

"It's not my fault, my brain implant made me do it"

April 3 2018, by Laura Y. Cabrera And Jennifer Carter-Johnson



An uncontrollable urge to aim right for them? Credit: Fabio Venni, CC BY-SA

Who's to blame if something goes wrong?

Imagine that Ms. Q was driving one day and had a sudden urge to swerve into a crowded bus stop. As a result, she ended up injuring several people and damaging the bus stop. During their investigation, police found that Ms. Q had a brain implant to treat her Parkinson's disease. This implant malfunctioned at the time the urge occurred. Furthermore, Ms. Q claims that the bus stop was not there when she acted on the impulse to swerve.

As brain stimulating technology advances, a hypothetical case like Ms. Q's raises questions about moral and legal responsibility. Is Ms. Q solely responsible for her actions? Can we attribute any blame to the device? What about to the engineers who designed it or the manufacturer? The neurosurgeon who implanted it or the neurologist who programmed the device parameters?

Historically, moral and legal responsibility have largely focused on the autonomous individual – that is, someone with the capacity to deliberate or act on the basis of one's own desires and plans, free of distorting external forces. However, with modern technological advances, many hands may be involved in the operation of these brain implants, [including artificial intelligence programs directly influencing the brain.](#)

This external influence raises questions about the degree to which someone with an implant can control their actions and behaviors. If brain implants influence someone's decisions and behaviors, do they

undermine the person's autonomy? If autonomy is undermined, can we attribute responsibility to the individual?

Society needs to discuss what happens when science and technology start challenging those long-held assumptions.

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