

For my final project, I studied implicit bias and unconscious racism. I focused mostly on race, and considered many cases of police brutality. I wanted to learn more about implicit bias and how it causes snap judgements and assumptions about others, and where it happens in our brains. Implicit bias really is just your brain trying to categorize and make generalizations, which is how stereotypes are formed. Implicit bias is not something that can be controlled, which makes it very dangerous. This is why many people don't think they are racist or biased, while in reality they still are. Implicit stereotypes are shaped by experience and based on learned associations between qualities and social categories, including race and/or gender. Individuals' perceptions and behaviors can be influenced by the implicit stereotypes they hold, even if they are unaware of them or unintentionally hold such stereotypes. Implicit bias is an aspect of implicit social cognition.

I have a strong and personal connection to this topic. As a member of the black community, it is heart wrenching to witness your people being killed. It's even scarier to know that one day, it could be you or your family suffering. I am scared for my brother driving in Atlanta, because to everyone else he could just look like another black boy, but to me that is my brother.

The police killed 1,147 people in 2017. Black people were 25% of those killed despite being only 13% of the population. Black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people. And, according to an article by CNN, between 2005 and 2017, only 80 officers had been arrested on murder or manslaughter charges for on-duty shootings. Only 35% were convicted, and the rest were pending or not convicted. The protests and marches are really important, but we need more action and more change to occur in order to actually save lives. It is not fair that black boys' lives are at higher risk, solely because of the color of their skin.

Leah G.
Georgia

I'm Not Racist

Leah G.



Writers Note:

I have very strong and personal connection to this story. As a member of the black community, it is heart wrenching to see these killings happen to your people. It's even scarier to know that one day it could be you or your family one day. Personally, I am scared for my brother driving in Atlanta, because to everyone else he could just look like another black boy, but to me that is my brother. Data show that officers generally stop black drivers at higher rates than white drivers, and stop Hispanic drivers at similar or lower rates than whites. After they are pulled over black drivers are 20% more likely to get a ticket (rather than a warning) than white drivers, and Hispanic drivers are 30% more likely to be ticketed than white drivers. (Stanford, 2019). Every year police officers are going free and the black community is hurting. The protest and marches are really important, but we need more action and more change to occur in order to actually save lives. It is not fair that my black boys have to be told that every time they get pulled over their life is at risk, solely because of the color of their skin.

A large inspiration for my story was a protest sign I saw all over social media. It read " Yes, all lives matter but we're focused on the black ones right now ok? Because, it's very apparent that our judicial system doesn't know that. And, if you can't see why we are exclaiming #black lives matter, then you are part of the problem." (anonymous) In my opinion, there are so many changes that need to be made. Instead of regular bullets, officers should use rubber bullets. All police officers have access to them and they do enough damage to take a suspect down without killing them. The choke hold should be banned. Every police officer should be held accountable for unnecessary force. Everyone is a victim of implicit bias and unconscious racism and officers, in particular, need to be trained about it. They have tried to teach about implicit bias in police training, but it has been unsuccessful. Teaching about implicit bias does help make people more aware of what's happening in their subconscious, but it can only help so much because it is not something we can control. About 1000 black men are killed from police brutality every year. Since we can't fix the problem directly, we need to change things around it. Change is necessary in order to save lives.

Keisha Johnson
September 14, 2019

I get up bright and early to go make Andre breakfast and get ready for work. I got to be at the salon soon for my first appointment of the day. I make sure that Andre has money for lunch and leave out the door. My day to day life is pretty hard since Andre's dad passed away when he was 5. We have not had it easy, but we make it work. I work two jobs to try and save up for Andre's college fund. I want to make sure that he gets the best education possible.

When I arrive at the salon my client Tierra is already in my chair. Tierra owns the local soul food place down the street. Her potato salad is to die for.

"Hey Keisha" all the girls chorus. I scurry over to my station where my client Imani was waiting for me.

"Hey girl how's it going" she asked.

