

**Building Authentic  
Relationships Across Differences**

# OVER- COMING BIAS

**Tiffany Jana  
Matthew Freeman**

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# Overcoming **Bias**

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# Overcoming **Bias**

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**Building authentic relationships  
across differences**

**Tiffany Jana ♦ Matthew Freeman**



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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.  
*a BK Life book*

*To our parents, without whom we may have been  
too biased to fall in love across differences.*

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# Preface

*Overcoming bias: building authentic relationships across differences* is about our human tendency to prefer some things and people more than others, and how to be intentional about not mistrusting people who are different from us. Bias, simply put, is the preference for one thing over another. Preferring warm weather over cold weather is a bias. Bias is a survival instinct that helps the human brain make rapid choices in a world where we are bombarded by thousands of choices every day. The problem with bias is that it doesn't stop at *weather*; it extends to rapid choices about which groups of people we instinctively trust and which we mistrust or fear.

We use the word “differences” in the title and throughout the book because without differences there would be no bias, particularly toward or against people. It's easy to get along with people who are like us. When people share similar values, perspectives, and experiences, we can relate to them. What's challenging is when we want or need to build relationships with people from different walks of life.

Differences can be about anything from educational background to age. Differences also include such hotly politicized topics as race, religion, and immigration status. Differences are not limited to any of these areas and can include anything that is different from you, the reader. Those are the only differences that matter as you use this book, because they are the ones that will challenge you. And yes, this is a book you use. You don't just read it. The book includes exercises and activities designed to help you navigate bias and increase your fluency on the subject.

If we do not choose to overcome our biases, we can inadvertently harm relationships and alienate people with our thoughtless autopilot responses. And collectively, these individual biases create disparate outcomes in our institutions, from education to health care to workplaces. Most often, we harbor biases that we have simply failed to reconsider as we have matured and gained more experience. We can consciously hold one set of beliefs while we unconsciously hold onto misguided ideas we encountered in our youth but never *reexamined*. This book will help you or someone you know clean out those cobwebs and build stronger, more authentic relationships—across difference.

We wrote this book because we work in management consulting, where we are constantly faced with challenges that emerge as a result of unchecked bias. We see everything from employees who feel unheard and undervalued to those who feel their only recourse is to file discrimination or harassment lawsuits.

We wrote this for individuals who want to take control of the bias conversation, understand it better, and take action to help themselves or the people around them. There is no need to wait until employees become disengaged or, worse, until someone sues you or your company. On a personal level, you don't have to stand idly by and let your trusted friend or your crazy uncle say biased things that you know cause harm to others. The information in this book can provide you with the skills you, your friends and family, or your teams need to work together and relate to each other with respect and compassion. Our goal is to provide you with everything you need to understand bias, talk about it with increased fluency, and overcome it so you can build stronger relationships in your personal and professional lives.

## Introduction

# **Why is everybody biased but me?**

Have you noticed a lot of conversations, articles, and news coverage about bias? Have you questioned yourself and wondered whether you have bias or noticed

places where you experience your own bias or someone else's? Are you looking for ways to recognize whether bias is getting in the way of your relationships or your success in the workplace? If so, we can help. Human bias is a fact of life. It is an annoying and frustrating part of life, but we have all been in situations where we see it and think, "Oh no. This is not really happening. How could he think that what he is saying is OK?" Or worse, "Why did I just say that?" Most of us are paralyzed in those situations, not because we are bad people, but often because we don't want to make a bad situation worse.

In this book we discuss why bias matters, we define the terms we believe will increase your fluency on the subject, and we talk about how you can move from thinking about bias to taking meaningful action to overcome it. Bias matters because we all have it and if you leave it unchecked, it can cause you to inadvertently push people away. This is precisely why we talk about building authentic relationships across differences. This book provides the tools you need to build and strengthen relationships without your unconscious biases getting in the way. You will find exercises, games, and activities to help you connect to your thought patterns and become more proactive and less reactive.

