



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

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; its not about guilt—its about **self-awareness**



- IAT Test: For 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:**



CEO

ASTRONAUT

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

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.

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, etc.



THEME:

Bias thrives on the absence of representation and exposure.

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.

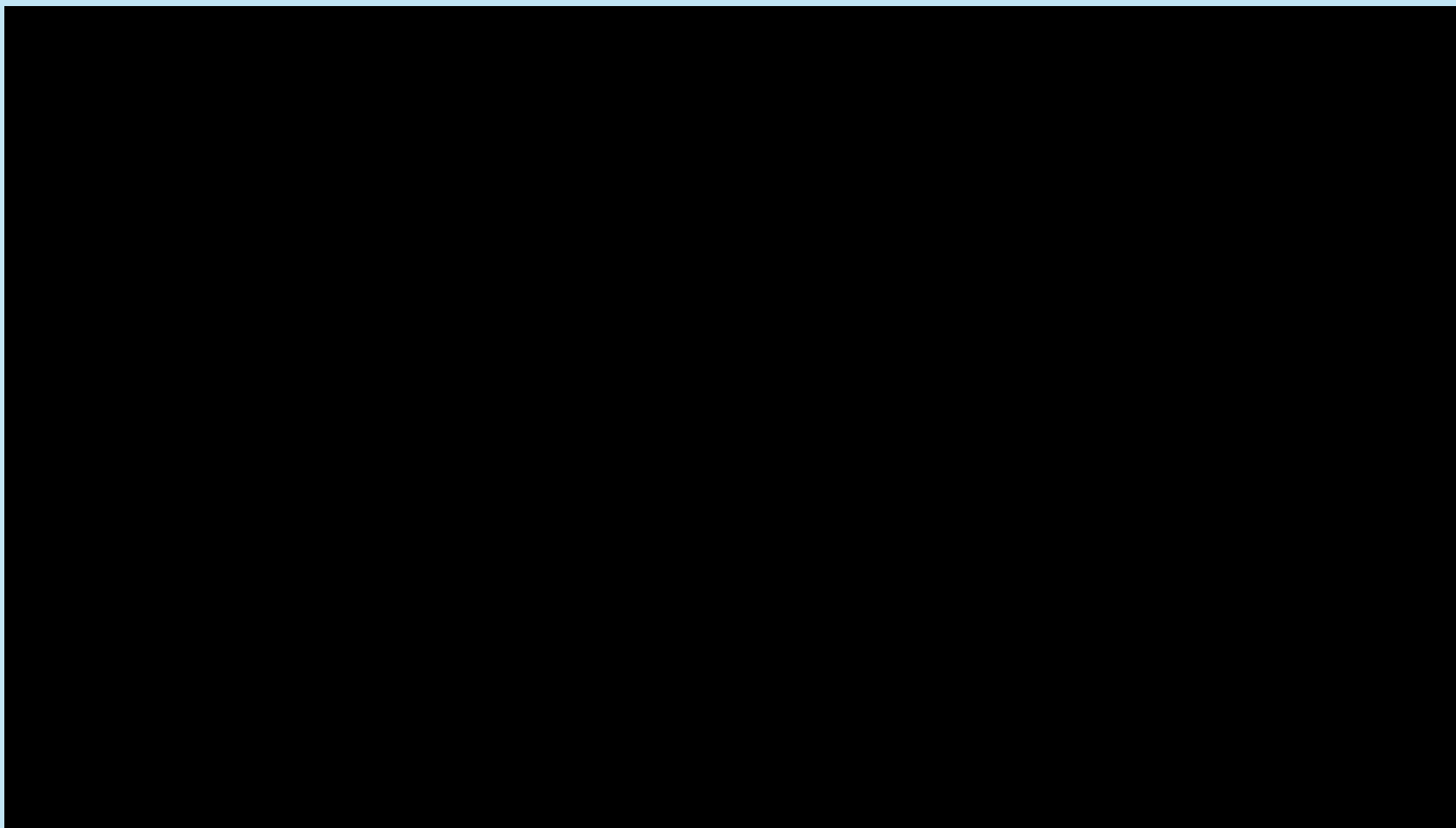


Race Bias

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

Video Break



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.

