

Bahrain holds its first elections since 2011 when the government violently quashed protests. The Shia-led opposition boycotts the vote. **Sat 22nd**

Gunmen in northern Kenya pull non-Muslim passengers from a bus killing 28 of them. The attack is linked to Somali militant group al-Shabaab.

Police officers in Cleveland, Ohio **shoot dead Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy holding a replica gun.** According to the officers, Rice did not follow their orders to raise his hands and so was shot, despite making no verbal threats nor pointing the replica gun towards anyone.

British driver Lewis Hamilton wins the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix to claim the Formula 1 title. **Sun 23rd**

Band Aid 30's reworking of 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' goes to number one in the UK. Proceeds will go toward the fight against Ebola in West Africa.

Kenya says its military has killed 100 al-Shabaab militants in response to Saturday's bus attack.

Ghoncheh Ghavami is freed from an Iranian prison. The 25-year-old British-Iranian had been detained after going to a men's volleyball match.

The National, the first pro-independence Scottish newspaper, is launched by Newsquest. **Mon 24th**

A Missouri grand jury rules that Darren Wilson – **the Ferguson police officer who shot dead teenager Michael Brown in August – will not be charged,** sparking protests across the US. **Sat 29th**

With extreme prejudice

Accusations and missiles were hurled at police across the US on 24th November, when a grand jury chose not to indict the white officer at the centre of the Ferguson case. But are US police officers really trigger-happy racists? Or are they in the grip of a more disturbing type of bias – one we're all guilty of? **Mon 24th**

Words: *Chris Bourn*, London. *Katharine Rust*, Baltimore

“The organisation that ignores the concerns of its community – particularly minority communities – does so at its own peril,” says chief Michael Meehan of the Berkeley Police Department, with the breezy, my-door-is-always-open candour you suspect he uses to winning effect at press conferences, on new recruits and at swearing-in ceremonies.

“Two police officers might exhibit the exact same behaviour – and one could be biased and the other one not”

Coming from him, it's more than a soundbyte, though. In a California campus town famous for its intellectual left-wing leanings, Meehan is head of a force that looks very much like a paragon of progressive policing: Berkeley has been recruiting exclusively college-educated officers for the past 100 years and was the first American agency to submit itself to civilian oversight in the 1970s. And since 2010, Chief Meehan and his command staff have been engaged in an earnest project to expose the hidden hand of racial bias within their local police culture, using an approach that might just prove revolutionary for law-and-order policy everywhere.



Patrick Record/AP/Press Association Images

University of Michigan students stage a die-in to protest a series of fatal shootings of unarmed black men



↑ A protest in central London following the decision not to prosecute police officer Darren Wilson for the fatal shooting of black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri

Elsewhere in the States, meanwhile, it's not so much that communities' voices are being ignored by their police force but that their main source of concern *is* their police force. Ferguson, Missouri, for instance. In November 2014, when a grand jury decided not to indict Darren Wilson – the white officer who shot and killed unarmed black teenager Michael Brown on 9th August after the 18-year-old had robbed tobacco from a nearby store – it sparked rioting and looting in Ferguson and the rest of St Louis County, as well as tense protests in 170 other US cities.

Amid intense media scrutiny and the FBI civil rights investigation triggered by Brown's killing, focus fell on the Ferguson police's handling of the tragedy: Brown's body had been left in the street in sweltering heat for around four hours; PR circulated by Ferguson PD that emphasised the dead boy's crime prior to his encounter with Wilson was heavily criticised as an attempt to mitigate the cold injustice of his death; and St Louis County PD's use of tear gas to keep order, not to mention its quibbling over whether projectiles fired at protesters could be classed as 'rubber bullets', added fuel to the fire. While the conflagration raged, the image of Ferguson law enforcement projected to the rest of the world was that of an insular institution staffed by overwhelmingly white cops who were callously insensitive to the pain of the suburb's 66 percent African-American population.

But wait. As you read that last paragraph did you notice that notion of 'RACIST WHITE COPS' flash-carding into your thoughts? Even if you didn't, that particular stereotype about American policing that you very probably hold was very probably present in your background comprehension of the words. And the ease with which I just wrote them – the readiness of terms like 'callous', 'cold', 'insensitive' to insert themselves into the phraseology – was very probably an instance of my own unconscious prejudices conspiring to influence my choices. Or, as this effect is known in a relatively new but increasingly significant field of psychological research, an example of implicit bias.