"It's good what about you" I replied.

"Good" she said. "How's Andre?"

"He's doing good, made varsity basketball team this year, I am so proud of him". These generic boring conversations are just part of the job, but I'm not gonna lie; I love bragging about my boy. What can I can say? I don't feel bad about it. I spent years raising him on my own and he turned out great. I couldn't have asked for a more well-mannered and kind son. I remember one time when he was six, about the time after his daddy died, he would somehow crawl into my bed every morning and hug and kiss me until I woke. It's like he just wanted to see me smile. He still does that sometimes, even as a seventeen year old. It warms my heart. He's always worrying about me like that. He doesn't think I see it, but he doesn't ask for much because he doesn't want me to worry. He looks just like his daddy. It's almost scary they look more alike every day. he has the same big chocolate brown eyes that I love so much. The same dark brown skin that he wears so proudly. He was the cutest little baby too, always screaming and hollering. He has such a passion for everything he does, it's really inspiring. And, he's so funny. Don't even get me started on that smile. That smile could light up a room. He exudes confidence and is a natural born leader. He has always had such a good heart. I never worry that he will get caught up in in the game. He is a stubborn one though. He always has to have his way, but to be fair his way is normally correct-which can be annoying because sometimes I feel like he is wiser than me.

It's around 3:45 when I get a text from Andre asking if he can go and hang out with his friends. He has always been very responsible, so I let him go. I wouldn't say I'm a strict mom, but I do need to make sure my boy is safe. He told me he will be at his friend Jamal's house and that he would be back before 9:30 since it is a school night.

I head home to start dinner Around 9 PM when the house phone rings. I don't remember much after that. All is know is that I sunk to floor sobbing. I couldn't think straight and it felt like my legs gave out. I couldn't breathe. My heart felt like it stopped beating after hearing the message. "We need you to come down to the station, your son Andre has been shot....he did not make it."

Jim Wilson
September 14, 2019

I wake up this morning with a knot in my stomach. I guess that's to be expected as a police officer. Waking up and knowing that today could be your last. But, that's way too depressing for 5:30 AM. I always wanted to be hero of some kind. Even as a child I ran around my mama's house with that stupid cape on like I was Superman. I guess being a cop to me was as close as I could get to being a superhero. My dad was a really big inspiration to me. He grew up in a hard time, he was just a hardworking blue collar man. I aspire to work as hard as my dad did. He died last year and since then I have dedicated every day on the force to him.

I quietly slip out of bed, trying not to wake up my wife Sarah. I thank God every day for putting Sarah in my life. She is the love of my life and I would do anything for her. We met when I was only twenty three. She has always supported me, even when I told her I wanted to join the force. She has given me two beautiful daughters Kate and Julie. I would do anything for my family. Sarah is a stay at home mom, but recently she has discovered a new passion for real estate. The past couple months Sarah has been so stressed out with her studying for her real estate exam. Our relationship has been a bit rocky because of us both being stressed out from working, but I know that we will work through it.

I get dressed in my uniform, grab some coffee, and head out the door. I get in my car and drive to the station. I see my partner as soon as a walk in the door. Mike and I have been friends for years and I trust him with my life. I couldn't have asked for a better partner. Today was another basic day, we have roll call, we inspect our patrol car, and announce that we are "10-8 in service now."

It's about 8:30 PM, and we just got a call in about a man who called in to report five black boys hanging outside a gas station. He claims he felt threatened and thought they could possibly be armed¹. When we get a call, we automatically assume the worst just based on previous incidents. We turn on the sirens and speed down to the gas station on Cascade Rd. When we pull up we see the typical group of about five black boys. They are loitering in front of the Shell gas stations at an hour like this, doing God knows what. The lighting is pretty dim and the fluorescents of the sign above is creating a very ominous scene. The boys were standing around the front door. The store was about to close so only the cashier was inside mopping the floor. I'm pretty sure I smell weed and see some alcohol on them. When they see us, they try to run. We tell them to stop and, when they don't, we turn to force. My partner calls for backup and I tackle one of the boys and cuff him. One of the boys who didn't try to run tries to pull out something from his back pocket. I'm pretty sure he's armed so I pull out my 9 millimeter. When he doesn't drop his weapon, I fire at him about six times until I'm sure he is down.

