

Implicit Bias Module Series Transcripts

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## **Introduction Video**

Kristen: Hi. My name is Kristen Weber, and I'm the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Justice at CSSP, the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Leonard: I'm Leonard Burton, a Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Kristen: CSSP is a national non-profit organization working to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children, youth, and families thrive.

Leonard: CSSP is pleased to collaborate with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Child Protection Agency leadership, management, and staff from numerous jurisdictions to bring you this e-learning opportunity as well as a one-day interactive in-person workshop on understanding and mitigating implicit racial bias.

Kristen: We appreciate that you are participating in steps to achieve equity by increasing your awareness of implicit racial bias and how it can lead to disparate outcomes for children and families.

Leonard: We also appreciate your commitment to improve the lives of children, youth, and their families. Thank you again for joining us.

## **Training Intro Video**

Hi, my name is Kelly Capatosto, and I'm a senior research associate on the race and cognition team at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity. At Kirwan we are committed to the creation of a just and inclusive society where all people and communities have the opportunity to succeed. Our commitment to this mission is why we work so hard to understand and overcome barriers that prevent access to opportunity in our society – such as implicit bias and the unequal distribution of public and private resources.

Our annual publication, *The State of the Science*, has highlighted implicit bias as a powerful cognitive mechanism that can derail even the best of our intentions. All of these reasons, and more, are why understanding what implicit bias is and how it operates is vital to creating just and inclusive communities.

This course will introduce you to insights about how our minds operate and help you understand the origins of implicit associations. You will also uncover some of your own biases and learn strategies for addressing them.

Each module is divided into a short series of lessons, many taking less than 10 minutes to complete. That way, even if you're pressed for time, you can complete the lessons and modules at your convenience.

We are delighted that you are starting this process to explore implicit bias and what its operation means for your decisions and actions. Thank you again for joining us.

## **Module 1, Lesson 1: What is Implicit Bias?**

This first lesson will provide the foundational understanding of how we define implicit bias, and why it matters for our pursuit of diversity, inclusion, equity and justice. During this module, when we talk about implicit bias, we are referring to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Let's start to unpack that a little bit.

Although it's often used in a negative context, the word bias simply means an evaluation or belief. That means, it's possible to have a bias that is favorable or unfavorable. In other words—you can have a bias toward an object, person, or concept that is positive or negative. Bias, in and of itself, is a neutral term.

For example, take these three colors: I could say that I am biased toward red, or biased against blue. Or maybe I'm neutral toward yellow. All of those statements could be true. And, most people would agree that my preferences for red over yellow or blue don't make me a bad person. They are simply my preferences, and I probably did nothing to consciously control these preferences myself.

So, when we say that our psychological processes are "implicit" or "unconscious," we are simply referring to something operating outside of our conscious awareness. Like "bias", the term "implicit" in and of itself isn't a good or bad thing; in fact, as you will learn later in this training, we rely on implicit processes to move efficiently throughout the world.

So by definition, implicit bias is nothing more than our evaluations or beliefs, whether positive or negative, that can exist without us even realizing it. So if it's true that our biases may be hidden to us, and they aren't necessarily bad, why are we talking about them?

Well, we're talking about them because we now know that it is possible for us to form implicit evaluations based on inaccurate information or stereotypes of people, objects, and ideas. There's also evidence that implicit biases can impact our decisions, perceptions, and behaviors. This makes it more difficult for us to live up to our values of equity and fairness. That means that the actions and decisions resulting from our implicit biases can create real-world barriers to equity and opportunity; you'll learn more about what the research says about the effects of bias later on in these modules.

But these practical applications are why it's so important to learn about implicit bias, particularly those biases that don't align with your intentions, or explicit beliefs. To summarize,

implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes we hold outside of our conscious awareness. Implicit bias does NOT refer to those beliefs we are aware of but that we conceal or suppress in an effort to appear non-biased.

The word attitude describes your evaluation of some concept like a person, place, thing, or idea. For instance, in the color example from earlier, I shared that I prefer red. Attitudes can be positive or negative. In this example, my evaluation of red is positive. Alternatively, my evaluation of blue is negative.

We use the word stereotype to refer to those beliefs that are mentally associated with a given category. For example, people often stereotype Asians as being good at math and men are associated with being in the workplace more often than women are. Even if we don't endorse these stereotypes they can unintentionally influence our mental processes.

At this point, you might be asking yourself, "why is the topic of implicit bias worth our consideration when there are so many other issues that can impact our pursuit of equity and fairness?" Implicit bias is just another tool we possess to understand how our conscious commitments to fairness and equity can be disrupted –even when people have the best intentions.

More importantly, considering Implicit bias doesn't take away from the importance of addressing explicit or direct instances of discrimination. In fact, the effects of implicit, explicit, and institutional bias are informed by and contribute to each other. Although the main focus of these modules will be on implicit bias, we will also incorporate information and resources related to institutional and overt forms of bias.

