

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

An Educator's Self-Assessment



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INTRODUCTION

Take a deep breath. This will get personal, and that's okay. This guide has been developed to help you explore the topic of bias. First, this truth:

We all have unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias, also known as implicit bias, happens when we allow our own attitudes, feelings, stereotypes, or beliefs to impact our judgment or understanding of other people. It's called "unconscious" because it is not something we do deliberately; rather, it is an involuntary process based on our deep-seated thoughts.¹ Unconscious bias can occur even when individuals know or believe the stereotype to be false.² It is the result of social conditioning, belief systems, life experiences, attitudes, exposure (or lack of exposure) to people who are different from us, and other factors that influence how we perceive and relate to the world around us.

Most people don't want to believe that an unconscious bias could influence their actions or behavior. But evidence of unconscious bias is all around:

GENDER

A 2015 study revealed that favorable treatment of boys over girls in elementary level math and science class (e.g. receiving more attention, encouragement and feedback than girls) influenced high school course selection for both boys and girls. Teacher preference encouraged boys to enroll in advanced math classes while doing the opposite for girls. The results show that this type of bias influences the long-term career choices of girls and contributes to the gender gap in academic degrees, such as those in the STEM fields.³

RACE

In the 2011-2012 school year, black children represented 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension; in comparison, white students represented 43% of preschool enrollment but 26% of preschool children receiving more than one out of school suspension.⁴

DISABILITY

In the 2011-12 school year, students with disabilities represented about 12% of public school students but accounted for nearly 25% of students referred to law enforcement, arrested for a school-related incident or suspended from school.⁵

So, let's talk. The topic of bias, and especially unconscious bias, is not easy to discuss. The last thing an educator wants to do is harm the students they are entrusted to teach. Exploring one's own bias can be uncomfortable, and evoke feelings of fear or anxiety of being singled out for actions one is completely blind to. The truth, however, is that we all have unconscious bias, and whether our decisions and actions are consciously or unconsciously motivated, the impact on our students is the same.

¹ Hendricks, B. What is Implicit Bias? Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/implicit-bias-in-the-workplace-definition-examples-impact.html>

² Gershenson, S and Dee, T. (2017, March 20) *The Insidiousness of Unconscious Bias in Schools* Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/03/20/the-insidiousness-of-unconscious-bias-in-schools>

³ Lavy, V., & Sand, E. (2015). *On the origins of gender human capital gaps: short and long term consequences of teachers' stereotypical biases.*

⁴ US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline)*. p.1

⁵ Ibid



So, what can we do? First Book is partnering with the Maryland State Education Association to address the topics of bias, cultural competence, and equity among educators and schools. Our goal in providing this self-assessment is to help you as an educator become more aware of your unconscious biases, learn how they influence your actions and behavior, and acquire strategies to help you minimize their impact.

Why explore bias?

Bias is a way of showing preference. It is a tendency to lean in a certain direction with one's beliefs and lack a neutral viewpoint. One can have a bias for strawberry over vanilla ice cream, for fantasy over historical fiction, or even the east versus west coast. These types of personal biases or preferences are harmless. However, when we look at how bias, especially unconscious bias, affects students and families in our schools and communities, the need for deep exploration and attention comes to light.

We are exploring unconscious bias because of the profound impact it has on student educational outcomes and the ability to engage families in our increasingly diverse society. Much of the research explores how an unconscious bias against someone's race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and/or economic status influences how they are treated. Many systems in our society are built and maintained upon biased views that negatively impact students of color, girls, people with disabilities, and low-income families. Unconscious bias has far reaching effects for students. Consider the trajectory of a student who is routinely removed from class because of a biased application of student discipline. This removal can lead to many hours of missed class time, which results in a reduced opportunity to learn. Studies show that unconscious bias in this area alone has the long-term effect of influencing a student's probability of school completion, and ultimately participation in higher education and the labor force or the criminal justice system.⁶

Our Brains at Work. To have a bias is to be human. Our brains constantly take in information and stimuli. Over millennia, our brains have developed the ability to compartmentalize things and people we are exposed to on a regular basis. We put them into categories so that we can quickly determine how they fit into our experience and what we can expect from them in the future.⁷ Age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and more are all among these categories. Our brains see grey hair and instantly associate it with being older. We assign values to what we see, for example: good or bad, right or wrong, safe or unsafe. By creating stereotypes, our brains give us a shortcut, or a more efficient way to quickly process situations and keep us safe. People



⁶ Rudd, T. (2014) Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline. Implicit Bias is Heavily Implicated. p. 4-5

⁷ Ross, H., (2014). *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. p.6

and experiences become the familiar “people like that” or the unfamiliar “those people.” When we encounter someone we haven’t met before, our brains often rely on input from the larger society (e.g. the media) to help us categorize.

