Welcome to W&L After Class: the Lifelong Learning Podcast. I'm your host Ruth Candler. We have a special podcast today that relates to some important contemporary issues. At the suggestion of two alumni we are talking with Julie Woodzicka. Many of you remember Julie as a professor in the psychology department, the department is now called cognitive and behavioral science. Our conversation today concerns the issues of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. This podcast is the first in a series of lifelong learning programs that will address the topics of prejudice, discrimination and antiracism in today's society. Julie joined the W&L faculty in 2000. She is a social psychologist whose research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and her course on stereotyping and discrimination has been called life changing by many students. Murray Shortall, W&L class of 2003, had this to say.

Murray Shortall 1:09

Hi, I'm Murray Abernathy Shortall, graduate of 2003. And I was one of the first people to take this class on stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. And it really changed the lens through which I see the world from what it was. And that has been such a gift and such a vital part of my education at Washington and Lee, but it became particularly relevant when the social justice movement took hold in the country. I was understanding the current events and what was happening from a different perspective from my husband, a graduate of the class of 2002. And I was trying to figure out why that was. It all came back to the class on stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. I grew up there in a mostly white affluent community. I didn't have a lot of exposure to multicultural diversity. I was reading a post by Dolly Parton yesterday on Instagram and she was talking about some kind of show that they have in Gatlinburg or somewhere near Dollywood. It was called the Dixie Stampede. And she said, “I didn't know that was offending people.” She has renamed it to Dolly Parton's Stampede. And she said, “You know, it was innocent ignorance.” And I really related to that growing up in Birmingham and now living in San Francisco, working in San Francisco with a much more diverse population. It holds true that I need to be aware of things that I do have stereotypes, prejudices that I may have, that influenced my work with people of marginalized groups, all of whom experience prejudice and discrimination on a daily if not hourly basis, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, these are all areas where we stereotype. We group people, understandably because that’s the way our brains are made. But they lead us to have certain prejudices, and they can easily lead to discrimination. And so Julie's class helped me take a hard look at what I was doing, and the ways in which I was categorizing people, the ways in which that was affecting my attitudes and therefore influencing my behavior. She helped me understand that I was not wrong to stereotype, but that I needed to take a hard look at my own biases and cognitive process around grouping people so that I could then understand my own behavior and how that behavior may be negatively affecting others. Julie's class is a Cliff's notes version, it is a
jumpstart, I still am learning every day I'm still experiencing it, and learning through my clients learning with my colleagues learning through trainings, learning through research trying to stay relevant. In fact, I have a paper on my desk right now talking about addressing clients' racism and racial prejudice in individual psychotherapy. So it is a very much a part of my life. And I don't know that it could have been, or I don't know that I would be nearly as effective as I hope to be with my patient population as a provider, if it weren't for this class.

Ruth Candler  5:20

Julie, welcome to W&L After Class.

Julie Woodzicka  5:22

Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Ruth Candler  5:24

So I have to tell you, our podcast team has really been looking forward to this conversation. You and I will be discussing topics that aren't always easy to talk about but need to be talked about if we are to better understand all that's happening in our world today. So let's begin with an explanation of some of the basic terminology you use in your course. Are prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination words for the same behavior, or are there differences among them?

Julie Woodzicka  5:53

So that is something that is interesting to me as a social psychologist because I hear people using them interchangeably, but they are completely different things, are completely different concepts. Stereotyping relates to the thinking component of all this. I tell my students it's the part that happens in your head. So stereotyping is making generalizations about people or a group. And if it's based on group membership, and if you're talking about one person, it's really kind of ignoring the identifying, like, individuating information about the person and just using their group membership to make judgments about the person. So that is really based in generalizations, categorizations and thought. Whereas prejudice, I tell my students again, that the prejudice really has to do with feelings. So it has to do with affective feelings about how you feel about somebody based on their group membership, again, so do you like them or don't you like them? Some social psychologists talk about prejudice as being a social emotion. So it's not just "like" or "dislike," but it is actually the emotion that you feel. So if you see a black person,
do you feel afraid? Or do you feel angry? Or do you feel contempt? So that really has to do with the feeling part. Whereas discrimination has to do with the behavioral aspect of all this. So discrimination is the only one that you can see. So you see how people treat other people. If they are treating somebody unjustly, based on group membership, again, that is discrimination and discrimination can be major acts, things that we hear about in the news, hate crimes, quid pro quo harassment, but it can also be really small, what we call everyday discrimination. People reporting that they are being followed in a store, that people ignore them, that they don't get as much respect as they should. And again, it's all based on group membership.

Ruth Candler 7:54

Regarding terminology, you've mentioned that a lot of your students get hung up when trying to talk about issues of identity like race and gender and sexual orientation when they don't know the proper terms to use, like Black or African-American, for instance, or the wide variety of gender identities beyond male and female. How do you respond to this confusion?

