

Call for Papers

“The Logic of Racial Practice: Embodied Cognition, *Habitus*, and Implicit Bias”

Symposium to be held at the University of Pittsburgh
April 12-14, 2018

Deadline for Abstracts: December 10, 2017

Organizers:

Dr. Brock Bahler, Department of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh
Dr. Gabby Yearwood, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh

Plenary Speakers:

Dr. Michael Brownstein, Department of Philosophy, John Jay University
Dr. Joy James, Africana Studies & Political Science, Williams College
Dr. George Yancy, Department of Philosophy, Emory University

In the last few years, the concept of implicit bias related to racial stereotyping has risen to prominence not only in a diverse body of scholarly research but also in mass media. While the standard definition of implicit bias regularly describes it as an unconscious or involuntary behavior, some researchers are also taking up the language of “habit” or of an embodied practice to explain automatic racial stereotyping and discriminatory actions (Devine et al. 2012; Byrne & Tanesini 2015; Rees 2016). This turn to the importance of habit and embodiment has recently garnered broad support from both qualitative and quantitative methods of research.

Regarding more qualitative approaches, the description of racism as a habit(us) or embodied practice surely calls to mind the legacies of scholars who argued for the primacy of praxis over theory, and of the inherent logic of emotions and unconscious behaviors—including William James, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu, among many others. Most significantly, it resonates with the descriptive and phenomenological approaches to whiteness studies and critical race theory, where scholars have described whiteness or racism as not so much a mental belief that is conceptually articulated but more of an embodied habit that has become sedimented into our bodies through the repetitive instilling of racist dispositions, postures, and ways of being in the world (Blee 2002; Sullivan 2006; Ahmed 2007; Yancy 2008; MacMullan 2009; Yancy 2012; Jennings). It also aligns with the work of numerous scholars in anthropology and religious studies who have highlighted the meaningfulness and significance of religious rituals and practices over mental assent and propositional thought (Csordas 1994; Stoller 1997; Asad 2003; McGuire 2008; Vasquez 2011; Benson 2013; Smith 2013).

From the hard sciences and medicine, it parallels with the extensive research that has revealed the power of embodied practices such as religious meditation, mindfulness, and yoga to change the make-up of the brain, successfully treat individuals suffering from the effects of trauma, and make us more compassionate individuals (Goleman & Davidson 2017; van der Kolk 2014; Newberg, D’Aquili & Rause 2002; Newberg & Waldman 2009). And it suggests a strong correlation with the position in the field of cognitive science known as embodied cognition, which suggests that bodily movements, emotions, and habits not only profoundly shape

cognition and brain activity but that thinking itself extends throughout the body and is scaffolded upon a material and social world (Damasio 1994; Gallagher 2005; Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl 2009; Rowlands 2010; Sheets-Johnstone 2011; Shapiro 2014; Zahavi 2014; Bahler 2016).

While these distinct fields of study often work in silos, the similarities in their conclusions warrant the convergence of scholars toward a robust interdisciplinary project that might foster charitable dialogue across disciplines and constructively add to the existing literature. To that end, this three-day symposium will bring scholars together for a synthetic analysis of race, religion, and cognition around the themes of embodied practices and habits. The symposium will involve both working papers (including plans to be published as an edited collection) and three public plenary presentations. Brief responses to working papers will be offered by appropriate faculty from the University of Pittsburgh. Some possible research topics may include...

- How religious practices and quasi-religious rituals shape perception and our being-in the world, and what this might reveal about our views of about race
- The (mis)use of religious practices, myths, and rituals for developing racist viewpoints
- The social, cultural, and institutional implications of defining unconscious biases as habits
- Embodied theory of mind and the roots of implicit bias and confirmation bias
- White privilege and embodiment
- Ways in which racial stereotypes are perpetuated and passed on within minority communities
- Embodied cognition, self-hatred, and internalized racism
- Talking about white privilege and racism with those who say we should stop talking about race
- Embodiment and the implicit association test
- Embodied cognition and interracial group relations
- The moral implications and/or personal responsibility of implicit bias/unconscious stereotyping
- How one uncovers one's own unconscious racist habits, dispositions, and attitudes
- The practical value of using the language of habit for overcoming unconscious racist assumptions and implicit biases
- Embodied cognition and the political realm
- Parenting and/or child development in discussing of race and racism
- The development of a praxis-based theory of education about race and racism
- Anti-racism as a cultivation of a virtuous habit

Proposals are invited for papers on a wide range of interdisciplinary work at the crossroads of implicit bias research, critical race theory, anthropology, cognitive neuroscience, sociology, religious studies, education, psychology, and more. Abstracts of no more than 500 words plus a 2-3 page CV should be sent to **Brock Bahler (bab145@pitt.edu)** by **Dec. 10, 2017**. Notifications of acceptance will be given by January 15, 2018.

Symposium Sponsored by the following Departments at the University of Pittsburgh:

- Grant funding from the University Research Council
- Grant funding from the "Year of Healthy U"
- Department of Religious Studies
- World History Center
- Department of Africana Studies
- Department of Anthropology

- Center for Race & Social Problems
- Department of Philosophy
- Department of Urban Education
- Office of Health Sciences Diversity
- Center for Philosophy of Science
- Simon Silverman Center (Duquesne University)
- Department of Philosophy (Duquesne University)

References

- Ahmed, Sara. "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149-68.
- Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Bahler, Brock. "Merleau-Ponty on Embodied Cognition: A Phenomenological Interpretation of Spinal Cord Epidural Stimulation and Paralysis." *Essays in Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (July 2016): 69–93.
- Benson, Bruce Ellis. *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Blee, Kathleen. *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002.
- Byrne, A., & Tanesini, A. "Instilling New Habits: Addressing Implicit Bias in Healthcare Professionals." *Advances in Health Sciences Education* 20, no. 5 (2015): 1255–62.
- Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes's Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Csordas, Thomas J., ed. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Devine, P., Forscher, P. Austin, A., and Cox, W. "Long term reduction in implicit bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 6 (2012):1267-78.
- Goleman, Daniel & Richard J. Davidson. *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*. New York: Penguin, 2017.
- Gopnik, Alison, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Patricia K. Kuhl. *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us about the Mind*. New York: Perennial, 1999.
- Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- MacMullan, Terrance. *Habits of Whiteness*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- McGuire, Meredith. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Newberg, Andrew, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause. *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*. New York: Ballantine, 2002.
- Newberg, Andrew and Mark Robert Waldman. *How God Changes Your Brain*. New York: Ballantine, 2009.
- Shapiro, Lawrence. *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Sullivan, Shannon. *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Rees, Clea F. "A Virtue Ethics Response to Implicit Bias." In *Implicit Bias and Philosophy Volume 2: Moral Responsibility, Structural Injustice, and Ethics*, 191-214. Ed. by Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Rowlands, Mark. *The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Primacy of Movement*. 2nd Ed. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Co., 2011.
- Smith, James K. A. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Stoller, Paul. *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- van der Kolk, Bessel A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking, 2014.
- Vásquez, Manuel A. *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Yancy, George. *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.
- Yancy, George. "Introduction: Framing the Problem." In *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* Ed. by George Yancy, 1-18. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Zahavi, Dan. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.