"Shit, shots fired call an ambulance, suspect is down!" my partner yells into his radio.

"Shut the fuck up, before I shoot you too" I yell at them out of shock and frustration. I hear the sound of more police cars racing down the street; backup has arrived. But, all I can look at is the boy I just shot. I watch as the blood drains from his now lifeless body and that's when I see it. That's when I see what was in his hand. A silver iPhone 7. What have I done? The initial shock begins to wear off and reality begins to set in. I just killed a child. Someone the same age of my own daughter. I hear the other guys yelling for someone to help their friend. I can see his blue and

¹ A large amount of white men feel intimidated by black men because they know that black men have more testosterone than them and are more prone to violence. They believe that this gives black men superhuman characteristic, which then leads to them forgetting or not wanting to believe in their humanity. (Ojiaku, 2016)

yellow varsity jacket. Tears burn my eyes as I begin to grasp the fact that I just killed #15 and I don't even know his name.

Andre Johnson
September 14, 2019

I rolled out of bed as soon as I smelled bacon and eggs. I go to downstairs to go eat and saw that my mom had already left for work. I eat and then went back upstairs to brush my teeth, shower, and get dressed. I grab my lunch money and backpack and walk out the door. I love my morning walk to school. It was a nice day and the walk was only about fifteen minutes. It gives me a lot of time to think. I enter school and began another boring day of six classes. Math, Science, blah blah blah repeat. The only class I look forward to is English. I really love to read and write. I don't really tell anyone, but I'm really infatuated with poetry. I sometimes find myself scribbling down little poems and such. Today's poem was inspired by Tupac song. But, I don't ever talk about it because I would never hear the end of it from my friends on the team.

It's the end of sixth period and just as I'm about to leave my friend Jamal approaches me.

"Sup Andre you down to hang out after school?" he asks. Jamal and I have been friends since we were in second grade, but recently he has been hanging out with a new crowd. It doesn't really bother me - I'm just not into all the stuff they do. Sure I like to have fun, but weed and drinking ain't my thing. But, I haven't just chilled in a while and I don't have basketball practice today, so I before I could think too hard about it I find myself agreeing.

Jamal drives us to his friend Malik's house. I text my mom to let her know I wouldn't be home until about 9:30. I told her I was at Jamal's house because Malik doesn't have the best rep and I don't want her to worry. Everything was pretty chill at Malik's. There was about five of us, just chillin' playing 2k on the Xbox, listening to some Young Thug. It's all good until one of the guys - I think Tyrone - suggest they go get some drank with their fake IDs at the gas station down the street.

We all hop in the car and head down to the gas station. I only tag along because I don't have a ride home and plan to ask Jamal to give me a lift once we get back to the house. We park and some of the guys go in. They come back out about ten minutes later with the drinks. They offer me a sip and I decline. Then someone lights up a blunt and that's when I know it's time for me to go home.

"Hey J can we dip now?" I ask.

"Yeah man just give me like 10 minutes" he responds.

That's when I see a really suspicious looking white guy sitting in his car staring at us. It looks like he is on the phone, but it's hard to tell since it's getting dark and he's far away.

I been waiting patiently, but I want to leave now and, just as I'm about ask Jamal if he's finally ready, I hear sirens. Bright flashes of red and blue as the police pull in and all the boys start to scatter and run. Stunned I stay completely still. Within seconds the situation escalates. Jamal is tackled to the ground and immediately I start to pull out my phone to record it. I have seen this before on the news and I know that if I don't record it, there will be no evidence of unnecessary force seeing as Jamal was unarmed and was being compliant when the officer told him to stop. But before I can even fully pull my phone out to record, I hear yelling and suddenly a sharp pain in my chest. I can feel myself passing out and I see my mother's face. I can faintly hear her voice telling me to get up. I try to focus on it, but I can't hold on. The world goes black.