The science of bias

"The incident in Missouri and its aftermath highlighted for US policing the breach that there is between police departments and some of their diverse communities," says Dr Lorie Fridell, a sociologist who is a leader in the application of implicit bias theory to law-enforcement practice, and has been expounding her programme of 'Fair and Impartial Policing' (FIP) in training rooms across the country for the past ten years. "I also think Ferguson was an opportunity to explore how we can reduce that breach," she adds.

Daniel Leal-Olivera/PA Wire/Press Association Images

In the months since Ferguson requests for Dr Fridell's training sessions have, she says, "gone through the roof". Among them was an assignment from the Department of Justice, following President Obama's calls to address racial profiling in policing, to conduct FIP training with St Louis County police. "The individuals in that training – as well as police leaders across the United States – are looking for answers," she says. "They want to do the right thing."

In the context of implicit bias, though, doing the right thing in any circumstance is problematic. "It's very difficult to identify when bias has impacted on police action in an individual case," Dr Fridell explains. "By definition, biased policing reflects the motivation of the officer. So two officers might exhibit the exact same behaviour, and one could be biased and the other one not."

To get an idea of what's going on here, it's worth putting yourself through the Implicit Association Test (you can find interactive versions of this easily online), the landmark social psychology experiment that energised the study of bias in the mid-'90s. In it subjects are asked to make various quick-fire associations – typically between black faces and positive or negative words, or between female names and 'logical' versus 'emotional' attributes – while the computer times their responses. Fluctuations in hesitancy are interpreted as 'valence', a measure of the ease with which associations are being made – and of the difficulty introduced when an unwelcome unconscious stereotype starts interfering with the subject's desire to 'do the right thing'.

The alarming evidence, backed up by decades of research, is that nearly all of us exhibit biases we're unaware of that often align with the grossest forms of explicit bigotry at large in society. Experiment after experiment has shown, for example, that a woman's name on a CV will, in general, result in her application being taken less seriously than one with a man's name at the top.

Even the psychologists themselves aren't immune: in one notorious study from 1982, researchers at the University of North Dakota took an assortment of papers from top psychology journals; they changed the authors' names, downgraded their university affiliations to less prestigious institutions and resubmitted the papers to the journals that had previously published them. Almost 90 percent were rejected second time around – not for plagiarism, but for methodological errors. Further research suggests academics are particularly susceptible to this sort of 'prestige bias'.

Most shockingly of all, our tendency to favour the dominant in society, while invoking stereotypes against members of marginal and minority groups, turns out to be in force no matter who is being examined. "Here's what I have heard from people of colour," says Dr Fridell.

"They go into the training thinking it's not about them. That this training is for those 'other folks' – the white folks in particular. And they emerge understanding that they too have biases. And in fact the science shows blacks can have biases against blacks; women can have biases against women. So they learn that they are not immune from biases even as pertains to their own groups."

The police department in Berkeley, California has been systematically exposing itself to these findings for the past five years – and Chief Meehan and co, conducting their police work in a climate that's open to academic ideas, have emerged as some of Dr Fridell's star pupils.

Captain Cynthia Harris, a 55-year-old African-American woman ("... although I look 25!") with over three decades' service, leads the implementation of Fair and Impartial Policing in Berkeley. "Initially," she recalls, "people thought it was something to do with racial profiling, and that kind of training doesn't go over well – you're being told that you're a bunch of racists. But after the [FIP sessions] I had people coming to me – which is unusual – saying the training was not that, and they learned something from it; they learned how to be more cognisant of their own biases."



“Police officers come to work and they feel fair. They don't consider themselves racists” – Chief Michael Meehan

"The thing that we like about the Fair and Impartial approach," says Meehan, "is that it doesn't start with the premise that one side or the other is always wrong so much as: we're all human beings; we have things that can affect our decision-making; and we should be aware of those things, to help us make the best decisions."

For Meehan the benefits of investigating implicit bias reach much further than departmental procedure: "The people in the community believe that there is disparate treatment – that minorities are treated differently. But the police officers, they come to work and they feel fair. They don't consider

themselves to be racists. They feel like they're doing their job in a positive and professional way." But now, he says, "we just really appreciate having an approach that isn't based on name-calling. It's based on science, and it does help bridge those gaps."