Julie Woodzicka 8:18

That is something that happens a good amount in most of my classes. Students don't want to talk about these topics because they don't know the right words. And because most of them are pretty well intentioned, they don't want to accidentally use a wrong label or term and be seen as someone who's racist or sexist. So that is something that sometimes can get in the way of the conversation. It's true labels change and terms change all the time. The labels are important. It's important what you're calling a group of people. For example, if we look at Black versus African-American, African-American didn't come up as a label until 1988. And it was first coined by Jesse Jackson, who said African-American is the identity that we should be talking about. And for a long time, only people who were kind of more liberal used African-American, and Black was used more by conservative people. There have been polls, the most recent big poll was done in 2007. It was a Gallup poll, and they asked Black people, "Which term do you prefer: African-American, Black, something else or do you not care?" At that time, about 60% of respondents said that they didn't really care whether they were, you know, called African-American or Black, as long as the terms that were used were, you know, respectful terms. And so for a while it was that people who were mostly liberal would say African-American, but just recently in the last year or so, the terminology again seems to be swinging more towards Black, that people are reporting that Black feels more comfortable to them. And it might have to do with the Black Lives Matter movement or just feeling like it is more descriptive. So I think what it comes down to is that if you're working with someone who is of a different race or ethnicity than you, and you have a somewhat close relationship with them, you should probably just talk to them about what term they prefer when you're referring to them. That seems to make sense. Another area that students sometimes need some guidance on is whether to use
homosexual or gay. So for a long time, people used homosexual and that was the accepted term. But homosexual carries with it a lot of stigma. In 1973, that's when the American Psychological Association termed homosexuality not a disorder. So up until 1973, homosexuality was in the APA manual as being, you know, this, this was a mental disorder, homosexuality. So it sounds very clinical. The gay community kind of grabbed onto the identity of saying, “You know, we want gay and lesbian.” And now if you use homosexuality in writing or even just saying it sounds outdated and not particularly good. So I think what it comes down to is if you’re going to have discussions about race or sexual orientation or gender identity, it is up to you to go online and find out what are the labels that you should use. It's really not very hard to do, and it makes a big difference. So in my class, we always have one class where we talk about labels. And by the end of the class, I say, "Well, now you know the words to use the rest of the term, and we can use them."

Ruth Candler  11:51
And just keep yourself up to date.

Julie Woodzicka  11:52
And keep yourself up to date because they change. They change often. So it is our responsibility to keep ourselves up to date.

Ruth Candler  11:59
Let's move on to talk about stereotyping, which is generally considered a negative behavior in American society. But stereotypes are pervasive nonetheless. Why are they so common?

Julie Woodzicka  12:11
Stereotyping is incredibly common. People would argue that they're automatic. We as humans are... We are wired to categorize things. So we seek to categorize things and people. We live in these worlds that are incredibly dense with stimuli. And for us to go through every situation and to actually try to process every individual person and every individual thing separately, that's a lot of cognitive work. And we as humans, we’re also cognitive misers. We're a little bit lazy, and we like to be able to categorize people and things because it makes going through this complex world a little bit easier. Stereotypes are... Part of the reason why we continue to stereotype is because it's cognitively easy for us to do. But we've also all been raised in these worlds where stereotypes are so prevalent. There's this cultural fabric that we learn about
when we're very young about which groups are which and what those groups are like. And those associations are hard to unlearn. So we have these very strong connections early on about what certain groups are like and what other groups are like. We like to categorize, we are a little bit lazy. And if you put those two things together, you find that stereotyping is fairly automatic. People do it very, very quickly.

Ruth Candler 13:41

All right, so take llamas, for example. They're cute, they're fluffy, adorable creatures, right? I once read an essay that argued that if every story you heard about llamas portrayed them as vicious cannibalistic predators with scales, you would inevitably look for evidence of these characteristics when you saw a llama, even if it meant rejecting evidence to the contrary. Are you familiar with the theory?

Julie Woodzicka 14:08

I haven't heard about the llama. But now I'm just terrified of llamas.

Ruth Candler 14:13

Sorry, I didn't mean to put that in your head.

Julie Woodzicka 14:14

No, that's all right. It makes total sense. Yeah. Like, if we have expectations, and we as humans... There's something called expectancy confirmation. We like when what we expect is confirmed. And we don't like it so much when our expectations are disconfirmed. So if you learned that there's a certain group of people who are a certain way, and that's your expectation, you will continue to look for behavior that confirms your expectancies. And there's been a lot of really, really cool and clever and just kind of elegant, simple studies that have looked at this. One of the classic studies is one done by Cohen in 1981. And what Cohen did was had people watch a video of a woman going through a series of everyday events, you know, she got up, she got ready for work, read a little bit, you know, had breakfast, listened to some music, ate a burger. So just things that normal people would do, like, on the weekend. And half of the participants were told before they watched her that she was a waitress. The other half of participants were told that she was a librarian. And then what they did is they had them watch the video, and at the end had people remember as many things as they could about her day. And what they found as you might expect is that there was this expectancy confirmation in that
if they thought that she was a waitress, they remembered very waitress-like things. Like, you know, eating a burger or listening to music. If they thought she was a librarian, they remembered the more librarian-like behaviors, like, you know, reading a book, or just, you know, sitting quietly. So we have... There's a lot of studies now that show that we tend to ignore information that could be really useful and valid if that information does not confirm what we expect about a group. So there's that. We have plenty of information that disconfirms stereotypes. We've all met, you know, people of certain groups that don't fit the stereotype. One would think, “Well, you meet enough people who don't fit the stereotype, the stereotype would go away.” But because of expectancy confirmation, and because of there's something else called self-fulfilling prophecy or self-fulfilling beliefs, if you treat somebody in a certain way, because you believe they’re a certain way because of the group to which they belong—like, let's say maybe you think women as a group are very emotional, so you treat a woman in a crisis like she's going to be very emotional—your behavior towards that person then causes that person to basically give back to you what you have given them. So, we also have these self-fulfilling prophecies. And there's been a ton of studies on this with teachers. Teachers think that certain kids are smart versus not, that those smart kids are really going to bloom during the year versus other kids who aren't going to bloom. And sure enough, they find that teachers treat the kids who they believe to be bloomers very differently. They give them a lot more attention. They answer their questions better, they give them more space kind of to ask questions. Similar studies have been done with black and white interviewers and interviewees, finding that black interviewees do not get as much of what we call intimate or immediacy behaviors. So they don't get smiled at as much by their interviewers who are white, who don't face them straight on, don't lean towards them, spend less time with them, and then the Black applicants, as one would expect, don't perform as well, because they're not getting the same kind of feedback. And then the white interviewer says, "Well, you know, they didn't do very well, so I'm not going to hire them."