Keisha Johnson
November 23, 2019

You know you never think it's gonna be your child. Out of all the children in the world I never thought God would take mine from me. He was a good kid, never got in trouble, good grades, but most of all he was kind. He had the type of smile that could light up an entire room. Yet, that is not what Officer Jim Wilson saw two months ago. He didn't see my boy. Instead he saw a hoodlum. Just another black boy, probably on drugs, gang affiliated, because that's all he can be in this society. He didn't see my Andre, my baby. And, I want to know why. Today is the day of the trial and I am all alone. No husband to hold my hand, siblings to help me through it. I have spent the last two months grieving. I feel like -someone reached in my chest pulled out an entire part of me. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep without having nightmares. I would wake up screaming and crying so hard I cannot breathe. He was my life and, without him here, my life seems meaningless. Everyone keeps telling me they are "so sorry for my loss" and that they are "so sorry about what happened." But, really that's bullshit; maybe they are sorry and maybe they do feel bad, but secretly I know they are just glad it wasn't their child.

The funeral was about a month and a half ago and it was awful. I remember the rain pounding on the concrete as I drive to bury my baby boy. Staring into the six foot deep hole they were going to put the body of my son in for the rest of eternity. All the flowers and food that was left for me that everyone thought would help fill the void and make me feel better. I remember the flashing lights of the press at my house, asking me questions...trying to turn my tragedy into the news story of the day. I remember the feeling of wishing it was me instead of him, because I would do anything to bring him back.

I've been sulking around the house alone for almost two months now, but now I'm done with that. Now I'm mad and I want justice for my son. So I start to research, to get proof that the Officer who shot my son is racist, whether he knows it or not. I begin to research a lot about "implicit bias" and "unconscious racism"². I learned so much information and it gave me a lot of hope for the outcome of the trial. I printed out all of the information that I found online and put it in a folder to give to the lawyer assigned to our case. I couldn't afford my own lawyer so they assigned me Mrs. Baker. She is a very nice lady in her late thirties, but I just hope she can win this case.

I get dressed in my Sunday best, It is a dark green flowy dress and my black heels. Andre's favorite color was green. I am really just tryin' to hold it together as I head down to the courthouse, when really I am falling apart inside. When I pull up to the court and start to head up the stairs I feel like I'm going to be sick. I really do not want to have to go through all of this, but I know it is necessary. I walk into the courtroom and get settled in my seat. I look around to take in all the details of the courtroom. The aggressive white lighting. The rows of benches set up behind me for speculators to watch from. The elevated seat where the judge will sit and right beside him a big American flag. The Judge walks in and sits down, ready to begin. Of course he is an older white

² Implicit stereotypes are shaped by experience and based on learned associations between particular qualities and social categories, including race and/or gender. Individuals' perceptions and behaviors can be influenced by the implicit stereotypes they hold, even if they are unaware/unintentionally hold such stereotypes. Implicit bias is an aspect of implicit social cognition: the phenomenon that perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes operate without conscious intention. Often times implicit bias is first thought of with racial assumptions. Most of the time these racial assumptions refer to African Americans. It is no secret the amount of racial profiling in America with black men and police brutality. (Payne, 2018)

man, which gives me little hope for the trial. I look over at the jury, and it was also a majority white group. The only thing giving me hope is all the research that I had given my lawyer before. I knew that if she mentioned it maybe the jury could be swayed.

They call up Malik, one of the boys that was a witness to the accident, to the stand. They swear him in and begin questioning him. The other lawyer is really grilling him trying to get him to make Andre sound like a bad kid. He admits to smoking weed and drinking that night. I feel myself losing hope for the outcome of this trial. This is ongoing for about three days as they keep calling up witnesses to the stage and making my son out to be some hood rat.

