Fumbling With Love: The First Step Toward Cultivating A Beloved Community

A Bible Study Addressing Four Psychological Barriers to Racial Reconciliation

by

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Date: 4/14/2022

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Ministry in the Department of Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some key reasons why it is often very difficult for Christians to love “racial” different Christians. Examining over eighty years of neuroscience and psychological research reveals key understandings about how the brain works when experiencing people who are racially different. Four psychological processes are major contributors to implicit biases that form mental barriers, feed stereotypes, cause discrimination, and lead to individual and institutional racism. These implicit biases are key obstacles to our call to cultivate a beloved community. Research suggests that once biases are identified, actions that counter biases are effective when the stimulus is ongoing. Building off these findings, I design a Bible Study referencing group psychology and theological reflection to be used with an intentionally diverse group of church leaders. By focusing on brain processes that impede racial reconciliation in conversation with Scripture, I develop a tool that begins healing to some of the forces that undermine unity and violate the integrity of the body of Christ.

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1 Race is a socio-historical construct, according to the RACE project and the “AAA Statement on Race.” It states: “While the biological basis of the concept of race is meaningless, the social reality of race is very real and affects people greatly (Reference #24B).” See Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe et al., “A Qualitative Analysis of How Anthropologists Interpret the Race Construct,” American Anthropologist (U.S. National Library of Medicine, September 2017), last modified September 2017, accessed April 9, 2022, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC607572
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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my husband, retired attorney, and childhood sweetheart, Thomas H. Hodges, Jr, who has been by my side since the very beginning. His love, support, prayers and dedication to my calling and our ministry is an act of true love and commitment that is touched by God. His devotion to me and our family is beyond words.

A special thanks to my family, Marcus, Aurielle, Karter, Nova, Danielle, Blake, Hayden, my mom, Shirley Williams, and brother, Bennie (BB), who were always there to, give an encouraging word, celebrate a milestone, cook on the grill, send a lunch, offer a prayer, or play Barbies. To God be all the glory!
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Dr. Sarah Musser and Dr. M. Keith Daniel whose prayers, support and editing were so aligned with the heart of this project.

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Ashley Lunn for the reminders, Judith Heyhoe for your patience and Word guru editing skills, Dr. Ken Evers-Hood for your poetic voice, Bishop Will Willimon for your sense of humor, Dr. David Goatley for your calm, and the Holy Spirit for breathing on this work.
Introduction

When I first began to research areas of implicit or unconscious bias, I thought it was going to be a simple list of areas to research and connect with my project. Little did I realize how intertwined and complicated these biases were. It made me see how magnificently God created the human mind. I now understand the reason neuroscientists spend lifetimes studying and researching the way the mind works.

The four identified psychological feats or brain processes that cause implicit bias are complicated and interwoven, yet each operates independently and simultaneously. I immediately thought of the Trinity, each divine body operating as its own entity yet, each in pristine collaboration with the other. It made me realize an essential area of our uniqueness in creation where we are a reflection of the Divine.

There are many unconscious biases working together to help us navigate our world smoothly and efficiently. We also refer to these unconscious operations as implicit biases. They are constantly at play in our everyday decision making and are informed by our individual backgrounds, experiences, and value systems. They utilize learned assumptions, beliefs, or attitudes that usually operate below our level of consciousness. These systems are so effective that they initiate negative actions that produce harmful results, such as inaccurate stereotypes and hurtful prejudices. They are also considered mental short cuts, because our brain processes millions of bits of information per second.¹ These behaviors are the focus of

¹See Britannica.com/science/information-theory/ Physiology.
our study and contribute to unconscious barriers when it comes to loving others who are different from us, especially when it comes to loving others of a different race.\(^2\)

As people of God, we are part of a family—one human race.\(^3\) Since this is true, we must examine why we look at someone from a different race and automatically feel disconnected, fear, harm, or “otherism.” Why do we treat each other like we are still strangers when we share a common baptism? When Paul speaks of a new humanity in Ephesians 2:12, Jesus has done away with the barriers, old attitudes of divisions, and enmities. Jew and Gentiles were united under the Cross and Resurrection. This reimagining of the church as a new humanity can be interpreted as “learning together and anew about injustice and division in the church and the world.”\(^4\)

As a new people united as one body in Christ, “we are a people on pilgrimage together, a mixed group, bearing witness to a new identity made possible by the Gospel.”\(^5\) But how can we move forward together as one, as the Body of Christ, when there is a huge monster standing in the middle of the room that we are hesitant to acknowledge or talk about? It is racism. It produces racist, prejudicial practices, inhumane treatment, crippling stereotypes, and is a part of American history and the Church. One very important element of cultivating a beloved community is embracing an intentional mindset when it comes to recognizing racism and dismantling blind spots.

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\(^2\) The RACE Project and the “AAA Statement on Race” indicate the anthropological position on race collectively, as a “dynamic, historically situated, culturally constructed folk concept that derives symbolic meaning from specific readings and rankings of phenotypic differences.” Differences include skin color, nose width, lip thickness, hair texture, and body type (Goodman, Moses, and Jones, 2012; Mukhopadhyay, Henze, and Moses, 2014).

\(^3\) Genesis 1:26-27.


\(^5\) Ibid, 23.
Doing God’s work is not easy. It requires us to examine ourselves and move beyond our own comfort zones and places of familiarity. It requires transformation into a new “self” that facilitates a deep dive into “loving” the way God wants us to relate to each other. But we need an understanding of a common definition of love along with practical steps, guidelines, and tools to begin to teach love of the stranger, the other, and our neighbor, as our siblings and even the more radical love of our “enemies.”

Love is situated as either attached to God or not attached to God. In Jesus, the Holy Spirit provides a bond of union between Christians by which they should always be linked to God and to each other in the principle of love. When love is not attached to God’s hope, patient endurance, and long-suffering, as in 1st Corinthians 13:4–7 and 1 Peter 4:8, it becomes a vehicle of self, which is not love. Christians are reminded in 1 John 4:20 that if anyone says, "I love God," but hates their sibling, they are a liar. For anyone who does not love their sibling whom one has seen, cannot love God, whom one has not seen.”

