



## What Is Implicit Bias?

**im·plic·it bi·as** /im `plisit `bīəs/ : The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible.

**System 1**  
Unconscious,  
automatic,  
fast, and  
effortless.



**System 2**  
Conscious,  
deliberate,  
slow, and  
effortful.

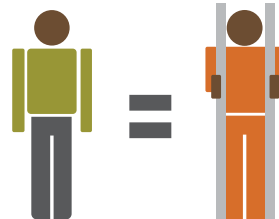
### Dual Systems Theory

Implicit bias is a product of **System 1 thinking**. We act on our implicit biases without awareness; thus, they can undermine our true intentions.

To compare System 1 and 2 thinking, think of how we process simple addition like 2+2 vs. a complex algebraic equation that requires conscious thinking and effort to solve.

### Where Our Biases Originate

Our implicit biases are the result of mental associations that have formed by the direct and indirect messaging we receive, often about different groups of people. When we are constantly exposed to certain identity groups being paired with certain characteristics, we can begin to automatically and unconsciously associate the identity with the characteristics, whether or not that association aligns with reality.



In the U.S., there is a strong implicit association between African Americans and criminal activity.

## Implicit vs. Explicit Biases

Implicit biases and explicit biases are related—yet distinct—concepts. Because implicit associations arise outside of conscious awareness, these associations do not necessarily align with our openly-held beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse. This disconnect between implicit and explicit is known as **dissociation**.

## Why Implicit Bias Matters

Implicit bias matters because everyone possesses these unconscious associations, and implicit bias affects our decisions, behaviors, and interactions with others. Although implicit biases can be positive or negative, both can have harmful effects when they influence our decision-making.



Understanding implicit bias is also important because of its connection to structural inequality. A significant body of research has established that implicit bias can have broad negative impacts. Addressing implicit bias on multiple levels (e.g., individual and institutional) is critical for achieving social justice goals.

# What Can I Do About It?

Having biases doesn't make you a bad person—it only makes you human. Fortunately, our implicit biases are not permanent; they can be changed. Take these steps to challenge your unconscious beliefs.

### 1 Educate Yourself

Take the Implicit Association Test (IAT) at [implicit.harvard.edu](http://implicit.harvard.edu) to learn of your unconscious beliefs. Study history and look for the connections between the past and the current realities of inequality.

### 2 Take Action

Seek people who run counter to stereotypical views, increase contact with groups of people outside of your own demographics, and try to think of things from the perspective of others.

### 3 Be Accountable

When confronted with bias, take the time to examine your actions or beliefs. Think of how you would explicitly justify them to other people.

For a more extensive introduction to implicit bias, see the 2013 edition of the Kirwan Institute's *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*. Shorter primers on the subject can be found in the 2014 and 2015 editions. All previous editions of the *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* are publicly available at: [www.KirwanInstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-review](http://www.KirwanInstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-review)