

Federal Judicial Center  
In Session: Leading the Judiciary  
Episode 30: How Recognizing Bias, Headwinds, and Tailwinds Lifts  
Everyone in an Organization (Including You)  
December 7, 2022

Craig Bowden: Coming up --

Dolly Chugh: The idea of privilege is that when it's working in our favor, we don't feel it. And when it's working against us, we may feel it directly, but people observing us from afar may not see that there's a headwind that's actually affecting my performance.

And so I think the idea with privilege is not to just worry about you have it/you don't have it. It's to try to isolate what are the headwinds and tailwinds that each of us have.

Craig Bowden: Today on *In Session, Leading the Judiciary*, we continue with part two of our discussion with social psychologist and author Dolly Chugh. In this episode, we explore how unconscious bias reveals itself in nonverbal ways, signaling feelings and beliefs we don't intend to convey.

Dr. Dolly Chugh, author of *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*, says this leakage often occurs during times of stress and in fast-moving environments. Dolly says that taking the time to act with intention can help us convey who we mean to be.

Dolly teaches MBA courses in leadership and management at the New York University Stern School of Business and conducts research on bounded ethicality, or what she calls the psychology of good people. Her work has appeared in top publications to include the *Harvard Business Review*, *Psychological Science*, and the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

This is part two of our discussion with Dolly. Part one of our discussion, Episode 29 of *In Session: Leading the Judiciary*, was released on October 11, 2022. Our host is Lori Murphy, Assistant Division Director for Executive Education at the FJC. Lori, take it away.

Lori Murphy: Dolly, welcome back. I'm excited to have the opportunity to talk to you about a few concepts from your book we didn't get a chance to discuss last time.

Dolly Chugh: Lori, thank you. I'm really excited to be here.

Lori Murphy: You know, Dolly, many of us are familiar with the concept of unconscious bias, and we may even accept that we have some unconscious biases. But most of us also believe that we act in ways that aren't biased. What does your research show?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. I absolutely relate to that sentiment that you just described. The challenge is, science doesn't always support my intuition about myself. The research,

research that isn't necessarily specifically done by me, that I've been excited to curate from decades of research by Nobel Prize winners and psychologists. The research says that most of our mind's work happens outside of our awareness. So for example, if I snap my fingers, in that little instant one estimate is that my mind had 11 million thoughts. And I mean, I don't know. I'm kind of tired right now. I'm like, really, 11 million? Maybe not. Maybe Lori's mind have 11 million thoughts, not Dolly's mind.

But my thoughts it's like little t thoughts, right? It's the idea that right now, I somehow know to sit upright and not lie down. I can understand the words you're saying to me. Like, these are autopilot-type thoughts. But in that same instant of the snap of the fingers, 40 - that's four zero of those thoughts, and that's a rough estimate - are conscious thoughts, what we think of as capital T thoughts. So 11 million 99.9 whatever percent versus 40.0 whatever percent.

In other words, a lot of what were our behavior is being driven by processes and thoughts that we're not consciously thinking of and intentionally driving. When we talk about implicit bias, sometimes those autopilot systems are being fueled by those implicit biases. And sometimes - not all the time - some of our implicit biases will leak into our behaviors.

What the data shows is that, for example, behavior that's very fluid and unconscious, like nonverbal behaviors. My eye contact with others, these tiny little facial muscles, how they can move in very specific ways that I don't necessarily control, but that are very strong communication signals to people. We could just tell by a tiny little gesture - not gesture - but movement, facial movement, whether somebody is afraid of us or not afraid of us, something like that.

How far we sit from somebody, I mean, these sorts of nonverbal behaviors have been shown to be predicted by implicit biases, as well as some more, what we think of as behavior-behaviors, you know? Studies that have been done with doctors asking them to use vignettes of medical patients and say what their diagnosis would be, or asking people to think about how they would budget funds in studies.

Now, these are often controlled laboratory studies, but again, they show a relationship sometimes between implicit biases that we aren't consciously endorsing. So they're in our 11 million, but not our 40, leaking into our behavior.

The reason the title of my book is *The Person You Mean to Be* is that what I'm interested in is that leakage. What I wanted was that - the person they meant to be. So am I behaving in the way that I intend or not? And that's I think what a lot of us would care about if we have a gap within ourselves.

Lori Murphy: So if I think that I'm a quote/unquote good person but I'm leaking out some potential biased behaviors as a result of these thoughts that I'm not even aware of, that's what you're getting at.