The data used to support this focus will include research conducted by sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, whose work focuses on the problem of racial discrimination. Their work revealed over 90 per cent of American churches are racially homogenous. Sociologist Christina Cleveland in *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep us Apart* states that, “Our homogeneity is like a cage surrounding our

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* Co-authors of *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, sociologists, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith addressed the question: “How do we capture the meaning of race in America?” Survey from 2,000 people nationwide, along with an additional 200 face-to-face interviews, examined the grassroots of white evangelical America, and discovered that most white evangelicals see no systematic discrimination against black people, and despite positive trends feel racial reconciliation is far in the horizon.
group, preventing us from becoming familiar with culturally different others.”7 In essence, people like spending time with those who are like them. Spending time with people who are similar to us is logical, natural, and powerful. Cleveland references research by Cahn and Carbone that American churches continue to increase in “ethnic, cultural and theological homogeneity despite the fact that America is becoming increasingly diverse.”8 We are naturally attracted to those who share our values, attitudes, and preferences. Cleveland also identifies research by Theodore Newcomb that sharing an experience with another person can cause people to feel a sense of connection, even across differences.9 Therefore, this project is designed for a diverse group of individuals who are committed to designing and participating in shared experiences with an intentional mindset to recognize racism as a social construct. The intent is to dismantle blind spots, or work around them, and engage new practices of reconciliation with the knowledge presented and new practices learned in this project. Strengths and weaknesses will be explored when using this research.

Chapter 1 defines blind spots and mindbugs. It discusses how implicit biases influence our minds and guide actions in ways that we are unaware. Chapter 2 discusses, the ways research changed during the twentieth century, introduces the Implicit Association Test (IAT), its creators, pros and cons, and four identified brain processes that create potential barriers to racial reconciliation. Chapter 3 addresses possible ways to dismantle mindbugs by retraining the brain to counter their effects and to better understand what it means to be a part of a beloved community. Chapter 4 introduces a five-day Bible Study that explores and

7 Christina Cleveland, Disunity In Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart (Downers, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 28.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, 30.
reflects upon the four identified psychological barriers to racial reconciliation by, identifying stereotypes, racism, discrimination, and ethnocentrism in the early church and churches today. Prayer, theological reflection, group psychology and aligned activities help connect learning with church leadership and individual contexts.

As a result of my thesis, my goal is to provide the church with a first step toward creating an anti-racism program focused on leading on-going transformation into a new “self” that recognizes implicit bias and blind spots and counteracts the same. This in turn should facilitate a deep dive into “loving” the way God wants us to relate to each other as siblings within a beloved community where we can imagine a new vision of “Christian intellectual identity that embodies the power of love that constantly gestures toward joining, and the desire to hear, know, and embrace.”\(^\text{10}\) It points to a theology that elicits life patterns that mirror God.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\) Ibid.
1. Blind Spots: Searching for the Light

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,

along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;

I will turn the darkness into light before them

and make the rough places smooth.

These are the things I will do;

I will not forsake them.¹

We all have blind spots. Physically, all animals classified as vertebrates have a blind spot in the retina of each eye. It is called a scotoma. It is the Greek word for darkness. The exact spot where the optic nerve attaches to the retina is called the optic disk. It is the size of a tiny pin head, approximately 1.5 millimeters or 0.06 inches in diameter.² This area has no light sensitive cells therefore light has no way to reach the visual areas of the brain. When light is received in the retina, electrical currents pulsate through the optic nerve to the brain. It instantly turns these currents into a legible picture image. What does this mean? We are technically partially blind in each eye. Why is this information important? Most of us are unaware of our own physical blind spot and the way the eye is designed because the brain works hard to compensate for this blind area. The brain is excellent at providing missing information. Why should we care? The way the brain compensates for this tiny blind spot is suggestive of the way that the brain may also contribute toward many human mental or psychological errors.

¹ Isaiah 42:16 (NIV)
This is the way our blind spot works. When something is in front of our eyes, we see it. Even when an object is physically imperfect or a part is visually missing, we can still determine the object. Our brain fills in missing pieces of items that are missing, using visual cues within the environment so that we are able to see and detect items in the world uninterrupted. Researchers suggest a number of reasons why we don’t notice our blind spot. Some suggest that when we open both eyes our visual fields actually overlap and tend to fill in missing information for the opposite eye. The brain compensates. If the brain constantly fills in missing information, the connection has also been made that in the same way the brain fills in information in visual perception, it also is capable of filling in information in other mental models, especially when it comes to people.

Why am I sharing all this information concerning blind spots, and what does it have to do with racial reconciliation? Mahzarin R. Banaji in *Blind Spot Hidden Biases of Good People*, referred to and used this same type of filling in of information when it came to people and cultural groups. Research focused on the brain’s ability to fill in bits of collected mental information about social groups. The connection is made because the hidden-bias blind spot operates in the same manner as the visual blind spot. The main point is “we can be as unaware of hidden biases in the same way we are unsure of the retinal scotoma in each of our eyes.” This connection is an example of how we are blind to true knowledge about each other when living

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4 Ibid. If you want to find your own spot, there are many tests available that will allow you to physically experience it in action. Most of the tests involve placing a small dot or star on a piece of paper and covering one eye. When you stare at the spot and slowly get closer and closer to the dot or star, at one point, the spot will disappear. This is your blind spot. If you continue to get closer, the spot will eventually return.

our everyday lives and making connections to and interacting with different groups, especially when it comes to race.

The group knowledge connection is made because as we encounter different groups of people in our environment, our brains collect information as bits of knowledge about those groups. This information is engrained as we continue to encounter these groups or gather information concerning these groups. When the information about social groups is received in our brains and sorted in our minds, biases are not recorded or acknowledged as biases. Therefore, we are unaware of the influence. These hidden biases have a powerful influence on our behavior, especially when it comes to members of “particular” social groups, and especially those of a different race.

Mahzarin R. Banaji shared research results which discovered that most people find it hard to believe that their behavior is guided by mental content that they are totally unaware of and influenced by. Additional research recognized and supported the fact that hidden bias blind spot data is believable because of the abundance of scientific evidence that points to this conclusion.6 It can be difficult convincing the general population about something they are not or may not be aware that exists. This research supports the connection to blind spots in our mind and bias as the root of stereotypes and prejudice that create barriers to racial reconciliation.