Ruth Candler  18:11

So I know many people who believe, or want to believe anyway, that stereotyping is largely a thing of the past. It doesn't sound like that's a possibility. Or do you think they're right? Or do you think at least they're less common than they once were?

Julie Woodzicka  18:29

The answer is no. So stereotypes continue. They're strong. There was, again, a really classic study that was done. There were three studies, it was called the Princeton Trilogy. And the first study was done in the 1930s, the second in the early ’50s. And the third was done the late ’60s. And basically what this Princeton Trilogy tried to do was figure out if stereotypes were fading. So in this study, they had 100 Princeton students, and the students would basically rate 10
different groups on what those groups were like. And what they found... So the Princeton Trilogy found that, yes, stereotypes were fading. So if you just look at Blacks, for example, the stereotypes became much less consistent and much less negative over time. And then there were researchers who looked more recently into those studies. And what they found was that the stereotypes weren't fading, they were just changing. So what you find is that stereotypes do change a lot. So you know, you think back when Black people in America were slaves, the stereotypes of Blacks were, you know, happy-go-lucky, superstitious, because at that point, Blacks didn't really pose a threat to Americans. And then you find, in the 1960s, when you have the Civil Rights Movement, the stereotypes about Blacks as a group really changed and they became, you know... Black people are violent or, you know, the nature of the stereotype really became different. So stereotypes change. What researchers also found is that your stereotypes can be very different than your personal beliefs. So stereotypes are always out there. And they're, again, kind of they make up the cultural fabric of a society. But personal beliefs are the degree to which you endorse those stereotypes. So you can know all the stereotypes about a certain group, you can know what the stereotypes in our current culture are about Black women, about Black men about white women about Asian-Americans. You can know all those stereotypes, but you can choose not to believe them. If you choose to believe them, however, those are your personal beliefs, you know, whether or not you endorse those stereotypes. So personal beliefs may be becoming more positive, although some would argue that right now in our current society, personal beliefs are not becoming more positive. But stereotypes are always out there. They just change.

Ruth Candler  21:07
I mean, that to me is so discouraging.

Julie Woodzicka  21:09
Mm hmm.

Ruth Candler  21:10
That wasn't the answer that I was expecting or hoping for. What do we do?

Julie Woodzicka 21:16
Well, so, because stereotypes are really on automatic, the first thing we have to do is we have to understand where our biases lie, like, what biases do we really have, and know, like, that you
are stereotyping. And that takes a lot of work. So the problem with this is that only people who are willing to work at it will be better. So Patricia Devine, who is a very well-known social psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, she talked in the ’80s about prejudice and stereotyping as a habit that you need to break. So it's like any other habit. If you bite your nails, you need to be aware that you're doing it. Every time you start to do it, you need to stop yourself and say, "Hang on, what am I doing? This is not something I want to do." And then you need to replace that behavior with something more positive. So with stereotypes, you need to be aware that you have these biases and that you may be stereotyping. You need to be motivated to, when you're doing that, to stop and really question, like, "Do I have evidence for this? Or is this just something that I'm really creating?" And then you need to replace it with beliefs that are more representative of your values or, you know, that are more egalitarian, saying like, “No, this isn't fair what I'm doing.” And that, in short, takes a lot of work. So people are going to have to want to do the work. It's not just going to change, we're not just going to have stereotypes fall away, or bias fall away. But people are going to have to start working really hard to change their beliefs and change their automatic associations.

Ruth Candler 22:54

To me, those that are willing to work at it... That doesn't seem to be where the problems lie. It's those that aren't questioning themselves. So how do you address those that really need to be examining the way that they're thinking? What do you do?

Julie Woodzicka 23:15

So that is a great question, Ruth. And I don't have an answer for that. I mean, it’s... If people are going to want to have things be equal, for whites as a group, that's a threatening thing. You know, there's a lot of white privilege and white group threat, identity threat, in that, you know, for there to be equality, one group of people is going to need to give up some of the privilege that they have, so that the group that has been, you know, systemically discriminated against, treated unequally, for ages to have more power. So that... I don't know the answer to that if people aren't willing or don't want to change. You can't force that upon somebody. Actually, I'm going to revise a little bit. You can in some ways. So you can have institutions set up that are, you know, more geared towards equality. Right now in America, and I don't think I'm telling you anything you don't know, there is a lot of systemic racism in education in, you know, in prisons and policing, in juries, in, you know, just about every area, you see systemic discrimination of all sorts. And, you know, one could make the argument, I think, that if we set up institutions so that they're less racist or sexist or any other issue that you can think of, that people will kind of get used to working within those systems. You know, I think of way back when seatbelts were still optional, and I grew up in Wisconsin, and I remember all the PSAs and on signs on the road, “give yourself a hug.” And we knew that wearing seatbelts saved people's
lives. But yet people—I remember my father who was like... There was no way he was gonna wear a seatbelt. Like, it was too uncomfortable and that just couldn't happen. So what did the government do? Well, they legislated behaviors so that people had to wear seatbelts. And then, you know, people grumbled and didn't want to, but sure enough, people started wearing seatbelts. And now you ask people's attitudes about seatbelts, and I mean, even my father came around like said, “Of course, it's important to wear seatbelts.”

Ruth Candler  25:20

That's a great example.

Julie Woodzicka

Yeah, so we can have, you know, institutions in our government, lots of places, you know, we can have broad social change that will impact individuals. And it's, you know, will take a while, but that is one way to do it. If individuals aren't willing to kind of question and stop themselves and think about how they behave and how their behavior impacts other people.