In the next modules, we will dive deeper into how implicit bias can show up in our daily life, and how we can work to counter it. Thank you for joining us.

## **Module 1, Lesson 2: Implicit Bias in Action**

Hello everyone. I'm Joshua Bates and I am a social policy analyst at the Kirwan Institute. In the previous lesson, we defined implicit bias as those attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. But what does it mean to have thoughts and associations that you're unaware of? What does that look and feel like? And why does it even matter? Let's try bringing implicit bias to life by doing some quick exercises. As you'll soon see, these exercises are very simple. The purpose is not whether or not you can complete them, but what they show us about how our brains work.

Let's start by playing a game of word association: Think or say aloud the word that should go in the blank: [visual: young\_\_\_\_\_, night\_\_\_\_\_, black\_\_\_\_\_ ]

Obviously there was nothing difficult about that exercise. Not only was it easy to fill in the blanks, you likely had a response ready long before you were prompted to fill it in. This is the power of our implicit cognition and our lightning fast associations! When faced with incomplete information we rely on associative memory to quickly fill in the gaps.

It's also important to know that most people have the same response. It is possible to have similar associations shared across various groups of people—we usually refer to these as “norms” or “stereotypes”. For the next activity, please read the following paragraph out loud:

“If you can raed tihs praapragh, it's bcsecuae our mnids are vrey good at ptuting tgoehter peiecs of ifnroamtin in a way taht is esay for us to make snese of. Our mnids do tihs atoumtaicllay, whituot our cosncoius cotnrol.”

This was a horribly misspelled paragraph, yet you were able to read it without much difficulty at all! Even, if it took you a little longer to read, your unconscious cognition automatically made sense of the paragraph based on your ability to associate it with words you already know.

[See ABC/12, 13, 14 visual]

Most of us see ABC. Similarly, here we see 12, 13, and 14. Even though the middle figure in those images never changed, our brains are able to form different perceptions of the same image based only on the context surrounding. And this is done without our intention or control. What these three exercises demonstrate is the automatic, adaptive, and associative nature of our implicit processing. When faced with otherwise ambiguous or confusing content, our brains try to quickly make sense of it by relying on associations we've stored in our memory. Importantly, these stored associations don't have to be based on accurate and logical information. By just seeing concepts grouped together repeatedly, we can internalize associations that are skewed, distorted, and inaccurate.

Now, let's go through one final exercise that really speaks to the question of why implicit bias matters.

[See visual]

On the screen you will see a column of words. When prompted, please say aloud the COLOR of each word, not what the word says. Try not to read the words, just say what color it is. Ready? Here we go.

Great! Let's try it again with a similar set of words. Remember, just say the color of the word, don't read the word. Ready? Go.

This assessment – known as the Stroop Task – is a psychological task that looks at the dynamics of our automatic processing. For most folks, the first screen was simple. The color and the word themselves matched. Therefore the results of your implicit inclination to read the words aligned

with your explicit directions to say the color. On the other hand, your automatic inclination to read the words the second time may have taken a little bit longer. As this demonstrates, our implicit and explicit goals can, and often do, diverge.

THIS is why implicit bias matters. While we'd like to think of ourselves as rational and logical adults, the reality is a lot of our thought processes are occurring unconsciously, without our intention and control. Those implicit processes – when activated – can derail even our most sincere explicit intentions.

There are limits to the amount of information you can consciously process at any given time. In fact, research shows that, on average, we can only consciously process between 5 and 9 stimuli at a time. So that phone number you misremembered was at the limit of your capacity to process information consciously.

We rely on our implicit cognition to move through the world. Given this, uncovering your biases and understanding their effects on your life and others is critical to ensuring that intentions and outcomes align.

In the next lesson, we're going to dive more deeply into the origins of our biases, how they form, and where they come from.

### **Module 1, Lesson 3: Origins of Our Bias**

Hi, I'm Lena Tenney, coordinator of public engagement at the Kirwan Institute. So far, we have talked a lot about what implicit bias is, and how it operates. Now we will share some information about the origins of our biases. To do so, we will discuss a different perspective on how we internalize the messages in our environment as implicit associations or biases.

Our brain's ability to make connection between two concepts is known as associative learning. The best example of how our minds do this is through the process of classical conditioning. Most of you may have seen or heard about the original classical conditioning study conducted with the scientist Pavlov and his dogs. Every time Pavlov gave his dogs food, they began to salivate—this was their automatic response. Then he rang a bell every time he presented the food to the animals. Over time, after seeing these two stimuli paired together repeatedly, the dogs eventually exhibited the physiological response of salivating when a bell was rung even when there was no food around--- the association was formed.

Even though this classic study uses the examples of animal behavior, we all do the same thing when our brains try to perceive and categorize people. So in the same way that the dogs associated the bell with food, we associate characteristics such as leadership or criminality with aspects of people's identity like race or gender. For example, because CEOs of large companies

have historically been older, white, men this may be the first image that comes into our mind when we think of someone in this role.