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6Ibid, xiv, 222. Until a quarter of a century ago, the psychological community believed that human actions were guided mainly by conscious thoughts and feelings. Currently, the majority supports that many human behaviors and judgments happen with very little conscious thought. Chesterton, British writer/journalist, 1908, commented that grasping self-awareness is more distant than any star.
Historical Background

Prejudicial Attitudes: Before 1950

Research into racial attitudes evolved from brain science into mind science between 1950 and 2000. Gordon W. Allport, one of America’s preeminent social psychologists, addressed understanding group knowledge in reference to stereotypes with his book, *The Nature of Prejudice* published in 1954. Though the last fifty years have broadened the perspective on prejudice, Allport’s work is still respected as a broad and accurate summary of prejudice and a solid foundational paradigm for studying prejudice. His perspective was made of carefully chosen existing theories of eclectic causes and possible solutions for prejudice. He never “championed one position to the exclusion of all others.” This was a testimony to his wisdom and scholarly brilliance.

His work stressed both the complexity and essential importance of mental categories. He explained that the human mind thinks with the aid of categories. Once they are formed, categories become the bases for the usual prejudgment. We cannot avoid this process because orderly living depends upon it. Categories are described as groups of items or things that have enough in common that one can relate to them as similar. This similarity doesn’t necessarily have to be great.

His work helped solidify the discovery that the way the brain works in response to the categories created for groups of people greatly affects our behavior. An even deeper discovery was that these categories create stereotypes because we attach certain expected characteristics to

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these groups. For example, we trust people according to the category we mentally assign them. We readily leave our young child with a preschool teacher at the school of our choice, or hand our credit card to a complete stranger in a department store because we have preconceived ideas of the kinds of people who fill these positions, based on stereotypes.

When it came to further understanding the nature of racial prejudice and stereotypes, science survey research developed drastically in the second half of the twentieth century. Question asking techniques were continually refined. The focus increased more and more on the dynamic of black and white relationship. It became the dominate focus and remains the most studied relationship dynamic, even today.

The evolution of racial attitudes was tracked by researchers using the same questions concerning race repeated every few years for several decades from 1960 until 2000. Students were asked to respond to questions like, “Do you think black and white students should go to the same schools or to separate schools?” and “Do you think white people have a right to keep black people out of their neighborhoods if they want, and black people should respect that right?” Sixty percent of white Americans favored racially integrated schools early in the 1960s. That percentage grew to nearly 100 percent by 1995, so the question was removed. When it came to racial housing integration the numbers were about as dramatic in positive increase, going from less than forty percent in 1960s to over eighty percent in the 1990s.

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8 Banaji, 175.
9 Banaji, 176, 228. The original sources for this racial bias research was conducted by Bogardus in 1925 and 1928. Thurstone in 1928 and Hinckley in 1932.
Research findings between 1960 and 2000 revealed an interesting dynamic. Though racial attitudes were interpreted as improved due to the increase in positive responses, when asked about integrating black and white people in schools and neighborhoods, questions concerning the appropriateness of government assistance did not reveal a positive attitude toward African Americans. One may think that responses to questions about government assistance concerning African-Americans would reveal the same increase in positive attitudes. Instead, there was gradual opposition to support for African Americans.

That was an unexpected discovery. Questions asked were, “Do you think the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of black people and other minority groups?” and “Do you think that black people have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standard?” Findings revealed that white Americans consistently expressed opposition to assistance from the government, yet supported integration of the races.

**Prejudicial Attitudes: After 1950**

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their living standard?” Findings revealed that white Americans consistently expressed opposition
to assistance from the government, yet supported integration of the races.

**Principled Conservative View**

What does it mean when racial attitudes appear to be positive, yet actions toward another
race, especially minorities, do not reflect that positive attitude? Scientists have disagreed on how
to interpret this interesting dynamic. One group, referred to as the “disappearing bias camp,”\(^\text{13}\)
believed that America’s racial bias has greatly disappeared. This “disappearing bias group”\(^\text{14}\)
obviously focused on the responses that revealed a positive attitude toward racial integration. This
group represents an America that believes this attitude does not represent a racist attitude but a
belief that America offers everyone a level playing field and equal opportunity for all, regardless
of race, therefore no additional help is needed for African Americans. When this position is
engaged it is called the principled conservative view.\(^\text{15}\) Those with this view do not believe there
is a bias when it comes to opportunities or access for minorities. Therefore, no government help is
needed or justified simply because a black person or another minority is less well off or less
successful.\(^\text{16}\) Ultimately, no racial bias exists. The majority of social scientists disagree with this

\(^\text{13}\) Banaji, 178.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{15}\) Banaji, 179. This view was reported by Reyna et al. (2005), and advanced by Sniderman and Tetlock
(1968). Variations of this view are labeled and developed as symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), modern racism
(McConahay, Hardee, and Batts, 1981), aversion racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Dovidio, 2001), and
subtle prejudice (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995.)
\(^\text{16}\) Banaji, 178. Much research supports that the playing field in America consistently is not leveled,
especially when it comes to areas of employment, education, medicine and law enforcement.
view and believe that responses that do not support the government making every effort to improve the social and economic health and the standard of living for minorities and other people of color are expressions of racial bias.\textsuperscript{17}

The opposing camp believes that “racial bias in America still exists, yet persists in a metamorphosed covert, less detectable form.”\textsuperscript{18} Those who support the principled conservative view obviously made their decision based on answers concerning negative attitudes expressed toward government assistance. This mindset is referred to as covert bias. Most social scientists believe that egalitarian views are publicly expressed by many Americans who privately possess racial biases that are potentially harmful. They are hidden potent energy that can cause and feed discrimination.\textsuperscript{19} These covert processes are subtle and therefore difficult to grasp.

The point is made that because these two groups show up in research across four decades, it can be said that both the conservative principal view and the covert bias group seem plausible. Simply said, “those who oppose government assistance plausibly include some who are racially biased and some who are principled conservatives or both.”\textsuperscript{20} This statement is also plausible because different interpretations do not exactly contradict nor exclude each other. It also can be said that each viewpoint contains some truth and that as people feel threatened or afraid, they generally become more conservative.\textsuperscript{21} Of course this makes drawing conclusions even more

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 178.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 179. This experiment by survey was reported by Reyna et. Al (2005). The principled conservative view which opposes government intervention for minorities was advanced by Sniderman and Tetlock (1986).
difficult and complex. It is noted that hidden covert biases persist in a different form than the overt racism expressed in the early twentieth century.

