# **IMPLICIT BIAS – LESSON 5: THE IAT Video Transcript**

Time to discuss the Implicit Association Test – the IAT – which is now the most popular

tool for measuring implicit bias. Just to be clear: the test itself (a reaction time

measure) isn’t the same thing as the underlying construct (implicit bias). It’s just a quick

and dirty measurement device. The best way to understand the IAT is to take a test yourself,

which you can do easily and anonymously at projectimplicit.org.

For now, I’ll offer a quick synopsis. Understanding the IAT begins with a basic insight: it’s

always easier for our brains to sort two concepts together if they are closely associated in

our minds. For example, if I say the word “dog,” and ask you to complete this word,

you’ll be quicker to think “cat” than “bat”. Or if I say the word doctor, you

will be quicker to think “nurse” than “purse.”

Armed with this insight, scientists created the IAT, which measures how quickly we sort

various pictures and words flashed on a computer screen together. Our sorting speed reflects

how tightly we associate any two concepts; quicker sorting means stronger association.

The Black-White race attitude test, for example, compares implicit attitudes toward two racial

categories – Black folks and White folks. Each racial category is represented by cropped photos

of male faces. To begin, you’re asked to sort the faces

as quickly as possible. If you see a White face, hit a key to your left; if you see a

Black face, hit a key to your right. Next, you sort words that represent two attitudinal

categories, good and bad. When you see a good word, such as “beauty,” hit a key to your

left; when you see a bad word, such as “filth,” hit a key to your right.

Now the real challenge starts. You are instructed to sort both photos and words, whatever flashes

on the screen. For some runs, you are instructed to press the same key for White faces and

good words (say, on your left), and a different key for Black faces and bad words (say, on

your right). If you have a more positive association with White folks as compared to Black folks,

in this arrangement, you will find your groove and fly through this test. Most of us do.

On other runs (randomized and counterbalanced), the IAT will give you different directions:

Press the same key for White faces and bad words, and another same key for Black faces

and good words. In these runs, most players can’t quite get into a groove, take longer

to respond, and make more mistakes by hitting the wrong key.

The average time differential between the two arrangements—White+Good as compared

to Black+Good—is called the “IAT effect” and reflects the strength of an attitude.

On average, we might be a fraction of a second faster pairing White faces with good words

than Black faces with good words. This means that, on average, we have an implicit preference

for Whites.

Over nearly two decades, millions of people have taken implicit association tests hosted

by projectimplicit.org. These tests have measured everything from racial attitudes, to gender

associations, to preferences for one political candidate over another. The results are overwhelming:

implicit biases measured by reaction times are systematic and pervasive. They are statistically

significant, which means they are not due to chance.

On average, our implicit attitudes (which, to remind you, are overall valences toward a category) predictably

favor certain groups over others.

80% of participants prefer young over old. 69% thin over overweight.

68% White over Black. 76% able-bodied over disabled.

Our implicit stereotypes (which are specific trait associations) are also predictable.

72% of participants associate Blacks with weapons (as opposed to harmless objects).

61% associate Asians with the foreign (as opposed to American).

72% associate women with humanities (as opposed to math).

76% associate women with family (as opposed to career).

Pervasiveness does not mean that every single person has the exact same amount of bias. There’s wide

variability across individuals and groups. For instance, most Whites have an implicit

preference for Whites over Blacks, but African Americans show no preference on average.

But there’s a natural bell-curve around that zero average, with about a third of African Americans

also showing an implicit attitude in favor of Whites over Blacks. Unfortunately, no one

is immune.

But this doesn’t mean that we’re powerless.

To learn more, watch my final video in this series: Lesson 6: Countermeasures.