Dolly Chugh: That's right. Let me give an example. You know, I'm right-handed, so I was just worried that I might -- I teach in this big kind of U-shaped classrooms. Am I kind of favoring one side of the room? And one day my teaching assistant, and good for her, she not only tracked what I asked her to track, but she also did some tracking around things like gender.

She came back and said, when you do call on women, you're disproportionately interrupting them before they finish more than you do men. And I was like, I have two daughters. I strongly believe in the voices of women, but I also have seen data that I've produced on implicit bias measures where I show implicit gender bias that is consistent with the behavior I was showing there.

So not a behavior intended, not a behavior when you're up there teaching. It's like air traffic. I mean, it's not really like air traffic control. That's a much harder job. But, you know? There's a lot going through your head. I've got 60, 70 students, lots of hands up thinking of lots of things. I'm

making split-second decisions. With that, those little t thoughts, and that's where you might see leakage.

Lori Murphy: Interesting. What I heard when you were describing that is a phenomenon you talk about in your book. I think you label it as self-threat, that we get a little bit threatened when someone points out that we're not necessarily acting in a way that aligns with what we think about ourselves.

Dolly Chugh: Heck, yeah. When this courageous and brilliant teaching assistant offered me this feedback, my first thought was, I mean, red zone defensive, like what? No way. Not me. I mean I talk a lot about that in the book. When we get defensive around an identity we care a lot about, it's hard to move past that to a place of learning and growth.

I can tell story after story just, you know? Sadly, I can tell story after story in the flavor of the one I just told you about the classroom where I've been given the opportunity, some information where somebody sees something I'm not seeing. Somebody knows something I don't know. Somebody's been impacted by something I've done. And my response is that can't be. Or I think you're mistaken. Or you're sensitive. Or you need to toughen up. Or I'm sure no one else thought that, or, you know? I mean, so many responses, but in this good person sort of domain it's not our default.

Lori Murphy: So let's go back to the example you shared about being in front of your classroom. You asked, I believe it was your teaching assistant, to notice some things about how you are in the classroom.

That gets us to the topic of privilege. Privilege can be confusing and even sometimes a polarizing term. So I'm curious how you define privilege. How we know it when we see it, how we know if we have it, and why should we care about it, and all of that around this word privilege.

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. It really has become something so charged and polarizing. I try to write about it and think about it in a much more neutral way. One of the metaphors that's helped me think about it is from Debbie Irving, who talks about headwinds and tailwinds.

The idea with headwinds and tailwinds is like if you go out -- and I'm glad my children aren't in the room I'm in because they laugh when they hear me give this example. I'd say, let's say I was to go out for a run. And my kids are like ha-ha. When was the last time you did that, mom? Well, I go for walks. But let's say you were to go for a run. You're saying I'm going to run until I get to that fire hydrant on that block in front of the supermarket. And then I'm going to U-turn and come back. And you're on your way to the fire hydrant and you're like, you know what, I think this little cross-training thing I'm doing is

working out pretty well. And my new eating regimen - I feel pretty good. And then you start your U-turn back and all of a sudden you're struggling. And you're like, I could use a break. And you know, oh, time to tie my shoes again. You know that kind of thing.

If somebody was watching you through the window inside, they might see someone on the way back who's like, wow, they don't even seem to be trying. Like they seem to be taking more breaks than anything else, and you know, not really super motivated. And maybe they just come from a family that doesn't really value running.

Not realizing what I'm feeling in the moment is I have a wind blowing right in my face. I have a headwind. Now it was the same wind that I felt on my way out, right? But that wind was on my back. And when the wind is at our back, we don't really necessarily feel it, nor do we realize the effect it's having on our performance.

And so this metaphor of headwinds and tailwinds really helped me think about privilege, because I think the idea of privilege is that when it's working in our favor, we don't feel it, just like those tailwinds. And when it's working against us, we may feel it directly, but people observing us from afar may not. Just like the person looking through the window may



not see that there's a headwind that's actually affecting my performance.

And once I thought of it that way, I thought, well, my god, all of us have headwinds and tailwinds, right? I mean, there is no one - no one - who's been able to convince me that they don't have some of both.

And so I think the idea with privilege is not to worry about like you have it, you don't have it. It's to try to isolate what are the headwinds and tailwinds that each of us have, and what's most powerful. This is my contribution, I think, to the privilege conversation is to add one more concept of ordinary privilege to think about the identities we hold that we don't usually think about.

