

# CHAPTER 8: Exploring Cultural Awareness

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PLEASE READ THE MATERIAL PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE SESSION.

### Homework for Session:

**Read** chapter 8; take **Implicit Bias Quiz** online (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>); listen to **Ted Talk** ([https://www.ted.com/talks/verna\\_myers\\_how\\_to\\_overcome\\_our\\_biases\\_walk\\_boldly\\_toward\\_them?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en))

### Class Objectives:

- Better understand own identity and effect of culture's values on attitude and behavior.
- Understand the importance of cultural differences on the work of a CASA Volunteer.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Appreciating and understanding diversity, cultural sensitivity, and culturally appropriate advocacy for the children and families with whom ProKids works are critical skills for volunteers and staff. This chapter will broadly explore cultural diversity. The case studies and examples used throughout this manual are intended to encourage the continued exploration of these issues.

What you think you know about other cultures -- and sometimes your own culture as well -- may be inaccurate and based on misinformation and stereotypes, assumptions, and lack of actual contact with members of that culture. In working with families, you need to learn about an individual's or family's culture, while recognizing the influence of your own background on your responses to cultural differences. When in doubt, ask your CASA Manager. It might feel awkward at first, but learning how to ask questions sensitively is a vital skill to develop. Once people understand that you sincerely want to learn and be respectful, they are usually very generous with their help.

Developing cultural awareness is a lifelong process in which people make mistakes, get to know others in deeper ways, and become more competent CASA volunteers. Cultural awareness involves analyzing yourself and your society, facing your biases and ignorance, and making a commitment to ongoing learning and openness. It is about developing skills, including improving your ability to control or change some of your beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes; to think flexibly; to find sources of information about those who are different from you; and to recognize that your own cultural way is not the only way.

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## Unit 1. Vocabulary

### Cultural Diversity Vocabulary

The purpose of this activity is to develop a working vocabulary related to issues of diversity.

Read the following terms and consider their definitions. Answer the following questions:

- What additional items would you add to the list?
- Do you disagree with any of the definitions?

### **Ablism**

Discrimination based on a limitation, difference, or impairment in one's physical, mental, or sensory capacity or ability.

### **Cultural Competence**

The ability to work effectively with people from a variety of cultural, ethnic, political, racial, religious, and economic backgrounds.

### **Cultural Group**

A group of people who consciously or unconsciously share identifiable values, norms, symbols, and some ways of living that are repeated and transmitted from one generation to another.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

An awareness of the nuances of one's own and other cultures.

### **Culturally Appropriate**

Demonstrating both sensitivity to cultural differences and similarities and effectiveness in communicating a message within and across cultures.

### **Culture**

The shared values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people who are unified by race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, or religion.

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### **Disability**

A limitation, difference, or impairment in one's physical, mental, or sensory capacity or ability.

### **Discrimination**

To act prejudicially. A manner of treating individuals differently due to their status or membership in a particular group.

### **Disproportionality**

The experience of over-representation or lack of representation of various groups in different social, political, or economic institutions (e.g., women are over-represented when identifying single heads of households; African Americans and Latino Americans are over-represented in our prison population).

### **Ethnic**

Belonging to a common group -- often linked by race, nationality, and language -- with a common cultural heritage and/or derivation.

### **Ethnicity**

The cultural description or country of origin of oneself or one's ancestors.

### **Gender**

One's biological sex.

### **Gender Identity**

The gender one identifies as.

### **Gender Orientation**

(See Sexual Orientation)



### **Heterosexism**

An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, or relationship.

### **Language**

The form or pattern of speech -- spoken or written -- used by residents or descendants of a particular nation or geographic area or by any body of people. Language can be formal or informal and includes dialect, idiomatic speech, and slang.

### **Multicultural**

Designed for or pertaining to two or more distinctive cultures.

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## National Origin

The country in which one was born.

## Prejudice

A bias for or against something without a logical basis.

## Race

A socially defined population characterized by distinguishable physical characteristics, usually skin color.



## Racism

The belief that some racial groups are inherently superior or inferior to others. Discrimination based on race.

