



● Understanding Bias: A Resource Guide

Bias Policing Overview and Resource Guide

The Community Relations Service (CRS) is the U.S. Justice Department's "peacemaker" agency, whose mission is to help resolve tensions in communities across the nation, arising from differences of race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. CRS may be called to help a city or town resolve tensions that stem from community perceptions of bias or a lack of cultural competency among police officers.

Bias and a lack of cultural competency are often cited interchangeably as challenges in police-community relationships. While bias and a lack of cultural competency may both be present in a given situation, these challenges and the strategies for addressing them differ appreciably. This resource guide will assist readers in understanding and addressing both of these issues.

What is bias, and how is it different from cultural competency?

The Science of Bias

Bias is a human trait resulting from our tendency and need to classify individuals into categories as we strive to quickly process information and make sense of the world.¹ To a large extent, these processes occur below the level of consciousness. This "unconscious" classification of people occurs through schemas, or "mental maps," developed from life experiences to aid in "automatic processing."² Automatic processing occurs with tasks that are very well practiced; very few mental resources and little conscious thought are involved during automatic processing, allowing numerous tasks to be carried out simultaneously.³ These schemas become templates that we use when we are faced with

1. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison Wesley, 1954/1979); Michael Billig, "Prejudice, Categorization, and Particularization: From a Perceptual to a Rhetorical Approach," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1985:79-103; as discussed in Lorie Fridell, "This is Not Your Grandparents' Prejudice: The Implications of the Modern Science of Bias for Police Training," *Translational Criminology*, Fall 2013: 10-11.

2. Shawn Marsh, "The Lens of Implicit Bias," *Juvenile and Family Justice Today*, Summer 2009: 16-19, <http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/ImplicitBias.pdf>

3. "Controlled and Automatic Processing," Indiana University, accessed July 29, 2015, CRS is neither affiliated with, nor endorses, the authors of any of the sources or recommended readings in this toolkit. The sources and recommended readings are provided solely for informational purposes.

new encounters. Our brains take pieces of information associated with familiar objects, sort it according to the schemas, and respond according to how we have been trained to react to that category.⁴

When these schemas are used to categorize people by age, gender, race, or other criteria, they are called stereotypes.⁵ This term is not necessarily a negative concept; the brain is sorting new people into easily recognizable groups. For example, a stereotype may consist of “elderly people,” or “people who went to the same school that I attended.” Attitudes, on the other hand, are positive or negative feelings and attributes towards a person or a thing.⁶ Implicit bias involves both implicit stereotypes and implicit attitudes. These stereotypes and attitudes are shaped by personal experiences and cultural exposure that leave a recorded imprint on our memory.⁷

Explicit vs. Implicit Bias

Explicit bias is the traditional conceptualization of bias. With explicit bias, individuals are aware of their prejudices and attitudes toward certain groups.⁸ Positive or negative preferences for a particular group are conscious. Overt racism and racist comments are examples of explicit biases.

Implicit bias involves all of the subconscious feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes that have developed as a result of prior influences and imprints. It is an automatic positive or negative preference for a group, based on one’s subconscious thoughts. However, implicit bias does not require animus; it only requires knowledge of a stereotype to produce discriminatory actions.⁹ Implicit bias can be just as problematic as explicit bias, because both may produce discriminatory behavior. With implicit bias, the individual may be unaware that biases, rather than the facts of a situation, are driving his or her decision-making.

In policing, for example, implicit bias might lead police officers to automatically be suspicious of two young Hispanic males driving in a neighborhood where few Hispanics live. Implicit bias might actually endanger officers; for example, if officers have an implicit bias based on gender, they might be “under-vigilant” with women and miss clues suggesting that a particular woman may be dangerous.¹⁰

Although everyone has implicit biases, research shows that **implicit biases can be reduced through the very process of discussing them and recognizing them for what they are**. Once recognized, implicit biases can be reduced or “managed,” and individuals can control the likelihood that these biases will affect their behavior. Unconscious negative bias toward a particular group also can be reduced through positive contacts with members of that group, and through “counter-stereotyping,” in which individuals are exposed to information that is the opposite of the stereotypes they have about a group.¹¹

[http://www.indiana.edu/~p1013447/dictionary/
ctrlauto.htm](http://www.indiana.edu/~p1013447/dictionary/ctrlauto.htm)

4. “The Lens of Implicit Bias”

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Lorie Fridell, “This Is Not Your Grandparents’ Prejudice: The Implications of the Modern Science of Bias for Police Training,” *Translational Criminology*, Fall 2013: 10-11.

9. Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., and Cox, W. T. L. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 1267-1278.

10. Fridell (2013, 10)

11. See for example, Devine (2012); Correll, J., Park, B., Judd, C. M., Wittenbrink, B., Sadler, M. S., and Keesee, T. (2007). Across the thin blue line: Police officers and racial bias in the decision to shoot. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92(6), 1006-1023; and Kawakami, K., Dovidio, J. F., Moll, J., Hermsen, S., Russin, A. (2009). Just say no (to stereotyping): Effects of training in the negation of stereotypic associations on stereotype activation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78(5), 871-888.; as discussed in Fridell (2013).

Likewise, though, psychological research has revealed that an officer's day-to-day work may actually contribute to the development of negative stereotypes. Policing inherently involves dealing with criminality and other negative behavior, so if an officer is consistently, repeatedly exposed to negative stimuli and contacts within a given community, he or she may develop negative stereotypes regarding the members of that community.¹² These stereotypes can influence implicit biases as discussed above and must also be actively managed.

Cultural Competency

Developing cultural competency is a relatively new priority in the field of policing, and is described as a broader concept rather than merely achieving organizational diversity.¹³ It refers to the ability of all department personnel to work effectively with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including people from different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds; individuals with various disabilities; and other groups. Cultural competency "is not an issue of access, or even equity; it is an issue of understanding."¹⁴ This concept can be considered in terms of phases, or levels, with each successive level representing more knowledge, understanding, and value of differences, and greater awareness of one's own attitudes, perceptions, and other worldviews.¹⁵

Since police officers encounter individuals from diverse groups on a daily basis, it is important for them to have the necessary cultural competencies to provide them with the knowledge, understanding, and self-awareness needed to best perform their jobs. Research suggests that improving cultural competency levels of public servants can potentially increase civic engagement and social trust among young members of minority populations.¹⁶

Police agencies can work to increase the cultural competency of their personnel in a number of ways, through training programs, policy statements, and efforts to identify aspects of the agency's "organizational culture" that may perpetuate or condone bias; or alternatively, by identifying and building on agency policies that promote understanding and awareness.

Hiring and recruiting police officers from diverse demographic backgrounds is an essential part of improving the overall cultural competency of the organization.

Developing cultural competence in law enforcement requires police agencies to:

- Seek human resource management strategies that promote diversity;
- Institutionalize and document the agency's commitment to cultural competence;

12. Smith, M.R., & Alpert, G. P. "Explaining Police Bias: A Theory of Social Conditioning and Illusory Correlation." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 34 (2007): 1262-1283, doi: 10.1177/0093854807304484

13. Kristen A. Norman-Major and Susan T Gooden (Eds.) (2012). Cultural Competency for Public Administrators. Available: [https://books.google.com/books?id=4uooCAAAQBAJ&pg=PA32&lpg=PA32&dq=ACLU+Cultural+competence&source=bl&ots=kMDfU_Rl0Y&sig=cb4XdPyHmg_NZm0lKMFVqBP8e4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEIQ6AEwBGoVChMltZ7n9tyFxwlVgxkeCh3FUQ0f - v=onepage&q=ACLU%20Cultural%20competence&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=4uooCAAAQBAJ&pg=PA32&lpg=PA32&dq=ACLU+Cultural+competence&source=bl&ots=kMDfU_Rl0Y&sig=cb4XdPyHmg_NZm0lKMFVqBP8e4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEIQ6AEwBGoVChMltZ7n9tyFxwlVgxkeCh3FUQ0f-v=onepage&q=ACLU%20Cultural%20competence&f=false)

14. Shelly L. Peffer. (2012) Legally Competent Public Servants: State Statutory and Regulatory Mandated Cultural Competence Provisions. In Kristen A. Norman-Major and Susan T Gooden (Eds.) (2012). Competency for Public Administrators.

