

RACIAL & HEALTH EQUITY: Make It Your Business

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Learn: What is Bias?

Bias is an attitude someone has — either positive or negative — towards something or someone. Bias occurs when, rather than being neutral, we have an existing preference for or aversion to something, someone or a group of people.

People can hold biases about many things, but they are often about race, gender, age, sexual orientation and religion. We all hold some form of bias, but biases are frequently based on stereotypes, rather than actual knowledge and direct experiences.

Stereotypes that are perpetuated in the media and American culture, and our own families affect our beliefs and assumptions about people and can lead to bias in unconscious ways.

Let's look at two examples:



Racial Bias in Health Care

Bias has real-world consequences, and can impact how people are treated, the care they receive and the justice they are afforded. Racial bias is well documented in health care. A [2016 study](#) found that Black patients are undertreated for pain compared with white patients. The study revealed that a substantial number of white medical students and medical residents hold false beliefs and racial biases about Black patients.

This racial bias, (which is rooted in stereotypes of Black people being presumed to be more likely to seek medication), led to the Black patients being underestimated and undertreated for pain.



Gender Bias in the Workplace

Gender bias is the tendency to prefer one gender over another. Gender bias occurs when we consciously or unconsciously ascribe certain beliefs about a person based on their gender. Men are frequently perceived as harder workers and better employees and are more likely to be hired than women.

A [2014 study](#) showed that both male and female hiring managers were twice as likely to hire a man over a woman. Not acknowledging our own biases negatively impacts ourselves, our relationships and our organizations. It is important to examine our own biases and work to eliminate them through education and reflection.

Reflect: What Biases Do You Hold?



Can you recognize biases that you hold about certain groups of people? Where did you learn this? How has this shaped your beliefs and actions?

How does bias impact your family or community? Do you benefit from bias or does it negatively impact you?

What actions can you take today to start to address bias in yourself?

Change: Steps Toward Progress



Become aware of your own bias

The first step in working to address and eliminate bias is to become aware of your own biases. One way you can start to identify your own biases and prejudices is by taking an Implicit Association Test. The [Implicit Association Test](#) is designed to educate the public about hidden biases they have. While this test has some limitations, it can be a great tool in becoming aware of our own biases and unconscious beliefs.



Understand how bias impacts actions

Once we start to become more aware of our own biases, we can start to understand how they impact our actions, thoughts and beliefs. Recognizing our own biases can be an uncomfortable process, but it's necessary in order to grow and start to eliminate bias. Thought leader and lawyer Verné Myers offers advice about understanding our own biases [here](#).



Continue to educate yourself

There are many resources designed to uncover some of your own biases and help you learn strategies for addressing them. The Kirwan Institute provides free learning materials that help people better understand and address bias and racial disparities in our society.

Learn More



- <https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>
- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- [Combatting Racial Bias in the Workplace](#) by the Kirwan Institute