Ruth Candler

On the subject of social justice, most people would say, "Well, I'm not prejudiced," but I've noticed that such a claim is often followed by the word "but," and to me that contradiction is so revealing. What do you think about that?

Julie Woodzicka  26:00

Well, first, I would say, you know, to the people who are saying, “I'm not prejudiced,” they're wrong. They are prejudiced. We all hold bias. We... and we can talk more in a little bit maybe about implicit and explicit bias. But we all hold bias. This is something that we have as humans. We are biased. So first the claim of saying “I'm not prejudiced, but...” And then the “but” is also, you know, further... they're kind of moral credentialing, saying, like, “I'm a good person, but I believe this not really good thing.” You know, it's just, it's just not true. And I think part of this is people realizing... just becoming more sophisticated about how we as humans work, how your brain works. You do categorize people, and you do have bias, it's part of being human. And that said, we can work really hard to try to, you know, decrease or mitigate that bias. But by saying, “I don't have it,” that's not the way to go. So I would say, you know, the claim, and I think it's very telling of Americans today and I think, you know, especially in white America, people are feeling like because they haven't personally—or at least they believe they haven't personally
harmed someone of another group—they’re kind of feeling like they’re not the problem. And at this point, we’re all part of the problem, if we’re not doing something actively to make things better for everybody. So yeah, I find that claim, whenever I hear someone say, “You know, well, I’m not prejudiced.” I’m like, “Wait, wait. Yes, you are. It’s just how it works.”

Ruth Candler 27:40

So you brought up implicit bias. During the last few years, the term implicit bias seems to be widely used in the media. What exactly is the difference between implicit bias and explicit bias?

Julie Woodzicka 27:55

Okay, so, it used to be, you know, back in the old days, you could ask someone straight up, you know, what do you think about this group of people? You know, would you want your son or daughter to marry someone of a different racial group? Would you want someone of a different racial group to move next door to you? And there were actually questionnaires that would ask those questions exactly to look at people’s prejudice. And people, you know, back in the day, were very willing to answer those honestly and say, “Yeah, I wouldn’t feel good about my daughter marrying someone of a different racial group or of, you know, a family moving in next door that wasn’t the same race as me.” And that that's explicit bias. So explicit bias is what we kind of think of as old-fashioned prejudiced. It’s the prejudice that’s out there that people are willing to say. There's nothing, like, hidden about it. There's... it's quite intentional. So explicit bias for long time that's all that social psychologists studied because they could because explicit bias was prominent. People would say they didn't like certain groups of people, and you could study it that way. However, you know, around the Civil Rights Movement, ’70s, ’80s, what researchers found is that people were less likely to admit their biases. And sometimes they didn't even really know that they had biases, and where their biases lay. So at that point, we started talking more about implicit bias. So implicit bias is usually sort of unconscious, you don’t necessarily know you have it. So that’s, that’s hard to address. Implicit bias is often not intentional. But again, intention, it doesn't really matter whether it's intentional or not. And implicit bias is bias that people are often not willing or even able to recognize. So it’s, you know, the kind of bias that we all have, but we’re not, like, waving a flag saying that we have it. So researchers, you know, really in the late ’80s and ’90s, started to really turn to looking for ways to measure implicit bias. So how do you, if people aren't willing to tell you their biases, or they don’t even know that they have these biases, how can we still study these topics? And social psychologists were at the forefront of designing measures, you know, to look at implicit bias. So some of the more simple ones are facial expression. So you can code people's faces when they are with someone in, you know, of a group that is different from them. And you can kind of see, you know, is there much gaze aversion, are they averting their eyes from the person? What’s the social distance? Will they get close to that person? A lot of really kind of clever and easy
studies in the early days of looking at this really looked at social distance. So they had, you know, someone in a waiting room who was of a different race than the participant, and they didn't think the study was starting yet, but the study began and they'd have the person come in, and they would have a chair that they'd have to place in the waiting room, and they just measured how far away did they place that chair from a person of another race. And that kind of was, you know, the study.

But we've gotten much better. You know, when computers became commonplace, there were much more specific and accurate ways to study implicit bias. One of the ways that most people hear about it now is through something called the Implicit Association Task, the IAT. And it looks at how quickly you can pair words that are evaluative words, like good or bad words. So like a good word would be "wedding," "joy," "happy birthday." Those are all words that have really positive connotations. Bad words would be things like "funeral," "dirt," "worms," that all have kind of negative, you know, connotations. And then you also have the target words, so the target words could be, let's say, for a Black, white the target words could be stereotypic Black names and stereotypic white names, you know, so you have Black names that are more stereotypic like Tyrone or Shanita. For white names, you have more stereotypic white names like Hannah or Emily. And then what you do is you have these words come up, either the evaluative ones or the target ones, they come up one at a time and people get instructions beforehand that if you see a word that is either good, or white, or black or bad, you need to sort them a certain way. And people also get, then, the counterstereotypic example where you have to pair white and bad and Black and good, and they basically look at how quickly can you categorize, like, a word, a Black face is good, or you know, bad, so you basically are pairing words and you're hitting computer keys and they look at your reaction time. So how long does it take you to pair Black and bad versus Black and good. And what we find over and over again is that it takes people a lot longer to pair Black and good and white and bad than it does to do Black and bad and white and good.

Ruth Candler  33:19
You said takes people longer. Is that separated out into white people or Black people?

