



Implicit Bias in the Library Workplace

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Exploring Implicit Bias

This exercise is about exploring. You don't need to judge yourself or others. This is simply about looking and seeing what ideas or examples emerge. Being open to looking is the most important.

- Who are my closest friends? What similarities do we share (race, social class, age, etc)?
- Who are my neighbors?
- When was the last time I noticed a prejudice in myself (automatic or considered)?
- Do I only find a certain type of person attractive?
- What is an environment I find myself most comfortable in? Who else is there?
- What is a time I felt uncomfortable with someone's sexual orientation or sexual practices?
- When was the last time I remember letting something slide that could be racist/prejudice/discriminatory in some way?
- What was the last gender stereotype I witnessed but didn't mention?
- When did I last get uncomfortable or feel like I didn't fit in?
- When was the last time I took leadership to welcome a person different from myself into an activity, event or space?
- When am I tokenized? Did I notice when it happened? Do I accept or enjoy it? Do I challenge it?



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Implicit Association Test

Have you taken the free Implicit Association Test (IAT)?

Project Implicit, a non-profit organization, is a collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition (otherwise known as implicit bias). The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is an online research-based tool to develop an individual's awareness of implicit preferences and stereotypes. This test may reveal that you have an implicit attitude that you didn't even know you had.

Here are instructions for completing the test:

1. Go to www.implicit.harvard.edu
2. Under Project Implicit Social Attitudes, enter your email address and login as a guest.
3. Once you login, you'll be sent to the Preliminary Information page. Please read the disclaimer, scroll to the bottom of the page, and click "I wish to proceed."
4. There will be several versions (race, age, religion, weight, etc.) of the test available. You are free to choose which tests you would like to take.
5. When finished, you will receive your results as well as more information about the test and the performance of others. You can also go back and take another test.

Upon completing at least one test from the IAT, reflect on how the results made you feel and if there were any surprises based on your results.



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Common Cognitive Biases

There are more than 150 cognitive biases with five that have direct impacts within the library and information profession workplace. These are among the most common:

Affinity bias. It is human nature to gravitate towards individuals who look like us, therefore, we prefer people who look like us. In a library, this may mean choosing to help those community groups in which we look like or feel comfortable with versus those groups that are different than us.

Halo effect. The overall impression of someone impacts your evaluation of that person. For example in a library setting, a customer's attitude or an employee's professionalism creates a good first impression.

Perception bias. The tendency to form stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups that make it impossible to make an objective judgement about members of those groups. In the library, there is often perception bias seen with race, gender, age, and appearance. For example, "Asian Americans are smart." "Women are more family-focused." "Millennials won't stay with the library too long." "Because you have a tattoo, you are a danger to me."

Confirmation bias. The tendency for people to seek information that confirms preexisting beliefs or assumptions. This bias supports the spread of fake news. Within the library, we want to teach information literacy to our customers. We want to ensure our programming and services help customers fact check their information.



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Self-Reflection Questions

- What biases have you witnessed or experienced within your library?
- How would you rate your organization's effectiveness working across cultures on a scale of 1 to 10? 1 means the organization doesn't work effectively across cultures. 10 means the organization is extremely effective working across cultures. Reflect on why you selected the number you did.
- What is one cultural group that is difficult to work with within your library and why?
- If you had to work with a group from culture X for the next 6 months, what would be most challenging and why?

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