Oh, Baltimore

On the other side of the country from Berkeley's Bay Area *bohème* is a hard town by the sea. Baltimore's slow economic decline, deep racial divisions and rugged civic landscape were all made famous, possibly in grainier forensic detail than any other American city, by a long-running TV series.

"*The Wire* is a great show," says Dr Lawrence Brown, an African-American man in his 30s who is an assistant professor in health policy at Morgan State

University. “But you know, you see it and you see the neighbourhoods in it... they’re war zones. What do you think anyone’s going to think about Baltimore? What do you think the Baltimore City cops coming in from Pennsylvania and Delaware are going to think of Baltimore?”

Brown is sitting off to the side of a large concrete room adorned with unfiltered fluorescent lights and yellowed brick walls – features of the brutalist aesthetic of the Baltimore Public Safety Training Facility, a building in the north-west of the city just a five-minute drive from the US headquarters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Brown has battled the Maryland snow on this Monday night in January, along with some 40 other community members and several sworn officers of the Baltimore PD, to listen to Dr Fridell explain how Fair and Impartial Policing can improve life for his fellow citizens.

The group consists mostly of African-American men and women, as well as a handful of older white people – a concoction of preachers, neighbourhood leaders, directors of various community service organisations, small-business owners, professors, city employees... a spot-on reflection of Baltimore leadership itself. Distrust of the police is palpable in the room and on everyone’s minds – one mother is overheard in conversation asking, “How do I protect my children from the police?”

As the talk gets underway, the participants listen intently to Dr Fridell – a tall, thin woman with tightly cropped blonde hair who strides back and forth in black heels. Her set-up moves smoothly into the case for coaching: she’s come to the Baltimore Police Department to explain the difference between explicit bias (blatant racism) and implicit bias, and to show how policing in America is more typically affected by the latter than the former. She explains the universal presence of bias in our lives as an inhaled byproduct of our cultural environment. To bring the theory to life she shows a photo of a crime scene in a subway – and invites the audience to make their own assessments of whether a black or white suspect was responsible.

To illustrate the positive effects of contact with a ‘counter-stereotype’ she screens a clip from the TV show *Britain’s Got Talent*, focusing on the judges’ jaws dropping in response to Susan Boyle and her unlikely virtuoso audition. The audience absorbs the science, but the flurry of questions from the floor reveals a general scepticism about its potential for changing the way policing is conducted in Baltimore.

The key issue, it seems, is recruitment. According to the research, bias is as insidious a force in the hiring process as it is in officers’ day-to-day behaviour. Over time background

bias can have an immeasurable impact in homogenising a police department’s demographics – fostering a greater sense of separation from the community, widening the cracks where bias can seep in. “The importance of attracting diversity into the department is huge,” Fridell explains to her audience. “Agencies need to go out and beat the bushes to find qualified applicants to create diversity.” The mood softens and the crowd nods in approval.

“Absolutely,” affirms Dr Brown amid the hubbub after the session has wrapped up. “That is 100 percent the issue.”

“Let’s talk about race”

Bias in recruitment, according to Chief Meehan, is a battle Berkeley is winning. “We understand that it’s critically important for our police department to be reflective of our community,” he says – although this is particularly difficult to achieve in California where affirmative action (the controversial practice of hiring by quota for ethnic groups that are under-represented in an organisation) has been illegal since 1996.

Instead, fortifying recruitment procedures with an awareness of the bias risk has paid off: “*The New York Times* a few months ago did a study of diversity in police departments, and, when you look at Berkeley, we are the most representative of our community of all cities of 100,000 or more that they looked at. But that’s not something that happens overnight – that’s a multi-year sustained effort to ensure it happens.”

Managing bias in his officers’ behaviour on the street day to day, though, is a tougher assignment. Stereotypes that are unconscious can’t be traced and apprehended by those who hold them – even by the best detectives in the department. But according to Dr Fridell, officers can be taught to recognise the types of situations where they may be prone to biased decision-making.

“We’re not going to be able to rid ourselves of biases, so we need to manage them,” she explains. “And the science says: if you recognise your biases, and are motivated, you can implement what the scientists call ‘controlled responses’ which is a fancy word for bias-free behaviour... So for an officer it might be a recognition that he has stereotypes about the homeless, and treats them as if they are unworthy, criminal etc – and once that police officer has recognised this, the way is open to choosing to treat them with respect and dignity.”