15. See for example, Cross, T.L. (2001). Cultural Competence Continuum, or Martin, M. and Vaughn, B. (no date). "Cultural Competence: The Nuts and Bolts of Diversity and Inclusion." *Diversity Officer Magazine*. <http://diversityofficermagazine.com/cultural-competence/cultural-competence-the-nuts-bolts-of-diversity-inclusion/>

16. As cited in Fletcher, Michelle N., "Cultural Competency in Law Enforcement: Assessing Cultural Competence Levels among College Campus Police Departments" (2014). Research Papers. Paper 504. http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1647&context=gs_rp

- Implement training and socialization strategies that promote a high service ethic for diverse populations;
- Commit to organizational policy assessments, and individual evaluations to measure the development of cultural competence.¹⁷

Developing cultural competence through these measures helps to ensure that officers do not misinterpret culture for stereotypes. Being aware of cultural nuances protects against using stereotypical responses to react to situations, because the officer can understand the culture from the individual's perspective.¹⁸ Cultural competency helps avoid face-value stereotyping by giving officers a deeper understanding of cultures.

What types of bias does the Community Relations Service address?

Actual or Perceived Race, Color, National Origin, and Ethnicity. Racial discrimination is treating a person adversely due to that individual's race or characteristics associated with that race, such as hair texture or facial features. Color discrimination is discriminating against a person due to the color of their skin.¹⁹ National origin discrimination involves treating people unfavorably due to where they are from or their ethnicity or accent.²⁰

Actual or Perceived Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation. According to the American Psychological Association, *sex* refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex. *Gender* refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. *Gender identity* refers to one's sense of self as male, female, or transgender. *Sexual orientation* refers to the sex of those to whom a person is sexually and romantically attracted.²¹

Actual or Perceived Religion. Some laws protect people against religious discrimination in certain ways, such as employment.²² It is important for police to understand basic tenets of major religions. For example, a female Muslim may avoid eye contact with a male officer. An officer might consider this a sign of deceit or evasion, but Muslim culture dictates this as a sign of modesty.

17. Fletcher, Michelle N., "Cultural Competency in Law Enforcement: Assessing Cultural Competence Levels among College Campus Police Departments" (2014). Research Papers. Paper 504.

http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1647&context=gs_rp

18. Perlin, M.L., & McClain, V. "'Where Souls are Forgotten': Cultural Competencies, Forensic Evaluations, and International Human Rights." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*. 15(4) (2009): 257-277. doi: 10.1037/a0017233

19. "Race/Color Discrimination," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed July 30, 2015.

http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/race_color.cfm

20. "National Origin Discrimination," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed July 30, 2015.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/nationalorigin.cfm>

21. "Definition of Terms: Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation," American Psychological Association, Accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>

22. "Religious Discrimination," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm>

Actual or Perceived Disability. Persons with disabilities are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Police often interact with individuals with disabilities, so it is important for them to be aware of various types of physical and mental impairments covered under the law, including vision and hearing impairments and conditions such as epilepsy or Autism Spectrum Disorder.²³ Often, these impairments can interfere with a person's ability to hear, see, understand, or respond to an officer's questions, directions, or orders.

23. "Commonly Asked Questions About the Americans with Disabilities Act and Law Enforcement," U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, Accessed July 29, 2015, http://www.ada.gov/q&a_law.htm

A Tool for Identifying Implicit Biases

Project Implicit

Project Implicit, a nonprofit organization of international social cognition researchers, has developed a series of Implicit Association Tests (IATs) that are designed to measure “attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report.”²⁴ IATs are designed to measure associations that either reinforce or contradict your conscious beliefs. An IAT may suggest that you have implicit associations based on race, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other criteria. IATs can be a useful tool in identifying potential biases, attitudes, and associations, but these tests alone should not be expected to overcome the impact of biases of the test taker.

How do IATs work?

The IAT, or Implicit Association Test, measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g. African American people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g. good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g. athletic, clumsy). When performing an IAT, you are asked to quickly sort words into categories that are on the left and right hand side of the computer screen by pressing different keys. A person is said to have an implicit preference for thin people, for example, if the person is faster to respond when the word “thin” is connected to “good” words, such as “happy” or “wonderful,” rather than “bad” words, such as “painful” or “terrible.”²⁵

What should I know before taking an IAT?

Project Implicit urges careful consideration about the appropriate use of the IAT. IATs should be used as an educational tool to develop awareness of implicit preferences and stereotypes, not as a tool for making judgments, such as whether to hire a person.²⁶

However, research has shown that individuals who are made aware of their implicit biases may be motivated to avoid letting the biases affect their behaviors.²⁷ Following is a link to IATs that police leaders might consider distributing to their officers and personnel:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>.

24. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

25. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/iatdetails.html>

26. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ethics.html>

27. Ibid. 10.

What strategies are used to overcome biases?

This section presents five evidence-based techniques, which are regarded as some of the most effective strategies for short- and long-term reduction of implicit bias. Police officials may consider incorporating these strategies into training and professional development opportunities to provide officers and other personnel with the skills needed to recognize and address implicit biases. The strategies presented below are summarized from the article, “*Long-Term Reduction in Implicit Race Bias: A Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention.*”²⁸ In this study, researchers conducted a 12-week longitudinal study observing random participants, and findings demonstrated how these types of interventions can result in the long-term reduction of implicit biases.²⁹

Strategies to Reduce Implicit Bias:

1. **Stereotype Replacement.** Stereotype replacement involves replacing automatic stereotypical responses with new, automatic, *non-stereotypical* responses. This intervention process involves the following steps:
 - a. Recognize a response as stereotypical;
 - b. Label the response as stereotypical and identify why the response may have occurred; and
 - c. Consider alternate responses for use in the future to avoid the stereotypical response. Use these alternatives as unbiased replacement responses.³⁰

For example, imagine you meet a man who happens to say, “I have a child who’s a math major in college.” You say, “Oh really? What’s his name?” The man replies that it is his daughter who is studying math. The first step is to recognize that your assumption that the child is male was based on a stereotype that males are better at math and more likely to study it at higher levels. Reflect on why this response may have occurred, such as the idea that society has consistently defined specific gender roles for boys and girls, and these gender roles are emphasized through media and marketing. Lastly, replace that reaction with a non-stereotypic response. Think about research that shows no difference in math performance based on gender, or perhaps think about an excellent math teacher you had who was female. Now, a process has been created whereby these stereotypic reactions can be evaluated and challenged. This is the first step to avoiding similar reactions in the future.³¹

2. **Counter-Stereotypic Imaging.** Counter-stereotypic imaging requires creating an opposite image of a stereotype in your mind. This can be done by examining general or abstract ideas, specific famous people, or specific non-famous people. The idea behind this method is to challenge the stereotype and make a positive association with the counter-stereotypic image.³²

For example, to address stereotypic thinking about gender and employment, think about people you know personally, such as your female friend who is a doctor and is married to a stay-at-home dad.

28. Patricia Devine et al., “Long-Term Reduction in Implicit Race Bias: A Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012): 1267-1278, doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003

29. “Long-term Reduction in Implicit Race Bias”

30. “Margo Monteith, “Self-Regulation of Prejudiced Responses: Implications for Progress in Prejudice-Reduction Efforts,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65 (1993):469-485. As cited in “Long-term Reduction in Implicit Race Bias”

31. Devine et al., “Long-term Reduction...”; “#SolutionsMonday: Destabilizing Stereotypes,” Perception Institute, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://perception.org/blog/solutionsmonday-destabilizing-stereotypes/>

32. Devine et al., “Long-term Reduction...”; “#SolutionsMonday: Destabilizing Stereotypes.”

- 3. Individuation.** Individuation is the process of giving individuality to persons in a group – helps prevent making biased inferences about individuals based on gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. This technique involves obtaining information about individual members of a group instead of generalizing about that group.³³

To employ this strategy, make a conscious effort to avoid making quick decisions based on stereotypes. For example, try to make a woman's occupation as a scientist more significant than her gender. Gather more information on her history, qualifications, experiences, and achievements before making a judgment. If she makes a mistake, inquire about any particular factors that may have contributed to the mistake at hand, rather than relying on an antiquated, knee-jerk stereotype that "women are not interested in science."

- 4. Perspective Taking.** The idea behind perspective taking is to lessen automatic group-based judgments and improve psychological closeness to the group in question. This strategy involves taking a first-person perspective of a member of the group, which helps one to empathize and understand the implications of stereotypes.³⁴

Focus on the group you are struggling with stereotyping. For example, if you want to overcome bias against African Americans, imagine what it would feel like to be considered less qualified for a position based on your skin color. If you are working on gender biases, imagine what it would be like to lose opportunities based on assumptions about family responsibilities or questions about your abilities to be authoritative and independent.