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

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

Religious Bias



Bias around dress, prayer, holidays that are different



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

Age Bias

**Bias
because:**

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

Impact:

- Hiring
- Promotions
- Training

Legal Risk

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

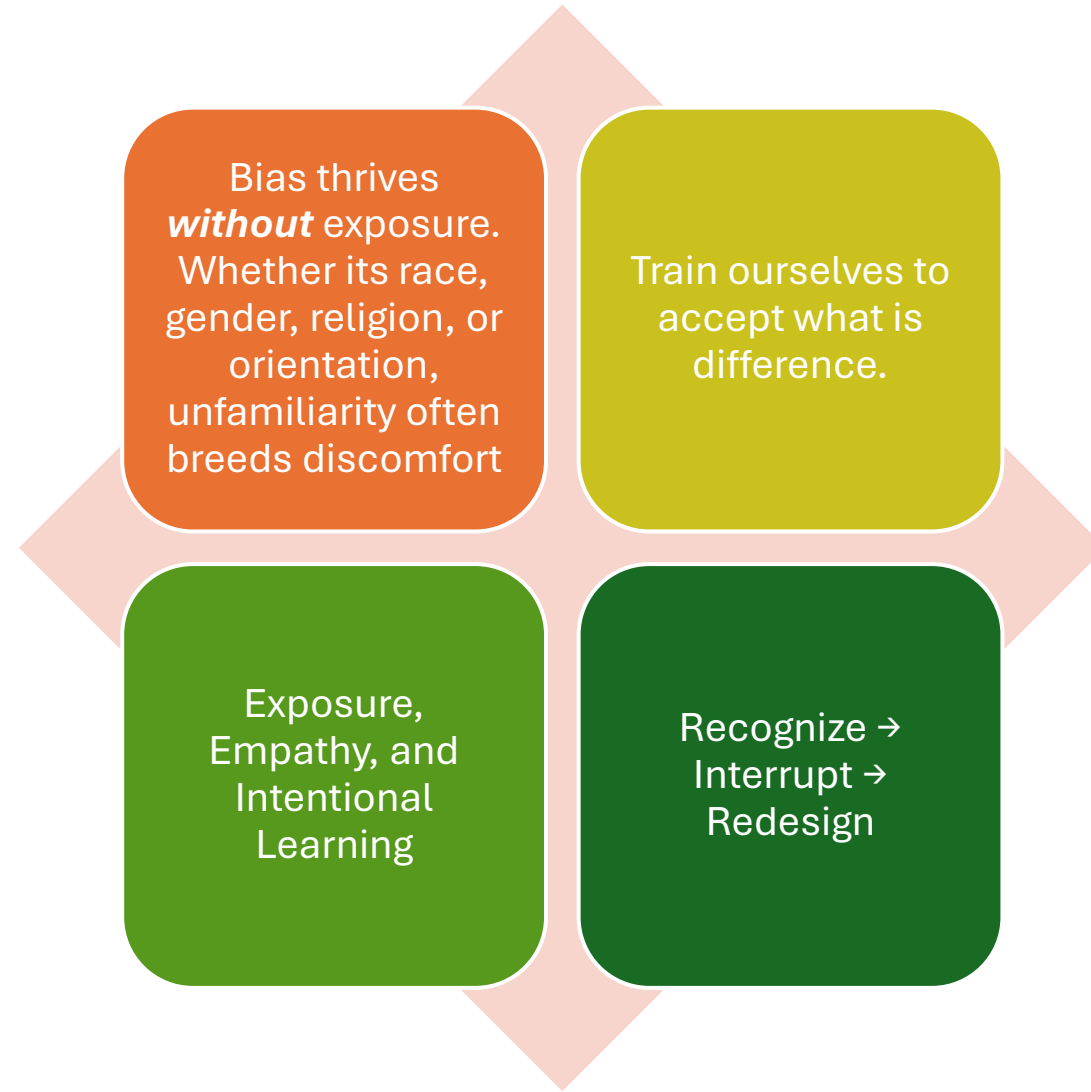
Intent doesn't matter—
impact does. Even
unintentional bias can
lead to liability



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

Final Thoughts



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 every day life
- Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks)
- The Will to Change – Jennifer Brown





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.



Questions?

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