One of the most interesting things about this style of learning is that people internalize associations at a young age and it's our childhood experiences that engrain them in our minds. So even if we hold beliefs that value equity and fair treatment, we can still be implicitly influenced by those messages we already received.

I'm a perfect example of that. People who know me are always surprised to learn that I have a strong implicit association connecting women with being at home, and associating with men and careers. In my life, this association is pretty ironic. Here I am, a non-binary person in the workforce who believes very strongly that people of all genders should be able to pursue their dreams. And yet, I still hold this strong association that directly opposes my own values and self-interest. But I know this association didn't appear out of nowhere. My own family experience reflected this dynamic—my mother was an incredible stay at home mom who cared for six children and my father served in the Air Force. I don't think I really knew any women who worked outside of the home—other than my teachers—until middle school. Because of this early experience, it's no surprise that I still unconsciously associate women with family and men with the careers.

But since I know about the implicit associations I hold, I can be mindful of my biases, or inclinations and intentionally try to stop them. For example, if I am part of a hiring committee for a job, I need to be aware of the possibility that my implicit associations might cause me to more harshly evaluate candidates who are women while giving the benefit of the doubt to candidates who are men. With this awareness I am actually able to start behaving in ways to address my biases.

## **Module 2: Introduction**

Next we will focus directly on the real-life impacts of these implicit associations within various contexts, delving into topics related to your line of work. Again, our ongoing conversation about bias is not about who is a "good person" or who is a "not-so-good person," but rather about how our implicit associations can have meaningful effects on your day-to-day life personally and professionally.

## **Module 2: Lesson 1: Introduction and Exploring the History of Race and Child Protection**

Hi. I'm Alex Citrin, a Senior Associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy where I work with child welfare systems and policymakers to advance practice and policy to achieve better

outcomes for children and families and to reduce current racial disproportionalities and disparities in child welfare.

Prior to joining CSSP, I worked directly with parents who had been accused of abuse or neglect as part of an attorney and social worker team. Through this work we supported keeping families together whenever safe and possible and ensuring that our clients and their families were able to access the supports and services they needed. In my current role and through my direct practice experience, I have seen how implicit associations can lead to bias that hurts children and families. I've also seen systems implement strategies to mitigate bias. In this module, we will focus on real-life impacts of implicit associations, specific to child welfare, delving into topics directly related to your line of work. Again, our conversation about bias is not about who is a good person or not so good person, but rather how our implicit associations can have meaningful effects on our day-to-day life personally and professionally.

To begin understanding how public systems created disparate outcomes, we need to take a look back briefly at some key points in U.S. history to examine how we got here and how different policies and practices have--sometimes intentionally, and sometimes unintentionally--impacted children and families differently based on their race and/or ethnicity.

In the 1600s and 1700s, family was the unit of social control for White families of European descent, and parents had total jurisdiction over their children, who were often seen as property. The government and other institutions had no involvement in how parents chose to raise or discipline their children.

Poor White children of European descent often worked in homes or communities as apprentices or as indentured servants. When the first slave ship docked in the US in 1619, it was the beginning of chattel slavery of African-American people in North America. Slavery was pervasive, brutal, and included the enslavement and abuse of Black children as one of the many ways that slavery denied Black people of the right to family ties.

Children of all ages, including infants, were kidnapped, torn from their families, sold, beaten, and had very high mortality rates.

Native Americans were also often captured, forced into slavery, and had very high mortality rates due to exposure to disease brought from Europe.

In the 1800s, the pendulum swung away from children as property to the idea that children--specifically White children--were vulnerable and in need of protection from abuse and maltreatment. It is in this century where modern child welfare practice emerged as an effort to bring parenting under the surveillance of the state with the goal of reforming families toward what was considered normative parenting standards. These accepted parenting standards were considered to be those of White, middle class, Protestant families.



From 1855 to 1875, orphan trains were established as a way of forcibly removing immigrant Catholic children from their families. Importantly, the focus of social welfare agencies was on removal and not on supporting children and finding a permanent home through unification or adoption. This meant that when social welfare agencies were created in 1825, the focus was on removal of abused and neglected children from their parents and from the unsafe city streets. Over the course of the century, the number of orphanages increased from seven to more than six hundred and mostly focused on supporting poor, White, and European immigrant children.

Importantly, these facilities did not accept youth of color, who were deemed as property, savages, and not worthy of resources. In 1874, the Mary Ellen case was the first instance of a criminally prosecuted case of child abuse. The outrage over this case led to an organized effort against child maltreatment.

In 1899, the first juvenile court was established in Illinois and embodied principles which, to name a few, included defining children as minors with limited decision-making ability and in need of protection, defining the rights and responsibilities of parents, establishing the state as having the ultimate parental authority, and establishing that the best interests of the child should guide decision-making.

