

# Implicit Bias Workbook

An opportunity to reflect and develop a plan  
to serve your clients better.

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produced in collaboration with Taquelia Washington, LCSW  
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# 1. Preface

Dear Reader,

My lived experience as an African American queer cisgendered woman has taught me that society does not treat everyone the same. While there are many reasons that play into the *why* behind this, it is hard to deny that systemic structures of oppression play a significant role in the lack of equity that can be seen across the world, and particularly here in the United States of America (USA). Meaning, it is hard to find a system in the USA that has not been touched by systemic forms of oppression. My educational and professional experiences have validated this tenfold. I have been privileged to serve communities that lie in the intersection of many different types of oppressive conditions. The impact of living at this intersection is tremendous and affects all aspects of one's life. Many of you reading this book are similar to me in the sense that you have dedicated part of your life in service of communities that are systemically disenfranchised. **And for this I bow to you.** Thank you for committing yourself to working in this way. Our communities deserve the absolute best care imaginable.

The role that we play as service providers in the lives of those we serve, although often small, can serve as a catalyst for change and can serve to bring a ray of light to those that are living in metaphorical darkness.

There are many layers to providing effective services to marginalized communities. One of the top layers involves the importance of service providers practicing cultural humility. Dr. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia describe cultural humility as

a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique.

They further explain that “cultural competence in clinical practice is best defined not to be a discrete endpoint [as previously understood] but as a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis with patients, communities, colleagues, and with themselves” (M. Tervalon, J. Murray-García, 1998). To help in this journey of cultural humility, it is crucial that providers unpack the ways in which they have been socialized to think and believe things about both themselves and others. This brings us to the topic at hand for this workbook – implicit bias. This will be defined shortly and discussed in much more detail throughout the workbook. One of the things you will learn as you read and reflect in the following pages is everyone has implicit bias. Let me say that one more time. Everyone has implicit bias. Everyone...including me. Everyone...including you.

**You have implicit bias.**

Take a breath and notice what comes up for you when you read that.

As you continue to read and explore, I want to encourage you not only to do this with your mind but also to do this with your body. Your body has wisdom we can draw from in this journey of unlearning.

**The goal of this workbook is to offer providers a space to learn and reflect on their own implicit biases in a safe and contained way.** I believe that this level of exploration is foundational in making the implicit explicit. Once we can make it explicit, we can have more conscious choice in how we act upon the bias. This process of exploration is important for you individually in helping you be a better human being and ultimately it is this type of process that will transform the way you serve those you work with on a regular basis.

As you are engaging in this workbook, you will notice a wide range of feelings that come up for you. Some of the reflection questions will ask you to go deep and think about ways that you have been socialized that you may not have thought about before or for quite some time. Remember to take care of yourself as part of this process. You may choose to engage in this workbook alone or you might choose to do so in community. **Think about what option will be in best service to your journey.** It is also important to note that there will be an extra layer of impact that might be experienced by those who have been a target of implicit bias. These experiences are often times painful or uncomfortable and to think about them may retrigger these feelings. I encourage you to take your time and journal throughout your exploration process as a way of capturing and honoring your feelings. You may also choose to use the grounding exercises offered in the next section as a way to help you stay present and to create some level of healing for yourself as you move throughout this process.

It takes a lot of courage to show up and reflect in this way. And for that I thank you in advance.

**Our communities thank you!**

And please know that this workbook is only one small part of the in-depth work that should be prioritized as you seek to become a more culturally humble provider.

Sincerely,  
*Taquelia Washington*

**Taquelia Washington** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and holds her Pupil Personal Services Credential. She is the founder of EmpowerMe! Services. Through this business, along with a team of subcontractors, she provides supervision to aspiring mental health professionals, teaches workshops designed to help those in helping professions provide more culturally inclusive and trauma informed services, facilitates courageous conversations as requested by a variety of organizations, and provides leadership coaching. Additionally, she offers consultation to help support the development of culturally inclusive services and systems of care. You can learn more about her work at: [www.empowermeservices.com](http://www.empowermeservices.com)



**Reflection questions:**

- Why is it important to you to explore your own implicit bias?
- How is this connected to the work that you do?
- How might exploring your own implicit bias help you personally and professionally?
- In preparation for the journey of this workbook, what works well for you to help you feel calm and self-regulate?

