What is bias?

• What it is: learned “habits” of judging others that get in the way of knowing, making good arguments, and treating people well

• Explicit AND Implicit

• What it’s NOT: simple ignorance, predispositions, partiality, reducible to overt prejudice or bigotry (i.e., explicit bias)
How common is bias?

- Extremely pervasive. 94% of you reported some level of implicit preference for a more socially valued group.

- Cannot be attributed to familiarity or ingroup preference. “Self-directed” implicit bias is also pervasive.

- Many of you were not surprised and consider implicit bias somewhat inevitable.
The Test

Do you get faster the more tests you take? (hand-eye coordination improves)

“People who have better hand-eye coordination or higher cognitive ability might be generally faster to respond, but there is no reason to think that they would be faster in one category pairing versus the other.”
The Test

The effect of muscle memory? Force of association?

“...the order in which you take the test does have some influence on your overall results. However, the difference is very small. So if you first pair gay people + bad and then pair gay people + good, your results might be a just a tiny bit more negative than they would be if you had done the reverse pairing first. One way that we try to minimize this order effect is by giving more practice trials before the second pairing than we did before the first pairing. It is also important to know that each participant is randomly assigned to an order, so half of test-takers complete gay people + bad and then gay people + good, and the other half of test-takers get the opposite order.”
The Test

Does knowing who the stigmatized group is change your results?

(assuming you are answering as fast as you can for all the questions)

The test is measuring your *implicit* not your *explicit* biases. You would think that if you could consciously impact your response time, members of marginalized groups would rarely test as having implicit preferences for the socially favored group.
Inevitability?

- Once entrenched, implicit biases may be very difficult (perhaps impossible) to root out.
- The does not have to mean that implicit bias inevitably results in discrimination.
- If we are willing to acknowledge implicit bias, we can and must take steps to limit it's impact.
Inevitability?

• As individual critical thinkers, we can work to uncover our implicit premises.

• As individuals and communities, we can structure the way we do things differently.
Problematic Moves

• Keeping bias from impacting our critical thinking and resulting in discrimination and oppression is hard and extremely necessary work.

• HOWEVER, the concept of bias is frequently abused.
Problematic Moves

• We have to be careful how we “call out” bias.

• It is harmful to both critical thinking and marginalized groups when it’s not done right.
Hasty Dismissals

- Dismissing others out of hand for being “biased”
- Good reasons and arguments swept under the rug
- Little or no bias actually present
- A silencing tool
- Example: dismissing critics of offensive jokes as biased
Defensive Avoidance

• “…guess I’m just biased.”

• By not defending your position you’re allowing yourself to avoid thinking critically

• Bias may or may not be present

• Example: the all too easy slide into moral relativism