By the late 1800s, the quality and quantity of child welfare interventions could be linked directly to racial inequities. African-American children continue to be legally torn from their families by slavery. However, the legacy of slavery meant that African-American children continued to be vulnerable to abuse and maltreatment with little protection or rights. African-American children who were removed due to maltreatment were placed primarily in private institutions, which were less resourced and had lower standards of care.

Native American children during this time were forcibly taken from their families and tribal communities with the desire to remove these young people from their culture and turn them into "civilized" people. Public and private organizations conducted mass child removals and raids, tearing Native American children away from their families and communities. These children were sent to boarding schools where they were forced to give up their language, dress, and culture, and where they were subject to harsh and abusive conditions with the goal of forced assimilation.

The 1900s brought a large series of policy reforms to expand social safety nets, but these mainly benefited White children and families, leaving children and families of color behind. These policy reforms coincided with the eugenics movement, which was the non-scientific ideology that society would be improved through an increase of the White population and decrease in populations of people of color and immigrants. While this ideology fell out of favor when it became the center of Nazi ideology in World War II, the theories behind it heavily influenced policies in the US at this time and led to intentional discrimination in systems that is still felt today.

It is also during this time that we see an enormous increase in the creation of juvenile courts and child protection societies, with these societies still serving mainly White children. Systems often labeled children of color as socially handicapped, meaning that their race or ethnicity was reason enough to treat them as lesser than their White peers. For example, in 1920, 40 states established pensions for mothers, a policy that intentionally discriminated against immigrants and non-White people. African-Americans represented only 3 percent of recipients, and Latinx people and Native Americans were excluded entirely from eligibility.

By 1978, as many as 25 to 35 percent of Native American children had been removed from their parents for alleged neglect or abuse, and many of these children had been placed in non-native foster and adoptive homes or institutions. Specifically, of those children removed, eighty-five percent were placed outside of their families and communities, even when fit and willing relatives were available. As a result of advocacy and outrage, this led to the enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act, also known as ICWA, to reduce the number of Native American children being removed from their homes and tribal communities. Changes in practice and law during this time also gave Native American parents the legal rights to deny their children's placement in off-reservation schools, which included the boarding schools that began in the 1800s and which we previously discussed.

The legacy of slavery, racism, and eugenics also connect directly to the mass incarceration movement of the second half of the 20th century. During this time, foster care placements nearly doubled in the late '80s due to factors such as the AIDS and the crack cocaine epidemic.

In 1971, President Nixon's administration launched what was known as the War on Drugs. Although the intent of the campaign was to stop illegal drug use, distribution, and trade, the policies that ensued targeted communities of color and disproportionately impacted African-American people and their families. The War on Drugs demonized African-American youth, tore apart families through police terrorization of African-American neighborhoods, increased incarceration, and increased news programming which spread harmful stereotypes about African-American people.

By the early 2000s there was an increase in what are considered "race neutral" policies, yet African-American and Native American families continue to feel the effects of the legacy these policies left behind, and some of these race neutral policies had significant unintended consequences on communities and families of color. Still today, African-American, Latinx, and Native American children and families experienced dramatically higher rates of intervention from public systems. Specifically, children and families of color continue to be overrepresented in youth justice and child welfare systems.

2018 data from AFCARS, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, show that race neutral policies do not reduce racial and ethnic disparities. For example, African-American children were overrepresented at a rate of 1.64, and American Indian/Alaska Native children were represented at two times the rate in the population, and in some communities this is as high as 10 times the rate in the population. This means that while American

Indian/Alaska Native children represent 1 percent of the total child population under 18, they represent 2 percent of the foster care population across the country, twice as much in the foster care population compared to the national child population. Similarly, African-American children represent 14 percent of the total child population and 23 percent of the foster care population, meaning that African-American children are represented in foster care at 1.64 times their rate in the national population. The disproportionalities and disparities go far beyond representation in foster care. We also know that once involved with child welfare, children and families of color are less likely to receive family preservation services, and children of color experience higher rates of placement in congregate care settings and longer stays in out-of-home care. Similarly, youth of color who are involved with the juvenile justice system also experience disparate treatment, including that African-American youth are more likely to be sent to solitary confinement and have their cases prosecuted rather than sent through diversion.

Implicit bias contributes to these disproportionalities and disparities, and we know that implicit bias can impact decision-making at numerous points throughout a child and family's involvement with child welfare. Many decision-makers believe their view of a specific case is based on an objective review of the facts and assume that racial disproportionality in outcomes is an unfortunate but true representation of reality. For example, implicit bias can impact decision-making at the point of a referral to the hotline whether a case is referred, screened in, investigated, and/or substantiated; whether an ongoing case is opened and a child is removed; and even if kin are explored and approved as a foster care placement. The reason for focusing on implicit bias, and especially implicit racial bias, matters is that individuals making decisions that impact children and families can be susceptible to bias. However, we know that bias can be mitigated by paying attention and being more aware. At the same time, systems can implement practices which also help to mitigate bias so that the rates of racial disproportionality and disparity can start to decline.