What do we do to change it?

While it would be easy to switch off our unconscious bias and get on with the work of educating our students without fear that we may be unintentionally causing harm, research shows you can’t just “turn off” your biased brain.⁸ It is a part of how you make decisions and evaluate the people and places around you. What you can do, however, is become more aware of your biases and how they influence your actions and reactions to the students, families, and others around you.

As part of First Book and MSEA’s partnership to support educators in understanding and learning how to address unconscious bias in order to better serve your students, this self-assessment will help you:

- 1 Discover areas where you may hold an unconscious bias.
- 2 Guide you in exploring your own personal narrative, or story, that may have informed your bias.
- 3 Learn how to disarm your bias by looking for more than one way to interpret a situation or interaction.
- 4 Use the power of books to gain exposure and insight into the lives, experiences, and stories of those against whom you may hold a bias.



⁸ Ross, H., (2014). *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. p.6



PART I

IDENTIFY AREAS WHERE YOU MAY HAVE AN UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The first step toward understanding and then adjusting for one’s bias is to determine what biases you may unconsciously hold. To determine this, we invite you to take a quick, free, and **confidential** 10-minute online assessment from **Project Implicit**. In 1998, researchers from Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington partnered to develop a web-based tool (The IAT - Implicit Association Test) that reveals unconscious bias in a variety of areas. More than 1 million people across 20 countries have taken the assessments to reveal unconscious bias in the following areas:

Age	Weight	Native American
Sexuality	Arab-Muslim Names	Religion
Gender in Science	Weapons	Asian
Race	Presidents	Skin tone
Gender in Career	Disability	



Project Implicit®

Please take 10 minutes to take the Project Implicit assessment on a computer or smart phone on any of the areas in the table above to reveal your degree of unconscious bias.

PROJECT IMPLICIT SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Log in or register to find out your implicit associations about race, gender, sexual orientation, and other topics!

Or, continue as a guest by selecting from our available language/nation demonstration sites:





Visit <https://bit.ly/ProjectImplicitIAT>.

You can choose to register for a free account or proceed as a guest.

Click “GO” to proceed as a guest.



Preliminary Information

Whichever IAT you do, we will ask you (optionally) to report your attitudes toward or beliefs about these topics, and provide some general information about yourself. These demonstrations should be more valuable if you have also tried to describe your self-understanding of the characteristic that the IAT is designed to measure. Also, we would like to compare possible differences among groups in their IAT performance and opinions, at least among those who decide to participate.

Data exchanged with this site are protected by SSL encryption, and no personally identifying information is collected. IP addresses are routinely recorded, but are completely confidential.

Important disclaimer: In reporting to you results of any IAT test that you take, we will mention possible interpretations that have a basis in research done (at the University of Washington, University of Virginia, Harvard University, and Yale University) with these tests. However, these Universities, as well as the individual researchers who have contributed to this site, make no claim for the validity of these suggested interpretations. If you are unprepared to encounter interpretations that you might find objectionable, please do not proceed further. You may prefer to examine [general information about the IAT](#) before deciding whether or not to proceed.

You can contact our research team (implicit@fas.harvard.edu) or Harvard's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects (cuhs@harvard.edu) for answers to pertinent questions about the research and your rights, as well as in the event of a research-related injury to yourself.

I am aware of the possibility of encountering interpretations of my IAT test performance with which I may not agree. Knowing this, I wish to proceed

2

Read the *Preliminary Information* and click "I wish to proceed," highlighted in blue at the bottom of the page.



3

Review the list of implicit association tests and select one to learn more about your unconscious bias in that area.

