

Connecting Banks and Communities Through Cultural Agility

Workshop Facilitation & Discussion Guide

Presented By:

**David B. Hunt &
Tony Orange**
Critical Measures, LLC
4627 Nicollet Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN. 55419
Tel: (612) 746-1375
Email: dbhunt@criticalmeasures.net

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Critical Measures, LLC
4627 Nicollet Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55419
Tel: (612) 746-1375
Email: dbhunt@criticalmeasures.net

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Understanding Unconscious Bias - Resources

1. In the past, bias was regarded as aberrant, conscious and intentional.
2. Today, we understand that bias is normative (we all have them), unconscious and largely unintentional.
3. This new understanding comes from new research from the fields of biology (neuroscience – the study of the human brain) and from sociology (specifically social cognition theory).
4. We also understand that our biases are most likely to be activated by four key conditions. They are:
 - Stress
 - Time constraints
 - Multi-tasking
 - Need for closure or decision-making
5. Here are some online resources to help you learn more about unconscious bias:
 - Watch the Discovery Channel video: “How Biased Are You?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5Q5FQfXZag>
 - Take an Implicit Association Test to learn more about your own, unconscious biases: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
 - Watch Malcolm Gladwell discuss “Blink” his best-selling book on unconscious bias: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OY0WFdk44pc>

6. To learn more about the ongoing research from the field of implicit or unconscious bias, read or download these online resources:

- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity:
Understanding Implicit Bias (An Overview):
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

Download Kirwan Institute’s State of the Science Review 2014:
(bias research in the fields of employment and housing)

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-implicit-bias.pdf>

Download Kirwan Institute’s State of the Science Review 2013:
(bias research in the fields of education, criminal justice and health and healthcare)

http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/SOTS-Implicit_Bias.pdf

- Newsweek article: “See Baby Discriminate” by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, September 4, 2009 (discusses findings on unconscious bias from Bronson’s book entitled “Nurture Shock”): <http://www.newsweek.com/even-babies-discriminate-nurtureshock-excerpt-79233>
- The Law of Implicit Bias by Christine Jolls and Cass R. Sunstein, California Law Review, 2006:
http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/The_Law_of_Implicit_Bias.pdf
- Atlantic Monthly article: “The Brain on Trial” by David Eagleman, July/August 2011 issue. Excellent article about how the concept of unconscious bias is revolutionizing criminal law.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/07/the-brain-on-trial/308520/>

What is the Implicit Association Test?

- The recent development of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) has accelerated research on implicit bias. The IAT's general method can be adapted to measure a wide variety of group-trait associations that underlie attitudes and stereotypes.
- The IAT is an implicit measure because it infers group-trait associations from performances that are influenced by those associations in a manner that is not discerned by respondents.
- For example, the Implicit Association Test asks individuals to perform the seemingly straightforward task of categorizing a series of words or pictures into groups. Two of the groups are related to particular social groups (old and young, male and female, black and white, homosexual and heterosexual) and two of the groups are the categories “pleasant” and “unpleasant.”
- The IAT is rooted in the very simple hypothesis that people will find it easier to associate pleasant words with groups with which they have social membership and harder to associate pleasant words with groups with which they are not associated. Similarly, individuals would likely have more difficulty associating unpleasant words with social groups to which they belong. In either case, the speed of associating these concepts suggests the strength or weakness of the underlying association.

How Does the Implicit Association Test Work?

- Psychologists understand that people may not say what's on their minds either because they are *unwilling* or because they are *unable* to do so.
- For example, if asked "How much do you smoke?" a smoker who smokes 4 packs a day may purposely report smoking only 2 packs a day because they are embarrassed to admit the correct number. Or, the smoker may simply not answer the question, regarding it as a private matter. (These are examples of being *unwilling* to report a known answer.) But it is also possible that a smoker who smokes 4 packs a day may report smoking only 2 packs because they honestly believe they only smoke about 2 packs a day. (Unknowingly giving an incorrect answer is sometimes called self-deception; this illustrates being *unable* to give the desired answer).
- The unwilling-unable distinction is like the difference between purposely hiding something from others and unconsciously hiding something from yourself. The authors of the Implicit Association Test claim that the test makes it possible to

penetrate both of these types of hiding. The IAT measures *implicit* attitudes and beliefs that people are either unwilling or unable to report.

