
IMPLICIT BIAS

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What it is:

Thoughts and feelings are “implicit” if we are unaware of them or mistaken about their nature. We have a bias when, rather than being neutral, we have a preference for (or aversion to) a person or group of people. Thus, we use the term “implicit bias” to describe when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes with them without our conscious knowledge. A fairly commonplace example of this is seen in studies that show that white people will frequently associate criminality with black people without even realizing they’re doing it.

Why it matters:

The mind sciences have found that most of our actions occur without our conscious thoughts, allowing us to function in our extraordinarily complex world. This means, however, that our implicit biases often predict how we’ll behave more accurately than our conscious values. Multiple studies have also found that those with higher implicit bias levels against black people are more likely to categorize non-weapons as weapons (such as a phone for a gun, or a comb for a knife), and in computer simulations are more likely to shoot an unarmed person. Similarly, white physicians who implicitly associated black patients with being “less cooperative” were less likely to refer black patients with acute coronary symptoms for thrombolysis for specific medical care.

What can be done about it:

Social scientists are in the early stages of determining how to “debias.” It is clear that media and culture makers have a role to play by ceasing to perpetuate stereotypes in news and popular culture. In the meantime, institutions and individuals can identify risk areas where our

implicit biases may affect our behaviors and judgments. Instituting specific procedures of decision making and encouraging people to be mindful of the risks of implicit bias can help us avoid acting according to biases that are contrary to our conscious values and beliefs.

Implicit bias is a universal phenomenon, not limited by race, gender, or even country of origin. Take this test to see how it works for you: [Implicit Bias Test](#)

Learn more:

[Implicit Bias](#) sits at the core of our previously published reports. Most recently, [Transforming Perception](#) documents how implicit bias shapes the lives of black men and boys, and [Telling Our Own Story: The Role of Narrative in Racial Healing](#) integrates implicit bias insights with a discussion of how narrative can work to undo the harms of discrimination.

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