## Sexism

Discrimination toward a person or group of people based on their gender or gender identity.

## Sexual Orientation

Describes the gender(s) of people toward whom one feels romantically and/or sexually attracted:

- LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
- Heterosexual:** attracted to the other gender
- Homosexual:** attracted to the same gender (i.e., gay man or lesbian woman)
- Bisexual:** attracted to either gender
- Transgender:** the state of ones gender identity (self-identification as woman, man, neither or both) not matching ones assigned sex.

## Socioeconomic Status

Identifies one's economic class (e.g., poor or working-class, middle-class, or wealthy).

## Stereotype

A highly simplified conception or belief about a person, place, or thing, based on limited information.

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## Unit 2: Cultural Sensitivity

In the context of the CASA volunteer role, cultural awareness is the ability to work effectively with people from a variety of cultural, ethnic, political, racial, religious, and economic backgrounds. It is being aware and respectful of the cultural norms, values, traditions, and parenting styles of those with whom you work. Cultural awareness includes the ability to learn from and relate to individuals from your own culture as well as those from other cultures. Cultural awareness is not about making others conform to your standards. It is about cultivating an open mind and new skills.

Each child and each family is made up of a combination of cultural, family, and personal traits. Part of your role as a CASA volunteer is to recognize the commonalities among all children (e.g., the minimum standards of care that are required for all children) and to support the personal development of youth through culturally sensitive, appropriate, and competent services. The following activity highlights some reasons to increase your cultural awareness and sensitivity.

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## The Importance of Cultural Awareness for Child Advocates

### 10 Reasons to Increase Personal Awareness, Practice Respect & Strive for Cultural Competence

1. Ensures that case issues are viewed with respect for the cultural perspective of the child and/or family:
  - Takes into account cultural norms, practices, traditions, intrafamilial relationships, roles, kinship ties, and other culturally appropriate values;
  - Supports sensitivity to this cultural perspective on the part of caseworkers, service providers, caregivers, or others involved with the child and family;
2. Ensures that the child's long-term needs are viewed from a culturally appropriate perspective:
  - Takes into account the child's need to develop and maintain a positive self-image and cultural heritage;
  - Takes into account the child's need to positively identify and interact with those he or she considers to be "like" himself or herself;
3. Prevents appropriate cultural practices from being mistaken for child maltreatment or family dysfunction;
4. Assists with identifying "real" issues of parental noncompliance versus culturally inappropriate or noninclusive service delivery;
5. Contributes to more accurate assessment of child's welfare, family system, available support systems, placement needs, services needed, and delivery;
6. Prevents cross-cultural communication clashes and decreases opportunity for misunderstandings;
7. Allows family to utilize culturally appropriate solutions in problem solving;
8. Encourages participation of family members in seeking assistance or support;
9. Recognizes, appreciates, and incorporates cultural differences in ways that promote cooperation; and
10. Allows all participants to be heard objectively.

*Created by the CASA Program of Portland, OR*



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The following statistics about racial imbalances in the foster care system are cause for alarm:

- Nationally, children from racial and ethnic minority groups make up an estimated 52% of the nearly 415,000 children in the foster care system.

*U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, FY2014*

- The number of white children entering foster care in a given year is greater than the number of African American children. Yet, African American children make up a disproportionate, and increasing, share of those who remain.

*W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Families for Kids Project website 2012, [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).*

- The percentage of Hispanic children in foster care is 21% in 2014.

*U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, FY2014*

For additional information on Adoption and Foster Care statistics, go to [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb)

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## UNIT 3: Cross-Cultural Communication

### Language & Cross-Cultural Communication

Culture and language are very closely related. As a CASA volunteer, you will need to interact effectively with people who speak English but have different cultural backgrounds from yours. You may also need to communicate with families who cannot speak, or are limited in their knowledge of, English. Whether you are able to speak the same language as the child and his or her family or must use a translator, it is important that you use plain language without agency jargon.