While much progress has been made, we know there is much to be done. We know that children do best when they're able to safely remain in their home and communities. Changing outcomes is not the responsibility of one worker or one agency alone. As Jessica Price, director of the Florida Institute for Child Welfare at Florida State University, has said: "We must do all that we can to create a fair system, and that includes using an intersectional lens when examining outcomes across sub-populations. It does not mean avoiding a topic that causes discomfort. Perhaps when people commit to increasing critical consciousness, face personal discomfort, and support anti-racist legislation and strategies, then real change can begin to permeate the child welfare system."

## **Module 2, Lesson 2: Implicit Bias in Child Protection**

Alex: Now we will hear from Ramona Simmons, former child protection professional in the state of New Jersey and former child protection services manager for Fairfax County, Virginia, the largest and one of the most diverse counties in the state of Virginia. Ramona will tell us about

why working to prevent disparate outcomes for children, youth, and families of color isn't a thing of the past. The effects of the history and of the policies described in the previous lesson, as well as the culture of racism and implicit bias, continue to have a negative impact on the children, youth, and families we interact with today. She will share with us her experience and why it is critically important to work to prevent disparate outcomes for children, youth, and families of color and why it's not a thing of the past.

Ramona: My name is Ramona Simmons. I began my career working for what was formerly known as the Division of Youth and Family Services in the state of New Jersey. I started out as a frontline child welfare worker. When I relocated to the state of Virginia, I started again as a frontline worker, and I've worked in various capacities. I worked as a foster care worker, a prevention worker, a child protective services worker.

Implicit bias, for me, is how our attitudes and understanding play out in our actions and behaviors. Why that is so important to address for child welfare staff is because child protective services workers are often the frontline first contact with the public. In addition, child welfare workers--specifically child protection workers--have a sense of power and control in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. When child protection workers don't have an understanding of their own biases, it impacts the work they do with families. This is so critical because child protective workers make lifelong decisions regarding the lives of children and their families. How those decisions impact children and families plays out in various ways. One of the things we say in doing our work is that every interaction is an intervention. So at the same time, every interaction that a child protective services worker has with a child or a family, their attitudes are playing out through their actions and behaviors. This is also demonstrated in how they carry out their services to the family, how they implement policies and practices in working with these families. And so if workers aren't aware of their biases, that is going to play out in a very negative way for the family.

We often see individual implicit biases play out when we're discussing services that we will be providing to families in the work of child protection. This may be seen in ways such as when we're discussing a case and how to proceed. Often we will talk about the demographics of a family; however, child welfare practitioners--whether it's the frontline worker or the supervisor--will often not acknowledge the race and ethnicity of the family. Now, we often have staff who still believe that the race and ethnicity of the family is not relevant. However, they fail to realize that when we don't address or acknowledge the race and ethnicity of a family or an individual, we're leaving out a part of that family and who they are.

At the same time we want to be careful not to make assumptions or stereotype a family. This prevents us from making cookie cutter approaches in deciding what services to provide to a family.

We have implemented various practices in child welfare that help us to mitigate our own implicit biases. Some of those things that we are doing and some of those practices include things such as reflective supervision, where it's an opportunity for the worker and the

supervisor to discuss their thoughts, values, and feelings when working with families. Without that opportunity, there is no way for checks and balance for that individual worker's opinions and thoughts about the families that they're working with.

It is important that we raise awareness about implicit racial bias. This is because our own implicit racial biases impact our actions, our behaviors, our attitudes, and how we interact with children and families on a daily basis in child welfare.

### **Module 3: Introduction**

Congratulations on making it to the half-way point. In this module, we'll discuss how to understand our own biases. We know that everyone has biases: it's a natural part of human brain activity. But how do we actually measure implicit bias? How do we identify what biases we personally may hold? This module will answer these important questions and set you on a path to understanding your own biases so that you can start doing something about them.

One unique aspect of this module is the opportunity for you to uncover some of your own biases by taking one particularly well-known and highly-regarded assessment: We want to acknowledge upfront that the results you receive may be challenging, but stick with us even in the difficult moments, as awareness of your own implicit biases better positions you to mitigate the effects of those biases, as discussed in Module 4.

### **Module 3, Lesson 1: How Do We Measure Implicit Associations?**

As we have discussed, a key characteristic of implicit bias is its unconscious nature. Put simply: folks generally are not aware of their biases and the ways in which they impact others. Equally important is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to uncover our implicit biases through introspection. Given these dynamics, tools have been created to help us measure our implicit biases to better understand them.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to measure our implicit biases. The first is by examining our behavior -- the automatic choices we make. The second is "neurological measurement" -- actually looking at how our brain is activated, using imaging technology.