Julie Woodzicka  33:25
Yeah. So, they, there is more of an effect for white people. There is an effect for Black people. It's not as strong as for white people, but you do find a pretty robust effect. And they have... It is not just for race. There are IAT’s for, you know, do you feel more positively about cats versus dogs and there's color IATs, there's political affiliation. There's, you know, gender. There's IATs for sort of every kind of social or any kind of group that you can think of. But again, it's really based on this idea of, you know, how much can you associate. So implicit bias, you know, is
really these quick associations that people may or may not know that they even hold. Whereas explicit bias is, you know, pretty straightforward, what you think about a person based on their group membership.

Ruth Candler  34:18
In our planning meeting before this podcast, you explained that you're a social psychologist and not a sociologist. What's the difference?

Julie Woodzicka  34:27
A social psychologist looks more at individuals. Psychology in general looks more at individuals whereas sociology looks more at group behavior. That said, there are plenty of experimental sociologists who do look at individuals and groups, but one of the main things is the individual versus group distinction. Also, social psychologists tend to use experiments more than sociologists would. Again, there are experimental sociologists who use experiments, but we tend to manipulate variables and see if those variables actually have an impact on people. So that's the... Those are the two main differences.

Ruth Candler  35:08
Well, then, can you tell me about the effects of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, not on a social level, but on an individual one?

Julie Woodzicka  35:15
Sure. So the effects are big, and they're pernicious, and they are widespread. We look at the effects in basically having correlational studies. So looking at different groups of people and the outcomes that are associated with different groups of people. But we also have experimental studies, actually manipulating the ways that people are treated and how that impacts them in the moment and even long term. There are basically three main areas of effects when you think about how discrimination impacts people. The first area is physical well-being. So you can find that people who are targeted with discrimination often, they often report actual physical symptoms, you know, stomachaches, headaches, increased cardiac disease, I mean all the symptoms that you would see with people who experience a lot of stress, because discrimination, especially everyday discrimination, is very, very stressful. So there have been... There's a good amount of research looking at the effects of everyday discrimination on physical health, finding that people who experienced more everyday discrimination, and this is above
and beyond socioeconomic level or other stressors, experience more physical symptoms. We also just can look at well-being, so people's mental health, their well-being scores. Same story that people who are targets of discrimination—and it doesn't have to be... I think when people think about discrimination, they think of things like hate crimes or these like big events. In some ways, those events are easier to process because they're concrete, they're obvious. You can report them, you can get help, you know, you can kind of work through it. Whereas the everyday discrimination is especially pernicious because it's always there.

Ruth Candler  37:13

Give some examples of everyday discrimination.

Julie Woodzicka  37:16

Okay, so women often report everyday discrimination in that they're walking down the street and they get catcalled, or they're in an elevator with someone who's giving them the up down. They have someone say to them, "You know, you'd be a lot prettier if you smiled. Why don't you smile, honey?"

Ruth Candler  37:33

Oh, God...

Julie Woodzicka  37:34

You know, there's just this kind of everyday incidence. Women often report being in a group where they keep trying to kind of say their idea, and then someone else takes that idea and says it, and everyone is like, “Oh, that's a great idea.” And they're like, “I've been saying that for the last 30 minutes.” So kind of feeling, you know, ignored, feeling invisible. So all those are, you know, everyday. They're not, you know, people hearing sexist jokes, people hearing racist jokes. Those are all events that happen to women, to Black people, to gay people, all the time. It's part of their daily lived experience. And it doesn't cause them to, like, crumble, but they have to... There's a lot of things. One, they have to decide, is this really discrimination or not? Like, is that something really happening or not, you know, they have to realize, is it, like, my perception or, like, what is the reality here? That's stressful and hard. Then they have to decide are they going to actually confront it, because confronting does take a good amount of psychological work, there are costs that are associated with confronting, so that's... everyday discrimination is just this, you know, continual onslaught of these very small everyday
indignities. But you know, across time, they add up. So there are well-being effects. You know, again, you look at effects that are similar to the effects of stress. And then you have—and this to me is a really interesting part—you have performance effects that people who are targeted with discrimination or who are even thinking about stereotypes relating to their group prior to a performance of, you know, taking a test, you find effects on performance. People do, you know, less well. So those three areas are often studied. And, you know, the outlook isn't great, there are some really serious effects on individuals of discrimination, not just the whole society.

Ruth Candler  39:33

How do you study it, and where does the data come from?

Julie Woodzicka  39:37

So, um, studies... Again, they can be, you know, done with correlation where you have people fill out surveys about, you know, lots of different things, like the amount of discrimination that they face and then also look at the effects. You can do correlational studies, which are just simply association studies. So in those studies, you can't say that this caused this, you can just say these two variables are associated. So it appears that as discrimination increases, mental, you know, well-being decreases. There's also... Social psychologists have a lot of studies where they actually come in and... or participants come in and they manipulate something to see the effects of discrimination or stereotyping. So some of the most famous studies from, you know, the ’90s were stereotype threat studies. So looking at what were the effects if you made women, if you made Black people, if you made Asians aware of stereotypes about their group prior to taking an academic test, would you see some kind of deficit in the test-taking? And in those studies, you know, they control for things like, you know, SAT scores and GPA so, you know, it's not just, you know, some people do better on tests than other people, but it's really looking at, you know, what, what's the effect of making the stereotype salient before a test. And if you think about how, like, GREs and other... SATs are set up, often there is a big demographic portion that you fill out before, and in some of the early studies, they found that simply checking your race is enough to cue the stereotypes. So, you know, you don't need to actually give people the stereotype, you just give them the category and that could prime the stereotypes. So, you know, we look at it through correlational studies, we look through experimental studies.

Ruth Candler  41:33
Before we wrap up, let's talk about your research, which focuses on racist and sexist humor. The term group-based disparagement humor struck me as I read through your syllabus. What is this? And how does it work?