Speaking a language different from the mainstream has a strong effect on family and individual development. Language is a powerful vehicle for communicating culture. It can be the glue that holds a cultural group together, and at the same time it can be a barrier to gaining access to needed resources such as education or jobs. Many immigrants eager for citizenship and full acceptance strive to acquire English while maintaining their own language. Language also influences the family's connections with the larger community, as those who do not speak English often feel isolated and excluded from the community. If children are the first to learn English, as often happens in immigrant families, the balance of power can shift as parents and grandparents rely on children to translate and interpret information from agencies and others in the community.

Immigrant families want to improve their quality of life; it is often their main reason for moving to the United States. They want their children to have a better life. They know that to attain this dream, their children need to learn English. Yet, maintaining one's own native or home language while learning English can benefit all involved.

*Adapted from Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, Christiann Dean,  
"Cornell Empowering Families Project," August 1996.  
Used with permission.*

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## Working with Gay & Lesbian Youth

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender<sup>1</sup> (GLBT) youth as a population are often at greater risk for neglect/abuse, discrimination, and dependency problems due to discrimination based on a lack of understanding and acceptance by the dominant cultural group. Consider these statistics:

- ELEVEN AND A HALF PERCENT OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH REPORT BEING PHYSICALLY ATTACKED BY FAMILY MEMBERS;
- FIFTY PERCENT OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH ARE REJECTED BY THEIR PARENTS DUE TO THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION;
- IT IS ESTIMATED THAT TWENTY-SIX PERCENT OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH ARE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES BECAUSE OF CONFLICT WITH THEIR FAMILIES OVER THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION;
- GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH ARE TWO TO THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO ATTEMPT SUICIDE THAN HETEROSEXUAL YOUTH; AND
- FORTY-TWO PERCENT OF HOMELESS YOUTH IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, OR TRANSGENDER.

The results of these alarming figures is that many youth feel very lonely and isolated. These young people need additional resources and advocacy that may not be available in certain communities due to discrimination and/or a lack of services. CASAs can advocate for additional services and educate themselves about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth.

### **Clinical psychologist Rob Eichberg describes homosexuality as follows:**

Some of us are heterosexual and others of us are homosexual and no one really knows why. Though many people might desire to do away with homosexuality in themselves or in others, there are now, have always been, and always will be lesbians and gay men. Being attracted to one's own sex is as natural for someone who is homosexual as being attracted to the opposite sex is for someone who is heterosexual. Much like the differences in the colors of our hair, eyes, or skin; the shape of our bodies; or being right-or-left-handed; it is not good or bad, right or wrong, or better or worse to be homosexual or heterosexual. It just is.

*From Coming Out, Rob Eichberg, New York; Plume, 1990*

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of these specific terms can be found in the Glossary of this manual.

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### Being in a Multicultural Environment

Read the following page, Tips for Family Practice in a Multicultural Environment, a resource designed for health care practitioners. As you read, consider how these tips might be helpful to you in your work as a CASA volunteer.

#### Tips For Working In a Multicultural Environment

1. Assume nothing.
2. Ask questions regarding specific behaviors, values, attitudes, and perspectives.
3. Pay attention to any signs of spirituality or religiosity and respect the family's beliefs.
4. Do not insist on eye-to-eye contact.
5. If you do not speak the family's language, find an interpreter; better yet, learn some basic phrases that will allow you to at least greet the family in their own language.
6. Seek personal experiences with members from the various cultural groups you might serve.
7. Set specific goals for achieving cultural awareness with respect to the various cultural groups your agency or practice might serve.
8. Acknowledge the legacy and presence of cultural and racial bigotry and prejudice in the United States.
9. Appreciate the difficulties and problems individuals and families encounter trying to live and thrive in a cultural setting that is, at best, different from their indigenous culture and, at worst, antagonistic toward their specific cultural orientation.
10. Explain the need for any and all information requested and, if possible, delay asking the most personal questions until the family has had the time to understand the need for the information.

*Understanding the American Family: A Multicultural Perspective, Anthony E.O. King.  
Handout at NCASAA Conference, 1992.*

**Keep in mind that if your only contact with a particular cultural group is through your work as a CASA volunteer, then your exposure to that culture is rather limited.**

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### Stereotypes vs. Cultural Sensitivity

**Part 1:** Read the following paragraphs about stereotyping.

**Part 2:** Address the following questions.

- Identify examples in the media where you have seen a community or culture stereotyped.
- Share an experience in which you were stereotyped or misunderstood by a person from another culture.
- How might stereotypes lead to prejudice?
- How can we begin to reduce stereotyping?

