

## **Staying Neutral in a Biased World: The Neuroscience of Implicit Bias**

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**Program Description:** Humans are not hard wired toward a particular bias but as a social species we are hard wired to acquire biases, both explicit and implicit. We will focus on the science behind implicit bias. We will elucidate the evidence that implicit bias influences behavior and how understanding the neuroscience suggests ways to manage biases in connection with mediation.

**Implicit bias** is a one's stereotype towards a group without conscious knowledge of it happening. There are fewer safeguards against this than explicit bias. It can influence biased behavior.

This is a biological response. We naturally have an us-vs.-them mentality that helps us survive. This is due to limited resources and our view of competition and cooperation. We use selective perception because we can't process all of the information we receive. We process 11 million bits of information per second but are only aware of 40 bits.

**Implicit association test** can be found at [implicit.harvard.edu](http://implicit.harvard.edu). This test gives statistics of all test takes and the lag time they have towards selecting people belonging to certain groups based on implicit bias.

**Research** has shown that newborns have no bias, but by three months, babies prefer looking at the race of their mothers more than other races. The amygdala response lights up when you see faces that are not your race. This happens implicitly within a second of seeing the face. A study of Caucasians showed that when they saw a white face, amygdala activity went down which equated to a positive response and when they saw a black face, the opposite happened signaling a negative response.

**Does implicit bias impact mediation?** There is more opportunity for implicit bias to affect mediation because of the less formal nature compared to adjudication. Studies have shown that minority claimants have gotten less in mediation compared to adjudication.

**How can we fix implicit bias?** A five-prong approach significantly reduces implicit bias at four weeks and the effects are still visible at eight weeks:

- Replace stereotypes: recognize and avoid stereotyping
- Imagine details of counter-stereotype in detail: think about admirable people of a different race before going into a mediation session
- Individuate: focus on details of the similarities with individuals instead of broad generalizations
- Perspective taking: use role play games featuring a person of another race that are written in the second person
- Increase your contact with people outside of your group in everyday life

Audience question: Why does implicit bias affect mediation results when it's only immediate? After you get based the implicit bias shouldn't it be explicit bias if it's still affecting your judgment at the end of a mediation?

Answer: The amygdala reverberates to the rest of the brain so your implicit bias doesn't go away but instead keeps being reinforced.