America’s persistent racial biases can be described as attitudes that lurk beneath the surface, hidden. They are composed of two different biased views. One bias view is recognized and acknowledged by the possessor, yet intentionally subdued from expression in public. It may be in part due to political correctness of our current times, resulting in impression management. This happens when people say what they think you want to hear. In contrast, an incredibly potent view is held by those who possess a hidden undercurrent of outwardly unexpressed bias because they are unaware that these biases exist. These types of covert biases contribute to more discrimination in America than overt, outwardly expressed prejudice. At the time of this testing it was a minority that openly expressed racial dislikes with content and without reservation. All the studies conducted on racial attitudes that took place during 1950-2000 shed light on similar harsh results. America was racially biased. Biases feed prejudice. Racism is real.

conducted in five countries examined 22 separate tests of the hypothesis that fear was the root cause of conservative viewpoints and found it to be universally true. Additional study on the principal conservative view of opposition to government help to minorities was conducted in 2005 by Reyna et al and advanced by Sniderman and Tetlock in 1986. Covert bias has also been studied and developed in variations labeled as modern racism (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981), symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977, Dovidio, 2001), and subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

22 Banaji, 27-31. Impression management has historically caused flawed responses to many questions that pertain especially to race (30).

23 Extensive testing during the 1970’s examined the level of assistance both black and white participants received from white potential helpers who were unaware they were being observed. Help was mostly for minor assistance such as sharpening a pencil or making change for a quarter. A large section of these test results were reviewed in the 1980’s by social scientists, Stephanie Bromley, Leonard Saxe and Faye Crosby. They discovered racial attitudes and discriminatory behavior were more prevalent than reported in previous research findings, (Gaertner and Bickman, 1971, Benson, Karabenick, and Lerner, (1976), and especially in “remote” transactions, in comparison to than face to face transactions, reaffirming earlier findings and strengthened scientific belief that racial bias was obviously still a very potent force.
Mindbugs: Perfectly Made Flaws

As people of God, we are all broken and fall short of God’s glory. But, how broken are we? How can we determine and measure our biases when we don’t realize they exist? When we focus on the study of unconscious bias today one cannot overlook the extensive work of Mahzarin Banaji, a professor of Social Ethics at Harvard University. She referred to unconscious bias as mind bugs.

So exactly what are mind bugs? Mindbugs are bits of knowledge ingrained as habits of thought that lead to errors in perception, memory, reason and decision making. Banaji explains that mindbugs reveal a flaw in how we think, see, reason, and judge each other. They are responsible for the fumbles we make as we attempt to see the world as it is, especially when it comes to loving people who are different from us. Mindbugs uncover a “particular disparity in us: between our intentions and ideals, on one hand, and our behavior and actions on the other.”

Mind science research helps us understand that these disparities undermine self-awareness, threaten the ability to consciously control actions, and obfuscate the cherished ideal of self-determination.

This term mindbugs was coined by Kurt VanLehn, a computer scientist at Arizona State University. He discovered that when children learned arithmetic, they often made errors when asked to subtract 169 from 207, for example. Those beginning to learn would make carrying errors that resulted in the repeated answer of 48 instead of 38. This was a systematic error he

24 Romans 3:23.
25 Banaji, 4.
26 Banaji, 20.
27 Ibid.
described as glitches in the brain’s software.\(^2^8\) It was also described as local misconceptions that formed error patterns. Math mindbugs caused children to fumble in their process of learning to subtract.

Mindbugs at work within our society also cause fumbles in our actions as implicit or unconscious bias, due to systematic connection to information collected concerning different groups. We have a bias when we have a preference for or an aversion to a person or particular group of people. Implicit bias refers to those actions and emotions that we are unaware of and are used to describe situations when we have preconceived attitudes toward groups of people or associate stereotypes with them without a conscious intention or awareness.\(^2^9\) These bias attitudes cover a huge range of categories including gender, age, ability, the LGBTQIA+ community, and especially race and ethnicity. Statements or beliefs such as, “men make better leaders,” “younger people are better at technology,” “lesbians don’t work well with men,” “or African-Americans are more likely to be criminals or are less intelligent” assume certain characteristics about individuals based on knowledge acquired about a group.\(^3^0\) These attitudes caused by implicit bias often result in unwanted and negative behavior, especially accentuated when it comes to race and ethnicity. Unconscious bias can cause judgment and behaviors that aren’t recognized. An example would be assuming all Hispanics are English language learners and overlooking them for a job that requires

\(^2^8\) VanLehn conducted his study on Mind bugs as systematic errors in 1990. He developed a theory of learning explaining how children develop procedural misconceptions that cause systematic errors.


strong English.\textsuperscript{31} Research has proven that much of human perception and the way we think are influenced and shaped by activity that actually occurs outside of our conscious awareness.

Today the term mindbugs refers to a broad category of cognitive and social errors observed in both children and adults. It is assumed that we have a bias in our past as we evolve, and in our cultural and individual histories.\textsuperscript{32} Our brains evolved according to what our ancestors needed to survive. Between 600 and 500 million years ago our ancestors only needed visual skills for a three dimensional world.\textsuperscript{33} Visual and perception skills were not needed for a two dimensional world that would eventually be created by scribbling on cave walls and papyrus. Eventually the human vision system evolved to understanding a two dimensional world. Our brains now know from experience and “innate wiring” that the actual size of a two dimensional object reproduced on the retina upside down, underestimates its depth extent. The brain is so confident in its understanding of three dimensional objects that it treats a two dimensional image as a three dimensional object, distorting its perceived size. Banaji’s extensive research helps us better understand how mindbugs are able to erode the edges of rational thought, and eventually the actual possibility of a just and productive society. Mindbugs are at the root of the disparity between our inner minds and outward actions.\textsuperscript{34} The ultimate finding was that evidence collected throughout the second half of the twentieth century created space for the plausibility that human rationality is severely limited\textsuperscript{35} due to mindbugs. Therefore, the connection can be made that implicit biases construct psychological barriers when it comes to racial reconciliation. Banaji’s

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Banaji, 217.
\textsuperscript{33} Lamb, 2007.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 20.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 19.
work, along with the work of those who preceded her, helps us understand that studying mind bugs leads to appreciate the impact of implicit bias and guides us toward hope that if we understand mindbugs and unconscious biases as a human flaw we all possess and see prejudices as something we all have in common, we are more inclined to try and change together.36

**Visual Mindbugs: Things Are Not Always As They Seem**

Not only are mind fumbles a part of our everyday existence, but it appears that visual fumbles caused by visual mindbugs help us better understand psychological mind bugs. Since we live in a three dimensional world, visual illusions help us further understand the way the brain works, when it fills in information that is missing. Psychologist Roger N. Shepard created an illusion called *Turning the Tables*. It involves images of two table surfaces that are identical parallelograms, but when the eyes capture the images, it interprets the images as different tables. It can easily be proven that both images are identical by placing one over the other and tracing the edges.37 The scientific explanation is this incorrect perception in shape and size happens because the brain automatically converts a two dimensional image on the page as it is received in the eye’s retina as a three dimensional image.

