

What is Everyday Bias?

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events



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Topic Summary

It seems like we are seeing more and more news and social media stories about people experiencing bias as they go about their daily lives—riding the subway, shopping in a store, dining in a restaurant and hanging out with friends. Indeed, the surge of such stories makes it seem like racism, sexism and other forms of bias and discrimination are becoming more pervasive. In the wake of the recent [Starbucks incident](#) (a white employee called the police about two African-American men who were waiting for a colleague and had asked to use the bathroom without making a purchase), are bias incidents like these on the rise, or are we just hearing more about them? Are there more stories coming out because

there is greater public consciousness about bias or because people are using their smartphones to record these incidents?

Over the past several months, some of the incidents include:

- An Asian woman was harassed by a man who cursed at her and told her, "You're the one who brought the (corona) virus here." After the woman attempted to record him on her cellphone, he slapped her phone away.
- Someone called the police because five African-American women were playing golf too slowly.
- A man attacked a group of five young Egyptian men with a knife while asking them, "Are you American boys?"
- A candidate for the U.S. Congress reportedly barged into a bathroom stall of a transgender woman and exclaimed, "There's a man here saying that he's a lady."
- At a Starbucks in California, the word "beaner" (a racial slur for Mexican people) was printed on a Latino customer's coffee cup.
- In a restaurant in New York City, a man berated customers and employees for speaking Spanish and then threatened to call immigration officials.

(To learn more, see ADL's lesson on [Everyday Bias](#).)

Because these incidents took place in spaces that are used by the general public, it is important to understand the historical context of discrimination in public spaces and in public accommodations. "Public accommodations" refer to public or other spaces that are used by the general public. Examples include retail stores, restaurants, hotels, parks, pools, recreational facilities and transportation.

There is a long history of discrimination against groups of people based on identity characteristics such as race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, etc. In fact, many of the protests during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s focused on these public accommodations (e.g. Montgomery Bus Boycott and

Woolworth's Lunch Counter protest) and major civil rights legislation enacted during this time period specifically addressed public accommodations. Even though there are laws in place, people are not always treated equitably and respectfully. To learn more, use ADL's backgrounder on the [Civil Rights Movement](#) and accompanying lesson plans.

Sometimes incidents like these involve implicit bias. The definition of **implicit bias** is as follows:

The unconscious attitudes, stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) towards members of a group merely because of their membership in that group. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. When people are acting out of their implicit bias, they are not even aware that their actions are biased. In fact, those biases may be in direct conflict with a person's explicit beliefs and values.

With implicit bias, the aggressor is usually (1) unaware of what they are doing, (2) not conscious of their bias and (3) not acting with intent. Explicit bias usually involves the aggressor being aware of what they are doing and their actions are (1) voluntary, (2) on purpose and (3) with intent.

It is not always possible to distinguish between explicit and implicit bias. If implicit bias is unconscious, only the aggressor knows what is going on in their mind and they may not be aware of their bias. While it can be helpful to make the distinction (between explicit and implicit bias) to challenge one's own biases, this is not always important or relevant to the person targeted. To that person, the impact of the biased action is what really matters, not necessarily the intent of the aggressor.

Age

11 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- Have you heard anything about recent incident(s) of everyday bias?
- What do you know about the incident(s) and what are your thoughts and feelings about those incidents?
- Could you relate to any of the incidents? How so?
- Do you think we are seeing more of these incidents lately? How so?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed everyday bias? What happened and how did you feel?

Questions to Dig Deeper

(See the Additional Resources section for articles and information that address these questions.)

- What do you think the impact of this kind of bias is on the targeted people? How about others who identify with the group that is targeted?
- How does this kind of bias affect our society as a whole?
- What can we do about everyday bias?

Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions might make a difference?

- Help to organize an educational forum in school or at your house of worship to share information and discuss everyday bias, including explicit and implicit bias. Make connections to other examples of bias and discrimination in your school, community or society at large.

- Search for and follow some of the hashtags on social media such as #DrivingWhileBlack, #ShoppingWhileBlack, #LivingWhileBlack, etc. Contribute to the conversation by adding your own thoughts and experiences and amplify other perspectives by sharing and liking.
- As a family, school or community, think together about incidents of bias and discrimination. Discuss possible actions you can take together and come up with a plan to address the bias in your school or community.

Additional Resources

- [Everyday Bias](#) (ADL Lesson plan)
- [Experiences with Race and Racism](#) (ADL Lesson plan)
- [Slurs, Offensive Jokes and How to Respond](#) (ADL Lesson Plan)
- [Challenging Biased Language](#)
- [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)

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