Julie Woodzicka  41:48

So group-based disparagement humor is simply any type of humor that demeans, objectifies, degrades a group of people. So sexist jokes, racist jokes and anti-gay jokes. And I actually became interested in looking at humor and the effects of humor way back, you know, in the mid-1990s. And for my master's thesis, I was interested in looking at whether distraction would make people think that racist jokes were more funny, because there was this theory called the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. And the whole theory says that messages can be presented to you either via a central route, which really gets, like, the meat of the message, or a peripheral route, which is more like all the stuff around the message, like the person who's giving the message, their attractiveness, like where you are, if it feels, like, light and fun. So I was interested... if you had racist jokes, and people were distracted so they really couldn't think about the racist message, but they thought more about "Oh, it's just a joke," if they would find it funnier when they're distracted. Then when they're told to kind of think about the message... Simple study.

When you do a study in psychology, you have to submit the study to an IRB, an institutional review board that looks at the ethics of your studies, make sure that you're treating human participants correctly and all of this, and I submitted my study to the IRB at the institution I was at, and I got back a response that said, “No, you may not subject your participants to racist jokes,” which was fine, but then they said, “Why don't you use sexist jokes instead?”

Ruth Candler  43:38
That's okay.

Julie Woodzicka  43:39

Right. So, at that point, it was just really interesting. At the time, you know, I was, like, young and I just wanted to get my master's thesis done. So I was like, great, I'll do that study with sexist jokes. But then looking back, and I think part of it was also in 2010, I got a... With Tom Ford, who's this fabulous researcher, we got a collaborative grant from the National Science Foundation to study the effects of sexist humor. And after we got that grant, National Science Foundation grants are public knowledge, so people can go through and read the abstracts of what's being funded because it's public money. And in Tom's little town, he lives in a place similar to Lexington, there were a couple of op-eds in the newspaper from people who had
realized that he got federal funding for studying sexist jokes. And, again, they were like, "What's the big deal? It's just... we're just joking. It's all in fun. Why can't people just lighten up?" And, you know, so again, that... That's valid, like maybe sexist jokes aren't harmful, but that's what we wanted to study. Like, there hadn't been any research looking at, like, what are the effects of these jokes and do these jokes cause more prejudice? So, you know, I thought it was just really interesting thinking back to my early days of people being like, “Oh, sexist jokes are fine. We don't want to touch racism, but sexism is fine.” And then, you know, with our experience of getting this federal grant to study sexist humor, a lot of people had problems with it, you know, that this was not a valid way to study or a valid question to ask. And again, we're thinking, “Well, of course it's a valid question to ask, and maybe we'll find that sure enough sexist jokes don't harm anyone.” But that's not what we found.

Ruth Candler  45:25

Anybody that's been on the receiving end of a sexist joke knows that that's not right.

Julie Woodzicka  45:28

And what we found, you know, so sexist jokes: They don't, you know, make people totally fall apart and, you know... But it's once again one of those, like, everyday instances of discrimination. People's immediate mood is impacted in a negative way after hearing sexist jokes. Sexist jokes don't make people more sexist. So, you know, if I tell a sexist joke to a man, he's not going to become more sexist because he hears a sexist joke. But what Tom Ford found in his earlier research, and then we followed up and did it with different groups too—we found that sexist humor acts as a releaser of prejudice.

So here's how it works. If you have someone who is already pretty high in sexism, that person knows that they can't walk around spewing sexism, because that's, like, just not okay, that's not a way to behave in our society, right? But we found that when they hear a sexist joke, that acts as a releaser that basically tells them in this normative context right now, it actually is okay to treat women in a different way. So for men who are high in hostile sexism, when they heard a sexist joke, they then subsequently discriminated against women. And we had lots of different tasks. One of them is, like, a budgeting task. They took money away from women's budgets for a feminist group. But for men who are low in sexism, hearing sexist jokes doesn't make them release prejudice, because there's really not a whole lot of prejudice to release.

So it works... sexist humor works differently, I would say, for different people. You know, I'd say that sexist humor is most dangerous for people who are already high in sexism, because then it sends a signal that this is a place where we're just fun and we're just kidding. And you can say what you really think about women in this space. So that's one of the reasons that's really dangerous, and we found that it wasn't just sexist humor. We found that in... if you think about
social groups, there are some social groups which it's okay to discriminate against, like terrorists or bullies. Like, it's okay not to like those people, you know, as if you think about what people think about not liking those people, that's, like, that's good. You don't want to like those people. There's other groups that if you direct prejudice towards them, it's seen as, like, really bad, like grandmothers as a group or firefighters, you know, like, those are virtuous groups that we have these stable and conceptual consensual opinions about how we treat those groups.

But then in the middle, we have this group that's called the suppressed-prejudice kind of window, where there are groups, like women, you know, racial minorities, sexual orientation, you know, religion, where in those... those are groups which people know you should not treat people in that window differently. But privately, people still do. And the, you know, there's variation in people's attitudes towards people in that window. And we found that when you have sexist jokes, or when you have disparagement humor that targets people in that suppressed prejudice window, that's where it's really dangerous. That's where, then, people who are high in prejudice against those groups will release prejudice towards the people in those groups.

So yeah, so we have... I mean, it's been fun to work with humor, but, you know, we've found a good amount that, you know, disparagement humor on its own isn't going to make people completely fall apart, but it does definitely make people feel like they can act in a discriminatory way towards groups which they might feel negative about.

Ruth Candler  49:23
You also research personal confrontation, which if I understand correctly means when a person confronts another about a remark that's sexist, racist, ablest, ageist, etc. Can you tell us a little about this line of research?