Human beings and larger animals are designed to operate in a three dimensional world and our brains are made to navigate it effortlessly. Once a two dimensional object is encountered the brain continues to do what it does best—make unconscious corrections to make them

36 This is the joy and hope motivating this project toward the building of beloved community!
understandable to us as three dimensional.\textsuperscript{38} Once the brain reads the two dimensional page as three dimensional, it imposes another layer of depth. Our brain on an unconscious level accepts the added information without question or hesitation. This process is automatic and without thought or effort from us.\textsuperscript{39} The eye receives, the brain registers, and the mind interprets. The brain fills in missing information that makes sense.\textsuperscript{40} Even though we know that two images are identical on a page, our brains’ unconscious inference pushes to override what we know to be true.

What is unconscious inference? It is a term introduced by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894), German physician, philosopher, and leader in unconscious mind study. His research proposed a sign “theory” of perception that explained sensations we experience from our environment as symbols of the stimuli, and are not actual copies of the stimuli.\textsuperscript{41} Our brains construct correspondence and meaning between the sensation and the symbol it creates through learned “unconscious inferences.” In doing so, the mind makes many mental adjustments in constructing a coherent image of what it sees and experiences.

Helmholtz used this term to describe Shephard’s illusion. His goal was to describe how the mind creates the ability to actually “see,” using the conscious perception of ordinary,

\textsuperscript{38} Stabilization of the visual system happened sometime between 600 and 500 million years ago according to studies completed by neuroscientist, Trevor D. Lamb in 2007. He studied the human eye and the evolution of photoreceptors.

\textsuperscript{39} Lamb’s research also helped us understand that the brain knows from experience and innate wiring of the visual system that the size we see through the retina of the horizontal plane comes up short when reflecting the extent in depth. Through the brain’s unconscious inference, the brain magnifies the dimension. The brain corrects the foreshortening and lengthens the dimension of the tabletop on the left and the short dimension on the right.

\textsuperscript{40} The innate wiring of our brain’s visual system recognizes that the horizontal surface’s size is not what perceived in depth. The size is magnified by our brain’s unconscious ability to infer.


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subjective, physical information. His research explained how our minds are easily deceived or tricked because the unconscious mental process of unconscious inference replaces the two dimensional shape of the retinal image with another image that is perceived as three dimensional. Helmholtz’s work also proved that the image we ultimately see as one image is actually two images merged into one. Each eye produces its own image on the retina, upside down. It creates a sense of depth created by two reflected eye images, referred to as stereoscopic vision. It demonstrates that our minds can effectively deduct three dimensional image properties from a two dimensional drawing.

The point is that when the brain encounters any information it searches to connect or associate it to information it already knows or is familiar. When it comes to words, pictures, experiences, and other information deemed difficult, related information automatically shifts forward for connection. Another example of how our brain infers depth perception is when we see two trees of the same size at different distances, the one closest appears bigger. Depth perception plays a trick on our eyes by making the tree farthest away appear smaller. Our brain makes an unconscious and automatic adjustment, so we see and realize that the trees are actually the same size.

These examples and explanations reveal mindbugs at work. With all this being said, these types of mindbugs actually reflect the efficiency of our visual system due to human adaptation over time. What Shepard’s tabletop research proves to us is our ability to navigate and adapt effectively, when perceiving a two dimensional image on a page into a three dimensional image.

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When one takes another look at the tables again and again, the newly gained knowledge has little effect on the mind’s automatic intellectual understanding of the perceived data. Shephard stated that, “any knowledge or understanding of the illusion we may gain at the intellectual level remains virtually powerless to diminish the magnitude of the illusion.” This knowledge makes space for the question: When it comes to other aspects of our lives, in what other ways do our minds play tricks on us, or fail at relaying accurate information? Does this same process of automatic association that allows us to learn and associate quickly work against us in different contexts or situations?

**Memory Mindbugs: Perspective in Truth**

Washington University research in 1982 revealed that mindbugs also cause the mind to play tricks with our memory through a process that psychologists call mental interference. Memory interference is a phenomenon that happens when one memory retrieval interferes with another. It happens in two major ways. There is the proactive interference theory and the retroactive interference theory. Proactive interference happens when older memories interfere with recalling new memories. This type interference makes it harder to learn new information. A great example would be a previous address constantly interfering with remembering a new address. Older information is often stored in long term memory and practiced longer and engrained deeper. Therefore, earlier learned information is often easier to recall. Retroactive interference happens when a new memory interferes with recalling an older memory. It presents

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41 Shepard, 128.
44 Banaji, 9.
much potential outside harm to others because it causes false memory and the misinformation effect. It is also referred to as the backwards effect.

An example of retroactive unconscious interference can be discovered when using a list of sixteen associated words. Read the following unpunctuated list of sixteen words, quickly.\textsuperscript{45}

Ant spider feelers web fly poison slimy crawl bee wing bug small bite fright wasp creepy

Cover the list so that you are unable to see it. Then, recall as many words as you can, without writing them. Don’t cheat. Look at the unpunctuated list of fourteen words provided below. Read the list quickly. Do not uncover the original list of words.

insect gnat maple ant poison birch leaves bite sting web oak wasp hive creepy

Without looking, write the words from the list above that appeared on the original list, still not looking. Now, check your list. If you wrote the word “insect” on your list, you have demonstrated the automatic association making machine. You experienced a mindbug.