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## 2. Grounding exercise

The following grounding exercise can be used throughout the workbook as you are finding yourself feeling activated.

Instructions written by Linda Ray, published at [www.livingstrong.com](http://www.livingstrong.com)

Four-square breathing, sometimes referred to as the box breathing technique, is a simple technique that you can do any time you feel stressed. Controlled breathing is an integral part of meditation and can be utilized independently to calm nerves and relieve stress by helping to regulate the autonomic nervous system, report researchers at the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Four-square breathing emphasizes control through counts of four, which allows your body to make full use of the air. You will also work the chest and abdominal muscles slightly as you practice the box breathing technique.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 1</b></p> <p>Sit straight up in a comfortable chair. Put your feet flat on the floor and relax your hands in your lap. You may overlap your hands or let them lie separately with palms facing up. The important factor is to maintain an aligned posture and to be at ease.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 2</b></p> <p>Close your eyes or dim the lights in the room. Find a quiet space where you will not be interrupted for at least four minutes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 3</b></p> <p>Close your mouth and breathe in slowly through your nose. Count to four as you inhale. Hold your breath for four seconds. You are not trying to deprive your body of oxygen, but need to allow a few seconds for the air to fill your lungs. Concentrate on your belly and notice how it also moves when you inhale deeply.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 4</b></p> <p>Open your mouth slightly and slowly exhale to a count of four. Hold the exhale to another count of four. Ideally, you should repeat the exercise for four minutes, but two or three times will help you to achieve a more relaxed state, relieve tension and settle your nerves.</p>
<p>Allow the air to fill your belly and notice how it passes over your chest. One of the goals of boxed square breathing is to bring the respiratory system back into alignment and end the shallow breathing that results from the fight or flight response mode the body enters when feeling stressed.</p>	

Another more detailed script can be found on the next page.

## Whole Health for Pain and Suffering: An Integrative Approach

### A Mindful Breathing Script

Start by settling into a comfortable position and allow your eyes to close or keep them open with a softened gaze. Begin by taking several long slow deep breaths breathing in fully and exhaling fully. Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose or mouth. Allow your breath to find its own natural rhythm. Bring your full attention to noticing each in-breath as it enters your nostrils, travels down to your lungs and causes your belly to expand. And notice each out-breath as your belly contracts and air moves up through the lungs back up through the nostrils or mouth. Invite your full attention to flow with your breath.

Notice how the inhale is different from the exhale. You may experience the air as cool as it enters your nose and warm as you exhale. As you turn more deeply inward, begin to let go of noises around you. If you are distracted by sounds in the room, simply notice them and then bring your intention back to your breath. Simply breathe as you breathe, not striving to change anything about your breath. Don't try to control your breath in any way. Observe and accept your experience in this moment without judgment, paying attention to each inhale and exhale.

If your mind wanders to thoughts, plans or problems, simply notice your mind wandering. Watch the thought as it enters your awareness as neutrally as possible. Then practice letting go of the thought as if it were a leaf floating down a stream. In your mind, place each thought that arises on a leaf and watch as it floats out of sight down the stream. Then bring your attention back to your breath. Your breath is an anchor you can return to over and over again when you become distracted by thoughts.

Notice when your mind has wandered. Observe the types of thoughts that hook or distract you. Noticing is the richest part of learning. With this knowledge you can strengthen your ability to detach from thoughts and mindfully focus your awareness back on the qualities of your breath. Practice coming home to the breath with your full attention. Watching the gentle rise of your stomach on the in-breath and the relaxing, letting go on the out-breath. Allow yourself to be completely with your breath as it flows in and out.

You might become distracted by pain or discomfort in the body or twitching or itching sensations that draw your attention away from the breath. You may also notice feelings arising, perhaps sadness or happiness, frustration or contentment. Acknowledge whatever comes up including thoughts or stories about your experience. Simply notice where your mind went without judging it, pushing it away, clinging to it or wishing it were different and simply refocus your mind and guide your attention back to your breath.

Breathe in and breathe out. Follow the air all the way in and all the way out. Mindfully be present moment by moment with your breath. If your mind wanders away from your breath, just notice without judging it – be it a thought, emotion, or sensation that hooks your attention and gently guide your awareness back to your breathing.