So what exactly do we mean when we say "overcoming" bias? By overcoming, we mean to control, conquer, and prevail over your bias. We have already stated and will continue to state that bias is not

something you are immune to. Again, we all have it. One way to overcome bias is to control it instead of letting it control you. Think of it as curbing a bad habit, just like, say, smoking or eating too many sweets. You have to learn to control your cravings, which begins by becoming more self-aware about your behavior, what triggers your desire, and experiment with strategies to interrupt your bad habit. Since control starts with awareness, chapter 1 will include some exercises to help you identify your biases. If you do not know what biases you harbor, you are powerless against them and may be harming others unintentionally. In this case, ignorance is not bliss; ignorance is privilege. A lack of awareness of your own bias allows you to move through the world without consideration for the impact your behaviors and attitudes have on others. Privilege is not a dirty word; it is simply something that works in our favor, an advantage of sorts. Taking the time to control your bias by raising your awareness of your bias is the first step in neutralizing privilege. Unchecked privilege can manifest as bias, so taking the inventory we present in chapter 1 is very useful.

You can conquer your biases once you know what they are and accept whatever implications they may have in your life and relationships. Some may balk at the idea that you can actually conquer your bias, but we disagree. Here's what we mean: In any one instance where bias may influence how you treat someone, you can slow yourself down and make rational choices instead of relying on the subconscious parts of your brain. If successful, you will have conquered your bias in that moment. Some of the exercises in this book, like Activity #4: Devil's Advocate and Activity #5: Get Out of the Zone, require you to confront your biases. It will be uncomfortable at times, but who conquers anything without a little apprehension and discomfort? You will read an example of coauthor Tiffany Jana conquering a specific bias against an entire demographic of people. It took building an authentic

relationship with someone from that demographic to help her identify and control her bias. Over time, she was able to conquer that particular bias and move on to identifying other areas for self-improvement. She conquered her bias about a whole nation of people when she made them part of her in-group. (You will learn more about that in chapter 3.)

We argue that you can prevail over your bias through sustained, lifelong effort. Think of the difference between conquering and prevailing like this: The United States arguably conquered Iraq when the military deposed Saddam Hussein, but the installation of a democracy has so far been a failure. You might say we conquered Iraq but we did not prevail there. If you take steps to control your bias and conquer it during critical moments, then over time you just may build the reflexes that allow you to prevail over your bias for the long term. Conquering is about winning the battle; prevailing is about winning the war. Using Tiffany's example, identifying the bias was step one—controlling it through raised awareness. Step two was conquering the bias after many successful, authentic interactions with someone across difference that led to a friendship. Step three was prevailing, when she ceased seeing the group to which her new friend belonged as “other.” Their differences still existed, but they no longer affected her emotions or behaviors negatively. Prevailing over bias means that unbiased behavior (where there was once a known bias) is an autonomic response, like breathing or your heartbeat. You no longer have to force it into consciousness or make unbiased choices. It becomes the default setting—but only for that specific bias. Then you must move on to the next bias and start the process over again. Or you can apply the same principle on a larger scale to influence systemic bias—large-scale institutional bias.

An authentic relationship is one that is genuine. It lacks an ulterior motive and is reliable and trustworthy. Authentic

relationships are established on the premise that each party is of equal value regardless of age, station, color, gender, or any other variable—just two people connecting on the basis of their shared humanity. Relationships can be authentic without being overly intimate. One need not bear one's soul to prove authenticity. Rather, within the appropriate confines of the particular relationship, two people should simply be genuine, present, and without ill intent. Again, boundaries are fine, but an authentic relationship is significant regardless of emotional distance. Once authenticity is established as a baseline, a person's humanity cannot and should not be unseen or devalued. Some of the hallmarks of authentic relationships include curiosity, kindness, care, concern, empathy, compassion, presence, shared values, pride, sincerity, inclusion, warmth, listening, respect, and understanding.

Human relationships are complicated. Coauthor Tiffany Jana remembers being in a taxi and the driver asked about her occupation. "When I said I worked on diversity and inclusion issues, the driver launched into a passionate monologue about black people and how he just didn't understand what all the fuss was about," recalls Jana. The driver was a retired, white male who genuinely meant no harm. He talked about his alcoholic father and how the driver simply made a choice to never live in poverty again. He thought poor black people should likewise choose not to be poor.

How do the taxi driver's words strike you? Would you have said anything? Would your response depend on who else heard his comments? Often the context of bias is what throws us. Some people feel the need to defend the person or persons on the receiving end of the bias. Other people prefer to avoid conflict if at all possible. Maybe you don't experience the driver's comments as biased at all. There is no single correct response in these situations. You have to do what is comfortable for you.