So I'll just use myself as an example. Like, you said, okay, Dolly, just tell me about yourself. I'm a professor; I'm a mom; I'm a woman; I'm Indian American; I'm a child of immigrants. These are some of the identities that are just top of mind for me.

And then someone might say, oh, are you straight? Are you gay? Are you? Well, I didn't even think to mention that. I'm straight. That's not top of mind for me. I don't really think about it very often in a deliberate way.

Well, that identity that I think about less, it's likely because I don't need to think about it. I don't have to

navigate what's the legal ramifications of me seeing a loved one in the hospital due to our marital status. I don't have to navigate what kind of jokes people tell about me and my partner. I don't have to navigate our physical safety for holding hands in public.

And, so that identity that I think less about gives me a hint of where my tailwinds are. So I call it ordinary privilege because it's so ordinary I'm not really thinking about it. And I don't mean ordinary like it's right or wrong or good or bad. I just mean ordinary kind of invisible to me ordinary.

Those identities that we think of less that are invisible to us are clues of where our tailwinds are. And then finally, it gives us a sense of where we might be able to be useful to other people. Because where I have tailwinds, someone else has a headwind. And perhaps I can use some of my influence to be a supporter of theirs. And if you want, we can talk more about what that looks like and why that's important.

Lori Murphy: I would love to go there, actually. Yeah, it's the so what of privilege, right? So we understand privilege and we understand this concept of headwinds and tailwinds. It sounds like what you're recommending is that we take some time to consider what our tailwinds might be, what our ordinary privilege might be. So I'm curious how do you suggest

we do that? And then also what do we do when we've identified our ordinary privilege and to be able to make a difference?

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. Well, part of what we can do is literally the little thought experiment I just did with myself. Any listener right now could do it. Let's all jot down on a piece of paper in front of you like really jot down what identities come to mind quickly. And then try to think about other people you know and what identities come to mind when you think of them. And then think, oh, wait. Are there dimensions I didn't think of? When I thought of that person did I write something down about their socioeconomic class? Did I write something down about their religion? Did I write something down about their physical abilities? Did I capture an identity for them, a dimension that I didn't capture for myself? In other words, that might be a place where I have tailwinds because I don't think about it that often. And then why is it so useful?

So this is beautiful research that's been done by Stephanie Johnson, David Heckman, and a number of other researchers that I have to say it was exciting for me to see these findings shown across a variety of contexts. The findings show that if you have -- let's just make this concrete. Someone tells a racist joke. All other things being equal, if a white person says, hey, that's not cool versus a black person says, hey, that's not

cool, the research says the white person will be taken more seriously in that moment than the black person.

Now, that's sort of strange because it seems like the lived experience of the black person might be more relevant if it's a racist joke. But what the data shows is that there also tends to be on average more of a sense of the black person having a sense of entitlement or being whiny in that moment.

And so the white person is sort of given the benefit of the doubt as having nothing sort of personal at stake and therefore taken more seriously. There are variations of this, you know, I'm giving you this very specific joke example, but there are variations that extend to promotions at work or feedback or different situations where the person who's not directly affected has ordinary privilege in this particular position. They have a tailwind that gives them influence in that moment that they might not expect.

I honestly don't find it exciting that we don't take seriously people who are directly affected and harmed in the moment. That's not exciting at all. But what is exciting is I think a lot of people feel helpless and don't know what to do in moments like that, and feel like it isn't their place to do anything. What this offers us is insight into influence we didn't even know we had. That we can in fact speak up, not instead of other people or over other people. Or, I have all

this ordinary privilege; let me tell you what your life is like. You know, not that way, but in a way that we don't have to feel helpless. I honestly think a lot of us feel helpless right now. We really see a fractured society around us and don't want it to be that way.

Lori Murphy: What you're suggesting is that we, by definition, we have the ability, I don't know if you'd go so far as to say responsibility, but we certainly have the ability to have influence in that situation simply because we have perhaps more privilege than the other individual. Is that what you're saying?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. And definitely the first part in terms of we definitely have the ability, the data would say we have the ability to do something more than nothing. In terms of like responsibility I mean I leave that to the individual. Again, the title of my book is *The Person You Mean to Be*. I think it's a matter of what individuals are striving for. The science, the data says we have an opportunity there. Certainly, I personally view that as an opportunity that I do view as a responsibility for myself, but I'm not laying that on anyone who doesn't want it.