- 5. Increased Opportunities for Contact.** This strategy is also used as a central tenet of community policing. Seek out opportunities to engage with stigmatized groups in a positive manner. Create positive interactions for both parties. This helps alter the cognitive processes and associations of a group's representation. When thinking about members of that group later, these personal positive interactions fuel reactions and responses rather than impersonal societal stereotypes. This technique supports previous strategies, such as individuation and the counterstereotypic imaging by providing opportunities to individually learn about a person and meet individuals who do not conform to stereotypes, which in turn helps tear down stereotypic responses.³⁵

This strategy can be accomplished by attending meetings of minority groups, chatting with community members of stigmatized groups, playing basketball with various community members, patronizing ethnic markets or restaurants where you would get to know people from communities that are unfamiliar to you, or bringing in diverse individuals to speak during roll call³⁶ or other training sessions.

33. Devine et al., "Long-term Reduction..."; "#SolutionsMonday: Individualtion," Perception Institute, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://perception.org/blog/solutionsmonday-individuation/>

34. Devine et al., "Long-term Reduction..."; Andrew Todd et al., "Perspective Taking Combats Automatic Expressions of Racial Bias," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100 (2011): 1027-1042, doi:10.1037/a0022308

35. Devine et al., "Long-term Reduction..."; "Destabilizing Stereotypes"

36. "Roll call" refers to a briefing of all officers with the on-duty supervisor at the beginning of a shift.

What training is available to reduce biased policing practices?

While many police agencies have developed internal or community-specific trainings to increase the cultural competency and awareness of their officers, few have training and strategies in place to discuss and counter implicit biases. Police agencies across the country are working to weave training on implicit bias into their academy and in-service training curricula. While the Community Relations Service does not endorse any independent trainings, below are two training programs available to police agencies that were developed by and are taught by national experts in the field.

Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP), LLC. The Fair and Impartial Policing Training Program was initially developed and pilot tested with the support of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). The DOJ/COPS Office supported three curricula to teach fair and impartial policing, with customized curricula for (1) recruits and/or patrol officers, (2) first-line supervisors, and (3) training-of-trainers. FIP, LLC has designed two additional curricula: one curriculum for mid-managers and one for command-level personnel. Community leaders can participate in the command-level training, if desired. The foundation of these curricula is the social-psychology research on implicit bias. Topics include: Understanding Human Bias; The Impact of Biased Policing on Community Members and the Department; and Skills for Fair, Impartial, and Effective Policing. Additionally, first-line supervisors receive training in how to work with officers who are exhibiting biased behaviors. The “Train-the-Trainer” curriculum allows law enforcement trainers to implement curricula for recruits/patrol officers and first-line supervisors. The curricula are based on the following principles:

- All people, even well-intentioned people who consider themselves unprejudiced, have biases.
- Having biases is normal to human functioning.
- Biases are often unconscious or “implicit,” thus influencing choices and actions without conscious thinking or decision-making.
- Policing based on biases or stereotypes is unsafe, ineffective, and unjust.
- Fair and impartial policing is a cornerstone of procedural justice and is important to community perceptions of a police agency’s legitimacy.
- Officers can learn skills to reduce and manage their own biases.
- Supervisors can learn skills to identify biased behaviors in the people who report to them, and take corrective actions when they detect biased policing.
- Law enforcement executives and their command-level staff can implement a comprehensive agency program to produce fair and impartial policing.³⁷

Anti-Bias Training for Law Enforcement Professionals. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has created a training program for civilian and law enforcement personnel aimed at examining stereotypes and cultural assumptions, discussing negative effects of discrimination, and turning knowledge into skills to use in diverse communities.

Additional Resources on Bias:

For more information on racial bias and preventing biased policing, see: “Bias-Based Policing,” a COPS Office webpage that summarizes and provides links to COPS publications on this topic.

37. Fridell, Lorie. Fair and Impartial Policing website.

[http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/
default.asp?Item=2274](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/default.asp?Item=2274)

For more information on strategies to overcome bias, see: “Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention.” Devine, Patricia G. et al. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 48, Issue 6, November 2012. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3603687/>.

For more information on religious discrimination, see: “Religious Discrimination,” A U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission webpage that summarizes the types of religious discrimination and related issues. <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm>

For more information on police agencies’ compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, see: “Commonly Asked Questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act and Law Enforcement,” U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section. http://www.ada.gov/q&a_law.htm

For more information about Implicit Association Tests, see: “Project Implicit” home page. [https://implicit.
harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp)

For more information about the Kirwan Institute and implicit bias literature reviews, see:
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>