One of the goals of this book is to help you increase your bias fluency so you can become more aware of bias and move beyond it. **Bulleted statements** in bold throughout the book make great talking points when helping someone navigate their bias. The good news is that you are also human and may identify a few tips to navigate your own bias. One of the best ways to influence personal growth in others is to show them your own. For this reason we will reveal personal accounts of our own bias and our attempts to overcome it. We will also introduce you to many other people who have confronted their biases and, in turn, helped their friends and colleagues do the same.

We would not be writing this book if we didn't believe that people could overcome bias. We have met hundreds of people who are comfortable claiming their bias and discussing how they move past it. You will meet some of those good people as we share their stories in the chapters that follow. We share our own stories, as well. We have had to take a long hard look at our own biases in order to really be effective at helping others. And our most basic advice is this: build authentic relationships across difference. What kind of difference? All kinds! Race, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation are the human differences that dominate the news, but in reality all human differences can create division, from personality, to generation, to what sports you watch. The most problematic biases are those related to differences outside of an individual's control. There's no better way to uncover, challenge, and ultimately overcome these biases, than establishing friendships with real people.

No one expects to get on a bike and just ride effortlessly without ever taking a tumble and scraping a knee. Overcoming bias is no different. We can provide the tools and skills, but be gentle with yourself as you road test these activities. No one becomes a cultural ally overnight, but your intention does matter, and

putting yourself out there in service of building authentic relationships across differences is definitely worth it. The really good news is that as more of us accept our individual responsibility for owning our biases and overcoming them, the potential impact on systemic bias is significant. Systemic bias is the large-scale bias of systems and institutions that perpetuate disparities and unequal outcomes that favor some groups over others. Those disparities decrease social mobility and divide people within nations. They affect health, wealth, and every social wellness indicator measured by economists around the globe. This is an international phenomenon, not only an American one. We see leaders grappling with bias issues when we consult internationally. Systemic bias has been baked into institutions around the world, and although the current generation in power did not create it, we are complicit if we fail to dismantle bias by starting with our own.

Now, we do have to warn you that if overcoming bias were easy, this introduction would be the end of the book. But it is not easy, which is why we've written this book. It will provide you with the tools and skills to make talking about and overcoming bias easier. When you finish this book, if you notice your own bias, or find yourself listening to someone else's bias, you will be better equipped as a cultural ally who can stand up and address the bias intelligently, compassionately, and effectively.



## Chapter One

### What is bias and why does it matter?

If you're a man, or you have men in your life, here's some news you can use: grow a beard. Seriously. Men with beards are seen as more trustworthy.

Two men advertising the same product, one with a beard and one without, make customers feel differently. The fact is, bearded salesmen sell more stuff.<sup>1</sup> Most people would tell you beards on spokesmen don't sway them, but they'd be wrong. Why? Because our brains have subtle preferences that we don't even know about. Americans, it turns out, have a pro-beard bias.

As a cultural ally, someone who seeks to expand their understanding of others and use it for good, you probably have a sense of what bias is. Many people know it when they see it, but can't define it very well. Here is a simple definition to prevent any confusion:

- ***Bias is the tendency to favor one thing over another.***

What types of things might a person favor over another? Well, anything really—a person might prefer certain flavors, colors, textures, sports, cities, teams, etc. No one really gets bent out of shape over flavor bias. Tiffany, for example, can't stand spicy flavors.

*I just don't like them. Spicy food hurts, it burns and stings, and I do not find eating it a pleasant experience at all. When I try to go with the flow and enjoy spicy*

*food like all of the happy spice eaters around me, I feel like I am entering some sort of twisted endurance challenge. Will my bias against spicy food ever make front-page news? Probably not. Will it ever ruin a relationship? Not likely, but it could cause some strain depending on how aggressively I choose to pursue my sweeter, more bland taste. But you get the idea.*

● **Bias is a natural, normal human tendency.**

People are only biased because that is how we are hardwired. The scientists who study human behavior believe that bias exists as a human survival mechanism. If our brains could not, within a split second, tell the difference between an angry lion and a harmless gazelle, we would not have lasted long as a species. And so our brain has evolved to make snap decisions based on making sense of what we see in the blink of an eye. So please don't judge your biased friends, family, or colleagues too harshly. The people around you are human and are designed to have bias. Our job as cultural allies is to find whatever opportunities we can to help people see their bias (because no one really wants to name or claim their bias).