As this practice comes to an end, slowly allow your attention to expand and notice your entire body and then beyond your body to the room you are in. When you're ready, open your eyes and come back fully alert and awake. The breath is always with you as a refocusing tool to bring you back to the present moment. Set your intention to use this practice throughout your day to help cultivate and strengthen attention.





### 3. Terminology

#### **Bias -**

1. Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.
  2. Cause to feel or show inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something.
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**Cisgendered** - Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

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**Confirmation bias** - The tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.

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**Cultural humility** - The ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity.

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**Explicit bias** - Attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level.

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**Implicit bias** - Refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

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**Queer** - An adjective used by some people whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g., queer person, queer woman).

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**Racial bias** - A form of implicit bias that is more specific to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions based on race.

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**Systems of oppression** - Discriminatory institutions, structures, norms, etc., that are embedded in the fabric of our society.

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**White supremacy** - The idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. White supremacy culture is reproduced by all the institutions of our society.

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## 4. What is bias and why is it important to talk about it?

Bias can be defined as both a noun (a thing) and a verb (an action). According to the Oxford Dictionary 2019, when defined as a noun it means: *prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair*. When defined as a verb it means: *cause to feel or show inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something*. When used as a noun bias more specifically refers to the internal process that happens, and when used as a verb it refers to are the internal process taking action. **It is important to acknowledge both.**

### What is the difference between implicit and explicit bias?

One formal description of implicit bias from the Perception Institute is:

“Thoughts and feelings are ‘implicit’ if we are unaware of them or mistaken about their nature. We have a bias when, rather than being neutral, we have a preference for (or aversion to) a person or group of people. Thus, we use the term ‘implicit bias’ to describe when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes with them without our conscious knowledge” (<https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/>) whereas explicit bias is referred to as the “attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level.” The key difference between the two is that one happens on the subconscious level and the other happens on the conscious. While it can bring up a range of emotions, it is important to make the implicit explicit, as that is the only way to have conscious choice in disrupting how to treat oneself and others as a result of these internalized biases.

As a service provider, eliminating acting on biases will provide a better quality of service in the communities in which one works. This is important not only on the one-on-one level but also on the institutional level. To become consciously aware of bias allows for the critical creation of systems of care and policies that better support communities. To create a deeper dive into ones own implicit bias, this workbook will take the reader on a journey of exploring biases that have become embedded as a result of various systems of oppression that exist in society. This workbook does not highlight *all* the systems of oppression but attempts to highlight some of the larger systems. With this in mind, and remembering that this is a lifelong process, and the reader is encouraged to continue their exploration process outside of the sections applied in this book.

As noted in the preface, it is the author’s professional opinion that everyone has implicit bias in one shape or another. There are two main reasons for this:

1. Human brains are designed, in part, to categorize (Alexander G. Huth, Shinji Nishimoto, An T. Vu, Jack L. Gallant, 2012). As the brain is developing and learning, it is a natural process for the mind to group, categorize, and simplify complex things. For example, it is age appropriate for a 3-year-old child to notice that people have different skin colors. To notice, name, and point out this difference inherently has no meaning outside of what one’s mind is doing naturally.

2. However, what then happens, whether immediately or over time, this same child is told explicitly by others or implicitly through the various forms of socialization that one is exposed to that there is meaning to different skin colors. And imbedded in this meaning is a hierarchy of skin color built off of anti-black sentiment. Being socialized and experiencing life in a society that has inherent systems of oppression such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, skews the learning to imply certain things. For example, that the closer to white one is, the “better.” Or that money is the “key to happiness.”

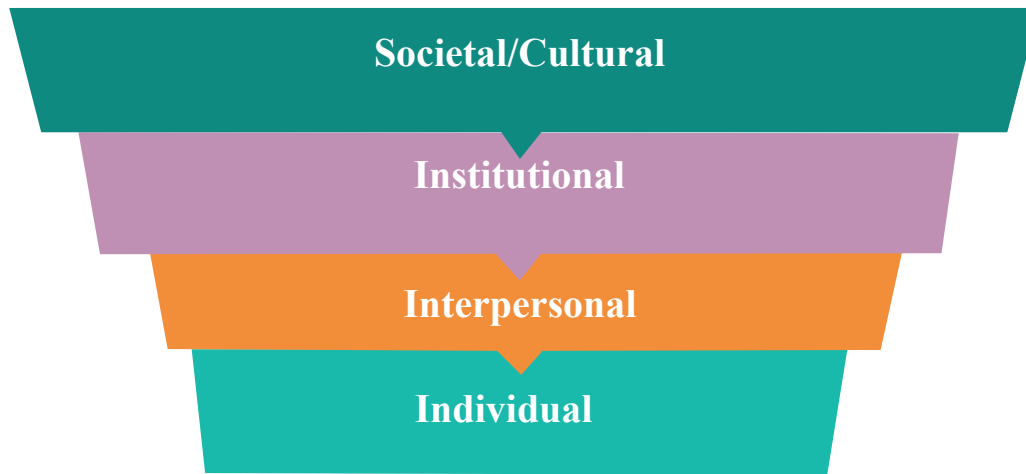
**Mental categorization + socialization under systems of oppressions = implicit bias**