They call up officer Wilson up to the stand swear and start with one question. “Mr. Wilson would you consider yourself a racist” the defense attorney ask. “No, I’m not racist.” he replies.

I found myself on the floor crying just as I had been when I first found out Andre was dead, as Mrs. Baker tries to comfort me. After five excruciating days of anxiety and frustration the trial was over and Officer Wilson walked out unconvicted and unsuspended from the force.³

³ According to an article by CNN Between 2005 and April 2017 only 80 officers had been arrested on murder or manslaughter charges for on-duty shootings. Only 35% were convicted and the rest were pending or not convicted. (Park, 2018)

Jim Wilson
November 23, 2019

For the past two months I could not leave my house without being bombarded by the media. Cameras flashing, blinding me as I try to take the fucking trash out. I feel like a puppet and people are just pulling my strings to get a story out of me. They are calling me foul things such as, “murder” and trying to make me out as a racist. I am not a racist. I have nothing against black people. It's not my fault that their race has a bad reputation⁴. Of course, I feel bad and I regret hurting that boy, but in that moment I thought my life was in danger. I thought it was self defense⁵. My wife and children are also suffering. They had to delete all social media because they are being harassed online. I even had to pull them both of my girls out of school for a couple weeks.

I have been suspended from the force indefinitely until after the trial. My career depends on me not being convicted. I got the best lawyer thanks to my captain. He want to make sure that the department doesn't get a bad rep because of me. I get ready and put on my suit. My kids are with the babysitter, as I don't want them to think their dad is a bad guy. My wife is putting on her favorite lipstick. She has been crying for weeks, but I'm glad to see her put together, even if I know it's a mask. Helps me forget how much pain I have brought to this family. I really appreciate her even staying with me and not going to stay with her parents like I thought she would.

When we arrive at the courthouse I try to act as calm as possible as I enter the courtroom and take my seat. I see Andre Johnson's mom and my heart clenches. Since the accident I have learned a little bit about her. I know that she is a single mom or was a single mom. I know that she is a hairdresser among other jobs. She seems like a hard worker, kind of like my father. I try to avoid eye contact as I cannot look her in the eye without feeling like a murderer. I try to mentally prepare myself for the next few days.

They put about five witnesses on the stand before it is my turn on the last day to go up. I slowly walk up to the stand. I put my left hand on the bible and my right on my heart.

“Do you solemnly swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, (so help you God?” The guard ask. “I do” I reply. I walk and sit in the chair looking out into the crowd of people. Some looking at me with disgust in their eyes some looking at me with blank stares, but only one catches my eye. My wife in the front row with tears slowly falling down her face. Then they ask me that damn question that I have been waiting for the entire trials.

“Mr. Wilson would you consider yourself a racist” the defense attorney ask. “No, I'm not racist.”

After five long days of court I am crying and hugging my wife as we celebrate. I am a free man. The judge and jury both came to the decision that I am “not guilty.” Not only was I not convicted, I am allowed to rejoin the force. I look over and see Mrs. Johnson on the floor crying as her lawyer tries to comfort her, but right now I'm just happy I have my life back.

⁴ The scientific American articles are on implicit bias really opened my eyes. I says that implicit bias is very normal and it just means that your brain is “noticing patterns, and making generalizations.” (Payne, 2018)

⁵ The reason that he thinks he feel bad, but really can't relate as much as a black person is because of the empathy gap. “The empathy gap, or hot-cold empathy gap, is the tendency to underestimate the influence of our emotional state on our decisions and behaviors, and overestimate the intellectual influence on decision-making”. They did a lot of test on the empathy gap, and the results showed people showed less empathy while watching videos of people of the opposite race in pain. (Ojiaku, 2016)

Andre Johnson

November 23, 2019

Andre doesn't have an after. His story ended 49 minutes after officer Wilson shot him six times in the chest.

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