

# MICROMESSAGING

to Reach and Teach Every Student™



NAPE  
National Alliance for  
Partnerships in Equity

## Research Nuggets

**Topic**            **Implicit Bias**  
**Unit**                **Micromessages**

*Implicit bias is a term used to describe the hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. (Teaching Tolerance, undated)*

## Introduction

Implicit bias is a term that arose to explain why stereotypes and discrimination persist even when an individual denies having biased attitudes toward another group. Harvard University social psychologist Dr. Mahzarin Banaji has been studying implicit bias since the 1980s alongside Anthony Greenwald, who created the first implicit associate test (IAT). Initially the test measured associations between positive images and words, and the results demonstrated that people easily and readily made correlations between, for example, an image of flowers and a positive word, like “happy.” Greenwald then began testing words and images associated with ethnicity and race and found that a majority of people were unaware of the deeply rooted bias they had for some groups of people. Banaji, Greenwald, and another researcher, Brian Nosek, have continued to apply the IAT to probe the nature of bias in various settings. Banaji states, “As adults, we continue to observe our environment and unintentionally adapt the stereotypes we hold to match.” Awareness of one’s own bias, however, does much to eradicate it.

## Illustrations and Examples

In 2011, the Level Playing Field Institute of San Francisco, California, published its findings addressing hidden bias and underrepresented people in information technology (IT). The 645 respondents viewed video clips of avatars engaging in workplace functions and then completed a 100-item survey assessing beliefs about company diversity and diversity practices, workplace environment and company culture, and overall job satisfaction and likelihood to willingly terminate their position from the company where they worked. Overall, white men (who comprised 77% of the survey respondents) felt that “diversity in the workplace has little value” and that “diversity was a non-issue because it was addressed well enough.” Women and minorities, however, were less satisfied in their jobs because of the dim prospects for upward mobility, continuous exclusion from company in-groups, and “untoward jokes or comments that have sexual connotations or are aimed at subculture groups, including homosexuality.” Further illustrating implicit bias, 74% of white men sensed that their companies spent the right amount of time addressing diversity issues, while 51% of women and 61% of people of color determined that their IT companies did not do enough. Women working in large IT firms had the highest rates of negative experiences, including but not limited to exclusionary cliques and difficulty balancing work and family obligations. Additionally, people of color were often insulted by unwanted racial/ethnic/religious/cultural jokes 50% more often than non-underrepresented people, and 40% of non-whites reported being mistaken for other individuals of the same race or gender. Implicit bias invades merit pay as well; research demonstrates that “women and people of color receive lower pay for the same level of performance in comparison to white males.”

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### Successful Research-based Strategies

- Become aware of your own unconscious biases through peer observations, asking your students, and videotaping your class.
- Take the implicit bias test at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>
- Create an awareness of gender-biased behaviors with regard to STEM occupations and preparation.
- Directly address and discuss implicit bias in STEM careers.
- Become aware of cultural biases in assessments through training so you can minimize them.

### References and Bibliography

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NAPE is an alliance of federal and state agencies, local school districts, colleges, universities, businesses, and corporate foundations working to ensure that every student can realize his or her potential in high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.



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