In the word list example, words from the original list had an insect connection. Because our brains made the connection, we use this same ability to connect to remember the original list.

This is how the brain works and operates when acquiring new information. It is also the manner in which the brain learns. What you also just experienced is called a false memory. It is also called a false alarm. The word “insect” was the connection. It was the connecting factor, but the inferred thought caused a mental fumble. The word “insect” fit the list in the mind because it was associated with all the other words, but it was not on the list.\textsuperscript{46} It was an honest mistake.

Your brain fed you the incorrect information automatically and without much effort. The fact is

\textsuperscript{45} Banaji, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 9.
that the mind does much of its work automatically, unconsciously as well as unintentionally. When we take the time to examine the way the brain works and understand how it makes connections, we understand why the mistakes were made. When we mistakenly remember something that did not occur, we can also refer to it as mental fumble. This can also be potentially very harmful.

This error in memory is caused by the retroactive interference mindbug.\(^{47}\) It is also called the misinformation effect. As mentioned previously, it happens when newer memories interfere when trying to recall older memories. It is also referred to as the backwards effect because a previously learned task is forgotten due to learning a new task. This effect also makes it more difficult to recall things that have been previously learned.\(^ {48}\) Simply stated, it is an influence on memory after the fact.\(^ {49}\)

A leader in this area of psychological research is Elizabeth Loftus, an American cognitive psychologist, who is an expert on human memory, and professor at the University of California at Irvine. She is considered one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century. She challenged the idea that memories live stored as a sort of mental library, made of literal representations of past experiences and events. Loftin believes that memories are reconstructed and not simply replayed back as stoic recalls. Therefore, they are malleable. This means they can be manipulated, influenced by what we are told and even affected by the way a question is asked.\(^ {50}\) Loftin wrote, “Our representation of the past takes on a living, shifting, reality... It is not

\(^{47}\) Ibid, 10.


\(^{49}\) Banaji, 10.

\(^{50}\) “Elizabeth Loftus,” *Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, accessed January 8, 2022, [https://cnlm.uci.edu/about/elizabeth-loftus/](https://cnlm.uci.edu/about/elizabeth-loftus/).
fixed and immutable, not a place way back there that is preserved in stone, but a living thing that changes shape, expands, shrinks, and expands again, an amoeba-like creature.” Further she explains, “there is a flimsy curtain that separates our imagination and our memory.”

Her area of expertise is with memory mindbugs in eyewitness cases. Her work has revealed much information concerning the high percentage of discrepancies in eyewitness accounts. It is alarming. She found that not only are the numbers staggering in inaccuracies, but slight changes in the manner in which questions are asked effected answers and solicited different content within the responses. For example, Loftus conducted famous eye-witness research that involved witnesses of two cars that collided, where there was no personal injury. After the incident Loftus asked half of the witnesses, “how fast the car was going when it hit the other car?” The second group of witnesses were asked, how fast was the car going when it crashed into the other car. The group that was asked using the verb “crashed” was also recorded as having a higher percentage of mistakenly inserting a detail of “broken glass,” which was in error. There was no broken glass recorded at the accident scene.

This is an example of misinformation being introduced that was in error, but with good intention. This is also what can be called a mental fumble. Loftus’ point was that a slight change in the language produced a “consequential change in what was recalled from memory, which resulted in an inaccurate eyewitness account.” If someone is relying on this information to make a report, as in the police or child services, this error would have dire results and consequences on

52 Banaji, 10.
53 This research was conducted and supported by Loftus & Palmer, 1974.
54 Banaji, 10.
another person’s life. Research has proven that nearly 70 percent of information is forgotten within twenty-four hours of initial learning.\textsuperscript{55}

A final analysis of Washington University’s research in 1982 revealed 82 percent of the time students remembered words not on the list, but shared a common theme. Compared to the seventy-nine percent of the time students remembered words that were actually on the list, this was a huge error percentage. These numbers indicated that more students were in error than correct. That is startling, but is more understandable given the research on mindbugs. The final results revealed that mindbugs were powerful enough to be able to produce a larger group of participants that could not remember correctly than the number of students who did remember correctly.\textsuperscript{56} These results may not knock anyone from their seat, but what if the circumstances were different and any one of us was asked to recall a suspect or murder victim? Would a similar mustache, physical resemblance, hair type or skin color, make an association that was inaccurate? Could it cause one of us to make a false identification? This information leads us to wonder about the ways our minds affect our lens for seeing and perceiving truth, especially when it comes to race.

This research makes one wonder about the number of inaccurate convictions in the court system today.\textsuperscript{57} Due to efforts made by the Innocence Project, an organization dedicated to making sure innocent people are not convicted using DNA, 250 people were found innocent of their convicted crimes. To put it into perspective, of 190 cases based on wrongful identities

\textsuperscript{55} Cherry, Accessed January 8, 2022.
\textsuperscript{56} Research by Gallo, Roediger, & McDermott, 2001; Roediger & Gallo, 2002 support these findings. An alarming feature of memory mind bug errors found a weak connection between one’s own confidence in their memory and accuracy. Confidence in one’s memory, did not result in better memory recall.
\textsuperscript{57} Banaji, 10. Innocent Project data can be found at (www.innocenceproject.org/understand/Eyewitness-Misidentification.php); Garrett, 2011, page 218.
accounts, 75 per cent were eyewitness accounts based on evidence. Many states believe this number is much too high and are considering allowing many guilty to walk free in an effort to save the innocent. It would be very interesting to see the final analysis of numbers according to race, but this report did not indicate the race of the individuals convicted.

**Truth and Racial Attitudes**

The richer we have become materially, the poorer we become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly in the air like birds and swim in the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers. ~ *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Research on the psychology that focused on racial attitudes is relatively new. It began less than a century ago. Sociologists and psychologists that undertook this area of study were true pioneers during the 1920s and the 1930s. This research was all that was available. It consisted of self-reporting that took the position that the individual was the best authority on one’s own individual racial attitudes and behavior. Self-reporting in research during this time was partially very useful because, unlike many Americans today, early twentieth century Americans appeared to be very open and revealing when it came to discussing racial and ethnic attitudes.