● **Most bias is harmless.**

So here is the rub. We don't care about each other's favorite color or bias toward a particular travel destination. But you have already guessed it: The bias minefield is wherever someone has a bias about people. If you want to see all hell break loose, express bias about a person or group of people who share some sort of similarity. Depending upon who is listening, you can get yourself in all sorts of trouble. Interpersonal or intergroup bias is exactly

what makes headlines. Expressing bias toward or against people and acting on that bias gets people fired.

● ***It is really hard to acknowledge personal bias.***

That, too, is not anyone's fault. OK, maybe we can blame that on society at large. Who the heck wants to stand up and say, "Hey, look over here! I am totally biased against \_\_\_\_\_." (Fill in the blank with something about people, then duck as the arrows come flying toward you.) We have made it dangerous for people to tell the truth about their thoughts, whether conscious or subconscious. In our highly politicized society, people have even taken heat for acknowledging *past* biases. In 2010, Shirley Sherrod was fired from her position with the Department of Agriculture after a politically conservative blog selectively edited a speech of hers to make it sound as if she was biased against white people. In fact, she had done the admirable task of acknowledging that traumatic childhood experiences with white people had influenced her in ways that she became aware of and uncomfortable with. She was telling her story of overcoming bias—which was selectively edited and used to get her fired. The Obama administration apologized and offered her a job, which she ultimately declined. Nevertheless, her story demonstrates how hard it is to acknowledge even a former bias you have worked hard to set aside.

So if and when someone near you lets some bias show, let's have a little compassion and see if we can help them, not hurt them. If you want to have a little fun and test yourself and your friends for bias, here is an easy activity for you. Just remember, everyone has bias. So don't feel bad when you discover your own biases, and tell your friends not to beat themselves up about it when they do as well. Acknowledging it is the first step.

### Activity #1 – Job Association

Your brain catalogs information to help you make snap judgments. Previous experiences, lessons from your family, messages gleaned from the media—all this and more inform how you navigate the world. If you want to know how this works, try this exercise. Fill in the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you see the following job titles.

Used car salesman: \_\_\_\_\_

Politician: \_\_\_\_\_

Lawyer: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity #1 often elicits stereotypes that people have about the professions listed. Unfortunately, this tendency to stereotype does not stop when we move beyond career choices. If we were to repeat the same exercise with racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation groups, the associations would come just as easily.

- ***Stereotypes lead to bias if you believe them.***

Stereotypes assume that people who share one characteristic, such as sex or skin color, share all other traits. We all know some: blondes are airheaded, men are aggressive, Americans don't know anything about other countries. This does not mean that there isn't any truth to stereotypes; they just can't be applied to everyone in the group. One of our favorite examples of this is the fact that Fortune 500 CEOs are taller than the average population. It's true. Look it up. So why are they taller? Well, studies suggest that Fortune 500 CEOs are taller than average because people have a positive bias toward tall people. Height is often associated with

power and leadership, so at some point American society stereotyped tall people as better leaders.

A more common stereotype is that Asian people are good at math. We are quite certain that many are good at math. A lot of other people are good at math, too. We are also confident that plenty of Asian people are not good at math. But still, the common stereotype might affect the outcome of a job interview without the hiring manager even realizing it. These stereotypical ideas are often locked deep in the recesses of our minds just waiting to creep up and get in the way of our better judgment, fueling the bias—or automatic preferences—we have for one group over another.

● ***If you aren't aware of the stereotypes you believe, you can't overcome them.***

This kind of unconscious bias is certainly relevant to the politically hot topics of race, gender, and sexual orientation. And evidence shows how our brains lead us to make irrational decisions based on a number of factors. A few examples:

- ♦ Men with beards are considered more trustworthy than clean-shaven men.
- ♦ People with accents that are foreign to us are trusted less than people with accents similar to our own.
- ♦ More people die in female-named hurricanes than in male-named hurricanes, perhaps because people think female names represent less of a threat.
- ♦ A hiring manager who's holding a warm drink in his or her hand is more likely to hire a job candidate than when interviewing a similar candidate while holding a cold drink.

Activity #1 helps identify unconscious biases. Activity #2 measures different kinds and intensities of bias. Maybe we should have named this book *Having Fun with Bias* since there are so many games in here! Some people find this topic depressing and intimidating, but you can have fun with it. In fact, if you are planning to intervene and help some of your well-meaning associates dial down their bias, fun is actually a great approach.