Let's start by looking at the first set of implicit bias measurement tools -- those that examine our behavior. Behavioral assessments are the primary way researchers examine implicit biases. Most of these tools measure how we process the relationship between concepts. The underlying assumption is that we are quicker and more efficient at grouping concepts and attitudes together that are closely associated in our minds (such as ice cream and joy). There are people out there who hold a negative implicit association toward ice cream. Therefore,

these type of tests do not assume any particular association, instead measuring the direction and strength of these associations. In other words, the test measures: do I have a positive or negative association with ice cream, and how strong is this feeling?

The most well-known of these assessments is the Implicit Association Test – also known as the IAT. In a later lesson, we'll explore this test in more depth. But for now, it's important to know that tests like the IAT and the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure are considered by most researchers to be accurate measures of one's implicit associations.

Other forms of behavioral assessments rely on what's known as "priming" to determine the positive and negative preferences people have about certain concepts. Priming takes place when our memory unconsciously influences our current thoughts and behaviors on a given task. For example, a person who sees the word "yellow" will be slightly faster to recognize the word "banana" since those two things happen to be closely associated in their memory. These associations can spill over into concepts unrelated to the "prime." For example, if an individual has a negative implicit bias toward women, they are more likely to have a negative disposition toward an unrelated image (for example, a letter from a different language). Their negative thoughts or feelings toward the image would likely be different if they were instead primed with a "positive" image of a man.

The other way we measure implicit bias is by using medical brain scanning technology. For example, one may use an fMRI to examine what areas of the brain are activated when we perceive same-race versus other race faces. By using these tools we can see in real time how our brains respond when we engage in these split second decisions to group concepts together. This is why tools like fMRIs and the IAT are often utilized together in studies examining the unconscious nature of how humans perceive and respond to different groups of people.

### **Module 3, Lesson 2: What is the IAT?**

We want to spend some time talking about one particular test that researchers use to measure implicit bias, the Implicit Association Test, or IAT. The IAT is free and publicly available online. It allows people to learn about their implicit biases from the comfort and privacy of their own home or office. So how does the test work? The IAT measures the relative strength of associations between pairs of concepts.

Let's start with a simple example. Each IAT has several sets of trials that ask you to make various pairings. Suppose if every time you were given the prompt of "cookies" and told to pair it with "milk," this likely would be an easy task you could complete quickly given these two concepts are often in tandem. But, suppose if you were given the prompt of "pepper" and asked to pair it with "cookies," or to match "salt" and "milk." It will likely take you longer to complete these matches. Most people do not have an existing association for "pepper & cookies" or "salt & milk," so this task would not feel automatic; making these associations

would require some deliberate, conscious thought—so they would take more time to pair. You may also make more mistakes trying to match these concepts in this way. This idea – the notion that concepts that are closely associated are easier to mentally process vs. unfamiliar associations that take longer to process is a key idea underlying the Implicit Association Test.

Now, instead of milk and cookies, Implicit Association Tests measure unconscious associations for various social attitudes and stereotypes. IATs are able to assess positive or negative implicit attitudes for race, age, gender, ability, and other identity groupings. They can also measure implicit stereotypes. Each IAT takes about 10 minutes, and at the end, the test taker is given about the strength of their association – strong, moderate, slight, or none.

Since its debut in 1998, the IAT has been extensively studied. Like any human assessment, it is not without limitation, but the IAT has withstood many tests of its reliability and validity. This means that IAT results are statistically significant and not simply due to random chance.

In the next lesson, you'll have an opportunity to explore some of your own implicit biases by taking an IAT.

### **Module 3, Lesson 4: Understanding Your Results**

Lena: I remember we've had a conversation before about your experience taking a particular IAT. Which IAT released it out to you?

Amy: The Muslim Arab IAT.

Lena: Okay. And what was that experience actually like taking that test?

Amy: Well that was the first one that I took because I was very confident that I was gonna do well on it because I lived in a Muslim country for three of my formative years when I was child. And I thought that I would do really well on it and I was surprised that I didn't. First, I started to disbelieve the test's accuracy and then I started to reason with why I got the results I did.

Lena: So Amy, you mentioned expecting to do well on the IAT.

Amy: [giggles]

Lena: So what do you mean by that?

Amy: I thought I was gonna be like this exemplary human being who didn't have a bias against Muslims.

Lena: Now that you've had some time and space to think about it, what are your feelings and your thoughts around that result?

Amy: I think I would like to work on my bias because I still want to be an ally. And I still want people who come into our country to feel as welcomed as I had felt when I had been in another country.

Kelly: What were some of your feelings about taking the test?

Karima: Definitely felt some discomfort in making that initial jump in to take the exam. Sometimes worrying about what my responses might be.

Kelly: In terms of in your responses or the results that you got, what did you find the most surprising?

Karima: My results came up saying that I had a slight preference, I believe, to European Americans to African Americans. Which I found surprising, I didn't think that my responses would've indicated that. And same for my sexuality IAT as well, showing that I had, I believe, automatic preference for straight or for gay.

Kelly: How did you grapple with that discomfort after feeling, you know, some of that disconnect?