**Questions in Research: The Problem**

Self-reporting was described as partially useful because questions in research can present difficulties. Most people see themselves as honest. But, when we focus on an average day of our

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58 Ibid, 11.
59 Ibid, 32.
60 Ibid.
daily lives, we often ask questions and receive answers we know are just not true. For example, how often do we give answers to questions we know are untrue when it comes to weight, height, age? How often have we slightly exaggerated our giving amount in church, when and if asked? What about a situation when you are asked, “Can you spare a dollar to the homeless man on the street?” You answer, “No, I don’t have a dollar,” when you actually do have a dollar or even more. Someone asks, “How are you, today?” You answer, “fine “when your back or head is hurting. These are examples where we easily answer untruthfully without much thought. Using questions may have been the only method to use during the 1920s and 1930s but additional research discovered that answers were not always reliable for more than one reason.

There are several motivational forces at work. The desire to make an impression and influence by the research handler are two major forces to consider. When asked how often do you give answers that you know are untrue, most people answer with the assumption that the question involves those times when they were consciously and deliberately lying, especially when it came to ways it would benefit them, even at the expense of others. But are you aware that there are forces working within to steer answers away from truth? These are untruths that may be on the perimeter of totally unconscious and partially conscious, and are told sometimes, even to ourselves.61

In order to help us become aware and learn the extent of the problems with unrecognized untruths when answering questions, explanation of the motivational forces at work should be explained. These forces are riddled with emotion. There is the paradoxical desire to be accurate and truthful, or avoid burdening or hurting someone, especially the person who asked the question. Sometimes, when asked questions like, “how are you?” We don’t really expect the

61 Ibid, 21.
honest truth. There is also the desires to not be embarrassed or make an impression. The particulars of what we call, “white lies,” “little lies,” “unharmful lies” and “well-intended lies,” are a discussion in themselves, but the fact is we often are guilty of lying or not telling the truth in one form or another for one reason or another, no matter how noble we think we are. Yes, even Christians are guilty of telling untruths, to state it nicely. Of course, Christians do it for the right reasons, right?

Impression Management

The desire to make an impression is engaged when a question is asked. This happens when people say what they think one wants to hear. This is the type of untruth that is motivated by a desire to be seen as favorable by others. This is common in a job interview, first date, race for political office, vie for a religious position, and even answering questions about your own attitude concerning racism. It is also common in many other situations where one could gain a possible advantage over another.62 This type of untruthful dynamic is referred to by social psychologists as impression management.

Erving Goffman first introduced the term in 1959,63 and since then sociologists and theorists have further examined other aspects of the concept. Goffman defined the term as “a self-presentation technique that focuses on improving a person’s image in the eyes of others.”64 When

64 Ibid.
it comes to social and cultural implications, impression management allows people the ability to construct and manipulate their public perception. It is not always negative but there is a fine line between the positive and the negative. Cultural implications help define the significance of cultural traditions, norms, and ways of life. The color of one’s skin and hair, and the clothing one chooses to wear, are considered an aspect of impression management.65

James T. Tedeschi, Barry R. Schlenker and Thomas V. Bonoma’s research explored another aspect of the term in 1971. It noted that this type of manipulation occurs mostly when answering questions that have little variation for answers. In the effort to try and control other people’s perceptions, we often want to be seen by others as we fictitiously see ourselves. It is often a charitable view, of course. But impression manipulation used by this study focuses on the negative notion to manipulate how one is seen or perceived. It is this problem that is noted in survey research. This human action is so common and expected that researchers have devised strategies to recognize and weed out participants who are more likely to be deceptive by asking simply true-false questions.

Examples of weeding out questions include: “I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable” or “I would always declare everything at customs, even if I knew I would not be found out.” People that answer “true” are categorized as those who desire to make a favorable impression. Of course, there are those identified as a minority, who are honestly able to answer “true” to these types of questions. The key word being “always.” The point is an error factor is considered, when choosing participants to respond and when choosing who is believed to present more honest answers on a particular survey, since both truth and deception are difficult to determine in self-reporting. Therefore, the methods themselves are imperfect. Not only because

65 Ibid.
information is limited in making a decision but for the very reason of conducting this study. Participants succumb to a desire to be overly generous or the reverse.

Some evolutionary biologists have stated that humans are hardwired to lie considering many observations of the number of lies told by the average person in an average day.\(^6\) Stronger scientific claims are based on the more widely accepted reason that human deception is innate and part of an evolutionary notion of survival, the same as many other nonhuman species.\(^7\)

Examples are when a snake camouflages itself to look like its surroundings, or a frog turns the color of its surroundings making itself harder to detect. This information is provided to make our reader aware that it is noted that self-reporting is flawed for many reasons. It is also noted as part of becoming aware of and understanding blind spots discussed in this study.

**Race and Influence by Research Handler**

When it comes to race, influence by the survey handler also posed another threat to reliability. Forty years after compiling answers from self-reporting surveys, psychologists began to document the types of answer deviations that emerged. The result was that impression management caused flawed and incorrect answers which produced inaccurate data. Yet, these answers provided the only information that was available to determine attitudes concerning race and prejudice. This was reported in a study on race in 1981, that also revealed more enlightening

\(^6\) Books by evolutionary biologists and socio-biologist, Bob Trivers (1985) and Maynard Smith (2004) depict accounts of human deception as evolutionary. Recent methods support evidence that describe the human genome as showing rapid evolutionary changes in human genes.

\(^7\) Banaji, 26. Evolutionary theorists support the belief that, if lying produces a selection advantage that allows the one lying to live longer and reproduce more offspring than someone who does not lie, selection pressures is able to create genetic changes in a short time span as thirty generations. This means less than a thousand years for the human species.
data to consider. White college students were asked two questions. One was whether it was a bad idea for black and white people to marry. Another question was whether black people were not generally as smart as white people. Students were to state their level of agreement on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Half of the participants received their questions from someone black and the other half of participants received their survey questions from someone white. There is little to no doubt that gathered research was filled with inaccurate responses.68

Participants were told none of the research question handlers would see their answers and answers would be held in confidence. The study revealed that the responses handed out by the black research question handler were much more favorable toward black people in their answer than when the question handler was white. The element of impression management was engaged due the fact that their answers were influenced by the race of the person who handed them the survey questions.69 Answers were influenced without the respondents being fully aware.