Skin-tone IAT	Skin-tone ('Light Skin - Dark Skin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize light and dark-skinned faces. It often reveals an automatic preference for light-skin relative to dark-skin.
Weapons IAT	Weapons ('Weapons - Harmless Objects' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.
Arab-Muslim IAT	Arab-Muslim ('Arab Muslim - Other People' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish names that are likely to belong to Arab-Muslims versus people of other nationalities or religions.
Gender-Science IAT	Gender - Science. This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.
Disability IAT	Disability ('Disabled - Able' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize symbols representing abled and disabled individuals.
Gender-Career IAT	Gender - Career. This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.
Religion IAT	Religion ('Religions' IAT). This IAT requires some familiarity with religious terms from various world religions.
Asian IAT	Asian American ('Asian - European American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Asian-American faces, and images of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.
Race IAT	Race ('Black - White' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin. It indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.
Sexuality IAT	Sexuality ('Gay - Straight' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish words and symbols representing gay and straight people. It often reveals an automatic preference for straight relative to gay people.
Presidents IAT	Presidents ('Presidential Popularity' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize photos of Donald Trump and one or more previous presidents.
Native IAT	Native American ('Native - White American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Native American faces in either classic or modern dress, and the names of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.
Age IAT	Age ('Young - Old' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish old from young faces. This test often indicates that Americans have automatic preference for young over old.
Weight IAT	Weight ('Fat - Thin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of people who are obese and people who are thin. It often reveals an automatic preference for thin people relative to fat people.

Within any of the tests, you will be asked to compare images and words that reflect positive or negative associations to help uncover unconscious bias.

Welcome

You have selected the Race Task. In this study you will complete an Implicit Association Test (IAT) in which you will be asked to sort pictures and words into groups as fast as you can. In addition to the IAT, there are some questions about your beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, and some standard demographic questions. This study should take about 10 minutes to complete. At the end, you will receive your IAT result along with information about what it means.

We thank you for being here!

Continue

How does it work? The assessment works by calculating the speed in which you associate positive or negative terms with images and words. Studies have shown that our conscious mind takes about 300 milliseconds to process an image. However, when people are observed through a fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan we see that the unconscious brain is much faster, processing imagery in about 80 milliseconds. This means that by the time the conscious mind has noticed something, the unconscious mind may already be in action in response to it.⁹

Once you complete the assessment, please continue to the next section to learn how you can become more aware of, and thus minimize, the impact of your unconscious biases.

⁹ Ross, H., (2014). *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. p.110

PART II

WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOUR BIAS?

So, you have taken the assessment, and have discovered that you have a “slight,” “moderate,” or “strong” automated preference for one group versus another, or no preference at all. What do you do now? How do you “turn off” your preference meter so that it doesn’t unconsciously influence your decisions, behaviors, and actions?

As stated earlier, according to much of the research, you cannot “turn off” a preference. You cannot “turn off” an unconscious bias so that you perceive situations and act without it. But, what you can do is actively become more aware of your bias and how it shows up in your interactions with others and take steps to remedy it.

The good news is that neuroscience shows that the human brain has tremendous ability for neuroplasticity — the ability for our brains to reorganize or reprogram itself throughout our lives. This reprogramming can happen because of new levels of awareness and new experiences that replace previous ways of deep seated thinking.

The following activities offer you three ways to think about your bias and give you concrete, actionable steps to minimize their impact in your decisions and actions with students. It is important to note that the task of exploring your unconscious biases is a deeply personal one, and that there isn’t an “instant” solution you can apply to rid yourself of them. This work is about increasing your awareness, being reflective, and being intentional about gaining exposure to areas where you may hold a bias. Once you do that, you can take steps to consistently watch for a bias to poke its head in your interactions with students and to combat any affects that bias may have on your actions.

We recommend setting aside 10 minutes a day to think through the questions and actions suggested. Being self-reflective about our upbringing and about the unconscious thoughts of our brains can be uncomfortable. Just remember, the most important thing we bring to teaching is who we are.¹⁰ These activities are meant to support you, because you work hard every day to support your students.



¹⁰ Derman-Sparks, L and Edwards, J., (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. p.22



Explore Your Personal Narrative.