Karima: I try not to really put too much weight on my personal biases but rather how I may have been conditioned and how we all have these implicit biases and that's okay.

Kelly: How did you change your maybe behavior or some of your decision making might've changed after getting those results?

Karima: It was good to recognize those implicit biases, I think that it gives us all a bit more humility but I know that it won't change how I interact with others.

Zach: The first time that I took the Implicit Association Test, I think there was some, initially, disbelief.

Jason: It can make you a little nervous to look inside your own potential biases that you have.

Zach: The first time that I took one, it relieved that I have a bias toward females and females not excelling in math and sciences. It made me really question "what are some of the things that I've done that have you know mitigated or maybe dampened their contributions?" And it made me really think through that.

Jason: I think it's powerful information. It may make you a little uncomfortable and that's actually a good thing because no personal growth comes without just some level of discomfort and we should embrace that.



Zach: My hope is that through practice, I can get better at listening and paying attention and being more self-aware of the role of implicit bias in not just my day-to-day but, you know, those around me.

Glennon: So I've taken numerous IAT tests and the one that was the most surprising and a little disheartening to me was the gender science one. I consider myself to be a feminist, and I have a preference towards men in science careers.

Jillian: I took the gender and career IAT and was likewise surprised and frankly disappointed by my results. Are there things that I'm doing that are unintentionally perpetuating and contributing to some of these automatic associations, and you know, how can I use these results to influence not just my professional life but really my personal life and I move through my day.

Glennon: You know, it is a little disheartening to recognize our biases, right, when we first recognize them, it doesn't make us feel good about ourselves. But, I think it's incredibly healthy because how else do you address them? How else do you change those biases without being aware?

Jillian: It's alarming on some level because explicitly I don't feel that way but to know that I still can be influenced and my perceptions still being swayed without my awareness, it's a bit scary.

Glennon: You should be proud of yourself for defying those biases that you still hold, and living explicitly contrary to them. The world that my children will come of age in is not the same world that I have come of age in and that gives me hope.

## **Module 4: Introduction**

The lessons in this module aim to help you understand when you are most susceptible to implicit biases, and then offer ideas and strategies for addressing them. This conversation will encompass ideas for interventions that can be used by individuals and institutions to minimize the influence of bias. Think about your own work environments and what ideas may be meaningful for you and your colleagues to consider.

### **Module 4, Lesson 1: Our Brain are Malleable**

In this process of understanding what implicit bias is and getting to learn about our own biases, it is normal to start to feel like they are too deeply ingrained in our thoughts and actions to be able to combat their effects. However, as more research comes to light, we are able to find more and more ways to either lessen the effects of bias, or change the biases themselves.

Although the latter is certainly a larger undertaking, it is very possible to do so. In the same way that our implicit biases were learned over time, we can disrupt this process with intention, attention and time. This is because the neural connections between our associations get stronger as we take in more information that confirms our stereotypes or biases. By paying better attention to what we are exposed to and making the intentional choice to seek out experiences that go against our biases, we are able to disrupt this automatic chain of events, and those physical connection in our mind can be weakened. Two interventions we will be talking about later—mindfulness and intergroup contact, have shown the ability to not only stop the manifestation of these biases, but alter the implicit biases we possess.

## **Module 4, Lesson 2: Identifying Susceptibility to Unwanted Bias**

As we illustrated with exercises and examples earlier in this module series, the likelihood that we will default to our implicit processes can be increased in certain situations. For example, Cognitive Load, also described as mental fatigue, can increase the likelihood that an activated stereotype will be applied when interacting with others. We can experience cognitive load through a variety of experiences and circumstance. Some include having a lot of distractions or time pressure. This can even be related to not getting enough sleep or not having enough to eat.

Since these types of distractions are common in our day to day life, the goal isn't to eliminate cognitive load, but to have a healthy skepticism of decisions that we make during these times. Beyond just being watchful of bias happening during those times, there are also strategies we can use to help improve our decision-making capabilities. For example, taking short breaks, reflecting on the decision at hand, or engaging in brief mindfulness exercises can help us get back on track when it comes to our deliberate thought processes.

Having subjectivity or ambiguity in the decision-making process can also increase our reliance on our implicit associations. Let's use an example from the education context. If a school has a broad or subjective discipline policy, we would be left to our own judgments in how we interpret that policy and how we adhere to it. This can cause us to rely on bias when filling in the decision-making gaps, and lead to systematic differences if many people interpret these policies in different ways.

Research shows us that without standardized procedures in place, individuals are more likely to rely on their implicit associations or stereotypes & social cues when making decisions. These reasons highlight the importance of improving the objectivity of our decision making processes and policies—rather than just improving our own, individual decision-making skills. Using Data-based Decision Making is a great place to start. As many of us may be unaware of our implicit biases, tracking data may be the first way to identify trends and to establish that bias may be an issue. Data is also crucial for informing how we should intervene.