How Pervasive is Implicit Bias?

A public website associated with Harvard University administers the implicit association test (IAT). (See: <https://implicit.harvard.edu>.) The website has accumulated a large database of well over 4.5 million tests since 1998. Key findings indicate that:

- **Age:** Around ninety percent of Americans mentally associate negative concepts with the social group "elderly"; only about ten percent show the opposite effect associating elderly with positive concepts. Older people do not, on average, show an automatic preference for their own group, the elderly. Remarkably, the preference for Young is just as strong in those in the over-60 age group as it is among 20-year-olds.
- **Gender:** Seventy-five percent of men and women do not associate female with career as easily as they associate female with family. (Women show an implicit attitudinal preference for females over males, but they nonetheless show an implicit stereotype linking females closer to family than career.)
- **Race:** The most controversial of the IAT tests is the race test.
 - A. **White participants consistently show a preference for White over Black on the IAT** – a substantial majority of White IAT respondents (75% to 80%) show an automatic preference for White over Black.
 - B. **Is the preference for White over Black in the Black-White IAT a simple 'in-group' preference -- for example, the same as liking members of one's family or one's hometown?** Answer: For White respondents, the automatic White preference may be an in-group preference. However, the automatic White preference is more than that - it is not observed with similar strength among Asian Americans, for whom Black nor White is an in-group. In this sense, the IAT may reflect an attitude that is learned through experience in a culture that does not regard Black Americans highly. Moreover, if the IAT result only represented an in-group preference, then Black Americans should show the same level of automatic preference for Blacks. But that is not the case.

- C. **Do Black participants show a preference for Black over White on the race attitude IAT?** Answer: Although the majority of White respondents show a preference for White over Black, the responses from Black respondents are more varied. Although some Black participants show a preference for White over Black, others show no preference, and yet others show a preference for Black over White. Data collected from this website consistently reveal approximately even numbers of Black respondents showing a pro-White bias as show a pro-Black bias. Part of this might be understood as Black respondents experiencing the similar negative associations about their group from experience in their cultural environments, and also experiencing competing positive associations about their group based on their own group membership and that of close relations.
- D. **Do young children show automatic preference for White over Black?**
1. Children are not born with preferences for one group or another.
 2. But a 2006 study by Harvard psychologist Mahzarin R. Benaji and Harvard graduate student Andrew S. Baron shows that full-fledged implicit racial bias emerges by the age of 6 – and never retreats.
 3. IAT research also shows that 6 year old, 10 year old and adult Whites show the same level of automatic preference for their in-group. What changes over time is the lowering of explicitly expressed preferences, with 6 year olds reporting the strongest in-group preference, 10 year olds more moderate preference, and adults reporting the least of all.
- E. **To what extent do other key demographic variables such as age, gender and education impact one's IAT race results?** The percentage of respondents who display implicit race bias varies relatively little across groups categorized by varied age, sex, and educational attainment. In other words, younger people are just as likely to display an implicit race bias as older adults, women are as likely to display an implicit race bias as men and educational attainment appears to make no difference with respect to implicit race bias.
- F. **Do automatic racial or ethnic preferences occur in other countries, in regard to other groups?** Answer: Yes. These have already been

demonstrated, using the IAT, in various Asian, European, and Australian groups. IAT researchers strongly suspect that these automatic preferences are a universal phenomenon.

Evaluating the Implicit Association Test

1. **Contention - IAT data come from self-selected samples which are not generalizable to the U.S. population as a whole.** This argument derives from the fact that IAT data come from voluntary visitors to the IAT website—a *self-selected sample, which is different from a representative sample* that can be obtained by selecting and recruiting respondents randomly from a defined population. As a result, detractors suggest that IAT data cannot be interpreted as representing the attitude distribution of some specific population of interest, such as adult residents of the United States.