But I think a lot of us do want it. I think a lot of people in the workplace are trying to think of ways they can support the people around them. They keep reading news stories

or being told by their organization we don't have a more diverse enough organization. And they're like, well, what do I do? Fine. But what do I do? And I think this gives us a path.

Lori Murphy: In your book, you cite some research that white males in the workplace have the most power to enact change without being negatively perceived by others, which I found really interesting, which seems to go along with what you're saying here. What opportunities does this afford our white male colleagues? Can you give us some specific examples in a workplace setting?

Dolly Chugh: Yes, so some of the research that I was alluding to earlier did focus on the workplace. For example, a white male boss would have proposed a black employee for promotion. The analysis of how that boss was perceived by their boss was unaffected. Whereas if a black male boss were to suggest a black employee for promotion, the analysis of how they were perceived by their boss suggested that there was some backlash to that.

I'm not sure if I'm getting the exact specifics right, but the general narrative of the data showed that white men could actively support candidates with identities different than those, without reflecting badly on them. Whereas if people who weren't white men supported candidates with identities similar

to theirs, independent of how qualified the candidates were, there was a potential of some backlash.

Lori Murphy: It sounds also like what you're getting at is something that -- I had not heard this term until I read it in your book called the law of reversibility. And that may be a way to help us understand privilege as well. So can you help us understand what that is?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah, that's a concept and a term that I've learned from Jessica Bennett, who is a writer and journalist. And she suggests, I think she applied it, if I remember right, to gender. But we could do this I think on any dimension of identity. The law reversibility is let's say someone just said, wow, Dolly was really angry in the meeting earlier today. So the law of reversibility would be to change my identity from being Dolly to being David and say David was really angry in the meeting today. And with the same behavior would you have described David as angry, or would you have described him as passionate, or full of conviction or invested?

So the law of reversibility allows us to see ways in which we may inadvertently have someone's identity shaping how we perceive them in their behavior.

Lori Murphy: Can you give us another example that's not with gender? I think this could have some real benefit for us as we try to shift our mindset and get that muscle memory.

Dolly Chugh: This is something that comes up where a black person will be described as articulate. The law of reversibility would say, well, would whoever the commentator have said the same description if they had seen a white person say and do the same things, would they have described them as articulate? And the takeaway there is often not. Let's say this was a senior executive speaking. We'd fully expect a senior executive to speak in a compelling way that held the attention of their listeners. That is most senior executives are at least decent communicators.

So would it warrant the description of articulate if they were a white person? And so the law of reversibility is a way of seeing, did I have a stereotype of black people that I applied unconsciously in that moment?

Lori Murphy: Yes, going back to what we were talking about, about implicit or unconscious bias. This is a way to see some of that leakage that we otherwise aren't necessarily aware of.

Dolly Chugh: The data is pretty clear that we all have some form of it and that sometimes it leaks into some of our behaviors. Not all the time. Not every moment. This isn't an is it or isn't it? Or again, I got to defend my good person identity. So it's a little bit of like uh. But also like an



Easter egg hunt. Okay, there it is. I got it. Let me work on that one.

Lori Murphy: Well, it's making the invisible visible. And when something is visible, then we can acknowledge it, address it, work on it, get past it, repair it.

Dolly Chugh: I love that connection. Again, yeah, that's beautiful. Because remember that tailwind, if you hold an identity that you don't have to worry about people assuming you're inarticulate, or you come from an identity that people actually assume you're emotional or angry when you have a strong point of view - we've just made that invisible visible.

Lori Murphy: And it's not putting the work on the person with less privilege, which is another challenge that often comes up in these types of situations.

Dolly Chugh: That's right. And that's a big part of being good is taking on that responsibility ourselves. And while that might seem like more responsibility, who needs more, right? I actually, again, think we all like getting better at things and it feels good to get better at them.

Lori Murphy: Dolly, thanks so much for being here and especially for helping us all be better versions of ourselves.

Dolly Chugh: And I'm so grateful to you, Lori, and to all your listeners. And I'm sure we don't show the gratitude we should. So thank you.

Craig Bowden: Thanks, Lori. And thanks to our listening audience. To hear more episodes of this podcast, visit the Executive Education page at [fjc.dcn](http://fjc.dcn) and click or tap podcast. You can also search for and subscribe to this podcast on your mobile device.

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