Stereotypes are rigid and inflexible. Stereotypes hold even when a person is presented with evidence contrary to the stereotype. Stereotypes are harmful. They limit people's potential, perpetuate myths, and are gross generalizations about a particular group; for instance, people who wear large, baggy clothes shoplift. Teenagers wear large, baggy jackets; therefore, teenagers shoplift. Stereotypes can adversely affect your interactions with children and others in your community. Even stereotypes that include "positive" elements (e.g., "they" are quite industrious) can be harmful because the stereotypes are rigid, limiting, and generalized.

Unlike stereotyping, cultural awareness and sensitivity can be compared to making an educated hypothesis. An educated hypothesis contains what you understand about cultural norms and the social, political, and historical experiences of the children and families with whom you work. You might hypothesize, for example, that a Jewish family is not available for a meeting on Yom Kippur, or that they would not want to eat pork. However, you recognize and allow for individual differences in the expression and experience of a culture; for instance, some Jewish people eat pork and still are closely tied to their Jewish faith or heritage. Another example might be that some African American families celebrate Kwanzaa, while others do not.

As an advocate, you need to examine your biases and recognize they are based on your own life and do not usually reflect what is true for the stereotyped groups. Everyone has certain biases. Everyone stereotypes from time to time. Developing cultural sensitivity is an ongoing, lifelong process.

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## Unit 4. Developing An Action Plan

When working with a child who has cultural differences, it is a good idea to develop an **ACTION PLAN**. A positive approach to dealing with differences will help you in your role as a **CASA** volunteer.

### A Positive Approach To Dealing With Differences

#### 1. Communicate Respect

Transmit positive regard, encouragement, and sincere interest. All people like to know that others respect them.

#### 2. Be Non-judgmental

Avoid moralistic, value-laden, evaluative statements, and listen so that others can fully share and explain themselves and their situations.

#### 3. Personalize Knowledge & Perceptions

Recognize the influence of your own values, perceptions, opinions, and knowledge on your interactions with others. Your perceptions are valid only for you and not for the rest of the world.

#### 4. Demonstrate Empathy

Attempt to put yourself into the other person's life and to understand how he or she feels about the matter under consideration.

#### 5. Practice Role Flexibility

Be able to accomplish a task but also value the ability to do so in such a way that people feel positive about being a part of the process. Encourage shared interaction.

#### 6. Demonstrate Reciprocal Concern

Interact equally, taking turns talking, promoting communication.

#### 7. Tolerate Ambiguity

Be able to react to new, different, and unpredictable situations with greater ease. Too much discomfort can lead to frustration and hostility. Learning to manage the feelings of uncertainty that accompany ambiguity is necessary for dealing with differences.

#### 8. Be Persistent

Keep communication lines open despite ambiguity and possible misunderstanding. Be willing to stay with the situation until you get a clear picture instead of giving up. If you do not understand something, ask that it be explained again.

Adapted from Seattle Crisis Clinic volunteer training program materials.

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## RESOURCE MATERIALS

There are many resources in your community for increasing your cultural awareness and sensitivity. Consider going to the following places to learn more:

- Your local library;
- Computer search,
- Community agencies (such as the health department);
- Communities of faith; and
- Community groups focusing on the cultural traditions and norms of, as well as health services for, particular cultural or language groups.

### Included in This Section:

These websites do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the National CASA Association or ProKids. Please recognize that no single source of information about a cultural group can adequately describe one person or one family.