Becoming aware of your personal narrative, or story, is a key step toward understanding and managing the impact of your unconscious bias. Our biases are developed over time and often have roots in our childhood and early life experiences. These roots inform our way of thinking and how we perceive the people and situations around us. To become more aware of your biases, it is important to reflect on how and when they developed. What were the seeds that led to the preferences you have today? Take a few minutes and think through or jot down your answers to the following questions:

1 What memories do you have of what your family taught you about various kinds of diversity or differences among people? Was your family's behavior consistent with what they taught?¹¹

2 What childhood experiences did you have with peers or adults who were different from you in some way (racial identity, culture/ethnicity, family structure, economic class, religion, gender role, sexual orientation)? Were these experiences comfortable? Why or why not? What experiences did you lack? Take time to acknowledge any specific triggers or trauma this may bring up for you.

3 What institutions influenced your values and behaviors as a child (e.g. religious institutions, Boy/Girl scouts, clubs, schools, etc.)?

4 What have you learned from your culture of origin that informs your values and behaviors? How is this different from what other people may have learned in their culture? How do these differences in culture affect your relationships and interactions with others?

5 What stereotypes have you heard about various racial/ethnic groups in the United States? This is not a list of stereotypes you believe, just those you have heard. Quickly write down as many as you can. Then, examine the list and try to figure out from where or whom you heard the stereotypes, and what age they came into your life. Be honest with yourself about which ones you believe.¹² Use the table on page 4 to help you consider stereotypes in different categories.

6 What kinds of behaviors of boys make you uncomfortable? Of girls? Where do these sets overlap and where are they different? From where or whom did you learn your differing gender expectations?

7 What feelings come up when you work with families with very low incomes? Who are homeless? Have a family member in jail? With very high incomes? Do you prefer to teach children or interact with parents from a particular economic class? What or who are the sources of your feelings?

8 Think about the people you know personally, and your experiences and interactions with them. How does this compare with what you were taught or told as a child?

As you explore your personal narrative, it is important to understand the source of your belief systems, values and preferences. Identifying where our narratives about different people originate is important, for these form the roots of our bias. The closer we get to the root of our bias, the more we can create a new narrative that disarms it.¹³

¹¹ Derman-Sparks, L and Edwards, J., (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. p.23

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ross, H., (2014). *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. p.112-17

How Many Interpretations Are There?

How often do you find yourself in a situation with a student and you just “know” what happened, or what someone was *about to do*, or even what someone else was *thinking*. We believe what our brains tell us 100% of the time and rarely, if ever, question our first hunch or instinct about what we’re observing. Mitigating unconscious bias takes awareness and a willingness to pause and use different parts of our brain. When we give ourselves space to see more than what our eyes and conditioning tell us, we give ourselves a chance to step beyond our bias and see a bigger picture.

Do this!

When you feel you are 100% sure of your interpretation of an interaction with a student, it may be healthy to turn on your “inner skeptic” and ask if there is another way to interpret or perceive the situation or person you’re interacting with. Doing so releases you from a “my view is the only view” manner of thinking and makes you more open to the ideas and perspectives of others.

For example, if you meet someone for the first time and they offer you a weak handshake, what is a common interpretation? Perhaps that the person is not strong-willed, or that they aren’t interested in you. However, if we turn on our “inner skeptic” we can recognize that there are many ways to interpret their handshake. Maybe the person is recovering from a medical procedure, or they were distracted, or they thought the handshake was fine. The key thing to recognize is that we create many interpretations from one action – a handshake. Once you recognize that there are other ways to interpret an interaction, you close the door on your bias, and open yourself to more than one way of seeing a situation.

The next time you find yourself with a 100% sure interpretation of an interaction you’ve had with a student, ask yourself:

1 What actually happened, or what did I actually observe?

2 What meaning or interpretation am I applying to what happened/ my observation?

3 What other meanings or interpretations can be applied to my observation? What are other ways I could perceive or interpret the situation?

4 Can I put myself in my student’s shoes? What are possible reasons for the student’s actions? What might he or she have been experiencing in that moment? How might he or she have seen the situation differently?

5 With alternate interpretations possible, what is the most productive way to deal with the situation?¹⁴

¹⁴ Ross, H., (2014). *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. p.112-17

How Many Interpretations Are There?