To further complicate things, once bias occurs within oneself, “our subconscious [has a] tendency to seek and interpret information and other evidence in ways that affirm our existing beliefs, ideas, expectations, and/or hypotheses” (Heshmat, 2015). This process of interpreting information is known as confirmation bias which further helps to engrain the thoughts or beliefs one previously believed to be true. In this society, there is a higher likelihood that people will be disproportionately exposed systemically to images and messages that attempt to skew our minds into believing false notions about marginalized people. This is validated in one’s mind through the process of confirmation bias. As a result, marginalized cultural identities are the most negatively impacted by implicit bias.

“Like the canaries in the gold mine, the unconscious bias that lurks in our minds can indicate the potential for devastating outcomes such as an officer making a split-second decision and killing an unarmed youth. And for educators, implicit bias can cause us to suspend and expel students more rapidly, as Secretary of Education Arne Duncan captured when he highlighted statistics on how black students are suspended and expelled at rates three times those of whites, often for lesser offenses” (tolerance.org).



## 5. How do systems of oppression influence implicit bias?



Systems of oppression can be defined as “discriminatory institutions, structures, norms, to name a few, that are embedded in the fabric of our society. All the ‘-isms’ are forms of oppression. In the context of social justice, oppression is discrimination against a social group that is backed by institutional power. That is to say, the various societal institutions such as culture, government, education, etc. are all complicit in the oppression of marginalized social groups while elevating dominant social groups” (<https://sfpirg.ca/infohub/systems-of-oppression>).

It is important to highlight the part of this description that states of oppression are embedded in the fabric of our society. Oppression is embedded in the fabric of society to such an extent that the ways in which it is manifested are invisible to some. As seen in the chart above, oppression can be manifested on many levels including the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and societal/cultural level. The individual level is where our implicit bias lies. The institutional and societal/cultural level is where oppression becomes embedded into the fabric of society. On these level, the norms and practices of the culturally privileged become synonymous with what is deemed to be normal and appropriate. Those that have qualities, skin color, sexual orientations, gender expression, abilities, etc. that are outside of this norm are pathologized. There is then a societal messaging or narrative that is created that reinforces this idea of what is the norm. These variations of messages or narratives are spread through the media, textbooks, toys that kids play with, standardized tests, the foundation of systems and institutions...and so on. It is through these messages and narratives that people living in this society, consuming these messages, become socialized into a way of thinking about ourselves and others. Inevitably this leads to implicit bias. These messages are internalized so deeply at times that they are acted on implicitly, and often in unconscious ways.

## Breaking down some of the larger systems of oppressions that are at play in society.

### White Supremacy

White Supremacy is defined as “the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. White supremacy culture is reproduced by all the institutions of our society. In particular, the media, the education system, western science (which played a major role in reinforcing the idea of race as a biological truth with the white race as the ‘ideal’ top of the hierarchy)” ( www.surj.org ). Similar to all other systems of oppression, the ways that white supremacist ideology has permeated the fabric of society can be invisible, in particular to those that benefit most from this system. This is often not lost on those who have been most impacted. To make sure this is clear and explicit, under the system of white supremacy, those that are closest in skin color to ‘whiteness’ have the most societal privilege and those whose skin tone are closest to ‘blackness’ hold less societal privilege. It is important to remember that this type of privilege is so much bigger than individual interactions; this privilege is embedded into all systems.

White supremacist ideology is the root that leads to racial bias.

Without an in-depth look at one’s own racial socialization process and deep reflection around the messages one has internalized about whiteness and antiblackness, one will be more prone to racial bias.