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## Websites with Relevant Information for Chapter 8

### Cultural Information

#### Center for the Study of Biracial Children

The Center for the Study of Biracial Children produces and disseminates materials for and about interracial families and biracial children. The center provides advocacy, training, and consulting. Its primary mission is to advocate for the rights of interracial families, biracial children, and multiracial people. [www.csbc.cncfamily.com](http://www.csbc.cncfamily.com)

#### National Center for Cultural Competence

This site contains information, resources, and links to other sites, provided by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. <http://nccc.georgetown.edu>

### Native American Links

#### National Indian Child Welfare Association

The public policy section of NICWA's website provides information on how specific child welfare laws impact Indian children. The site also provides links to other information on Native American culture. [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

#### NativeWeb

This site contains over three thousand links to various aspects of Native American culture and history. [www.nativeweb.org](http://www.nativeweb.org)

#### Virtual Library – American Indians

Virtual library of the Indian culture with an index of resources on the web, including culture, history, language, health, and art. [www.hanksville.org/NAresources/](http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/)

#### African American Children & Families

##### Footsteps: Celebrating African American History and Achievement

This online magazine celebrates the heritage of African Americans and explores their contributions to our culture. [www.footstepsmagazine.com](http://www.footstepsmagazine.com) and <http://africanamericanculturesllp.weebly.com/family.htn>

#### National Black Child Development Institute

NBCDI's website includes information on membership, public policy, resources, and a calendar of upcoming events. [www.nbcdi.org/](http://www.nbcdi.org/)

#### European American Children and Families

The Center for the Study of White American Culture supports cultural exploration and self-discovery among white Americans. It encourages a dialogue among all racial and cultural groups concerning the role of white American culture in the larger American society. [www.euroamerican.org/](http://www.euroamerican.org/)



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### **Asian American Children and Families**

#### **Asian Community Online (ACON)**

This site provides links to various aspects of Asian culture, including Asian studies, advocacy, culture, education, health, sexuality, and women. [www.acon.org](http://www.acon.org)

### **National Korean American Service and Education Consortium**

This national organization seeks to educate and empower Korean American communities nationwide. [www.nakasec.org](http://www.nakasec.org)

### **Latino Culture**

#### **Hispanic Business Culture**

This site provides information about the Hispanic business culture. [www.hispanicbusiness.com](http://www.hispanicbusiness.com)

#### **Hispanic Online**

This site includes information on culture, entertainment, politics, reference materials, and other Internet sites. [www.hispaniconline.com](http://www.hispaniconline.com) and [www.hisp.com/links.html/](http://www.hisp.com/links.html/)

**Latino Links:** [www.latino.sscnet.ucla.edu](http://www.latino.sscnet.ucla.edu) and [latinolink.com](http://latinolink.com)

### **Gay Men and Lesbian Women**

#### **Coalition for Positive Sexuality**

This site offers information about sexuality for teens, both homosexual and heterosexual. [www.positive.org](http://www.positive.org)

#### **Human Rights Campaign**

The largest national lesbian and gay political organization, the HRC envisions an America where lesbian and gay people are ensured of their basic equal rights. They lobby the federal government on gay, lesbian, and AIDS issues; educate the public; participate in election campaigns; organize volunteers; and provide expertise and training at the state and local level. This site has upcoming legislation and informational material. [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

#### **Lesbian.org**

Lesbian.org promotes lesbian visibility on the Internet, and includes political and cultural resources as well as additional links. [www.lesbian.org](http://www.lesbian.org)

#### **Lesbian Mothers Support Society**

This site includes parenting articles, children's resources, adoption information, and other links. [www.lesbian.org/lesbian-moms/text.html](http://www.lesbian.org/lesbian-moms/text.html)

#### **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**

NGLTF is a national progressive organization working for the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Their site contains updated information on GLBT law and current issues. [www.nglft.org](http://www.nglft.org)

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## Test Yourself for Hidden Bias

Psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington created “Project Implicit” to develop Hidden Bias Tests - called Implicit Association Tests, or IATs, in the academic world - to measure unconscious bias.

To take Project Implicit’s Hidden Bias Tests, [click here](#). You may be asked to register.

## About Stereotypes and Prejudices

Hidden Bias Tests measure unconscious, or automatic, biases. Your willingness to examine your own possible biases is an important step in understanding the roots of stereotypes and prejudice in our society.