It's also important to speak up when you see a policy that may lead to racial disparities because of the ambiguity in how it's interpreted. Identifying and articulating policies to specifically improve racial equity or inclusion help reduce the ambiguity by bringing the problem to the surface. Taking notes and articulating the decision-making process also decrease the possibility that the negative effects of bias may slip through, unnoticed. Finally, one of the most important predictors of the unconscious attitudes we possess, are our friends, family, and the people we surround ourselves with. For example, research shows us that limited exposure to people who are different than ourselves can increase the likelihood that one will rely on stereotypes, rather than experience, to make judgments about others' actions.

Additionally, limited contact with diverse social circles can decrease our empathy and positive emotions toward others. This is why the research shows time and time again that having meaningful intergroup contact with different social, racial or ethnic groups is one of the best ways to reduce implicit bias. It's even more effective if you are working toward a common goal. To some extent, this can even work if intergroup contact is imagined. For example, taking the time to challenge ourselves and really take the perspective of others has been shown to reduce implicit biases in a variety of contexts.

The last point, unlike the others, does not create a context where bias is likely to occur, but it greatly decreases the likelihood that bias will be caught and corrected for. Over-confidence in one's ability to make objective or inclusive decisions makes it very difficult correct for prejudice or bias. If we don't have a healthy skepticism for our own decision-making and we aren't aware of how we may unintentionally be biased, we can't take the proper steps to intervene. Instead, sharing awareness of implicit bias and its effects can help us be more accountable, and help others get involved in these practices too.

### **Module 4, Lesson 3: Individual Interventions**

Sometimes the enormity of the problems in the world can feel overwhelming. "What difference can one person really make?" we ask ourselves. However, mitigating the unwanted effects of implicit bias is the perfect opportunity to make the spaces and places we are in more inclusive, equitable, and just. Each one of us has the power to enact individual interventions that can align our good intentions with our desired outcomes. So how do we do this?

The first step is to become aware of your own biases. In the previous module, we talked about the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and how it can be used to measure implicit associations. Taking an IAT—or several—is the best way to identify the biases we may hold. Becoming consciously aware of our own biases is crucial because we can't solve a problem without knowing what it is.

After we are more familiar with our own biases, we can practice mindfulness and perspective taking. Research shows that these are some of the most effective ways of increasing our cognitive control. Mindfulness can improve our personal ability to fully focus on the present, be aware of what is happening around us, and understand how others may be experiencing the world. Mindfulness can also help us to align our associations with our beliefs. Studies have shown that through meditation focused on specific marginalized populations, people are actually able to alter their implicit biases! By intentionally thinking about marginalized populations in a positive, loving manner, individuals can increase their empathy and decrease the strength of their implicit biases.

Intergroup contact is another effective strategy for mitigating implicit bias. We know from decades of research that having meaningful interactions with people who are different from us can actually reduce our implicit biases toward those people by helping our brains form new associations. Intergroup contact requires individuals to work together toward achieving a common goal. In other words, it is cooperative rather than competitive. In addition, there must be equal status within the group—no one is considered more or less important than anyone else. It's much more difficult to continue to rely on stereotypes about a type of person if you have a meaningful relationship with someone who belongs to that group.

Finally, exposure to counter-stereotypical examples can challenge implicit biases. When we see people who challenge commonly held stereotypes about their identity groups, we begin to realize that not everyone fits into those stereotypes. We begin to question the stereotypes that we have learned throughout our lives and understand that an entire group of people cannot be assumed to be the same. Typically, we tend to see people like ourselves as individuals while seeing people who are different from us as a homogeneous group. Counter-stereotypical examples can change this thinking by helping our brains not rely on the cognitive shortcuts that stereotypes provide.

#### **Module 4, Lesson 4: Institutional-Level Interventions**

Many of the individual interventions we have talked about are also helpful for mitigating bias at an institutional level. Organizations can provide time for mindfulness exercises, or collecting data on their equity impact in order to address implicit bias on a large-scale. Many of these practices can affect organizations' policies and decision-making processes if employees at multiple levels take active steps to reduce bias.

Beyond creating bias-conscious practices and policies, organizations must ensure that how people engage with each other in the workplace is also helpful for preventing, rather than perpetuating bias. To share some examples of how to do this, we will hear from Kip Holley, Kirwan's Civic Engagement specialist.

## **Module 4: Closing**

Congratulations! You have successfully completed the Kirwan Institute's online implicit bias training modules! We hope you have found this experience engaging, enriching, and even a bit challenging. So, you may be wondering, what now?! How do you begin to take this information and move into action?

By disrupting undesirable implicit biases within ourselves, our institutions and our communities, we can make a meaningful and positive impact in our society. We will move one step closer to being the individuals we want to be, and a part of a society that values all.

If you are interested in learning more about implicit bias or you want to share this information with others, please explore the Supplemental Resources section of this training website for additional materials, ideas, and inspiration.