Response - Even so, the greater favoritism to advantaged groups found in IAT measures than in explicit measures would almost certainly be found with representative samples. Strong evidence for this assertion comes from examination of the Race IAT data which shows that, with one notable exception, the percentage of respondents who display implicit race bias varies relatively little across groups categorized by varied age, sex, and educational attainment. African Americans constitute the *only subgroup of respondents who do not show substantial implicit pro-European American race bias on the Race IAT.* Approximately equal percentages of African Americans displayed implicit bias in the pro-African American and pro-European American directions.

2. **Sharp dispute exists over what psychological processes the IAT actually measures.**

IAT proponents claim that the IAT taps into hidden reservoirs of unconscious positive and negative affect toward different social groups, but many studies question this interpretation and indicate that the IAT measures a host of alternative processes that do not involve implicit negative bias toward social groups.

For example, some researchers have argued that the IAT does not measure positive or negative affect toward different social groups but rather:

- a. variations in the mere familiarity with particular group categories
- b. egalitarian empathy for disadvantaged social groups; (are members of certain groups perceived as “bad” or “badly off”?)

- c. performance anxiety linked to the fear of being labeled a bigot

See: Antidiscrimination Law and the Perils of Mindreading, Gregory Mitchell and Phillip Tetlock, 67 Ohio State Law Journal 1023 at 1031 (2006)

- 3. **Contention - The IAT is an arbitrary metric that sorts people along a dimension—reaction time—that looks objective but lacks any objective connection to legally actionable behavior.** Thus, detractors say, even if we grant that the IAT is a valid measure of implicit associations between group categories and evaluative attitudes, IAT scores remain meaningless until empirical studies link specific ranges of scores to specific acts that objectively (or consensually) represent discrimination. In other words, the IAT measures attitudes but lacks the capacity to predict how or whether those attitudes will affect real world behavior toward others.

Response: Implicit bias measures correlate with real-world behavior. In one study, the researchers analyzed a total of 224 IAT behavior correlations, generated from sixty-nine statistically independent samples, drawn from twenty-one peer-reviewed published studies and thirty-one unpublished studies. They found that implicit biases correlated with real-world behaviors like being friendly toward a target, allocating resources to minority organizations, and evaluating job candidates." In other words, those who show a larger bias on the IAT also discriminate more in their behavior. “

Research studies suggest that implicit attitudes impact behavior.

- A. **White people who exhibited greater implicit bias toward black people also reported a stronger tendency to engage in a variety of discriminatory acts in their everyday lives** according to a 2007 study by Rutgers University psychologists Laurie Rudman and Richard Ashmore. These acts included avoiding or excluding blacks socially, uttering racial slurs and jokes, and insulting, threatening or physically harming black people.
- B. **Implicit biases against minority groups found to correlate with a propensity to discriminate against these groups in budget allocations.** A second study by the same authors examined the link between implicit bias against Jews, Asians and Blacks and discriminatory behavior toward each of these groups. They asked research participants to examine a budget proposal ostensibly under consideration at their university and to make recommendations for allocating funding to student organizations. Students who exhibited greater implicit bias toward a given minority

group tended to suggest budgets that discriminated more against organizations devoted to that group's interests.

Race and the Brain. We're hardwired to react suspiciously to other races. But we also have the tools to overcome it

BY JEFFREY KLUGER

THE HUMAN BRAIN IS SURELY THE MOST sophisticated data-processing machine in the world, except when it's not. In fact, in some ways our brains can be flat-out crude—like when they're dealing with matters of race.

Like all other animals, our species emerged in a world where there was critical value in distinguishing between members of your own tribe—who nurture you and protect you—and members of other tribes, who see you as a competitor for food and mates. Your very survival can turn on making this distinction quickly and reliably; as a result, the primal wiring that makes such discrimination possible is not very easy to disconnect. And in a culture like ours, in which race is an issue we grapple with nearly every day, the impulse may have heightened over time.