Julie Woodzicka  49:38

Yeah, so this is my more recent work, which has been really fun and exciting. So basically, people confront... And confronting is difficult, there's plenty of research showing that confronting is not just one behavior. It's actually lots of different steps. First, you have to actually, like, see something as discrimination, then you have to decide that it's a big enough deal that you're actually going to do something about it, that it's confrontation-worthy, then you have to decide how you're going to actually confront, then you've got to confront. So there's all these different pieces. So it's not just like you see something and you confront. There's all these different factors. There's also research showing that confronters often incur social costs, so people report really not liking people if they confront, let's say, sexist jokes, because they're like, “What's the big deal? It's just a joke, lighten up, you know, you need to get a sense of humor.” So confronting is not really easy. Um, what my lab in particular has been
working on over the last couple years is how to give people tools to confront in a way that may mitigate the social costs of confronting, so how... If you know me, I'm someone who generally likes to be liked. I mean, we all like to be liked.

Ruth Candler  51:04

I like you, Julie.

Julie Woodzicka

Thank you. I like you too. You know, I think about, you know, how can you confront and feel like you're effectively stopping the discrimination that's happening but also feel like, you know, that people are going to like you and support you. So we have been looking at different techniques of confrontation, and the one that we've most kind of honed in on is witty or humorous confrontation. Because I think we can all think of a time when someone said something, whether it was directed towards our group or another group, and, like, we want to say something but we didn't and then we walked away and we thought of, like, the perfect comeback, like if I had only said... I would have been brilliant and clever and everyone would have laughed, but he would have felt, like, bad about it, you know.

So I think, you know, we all have experienced that where we walk away. So we're thinking about what if we gave people tools, we actually gave people some confrontations that would work and we've really focused more on confronting sexist and racist humor because humor is really hard to confront. And we've done a lot of research on this to looking at... People rate sexist and racist humor as kind of being lower on the "is it worthy of confrontation?" scale. So we're thinking about, well, how can people really handle sexist humor. So we've been looking at witty confrontations and both how effective they are and how likable the confoner is seen after employing the confrontation. And so to give you an example, so let's say you hear a sexist joke: “What do you do when the dishwasher stops working? You slap her and tell her to get back to work.” So someone tells that joke, so what do you do? Well, we have come up with the different confrontations and, like, one witty one might be just saying something like, "Wow, still single, huh?" Or "That must have sounded better in your head." Or "Can you repeat that? I couldn't hear you over my eyes rolling." Or "Wow, you're real charmer, huh?" Or "Your mom must be proud." You know? So we have kind of this whole litany.

And you laugh when you do it, right? You're treating humor with humor, but hoping to get your point across. So that's the thing, too. We don't know what... We know a lot about what people who are observing the interaction think about that confronting when it comes to confrontation. And in short, people who are observing think it's great. They think the person is totally likable
and fun and they want... One of the questions we ask is “How much would you want to be friends with that person?” They totally want to be friends with that person. What we don't know is if the person who is telling the joke actually realizes they're being confronted. So that is something we need to study more. We know that people who are seeing the confrontation, they say, “Oh, yeah, that would be effective. That person would know that they're kind of being called out like that's not okay...”

Ruth Candler  53:56
Because they're seeing it from the outside...

Julie Woodzicka  53:57
Right, but we don't know if the person who is actually on the inside who thought it was a good idea to tell that joke in a social situation in the first place is effectively getting the message. So we need to look more at that.

Another thing we don't know is how different confronters are being evaluated by other people. So, in all my research looking at this, we have used confronters who one could assume would be white. So usually we have a situation in which someone tells a sexist joke, either male or female, and then a white woman confronts and they know it's a white woman because the name is usually, you know, kind of a prototypical white name. And it was interesting because I was giving a talk about this research on witty confrontation, I asked for questions and in the audience there was a Black woman who raised her hand and said, "So do you mostly use white women in your research?" and I said, "Yeah, you know, I do." And she said, "Do you think it would work the same for Black women?" And you know, I said, "I don't know, that is a great question." Would it work the same if you are a Black woman versus a white woman and using these confrontations?

So, you know, in one school of thought there is this stereotype about Black women, it's called the angry Black woman stereotype. So one might think that, you know, if a Black woman uses that witty confrontation, she may not be seen as, like, fun and funny, but rather is seen as kind of, like, angry or like sassy or something. So maybe a Black woman, it doesn't work. Or one could also, you know, you could also flip it on the other side and say, “Well, you know, because Black women in the society are rated more negatively than white women, perhaps a Black woman who has a serious confrontation—because we always have a control where we have a serious confrontation where the person just says “That's sexist.”—but maybe, like, people really don't like it when the black woman is, like, too serious, because then she seems, like, more angry. But if she does the funny confrontation, the witty confrontation, she's viewed more positively. So the answer to this was, like, I don't know.
So, this summer, I have the good fortune of working with a W&L student named Enuma Anekwe-Desince, and Enuma and I really looked at this question, you know, how are both Black and white women perceived when they use both witty and serious confrontation?

Ruth Candler  56:37

So we talked to Enuma about her research this summer, and this is what she had to say.

Enuma Anekwe-Desince  56:43

My name is Enuma Anekwe-Desince, and this summer, I've had the pleasure of working with Dr. Woodzicka as a summer research scholar. So during our summer research together, we were investigating primarily whether Black and white women will be perceived similarly or differently based on how they confronted sexism. To do this, we specifically wanted to examine people's perceptions of warmth and competence and to see whether or not they changed based on confronter race and confrontation type. We hypothesized, which is to say we believed, that based on what type of confrontation they used, witty/funny versus serious, Black and white women would be rated differently on warmth and competence.

