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EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

UNDERSTANDING AND ACKNOWLEDGING

# Implicit Bias

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*Adapted from [Implicit Bias is a type of Unconscious Bias | Simply Psychology](#) and [ABA Resources Identify Implicit Biases Against People with Disabilities \(americanbar.org\)](#)*

# Understanding implicit bias



## Implicit Bias

Implicit bias (also called unconscious bias) refers to attitudes and beliefs that occur outside of our conscious awareness and control.



## Unconscious Bias

There is no difference between implicit bias and unconscious bias. They're two terms for the same concept.



## How implicit Bias is Formed

These associations are developed over a person's lifetime, and can be formed through experiences, culture and upbringing, media exposure, and messaging we are exposed to in direct and indirect ways.



## Explicit Bias

The opposite of implicit bias, explicit bias is the term used when someone is aware of their pre-existing beliefs and prejudices about a specific group of people and makes intentional decisions based on those beliefs.

**Implicit bias is a form of bias** that occurs automatically and unintentionally.

It nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors.

Implicit bias is distinguished from other forms of bias by the fact that it is unconscious.

## MOST COMMON EXAMPLES

### **RACIAL STEREOTYPES**

Unconscious racial stereotypes are a major example of implicit bias. In other words, having an automatic preference for one race over another without even being aware of this bias. This bias can manifest in small interpersonal interactions and has broader implications in the legal system and many other important sectors of society.

### **GENDER STEREOTYPES**

Gender biases are another common form of implicit bias. Gender biases are the ways in which we judge men and women based on traditional feminine and masculine assigned traits. Common implicit gender bias can have an impact on women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). In the school setting, girls are more likely to be associated with language over math, whereas males are more likely to be associated with math over language (Steffens & Jelenec, 2011), revealing clear gender-related implicit biases that can ultimately go so far as to dictate future career paths. Even if you outwardly say men and women are equally good at math, it is possible you subconsciously associate math more strongly with men without even being aware of this association.

### **LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY BIAS**

Similar to implicit racial and gender biases, individuals may hold implicit biases against members of the LGBTQ+ community. Again, that does not necessarily mean that these opinions are voiced outwardly or even consciously recognized by the beholder for that matter. Rather, these biases are unconscious. A really simple example could be asking a female friend if she has a boyfriend, assuming her sexuality and that heterosexuality is the norm or default.

### **WEIGHT**

Implicit weight bias is a tendency to judge people based on their weight. Our society tends to place a value on thinness. Most instances of implicit weight bias involve a subconscious prejudice and mistreatment of people who have obesity. A person who has an implicit weight bias may make negative assumptions about people with obesity and may even make decisions – such as hiring decisions or promotion decisions – based on a person's weight instead of on their qualifications.

## MOST COMMON EXAMPLES

### AGE

Age is the only universal social category we humans share, points out Michael S. North, an assistant professor of management and organizations at New York University's Stern School of Business. "Unlike gender or race, literally everyone eventually joins every age group if they live long enough," he says. "Older people can be stereotyped as warm but incompetent, which motivates people to be nice to them but also keep their distance," says North. He explains that when older people do not have a clearly defined role in society, it can lead to implicit bias in the form of questioning the value of their opinion or work.

### ABILITY

A 2007 study found that "preference for people without disability compared to people with disabilities was among the strongest implicit and explicit effects across the social group domains" (e.g., gender, race, religion, sexuality, weight, political orientation, etc.), with only age showing more implicit bias.

### LEGAL SYSTEM

Both law enforcement and the legal system shed light on implicit biases. These biases can encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments for people of different ages, race, ability and identity factors. For example, a public defender prioritizing a case involving a white defendant or a jury's unconscious perception that a young Black teen is more responsible for their actions than their white peer (Goff, 2014).

### NAMES

A common example of implicit bias is favoring or being more receptive to familiar-sounding names than those from other cultural groups. Research has shown Anglicized-named applicants receive more favorable pre-interview impressions than ethnic-named applicants (Watson, Appiah, & Thornton, 2011). This reflects how people can be unaware of how their own implicit bias can impact actions and decisions, even if inclusivity is one of their values.

## ACTIONS TO TAKE

*Intergroup Contact:* Meet and engage with individual members of outgroups. Getting to know people one-on-one and engaging in positive and meaningful relationships can help you build new positive associations and reduce stereotyping.

*Counter-stereotypes:* Develop new associations that counter your stereotypes. Expose yourself to or think about exemplars who possess positive traits that contrast with your stereotypes.

*Individuation:* Consider the attributes of the individual apart from their group. For instance, when you meet someone who has a mental health condition, focus on their individual characteristics, traits, interests, and preferences rather than stereotypes about persons with these conditions.

*Perspective Taking:* Take the perspective of the individual. Try to understand from their perspective what they encounter and what adaptive techniques they might use to function successfully.

*Deliberative Processing:* Reflect on your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions to better understand which ones are worthy of a more thoughtful consideration rather than a split-second reaction. We tend to act on our stereotypes when we have a lot of information to process in a short amount of time and feel stressed.

*Common Ground:* Focus on what you have in common with the individual members of the groups you are stereotyping rather than their differences.

*Education:* Participate in trainings and other educational programs aimed at raising awareness about implicit biases and their impact.

*Self-Monitoring:* Continuously self-monitor your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions for the influence of implicit biases.

*Accountability:* Hold yourself responsible for the negative influence that implicit biases have on your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions. Do not dismiss your accountability simply because implicit biases are triggered automatically without conscious awareness.

## RESOURCES

**Implicit Bias is a type of Unconscious Bias | Simply Psychology and ABA Resources Identify Implicit Biases Against People with Disabilities ([americanbar.org](http://americanbar.org))**