### **Activity #2 – Implicit Association Test**

For this exercise you'll need to take the Project Implicit Implicit Association Test (IAT). To take the test, visit

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

and take the online. The IAT, hosted at Harvard University, allows you to test yourself for over a dozen different biases, including those involving race, skin tone, weight, age, and disability. Even if you are certain you don't have any bias, take Harvard's test and see how you score. Don't worry, they don't know who you are and no one will know your scores unless you tell them. Project Implicit does collect general demographic information like age and gender, because it's a study and they are collecting data. No names or contact information are required.

Most people try to behave decently and not be racist or sexist. Nevertheless, our brains don't break the habit of categorizing things when we see people. And so, despite our best intentions, we generalize and rely on mental shortcuts when we deal with people. What thoughtful person wants to determine someone else's worth based on the color of her skin? Or make promotional decisions because of a candidate's height? Clearly these criteria are absurd—and yet, we rely on them every day, without even realizing it.

- ***Bias can get in the way of our personal goals and intentions.***

We assume that if you're reading this book, you believe in equality and trying to treat people fairly. If so, then you need to know your brain can get in the way. If equality and fairness don't motivate you, perhaps success and advancement do. Overcoming your bias can help you build better relationships, and those relationships can pave your path to advancement in your career and in life. Thank goodness science is advancing at such a fast pace. If you have a particularly skeptical friend or someone who won't take anyone but an expert's word for it, refer her or him to the research we've listed in the back of this book.

You have probably noticed all the talk about bias, race, gender, sexual orientation, and the like in the news. Clearly the world is paying attention to the new science and to people's concerns about how they are being treated. This is a good thing. So why isn't that enough?

- ***Bias can give us blind spots that make it harder to see someone else's point of view.***

Despite the best intentions to treat everyone fairly, bias can give us enormous blind spots. Those blind spots make us unable to see things from another person's point of view. And when people act on their biases, it creates a downward spiral, where the victims of bias trust others even less. People who are on their guard don't tend to make friends easily or be particularly warm and fuzzy.

A friend of ours remembers a cross being burned on her family's property and has painful associations with the Confederate battle flag because the people who did it were open Confederate sympathizers. It is a challenge, given her family history, to trust any fliers of or apologists for that flag. And when she sees

someone with a Confederate battle flag sticker on his car, what do you think she feels?

On the other hand, many who fly the Confederate battle flag don't know or don't care how it has been used as a symbol of racial terrorism, preferring to focus on their ancestors' wartime sacrifices. And in this way, disconnection and division are sowed and reaped within our society, as two groups with very different experiences of the same symbol cannot or will not understand each other.

● ***Bias can be passed from generation to generation.***

The origins of many biases are not a mystery. People are social animals—we depend on the herd for survival. But who is part of our herd? Who is safe, trustworthy? Who will take care of us, and who will hurt us? As babies, our brains memorize the look of the faces around us and think of those that are similar looking as safe for the rest of our lives. What happens when we see people who look different from what we saw growing up? Features that we did not see in childhood register in a different part of the brain, a part more associated with the emotion of fear. Being members of a herd, a tribe, or a group—what we call an “in-group” is hardwired into our brains (see chapter 3). It is essential to our survival as a species. The good news is that our definition of in-group can change. Throughout the rest of this book we will talk about how to shake up the mix of nature and nurture that makes it hard for us to trust people outside of our clan.

Beyond what we see, what we experience also shapes who we become and what we believe. Even our trusted friends' and family's personal experiences and biases shape our own biases. In other words, we learned from mom and dad (or who raised us) what kinds of people are trustworthy.



People often hope that the next generation will fix all of the bias-related failures of the previous generations. This is where the playground example comes in. Small children play on the playground with other children without regard for race, color, gender, religion, and so on. Unfortunately, playground politics don't last. Eventually children notice cues from parents and peers—for example, mom clutching her purse and scurrying the child along when someone suspicious walks too close. Children are programmed to pay attention to these cues. Sometimes the messages are overt—"You are not allowed to play with kids from THAT school"—or there is subtle social pressure from a popular peer to avoid or mistreat certain people. When those overt and subtle messages form a pattern of biased treatment toward or against a specific group—people with disabilities, or a race, sex, or class—biased leanings take root in young minds and follow them through adulthood. The biased people you know often learned their bias from people who raised or mentored them. Sometimes you can help people whose bias slips out just by asking them *why* they believe what they believe about a person or group of people. You may get a perfectly sensible response. These folks may also dig a deeper and deeper hole with every word as they try to rationalize an irrational bias. Do not laugh. Do not judge. Just listen. You may learn valuable information that can help you help them.