So for each individual participant who took our study, they were assigned to one of four conditions: Black witty, Black serious, white witty, or white serious. To show the differences between Black and white women we did two things. One, we used stereotypically Black or white names, such as Ebony and Emily respectively. And then we also used Black and white women's faces. Then the scenario that participants read was the following: Emily and Jake, or Ebony and Tyrone, are talking about a recent internet search that Emily or Ebony did. Jake or Tyrone says, “That reminds me of a joke. Is Google male or female? Female, because it doesn't let you finish a sentence before making a suggestion.” Now in the witty confrontation, Emily or Ebony would respond to the joke with, "Damn, that must have sounded better in your head." And for the serious confrontation, Emily or Ebony would respond to the joke with, "Damn, that's sexist."

Now afterwards, participants would be asked to answer a series of questions one after the other. So to measure warmth we asked questions such as, “To what degree is the confronter,” either Emily or Ebony, “the following adjectives: warm, good-natured.” And then to measure competence, for example, we asked questions such as, “To what degree is Emily or Ebony the following adjectives: competent, intelligent.” And participants were asked to rate the confronters on these qualities on a five-point scale, one being not at all and five being extremely.

So then after collecting the data and running some analyses, we found some interesting results. For one, on a measure of warmth, for those who saw white woman confronters, whether they
used witty or serious confrontations did not have much of a difference at all in how warm they were rated. However, for Black woman confronters, there was a significant difference in the warmth rating based on whether or not they used witty or serious confrontations. Specifically, Black confronters were rated as much warmer if they used witty instead of serious confrontations. In our measure of competence, however, there were no differences based on race or confrontation type at all.

Now, lastly, we also measured participants’ responses to the following question: “Based on Ebony or Emily’s response to Tyrone or Jake’s joke, to what degree would you want to be friends with her?” Now for white women, the type of confrontation that they used did not affect participants’ desires to be friends with them. However, for Black women, those who used witty confrontations were wanted as friends more than Black women who used serious confrontation.

Now this aligned with our hypotheses, so this was great news. However, in the field of psychology, it’s not enough to just have one study with significant results that support your hypotheses. So we had to try to replicate the findings, which led to our second study. Now in this round, we used different scenarios with different combinations, different names, and we replaced the use of faces with hands. And after analyzing the data that we collected this time around with the same questions asked, we saw again that there were no differences based on race or confrontation type for competence. However, overall, meaning for Black and white woman confronters, those who used witty confrontation were rated as warmer than those who had serious confrontations. This time around, the results were not as strong as the initial study, but they still replicated, meaning that the mean ratings for warmth went in the same direction for both studies.

Furthermore, the results for the question about whether participants wanted to be friends with the confronter replicated in this study as well, with participants wanting to befriend a Black woman using witty confrontation more than a Black woman using serious confrontation, and it not making a difference for a white woman much at all.

So essentially what I learned this summer is that there are less social costs associated with using witty/funny confrontations than serious confrontations for all women, but especially for Black women who are trying to tactfully traverse responding to sexism in the real world. As the response to the “want to be friends with” question shows us, Black women have more to lose, and are less likely to be befriended if they respond to sexist jokes seriously, than with a humorous response.

Ruth Candler 1:01:26

Wow. Enuma is so impressive. Julie, do you have anything to add to what Enuma said?
Julie Woodzicka  1:01:33

Not really. Enuma covered it really quite well. Probably the only thing is just I'd love to say how invaluable our summer research students are. I think I am speaking for most of the faculty to really say how much we value the students who work with us side-by-side collaboratively in the summer on our research projects. Enuma was amazing. I could not have asked for a better research assistant. She helped in all aspects of the study from conceptualizing it all the way through to analyzing the data. We're currently writing up some research for publication together. We'll submit our results to a conference, a national conference. So yeah, it was a delight to work with Enuma this summer.

Ruth Candler  1:02:21

Julie, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. This conversation has been very informative. I have one more question for you though. And it's a big one. How does stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination relate to issues before the American people today, like white privilege, systemic racism and the legacy of slavery in America?

Julie Woodzicka  1:02:46

That is a big one. Yeah, no, you know, so I... I just feel like knowing something about the processes involved with stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, and why we continue to stereotype and the automaticity of stereotypes, and just knowing what is implicit versus explicit bias, knowing... really understanding what systemic racism is, that it's not just, you know, based on an individual, it's like how whole institutions have been set up, that that is so valuable to understand what's happening today. Because you really, the lens through which you view current events today is very different if you understand implicit bias and you understand systemic racism and you understand that it's not individuals who aren't working hard enough, or it's not individuals who are behaving badly, it's individuals who are in a system that has treated them unfairly for a really long time.

So I think that the first step is just being aware of these processes which impact our everyday that are really tied up in all of our institutions, you know, from W&L all the way to, like, top government institutions. Because if you don't have the awareness, I think it's just so much easier to say, one, this isn't my problem, I'm not part of it. But we all are part of it because we all live in this nation together. Or you're willing to just try to ignore it, like maybe it'll go away. It's not going to go away. We need to find a way to, you know, work on these issues.

Ruth Candler  1:04:23
So, Julie, you've given us a lot to think about and ponder, and I really appreciate you being with us today. So thank you.

Julie Woodzicka 1:04:31

Thank you. It's fun.

Ruth Candler 1:04:33

And thanks as always to you for listening. If you'd like to learn more about the topics we discussed in today's podcast, visit our website, wlu.edu/lifelong. You'll also find more information about our future opportunities to engage with W&L alumni on many topics, including an expanded consideration of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination in American society. Look especially for our online discussion of racial issues with several W&L faculty and alumni in the coming months. We hope you'll join us back here soon. Thanks again, and until then, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.