



By the Light of the Luau: Illuminating Bias in the Workplace

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What Is Implicit Bias?



Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes formed through culture, media, and upbringing



Implicit bias describes the automatic association people make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups (or characteristics).



Under certain conditions, those automatic associations can influence behavior—making people respond in biased ways even when they are not explicitly prejudiced



Everyone has Implicit Bias



Video Break

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The Implicit Association Test (IAT)



Anthony Greenwald at University of Washington and Mahzarin Banaji at Harvard University developed the applied science in the form of the Implicit-Association Test (IAT)



Developed by Harvard (Project Implicit)



Measures automatic associations



Can reveal bias; it's not about guilt—it's about **self-awareness**

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- **IAT Test Example:**
 - How quickly someone pairs “female” with “nurturing” vs. “leader” can reveal bias.
 - It’s not about guilt—it’s about ***self-awareness***
- **Let’s do a quick exercise right now:**

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Associative Learning and Cognitive Learning

Associative learning can be defined as a type of learning in which a behavior is linked to a new stimulus

Psychologists point out that in most situations our learning is a connected experience

Cognitive learning can be defined as the learning processes where individuals acquire and process information

The key difference between associative learning and cognitive learning is, unlike in associative learning where the focus is on the behavior and external stimuli, in cognitive learning the focus is on human cognition and reasoning

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Bias & Stereotypes – The Connection

Bias triggers stereotypes (Implicit or otherwise)

Little Girl study: Two groups observed a child taking a test. One group was told she was from a lower economic status, the other group was told she was from a higher economic status.

Implicit bias feeds into stereotypes- mental shortcuts about groups. These form early and shape how we unconsciously see people.

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Why It Matters in the Workplace



At work, that bias can influence how we view someone's competence, leadership potential, or cultural “fit”– without realizing it.



An unchecked bias isn't just a cultural issues- it creates legal risk under laws like Title VII, the ADA, and ADEA



Bias affects hiring, promotions, discipline that can create legal risk under Title VII, ADA, ADEA, etc.

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How Bias Thrives...

- Bias thrives on...
 - the absence of representation and exposure.
 - Lack of acceptance or understanding of others



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Gender Bias

Men = leaders, Women = emotional/nurturing/docile



Disney examples: Old (Cinderella/Sleeping Beauty/Snow White) vs. New (Moana/Encanto/Frozen)



Workplace impact: That shift matters. In the workplace, women may still be judged harshly for assertiveness or overlooked for leadership- not from intent, but from deep conditioning.

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Race Bias, and Color Too

Race bias can stem from media, systemic inequality, or limited cross-cultural experiences.

Black or Latino professionals may be seen as less competent or more aggressive, leading to micromanagement or exclusion—even when performance is strong

Asian professionals may be seen as more competent in computer, IT or technology associated professions

Is someone being discriminated against because they have dark skin vs. favoring someone with light skin

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National Origin Bias

Bias related to national origin shows up when someone has an accent or comes from a different cultural background.-



Bias impacts opportunity, “fit” perceptions

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Disability Bias



Disability bias often comes from lack of exposure. People assume those with disabilities are less capable or need help—even if that’s untrue.

Leads to exclusion or assumptions, bias can still mean being left out of projects or passed over for advancement—not from malice, but from unexamined assumptions.

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Age Bias

**Bias
because:**

- Someone is known to be older
- Someone looks older [ie: premature gray]
- Someone is younger

Impact:

- Hiring
- Promotions
- Training
- Task Assignments

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Sexual Orientation Bias

- Bias based on sexual orientation is often rooted in outdated norms or discomfort with what's unfamiliar.
- One thing we've seen across all these examples is that **bias thrives in the absence of representation**. When something is unfamiliar, our brains default to fear or judgment.
- Exposure reduces stigma

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Religious Bias



Bias around dress, prayer, holidays that are different



Discomfort or misunderstanding can lead to exclusion—or resistance to reasonable accommodations.

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Do not forget about the majority...

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Legal Risks

Unconscious bias can result in **disparate treatment** or **disparate impact**, both of which are illegal under federal law.

Impact on:

Hiring

Promotions

Training

Task
Assignments

Discipline

Intent doesn't matter—impact does. Even unintentional bias can lead to lawsuits and liability

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Strategies to Interrupt Bias

- We can't eliminate bias, but we can build systems to **mitigate it**—like structured interviews, consistent evaluations, and objective decision-making.
- Quality training going beyond checking the HR/legal box
- Leadership should be inclusive. Create a space for honest reflection, growth, and accountability

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Strategies for Employers

01

Re-evaluate what counts as "Adverse"

- "With pay" ≠ no harm
- Treat schedule, duty, and prestige changes as adverse actions
- Document all job changes, even lateral

02

Strengthen Documentation

- Show your math

03

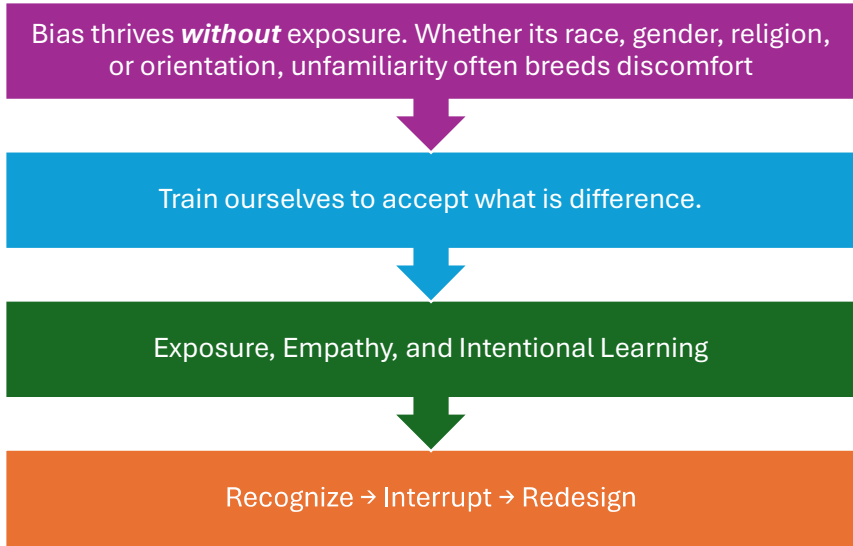
Retrain Managers and Supervisors

- Educate on how their discretion can create exposure
- Train on retaliation and perception-based harm
- Remember Chapter 21 distinction for sexual harassment claims

Title VII used to be about big decisions. Now it's about quiet harms, inconsistent treatment, and bad documentation.

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Final Thoughts



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Where to go
from here:
Books,
Podcasts,
and other
Tools

IAT Test:

- IAT: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Books:

- *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* by Anthony Greenwald & Mahzarin R. Banaji
 - Written by authors of IAT
- *Inclusify: The Power of Uniqueness and Belonging to Build Innovative Teams* by Stefanie K. Johnston
 - Focusses on workplace dynamics and leadership

Podcasts:

- Code Switch – NPR; explores race and identity in everyday life
- Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks)
- The Will to Change – Jennifer Brown

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Questions & Discussion



Open for questions and shared stories



Encourage continued reflection



Bias is human. Choosing to be inclusive is intentional. The more we become aware, the better we can lead, advise, and advocate for a truly inclusive workplace.

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Questions?

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