

### *Goal Keeping and Implicit Biases*

Imagine that you're a goalkeeper playing in the final match of soccer's World Cup. It's late in the game, the score is tied, and the opposing team has just earned a penalty kick. Since goalkeepers stop only 18% of penalty kicks, it's fair to say that you're in a tough position.

Wouldn't it be great if you could influence which side of the goal your opponent shoots for, without having him or her even realize it? If you could do that, you could better predict whether you should dive to the left or to the right to make the big save. Remarkably, research conducted by Professors Rich Masters, John van der Kamp and Robin Jackson show that this is possible. They began by taking careful measurements from 200 video clips of penalty kicks in elite level matches, and found that 96% of the time, goalkeepers positioned themselves just a few inches off-center.

There is no evidence the goalkeepers did this on purpose – they were only about six inches off-center, on average, and their positioning did not influence to which side they eventually dove – but it did influence the direction of the penalty taker's shot. More often than chance would predict, shots were directed to the side of the goal with more space. Subsequent experiments confirmed that it is possible for a goalkeeper to subtly influence perceptions of space, and consequently the direction of penalty kicks, by standing just off-center in goal.

Being just a few inches off-center means that the penalty taker is unlikely to be consciously aware the difference, but will be at least 10% more likely to direct the penalty kick to the side with more space than to the side with less space. The goalkeeper's behavior has caused the penalty taker to have an *implicit bias*, a preference that guides action without the person's conscious awareness.

Implicit biases are an emerging area in psychology, and not limited to the soccer pitch. Psychologists are examining how implicit biases about race, gender, body type and other characteristics can influence our behavior towards people in important ways without our even realizing it. Good examples of implicit bias tests can be found online; to try them, direct your internet browser to [www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu) or simply perform a google search for "implicit bias."

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