White supremacy is at the center of many other intersecting systems of oppression including, but not limited to, racism, classism, misogyny, ableism, and cisgenderism. In fact, famed author bell hooks argues that one cannot separate the detrimental impacts of White Supremacy, Patriarchy, and Capitalism (hooks, 2013); so much so that she uses them as one word...whitesupremacypatriachycapitalism. When looked at separately each one of these overarching systems of oppression aids in producing different types of implicit bias. In addition to racial bias, other examples include class bias, gender bias, religious bias, and sexuality bias, to name a few.

While some argue that implicit bias cannot be undone, it can be argued that through a deep commitment to self-reflection, examination, and unlearning, one can begin to make their biases explicit and thus be able to make conscious choices regarding how they act upon these biases. **Again, it is about making the implicit explicit** to engage in conscious choice around how one acts and treats others.

**Personal reflections after reading this section.**

What comes up for you?

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## 6. Exploring explicit bias

Prior to diving deeper into examining one's own implicit bias, it can be extremely helpful to reflect on what one already knows about their own biases. Since it can often be taboo to talk about one's own explicit bias, what often happens with well-intentioned service providers is that subconsciously one begins to try to stifle their biases; shove them down as if they do not exist. Doing so is not only doing a disservice to oneself but also makes it harder to work toward eliminating said biases. As a result, one should advocate making the invisible visible. Shine a light on these darker sides of one's thoughts to begin to take steps toward transforming them. Transformation can happen through education and exposure amongst many other things. **As one is working toward this type of transformation, it is important to note that the education and exposure that is sought SHOULD NOT be on the backs of those in the target group.** In other words,

do not rely on members of oppressed groups to educate or provide you with information, as this is exploitive.

Rather, one should find ways to move toward this goal that does not involve intentional or unintentional exploitation. In working toward this goal, spend some time responding to the following reflection questions:

- What do you currently know about areas where you hold bias? Areas may include but are not limited to: racial/ethnic groups, genders (including cisgender, transgender, and non-binary people), sexual orientations, people of different abilities, classes, etc.
- What are the layers of socialization that have contributed to these biases?
- What feelings come up for you as you reflect on this?
- In what ways do these biases show up in your personal and professional life?
- What action steps can you take toward educating yourself and increasing exposure of the groups where you hold bias?









## 8. Further reflection

After taking the implicit bias tests and reflecting on the results, the next layer in self-discovery can be around exploring the deeper roots of the revealed biases including the ways in which one has been culturally socialized. This section is designed to help the reader reflect more deeply about cultural socializations and the connections between the way one was socialized and the biases one holds.

### Exercise

As a first step in this, it can be helpful to first reflect on one's own cultural identities. As modeled and mentioned in the preface, it is extremely important for service providers to have a deep understanding of their own cultural identities and how these identities shape their experiences in the world. This exercise is designed to help the reader start in this type of reflection.

### Refer to the attached identity wheel.

Describe the salient parts of your identity. For each identity, reflect on the following:

- How has this part of my identity shaped who I am in this moment?
- How has my understanding or experience of this identity changed over time?
- What have been key experiences that have shaped this part of my identity?
- How do I currently feel about this part of my identity?
- What is the level of cultural privilege associated with this part of my identity? How has this impacted my experiences growing up?
- What have I been taught to think about myself and others based on this part of my identity?
- How might certain biases I hold have been shaped by any of the above?

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## 9. Applications and moving forward with awareness

Understanding one's own bias in an explicit and intimate way is one of the first steps one can take in creating actionable change. The next steps in working toward actionable change should involve the following:

- Recognizing stereotypical thinking
- Catching oneself in the moment when biased thoughts enter into one's brain and immediately challenge the thought.
- Beginning to train one's mind to notice exemptions to the categorized thoughts that the mind has learned to believe.
  - o This can be done through expanding exposure to particular groups by getting to know individuals from these groups, seeking out accurate literature, stories, documentaries/movies, performances, etc. that can help to expand views and explore new perspectives.

**In summary, when one recognizes a bias, the thought should then be substituted with the new information that has been learned; doing this on an ongoing basis takes mindfulness, self-reflection, and commitment.**





## 10. Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this workbook and to reflect in the ways in which you have. I encourage you to continue to strive to be a lifelong learner. Know that we are in this journey together.

### Personal reflections after reading this section.

What are your concluding thoughts? What next steps will you take?

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