1974, 64, or 54. We’ve been moving forward; we’ve been moving in a system. For instance, the Civil Rights Movement was only a movement because people

chose to speak up about it in order to make change, and I believe that's what's been happening with LGBT over the past decade or so. There's a system we all have in order to make differences in our future society. This is how we develop and grow as a whole. Everything we do is systematic whether we notice it or not, but that's the only way to progress.