

# KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPLICIT BIAS



The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity identifies the following as key characteristics of implicit bias:

Implicit biases are **pervasive**. Nearly everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges

Implicit and explicit biases are **related but distinct mental constructions**. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce one another.

The implicit associations we hold **do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs** or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.

Implicit biases are **malleable**. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.

(Kirwan Institute 2015)

## WHAT ARE MY BIASES?



Try out some of Harvard University’s Project Implicit bias assessments to become more aware of unconscious biases that you may have:  
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

# STEPS TOWARDS ALLYSHIP



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Implicit biases can have lasting impacts on historically underrepresented communities. They can affect a variety of interactions and decisions, including but certainly not limited to job hiring, teaching, medical care, and voting (Viskontas and Mooney 2014). Even something as simple as a person’s name may cause us to assume things about their race and gender that in turn could cause us to unconsciously allow our assessment of their qualifications to be impacted.

Some studies have found that implicit bias becomes coded deeply within our neural structures. David Amodio, a neuroscientist at New York University, believes that the amygdala — which helps control learning and fear-conditioning — is involved (Viskontas and Mooney 2014). Because of neural plasticity, the ability of the brain to make structural changes, these behaviors can be “unlearned” with ongoing conscientious effort.

Here are a few tips for combatting implicit bias:  
The first step to changing your implicit biases is **acknowledging** that you have them. Consciously **contrast negative stereotypes** with specific counter-examples. Rather than aiming to be “color-blind,” the goal should be to **“individuate”** by seeking specific information about members of different racial groups. This individuation allows you to recognize people based upon their personal attributes rather than stereotypes. Assume the **perspective** of an outgroup member. By asking yourself what your perspective might be if you were in the other’s situation, you can develop a better appreciation for what their concerns are. Make more of an effort to **encounter and engage** in positive interactions with members of other groups.  
(Perception Institute)



## WHAT IS IMPLICIT BIAS?



**Implicit bias** — sometimes referred to as **unconscious bias** — “refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Kirwan Institute 2015).

People can hold implicit biases towards any number of identities, including races, genders, sexualities, and disability statuses.

Implicit bias is highly prevalent and can affect everyone regardless of their own identities. For example, while Project Implicit found that 88% of white Americans were biased in favor of white people, this same “strong preference” for white people was found in the results of the Implicit Association Test when administered to people of color (Johnson 2014). This calls attention to the fact that implicit bias is a part of a larger systemic and cultural issue.



## CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES



Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity - Implicit Bias  
[goo.gl/KM4bT5](http://goo.gl/KM4bT5)

Perception Institute - Solution Statement  
[goo.gl/qd94ZU](http://goo.gl/qd94ZU)

“Black-on-Black Racism: The Hazards of Implicit Bias” — Theodore R. Johnson  
[goo.gl/fEa5i7](http://goo.gl/fEa5i7)

“The Science of Your Racist Brain” - Indre Viskontas and Chris Mooney  
[goo.gl/dujrYb](http://goo.gl/dujrYb)

“How to Right Your Own Implicit Biases” - American Association of University Women  
[goo.gl/vlm0mu](http://goo.gl/vlm0mu)

“Understanding Implicit Bias” - American Federation of Teachers  
[goo.gl/ONPmaJ](http://goo.gl/ONPmaJ)



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## IMPLICIT BIAS

This information resource was created to aid students, faculty, staff, and individuals of the broader community to better understand implicit bias and to take steps towards active allyship. The aim of this resource is to foster intergroup dialogue on campus, in the workplace, and in the Tucson community.