The ability to distinguish friend from foe helped early humans survive, and the ability to quickly and automatically categorize people is a fundamental quality of the human mind. Categories give order to life, and every day, we group other people into categories based on social and other characteristics.

This is the foundation of stereotypes, prejudice and, ultimately, discrimination.

### Definition of terms

A *stereotype* is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group - a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

A *prejudice* is an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude.

Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an “in-group” such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at “out-groups.”

*Discrimination* is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

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## How do we learn prejudice?

Social scientists believe children begin to acquire prejudices and stereotypes as toddlers. Many studies have shown that as early as age 3, children pick up terms of racial prejudice without really understanding their significance.

Soon, they begin to form attachments to their own group and develop negative attitudes about other racial or ethnic groups, or the “out-group”. Early in life, most children acquire a full set of biases that can be observed in verbal slurs, ethnic jokes and acts of discrimination.

## How are our biases reinforced?

Once learned, stereotypes and prejudices resist change, even when evidence fails to support them or points to the contrary.

People will embrace anecdotes that reinforce their biases, but disregard experience that contradicts them. The statement “Some of my best friends are “\_\_\_\_\_” captures this tendency to allow some exceptions without changing our bias.

## How do we perpetuate bias?

Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the culture at large. The fact that white culture is dominant in America may explain why people of color often do not show a strong bias favoring their own ethnic group.

Mass media routinely take advantage of stereotypes as shorthand to paint a mood, scene or character. The elderly, for example, are routinely portrayed as being frail and forgetful, while younger people are often shown as vibrant and able.

Stereotypes can also be conveyed by omission in popular culture, as when TV shows present an all white world. Psychologists theorize bias conveyed by the media helps to explain why children can adopt hidden prejudices even when their family environments explicitly oppose them.

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## About Hidden Bias

Scientific research has demonstrated that biases thought to be absent or extinguished remain as “mental residue” in most of us. Studies show people can be consciously committed to egalitarianism, and deliberately work to behave without prejudice, yet still possess hidden negative prejudices or stereotypes.

“Implicit Association Tests” (IATs) can tap those hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. Project Implicit - a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and University of Washington - offers dozens of such tests.

We believe the IAT procedure may be useful beyond the research purposes for which it was originally developed. It may be a tool that can jumpstart our thinking about hidden biases: Where do they come from? How do they influence our actions? What can we do about them?

## Biases and behavior

A growing number of studies show a link between hidden biases and actual behavior. In other words, hidden biases can reveal themselves in action, especially when a person’s efforts to control behavior consciously flags under stress, distraction, relaxation or competition.

Unconscious beliefs and attitudes have been found to be associated with language and certain behaviors such as eye contact, blinking rates and smiles.

Studies have found, for example, that school teachers clearly telegraph prejudices, so much so that some researchers believe children of color and white children in the same classroom effectively receive different educations.

A now classic experiment showed that white interviewers sat farther away from black applicants than from white applicants, made more speech errors and ended the interviews 25% sooner. Such discrimination has been shown to diminish the performance of anyone treated that way, whether black or white.

Experiments are being conducted to determine whether a strong hidden bias in someone results in more discriminatory behavior. But we can learn something from even the first studies:

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- Those who showed greater levels of implicit prejudice toward, or stereotypes of, black or gay people were more unfriendly toward them.
- Subjects who had a stronger hidden race bias had more activity in a part of the brain known to be responsible for emotional learning when shown black faces than when shown white faces.

### Leading to discrimination?

Whether laboratory studies adequately reflect real-life situations is not firmly established. But there is growing evidence, according to social scientists, that hidden biases are related to discriminatory behavior in a wide range of human interactions, from hiring and promotions to choices of housing and schools.

In the case of police, bias may affect split-second, life-or-death decisions. Shootings of black men incorrectly thought to be holding guns - an immigrant in New York, a cop in Rhode Island - brought this issue into the public debate.

It is possible unconscious prejudices and stereotypes may also affect court jury deliberations and other daily tasks requiring judgments of human character.

People who argue that prejudice is not a big problem today are, ironically, demonstrating the problem of unconscious prejudice. Because these prejudices are outside our awareness, they can indeed be denied.