The Ferguson tragedy has put the spotlight once again on a painful national truth: that police officers in the US kill a disproportionate amount of black citizens – usually young men. And the frequency with which their suspects



“Ferguson was not a blip... This is a message that’s going to resonate across the country: there has to be change” – Captain Cynthia Harris

turn out to be unarmed is alarming. Four days before Brown was killed, 22-year-old John Crawford was shot dead after having picked up a toy rifle in a Wal-Mart in Beavercreek, Ohio. Two weeks prior to that 43-year-old asthmatic Eric Garner, suspected of selling untaxed cigarettes, died after he was wrestled to the ground and held there in Staten Island, New York. On 14th September, five weeks after Brown’s death, 24-year-old former American football player Jonathan Ferrell was found to be unarmed after he’d been killed by ten shots from police in Charlotte, North Carolina. And so it goes on.

Under the weight of a vigilant media, the pressure on law-enforcement across the United States to hold itself to account is greater than it has been in decades. Even pacifist Berkeley has not escaped controversy – in December, student protests of Garner’s killing turned ugly in the Bay Area when a group of demonstrators began looting and throwing bricks at police, injuring four officers. The Berkeley PD subsequently faced criticism, and then further nights of protest, for kettling and aggressive crowd control tactics.

But as Chief Meehan would be the first to point out, his officers are human too; anger exists within his department as well as on his streets. “Ferguson was not a blip,” says Captain Harris while her boss listens. “President Obama’s talking about it, the Attorney General’s talking about it – so I think you will see some significant changes in police departments. But it’s got to be more than policy, right? It’s got to be behaviour. You can always write a policy for something, but if you don’t believe in and enforce that policy it does you no good.”

The reaction of the American public to Ferguson, she continues, is something “we have not seen since the civil rights movement. And so I think this is a message that’s going to resonate across the country: that there has to be change. And there has to be a significant mood for change.”

“I’m very optimistic,” says Meehan. “Just by having a willingness to have these difficult conversations, people feel more trusting of you... You know, if you sit down with somebody and say, ‘Let’s talk about race,’ it’s awkward. But here we are doing a training that’s nothing but that. It’s refreshing, and it’s enlightening and it lowers people’s defences to the point where they’re actually talking to each other – and not at each other.”

A few weeks later, this same conclusion was reached by the director of the FBI, the head of law-enforcement in the United States. All Americans, “especially those of us who enjoy the privilege that comes with being the majority,” said James Comey, in an unusually candid speech at Georgetown University on 12th February, “must confront the biases that are an inescapable part of the human condition... We simply must speak to each other honestly about all these hard truths.”

It may seem naive to expect the cloud hanging over policing in America, and the dead weight of ingrained psychology, to lift as the result of an awkward conversation or two. But taking others seriously – other voices, other faces – is surely Dr Fridell’s ‘controlled response’ in action. And, from the other side, responding to those “racist cop” flashcards becomes next to impossible when the cop is sitting in front of you, listening hard to every word you say. 🗣️

Notes

Nov

Tue
25th

The world’s biggest survey into wildlife crime reveals that **live tigers, bears, orangutans and chimpanzees are all available for purchase on the web**. The report by the International Fund for Animal Welfare found more than 33,000 animals and items that should be protected by international laws on sale at a total value of \$11 million (£7 million).

Apple becomes the first company in the world to be valued at over \$700 billion. ExxonMobil, the second biggest company, is worth \$405 billion.

A court in Pakistan sentences Bollywood actor Veena Malik and her husband, Asad Bashir Khan, to 26 years in prison in absentia for “malicious acts” of blasphemy against Islam. Malik, who fled to Dubai following the broadcast of a scene she took part in that was loosely based on the marriage of the prophet Muhammad’s daughter, vows to fight the ruling.

Australian batsman Phil Hughes loses consciousness after being struck on the head by a cricket ball during a match in Sydney.

Thu
27th

The evidence points towards all of us exhibiting biases at the unthought level.

Wed
26th

To get an idea of how biased you are, you can take an implicit racism test developed by psychologists at Harvard.

Visit the Project Implicit site at implicit.harvard.edu

Leaders of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters are arrested as police try to clear the Occupy Central site. Around 80 are arrested including student leaders Lester Shum and 18-year-old Joshua Wong.

Nevada becomes **the first state in the US to ban car service company Uber** from operating. Court officials deem the company to have failed to comply with state transportation laws.