Think about it. Can you recall your parents' or guardians' biases? How did their opinions and experiences shape yours? We have a good friend named Manny, born in the 1940s, who recalls his mother locking the car doors when they crossed into the Dakotas on their family road trip. He said, "Mom, why are we locking the doors?" She replied, "Indians. This place is crawling with Indians." Such parental bias is a strong influence regardless of the decade. And every generation harbors cultural fears. Manny thought the Indians were hiding around the corner to get

them. He ultimately became a skilled diversity practitioner and, in doing so, examined his own biases and early influences. We heard this story when Manny, an older white male, shared it in front of dozens of people during diversity training. He used his experience to show that well-meaning people inadvertently share their misperceptions with others, including, and especially, their children. Manny thought Native Americans were to be feared because he received bad information. It is vitally important that we help our friends, family, and colleagues consider the biases they have and the source from which they originated. Does time, context, or a change in personal perspective affect what they believe over time? We think it does, but people don't stop often enough to take an inventory of what they believe and why they believe it.

Tiffany was born in El Paso, Texas, and has this to say:

*As a result of my proximity to the border with Mexico, many of my friends, doctors, teachers, and babysitters were Mexican. I also spoke Spanish before I spoke English due to my access to the Mexican border and Mexican people. The early influences of Mexican culture on my life made an indelible impression on my worldview. I am sitting in a café in Texas, visiting for the first time in 30 years, and everything about the place makes me nostalgic for my childhood. The southwestern art, the Mexican cultural references, and the majority Spanish-speaking population warms my soul. I have a positive bias toward Mexico, Mexicans, and Spanish-speaking people because I associate all of it with my childhood. I happen to have had an unusually wonderful childhood.*

*But even a positive bias can create problems. I, unfortunately, have a known irrational response when one of my biases is triggered. The tone of the immigration debate infuriates me, particularly when people express negative stereotypes about Mexican people. The minute I hear people talking negatively about the people I consider family by association, I feel the heat rise in my face. My speech quickens, my blood boils, and I am at the ready with a dozen comebacks, many of which I would probably not use in a rational conversation where my emotions had not been piqued. Say something bad about Mexicans and you may as well insult my mother. That is funny, because I am not aware of any Mexican ancestry in my family.*

*Bias works both ways. It can influence your opinion toward or against people, places, things, and ideas. I have a bias that favors Mexicans.*

Our friend Manny had a bias against Native Americans until he learned better. The people who harbor negative stereotypes about Mexicans have negative biases. Why does your bias or mine matter? It matters because when we are confronted with the object of our biases, it can influence our behavior in ways that defy our values and our conscious thought. As Tiffany explains, “I have to fight to think well of a person who says what I consider to be hateful things about Mexican people.” They may have experiences that validate their opinions, and their opinions are exactly that—*opinions*. If Manny had met a Native American when he was 12 years old, he would have likely been terrified because he held the opinion that they were inherently dangerous. Had his perspective never been examined, would he have hired an

American Indian attorney when he needed one? Would he judge someone of Native ancestry more harshly when her character was called into question? When we harbor unconscious biases, they can wreak havoc on our better judgment.

- ***Bias is in the air you breathe.***

You could have the most inclusive families in the world, however, and still absorb biased information about others. One well-known study analyzed a wide swath of written material—from books to magazines to newspapers—and created a database that approximates what a college-bound student will have read by the time she enters college.<sup>2</sup> It then analyzed how often words were paired in order to understand where stereotyped messages about people might come from.

The study found, perhaps not surprisingly, that we are immersed in a culture that creates and reinforces problematic associations. Black is most commonly paired with the adjectives “poor” and “violent,” while white is paired with “wealthy” and “progressive.” Males are described most often as “dominant” and “leader,” while female pairs most often with “distant” and “warm,” perhaps indicating that we assess women for their emotional tone while we expect men to assume leadership positions.

- ***Positive bias can be just as harmful as a negative bias.***

Don’t think that just because you like something or someone that bias must be a good thing. You will get that response from people you are trying to influence with the ideas in this book. The problem with positive bias is that it can unfairly influence a person’s decisions and attitudes against someone else. Positive bias can still fuel exclusion. Positive bias pushes us toward one thing

and away from another. That can leave people feeling included or excluded depending on which side of the bias they are on.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

For 24 hours, pay attention to what you see and hear in the media. Try to identify any bias in the perspectives shared.

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