Consider the scenarios below and apply the four questions from the previous page. How many interpretations are there to these situations?

SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 3
You are speaking to a student and they do not give you direct eye contact. What is your first reaction?	A student is often late for the first class of the day. How do you respond?	You meet the parent/guardian of one of your students, and they don't say much or ask you questions about their child. What is your first thought?

When we give ourselves space to see more than what our eyes and conditioning tell us, we give ourselves a chance to step beyond our bias and see a bigger picture.

There is a difference between what we actually see or experience, and the meaning (or interpretation) we give the encounter. When we activate our inner skeptic, it is possible to see that our initial perspective is not the only one, and that other possibilities do exist. With the knowledge of other ways to interpret a situation or experience, we can identify or create a better way to handle various situations. This helps disarm our bias by offering us a broader perspective and acknowledging that there is more than one way to look at an interaction.

"Self-awareness is our capacity to stand apart from ourselves and examine our thinking, our motives, our history, our scripts, our actions, and our habits and tendencies."
- Stephen Covey

"Just because you think it, doesn't mean it's true."

"The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend."
- Robertson Davies, Tempest-Tost

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.
- Oliver Wendell Holmes

CONCLUSION

There is still much work to be done to make our classrooms, schools, and communities places where all students are treated equally and have access to a high-quality education without the shadow of unconscious bias. This self-assessment has been created as a tool to help you uncover your own unconscious biases and offer strategies and techniques to help you become more aware of them, learn how to manage their impact, and how to give yourself ways to grow beyond your conditioning.

For additional resources to help you learn more about unconscious bias, please see the appendix. The work to uncover one's bias is not always easy, but it can be done, and our students will be better positioned for success because of our efforts.

Finally, this is the second part of a 3-part resource collection focused on bias, cultural competence, and equity. First Book and the Maryland State Education Association will launch a workbook for educators and students focused on these themes in Spring 2019. To access the first resource, a printable 12-month calendar that features key dates of significance across many cultures and activities to help your students expand their awareness of others, please visit <https://www.fbmarketplace.org/free-resources/>.



APPENDIX

Additional Sources to Learn about Unconscious Bias



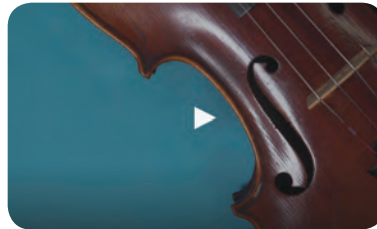
PBS 2-minute videos series on implicit, or unconscious, bias

Visit the links below to view a series of 2-minute videos from PBS about implicit, or unconscious, bias. Just as we have been conditioned to associate peanut butter with jelly, other associations have a similar hold in our unconscious. Learn more in these engaging videos, and how you can address unconscious bias from PBS.

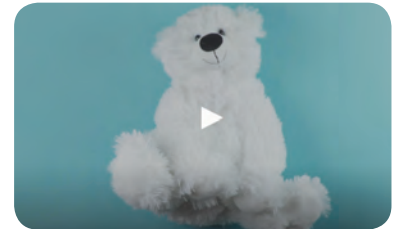
Get started here: <https://bit.ly/ImplicitBiasVideos>



1 - Implicit Bias:
Peanut Butter, Jelly,
and Racism



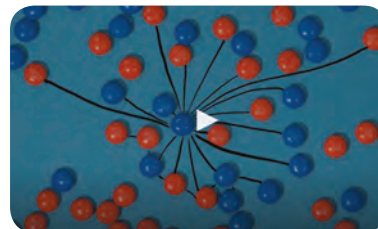
2 - Implicit Bias:
High Heels, Violins
and a Warning



3 - Implicit Bias:
Why We're Awkward



4 - Implicit Bias:
Snacks and Punishment



5 - Implicit Bias:
Check our Bias to
Wreck Our Bias



America to Me – Documentary Series

<https://bit.ly/AmericaToMe>

America to Me is a 10-part documentary series available on the Starz Network. It follows the lives of high school students, teachers and families at Oak Park and River Forest High School in suburban Chicago. This series offers a profound insight into how unconscious bias, equity, history and the complexities of race, identity and privilege play a role in educating our students and preparing them for a life of great promise. Discussion guides are available for download with each episode.





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