### The Effects of Prejudice and Stereotypes

Hidden bias has emerged as an important clue to the disparity between public opinion, as expressed by America's creed and social goals, and the amount of discrimination that still exists.

Despite 30 years of equal-rights legislation, levels of poverty, education and success vary widely across races. Discrimination continues in housing and real estate sales, and racial profiling is a common practice, even among ordinary citizens.

Members of minorities continue to report humiliating treatment by store clerks, co-workers and police. While an African American man may dine in a fine restaurant anywhere in America, it can be embarrassing for him to attempt to flag down a taxi after that dinner.

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A person who carries the stigma of group membership must be prepared for its debilitating effects.

Studies indicate that African American teenagers are aware they are stigmatized as being intellectually inferior and that they go to school bearing what psychologist Claude Steele has called a “burden of suspicion.” Such a burden can affect their attitudes and achievement.

Similarly, studies found that when college women are reminded their group is considered bad at math, their performance may fulfill this prophecy.

These shadows hang over stigmatized people no matter their status or accomplishments. They must remain on guard and bear an additional burden that may affect their self-confidence, performance and aspirations. These stigmas have the potential to rob them of their individuality and debilitate their attempts to break out of stereotypical roles.

### **What You Can Do About Unconscious Stereotypes and Prejudices**

Conscious attitudes and beliefs can change.

The negative stereotypes associated with many immigrant groups, for example, have largely disappeared over time. For African-Americans, civil rights laws forced integration and nondiscrimination, which, in turn, helped to change public opinion.

But psychologists have no ready roadmap for undoing such overt and especially hidden stereotypes and prejudices.

### **Learned at an early age**

The first step may be to admit biases are learned early and are counter to our commitment to just treatment. Parents, teachers, faith leaders and other community leaders can help children question their values and beliefs and point out subtle stereotypes used by peers and in the media. Children should also be surrounded by cues that equality matters.

In his classic book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, the psychologist Gordon Allport observed children are more likely to grow up tolerant if they live in a home that is supportive and loving. “They feel welcome, accepted, loved, no matter what they do.”

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In such an environment, different views are welcomed, punishment is not harsh or capricious, and these children generally think of people positively and carry a sense of goodwill and even affection.

### **Community matters**

Integration, by itself, has not been shown to produce dramatic changes in attitudes and behavior. But many studies show when people work together in a structured environment to solve shared problems through community service, their attitudes about diversity can change dramatically.

By including members of other groups in a task, children begin to think of themselves as part of a larger community in which everyone has skills and can contribute. Such experiences have been shown to improve attitudes across racial lines and between people old and young.

There also is preliminary evidence that unconscious attitudes, contrary to initial expectations, may be malleable. For example, imagining strong women leaders or seeing positive role models of African Americans has been shown to, at least temporarily, change unconscious biases.

### **'Feeling' unconscious bias**

But there is another aspect of the very experience of taking a test of hidden bias that may be helpful. Many test takers can "feel" their hidden prejudices as they perform the tests.

They can feel themselves unable to respond as rapidly to (for example) old + good concepts than young + good concepts. The very act of taking the tests can force hidden biases into the conscious part of the mind.

We would like to believe that when a person has a conscious commitment to change, the very act of discovering one's hidden biases can propel one to act to correct for it. It may not be possible to avoid the automatic stereotype or prejudice, but it is certainly possible to consciously rectify it.

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### Committing to change

If people are aware of their hidden biases, they can monitor and attempt to ameliorate hidden attitudes before they are expressed through behavior. This compensation can include attention to language, body language and to the stigmatization felt by target groups.

Common sense and research evidence also suggest that a change in behavior can modify beliefs and attitudes. It would seem logical that a conscious decision to be egalitarian might lead one to widen one's circle of friends and knowledge of other groups. Such efforts may, over time, reduce the strength of unconscious biases.

It can be easy to reject the results of the tests as "not me" when you first encounter them. But that's the easy path. To ask where these biases come from, what they mean, and what we can do about them is the harder task.

Recognizing that the problem is in many others - as well as in ourselves - should motivate us all to try both to understand and to act.