

Bias Awareness Activities

(i) Implicit Association Test

A well proven technique for enhancing awareness of our own unconscious bias is the IAT (Implicit Association Test). The IAT measures the reaction time of individuals to a series of words or pictures presented on screen. The differential reaction times between stereotypical and mismatched-stereotypical words or images, indicate the extent to which the individual holds implicit stereotypical associations.

EG. The individual is asked to hit a certain key (as quickly as possible) if the word presented is a 'female name' or a 'weak word' (e.g., delicate, small, flower) and a different key if the word is a 'male name' or a 'strong word' (e.g., powerful, mighty, robust). The activity is repeated numerous times and the average reaction time for a correct response is recorded. Then, the rules change and the individual is asked to press one key if the word is a 'female name' or a 'strong word', and a different key if the word is a 'male name' or a 'weak word'. Again this is repeated numerous times and the average reaction time recorded.

In this example, because gender stereotyping associates female names with weak words, and male names with strong words, reaction times are expected to be faster on the first test, compared to the reaction times of the second test that involves the mismatch of stereotypical categories.

There are a wide range of different tests available and they can all be taken anonymously, giving a result immediately upon completion. They are by design American-centric, however – when submitting – they do ask for country or origin and also country of residence. The results are displayed on screen with an interpretation. These IAT tests administered by Harvard University are publicly available at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Before undertaking any test, please read the introductory page carefully. Including the link [general information about the IAT](#). This is important as a precursor in order to have a complete understanding of what the tests measure.

There are 15 different tests to choose from. As this is an exercise in self-discovery it is recommended that you not do a whole battery of tests one after the other, as this might put you into overwhelm. It is also important that when you receive your result and interpretation that you take the time to reflect on what this means for you.

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(i) Implicit Association Test (continued)

If you find yourself emotionally triggered, or going into denial or experiencing confusion, shock, anger, or defensiveness, stop and take some time to just sit with the results, and come back to them later – and quietly reflect. It is important not to blame or shame yourself if you find that your results are not as you expected from your conscious values or beliefs.

It is a good idea to take a screen shot or photograph of your results, so you can refer to them at any time.

FYI: Over a million people have taken these tests, and results confirm that participants across a range of locations, ages, genders, races, and ethnicities hold unconscious stereotypes and prejudices regarding disability, sexual orientation, race, skin tone, age, weight, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

IMPORTANT: It is important when taking any of these tests that you understand fully that bias is inevitable as a result of social conditioning and cognitive processes. No one is immune to these social forces, they are part of the human condition. Becoming aware of them is the first step. Then considering how these unconscious mindsets are influencing behaviours and how you relate is the important next step.

The helpful thing is, that once there is awareness, it is possible to be on the lookout for the manifestation of the previously unknown as it influences and impacts in daily life. And for the self as a Mentor, be conscious in advance of what might come into play when working with different Mentees and choose to remain centred and neutral in energy.

NOTE : It is critical to realise that whatever the results, they DO NOT necessarily show evidence of, or are accusing you of being prejudice. Rather, the exercises are designed to assist in highlighting the existence of hidden bias that, contrary to our conscious intentions, may be manifesting in our relational dynamics. The truth is that we all hold hidden biases that manifest in subtle and unconscious ways

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(ii) Scenario and Interpretation

“A father and son are driving together and are involved in a horrific car accident. The father is killed and the son seriously injured.

The father is pronounced dead at the scene of the accident and his body was taken to a local morgue.

The son is rushed by ambulance to a nearby hospital and immediately wheeled into an emergency operating room.

The surgeon is called an upon arrival in the room, and seeing the patient, the attending surgeon exclaims “Oh my God, it’s my son!”

What is your explanation of how this can be the case?

Note: Please don't go to the next page until you have formulated your response.

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(ii) Scenario and Interpretation (continued)

Around 40% of participants who are faced with this challenge do not think of the most plausible answer—that of the surgeon being the boy's mother.

Some readers invent elaborate stories such as

- The boy was adopted
- The surgeon is his natural father and the man who died was his step father
- The father in the car is a priest
- The surgeon is gay and the boy has two fathers

What was your story?

Even if you did make the call that the surgeon was his mother, it is important to recognise that many will not do so. Thus, this exercise illustrates the powerful pull of automatic, stereotyped associations. And for some individuals, the association between a surgeon (or other stereotypical male roles) and men is so strong that it interferes with problem-solving and making accurate judgments. For example:

- Engineering
- Mine Manager
- Construction
- Mechanics
- CEO's
- Truck Driving

What other roles would you add to the list? And vice versa – what roles are considered to be stereotypically done by women? Make a list.

REFLECTION: If presented with another (Mentee in this case) that runs counter to either of these roles – how would you respond? What would you be called on to do?