In the 1990s, psychologist and social scientist Mahzarin Banaji of Harvard University co-created what's known as the implicit-association test (IAT), a way of exploring the instant connections the brain draws between races and traits. Previously administered only in the lab but now

available online (at implicit.harvard.edu), the IAT asks people to pair pictures of white or black faces with positive words like *joy*, *love*, *peace* and *happy* or negative ones like *agony*, *evil*, *hurt* and *failure*. Speed is everything, since the survey tests automatic associations. When respondents are told to link the desirable traits to whites

What happens when racism isn't an unconscious bias that you wish you didn't have but a hatred you embrace?

and the undesirable ones to blacks, their fingers fairly fly on the keys. When the task is switched, with whites being labeled failures and blacks called glorious, fingers slow considerably, a sure sign the brain is struggling.

When Banaji, along with cognitive neuroscientist Liz Phelps of New York

University, conducted brain scans of subjects using functional magnetic resonance imaging, they uncovered the reasons for the results. White subjects respond with greater activation of the amygdala—a region that processes alarm—when shown images of black faces than when shown images of white faces. “One of the amygdala’s critical functions is fear-conditioning,” says Phelps. “You attend to things that are scary because that’s essential for survival.” Later studies have shown similar results when black subjects look at white faces.

The brain, of course, is not all amygdala, and there are higher regions that can talk sense to the lower ones. Phelps cites studies showing that when blacks and whites are flashed pictures of faces from the other race so quickly that the subjects weren’t consciously aware of seeing them, their amygdalae reacted predictably. When the images were flashed more slowly so that subjects could process them consciously, the anterior cingulate cortex and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—regions that temper automatic responses—kicked in.

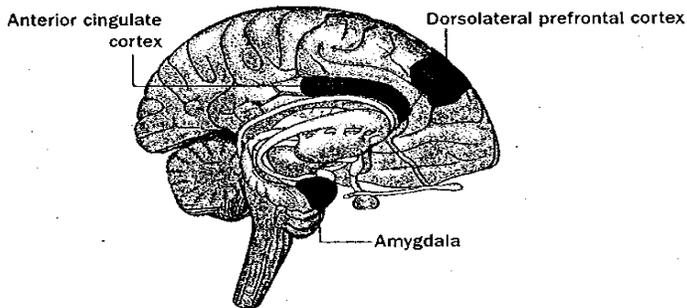
Phelps conducted other studies in which the images included such friendly faces as Will Smith’s and Harrison Ford’s and found that this helped control the amygdala too. “The more you think about people as individuals,” she says, “the more the brain calms down.”

But what about when the brain goes the other way? What about when racism isn’t an unconscious bias you wish you didn’t have but a hatred you embrace? It’s hard to know how ordinary human brains become so twisted, but the problem may begin with our ability to fathom time.

Animal brains operate mostly in the present and past; they know what’s happening now, and they recall things that occurred before. When animals encounter an unwelcome outsider, simply driving away the interloper is thus sufficient, since they don’t give much thought to whether the intrusion will happen again. Humans, however, operate with awareness of the future, which means we seek to extinguish not only a current threat but also future ones—and that can mean trying to eradicate the entire group that poses the perceived danger.

Worse, as our ability to develop weapons has progressed, our ability to carry out our murderous plans advanced along with it. “For the same aggressive impulse, we can do a lot more killing,” says psychologist John Dovidio of Yale University. The bad news is that wisdom, the human faculty that trumps all this, can be very slow to arrive. The good news is that with enough time, both individuals and the species as a whole do acquire it. ■

Sounding (and Silencing) the Alarm



The brain's lower-most parts are its most primitive. Racism begins in the basement

REFLEXIVE FEAR

When people see a member of a different race, the first part of the brain to react is the amygdala, which processes alarm and fear

THE ALL-CLEAR

Magnetic resonance imaging reveals that two higher brain regions may kick in after the amygdala, sensing no danger and canceling the alert