After being made aware of unseen forces at work behind the scenes, if we were to ask the question whether you were biased toward people of other races, ethnicities or cultures, what would your answer be? Considering the limits on honesty, how close to the actual truth can be expected of you and each of us, when it comes to race? Even when causes of distortions are revealed, research supports that it may not stop many of us from distorting our truth.70 In considering each of these questions and their potential answers, there was a desperate need within the field of psychology to improve the manner in which implicit bias and racial attitudes were

68 Banaji, 30.
69 Information concerning the history of question-asking methods in investigations of race was supported in a study conducted by McConahay, Hardee and Batts in 1981.
70 Banaji, 31.
collected. This research supported the fact that a better method was needed for gathering responses, especially when it came to race. It made space for the creation of the online, self-administered Implicit Association Test (IAT). It provided options for gathering racial attitudes and removed the influence of a survey research handler.
2. Implicit Association Test (IAT)-Race Bearing Bodies

Research methods concerning the manner in which implicit bias and racial attitudes were collected evolved drastically during the twentieth century. They leaned less toward researcher posed question surveys and more toward methods less influenced by impression management. The additional interest in understanding covert and overt types of unconscious biases led to further study and eventually to the design of the Implicit Association Test or IAT. The IAT was designed to reveal the clearest view into a region of the mind that survey questions were unable to access. Its goal was to measure the harder to detect hidden covert biases.

Dr. Mahzarin Banaji and Dr. Anthony Greenwald’s extensive research discusses how covert biases impact our attitude. Attitudes represent the way our brains associate and link things together in either a positive or negative way. Our covert attitudes are usually the negative opinions we conceal and harbor for members of other groups and directly affect our emotions. When these associations affect our emotions, it creates what psychologists call our emotional value or valence.¹ Our emotional value toward others is created when categories are linked to the property of “goodness” and “badness.” Banaji and Greenwald state in Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People that our emotional valence can be the mental glue that bonds all items together. Research has proven that our “positive valence attracts, and negative valence repels.”² Implicit biases are created when our attitudes toward other people are associated with stereotypes either with or without conscious awareness. Research also supports that the IAT measures attitudes

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² Banaji, & Greenwald, 39.
people may be unable or unwilling to share or report. Therefore, it becomes very jarring when people discover biases as implicit attitudes that they are unaware.

**What is the IAT?**

How does the IAT measure hidden covert biases or stereotypes and not include researcher posed survey questions, especially if they are without our conscious awareness? The Implicit Association Test (IAT) was created in 1995 to be self-administered using a computer. Its design allowed the participant to take a peek into one’s own mindset and social cognition. It measured how quickly words or pictures were sorted into different categories. It provided an easier way for non-psychologists to gain knowledge concerning neuro-science.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures the way our brain links associations between concepts and the strength of those associations. For example, if African American was the concept or group, the IAT would measure how strong the associations are linked to evaluations of that group, such as “good” or “bad” to stereotypes, such as “athletic” or “rhythmic.” Words and images are separated into two categories on the computer screen. For example, the two choices are “good” versus “bad” or “gay” versus “straight.” This dynamic creates a binary that does not allow for answers that cross categories. An example is that one cannot answer as both “young” and “old,” or “gay” and “straight,” or “Black” and “White,” or “neither.”

Once the test begins, participants are asked to sort different words into different categories, quickly on the left and right side of the computer screen. The letter “e” key is pressed if the word is sorted into the category on the left. The letter “i” key is pressed if the word is sorted
in the category on the right. The idea is that responses are easier when closely related items share the same response key.  

There are five main parts to the IAT. The first part consists of sorting words into categories according to relationship of concepts. An example would be looking at a category labeled “thin people” on the left. If a picture of a person evaluated as thin appeared on the screen, the participant would press the “e” key to sort the thin image with the category labeled “thin people.”

The second part consists of sorting words into categories according to how the participant would evaluate a term. An example would be if the category labeled “good” were on the left, and the word “pleasant” appeared on the screen, the participant would press the “e” key, to associate “pleasant” and “good” in the same category.

The third part consists of sorting categories where both the concept and the evaluation are combined. An example would be “thin people” and “good” would be on the left side of the screen and “fat people” and “bad” would be on the right side of the screen. In the actual test, these combinations are reversed across participants taking the test. About half would choose from the “thin people” and the term “good” combination first. The other half of participants would choose from the “fat people” and “bad,” combination first. This alternating of terms and associations improves the reliability of the test.

The fourth part consists of redoing the activity where all concept categories are switched. An example would be if African American was on the left side in the first exercise, it would be on

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the right in the second exercise. The test automatically increases the number of attempts in this section to decrease the effects of practice.

The fifth part consists of redoing the activity where the combined categories are switched and are in reverse order. An example would be if the combination of “African American” and “good” were on the left side in the first activity, “African American” and “good” would be on the right side in the second activity. This also increases the reliability of the test.4

Specifically, the IAT score is determined based on the average length of time it takes a person to sort words in the third part versus the fifth part. It would be determined that a participant would have an implicit bias or preference for “thin people” if they consistently categorized “thin people” and “good” faster when they shared the same response key, as opposed to the reverse.

An example of how the IAT measures an implicit bias is the test would indicate an implicit preference for “straight” people over “gay” people if a participant was faster at responding to a prompt statement associating “straight” and “good” when paired with a statement that associated “straight” and “bad,” compared with the response when “gay” and “good” are associated with “straight” and “bad” are paired.

When it comes to results, implicit bias preferences are scored within a range of “slight,” “moderate,” or “strong.” The test indicates a strength preference of “slight,” “moderate,” or “strong” according to the speed a participant responds to a series of questions made of word couplings, indicating “good” versus “bad” associations.5 Test results reveal that when there is no shared valence or emotional value connection between two categories of things, it is harder to

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
make a connection. In other words, there is little to no mental glue.⁶ This makes sorting items more challenging when trying to connect a word like, “flowers” with unpleasant words, for example. There is no strong mental connection. This is also what psychologists call mental association. The Princeton WordNet Search defines mental association as “the state of being connected together as in memory or imagination.”⁷ Therefore, it is also the process of the way our brains connect the different mental images we imagine in our heads to each other. Research has consistently proven that people tend to sort good categories faster when pairing people like themselves in their own in-group as opposed to pairing good categories with other groups, of which they are not members. This proves to be consistent when it comes to all categories, including race, age, religion, nationality, and even temporary insignificant memberships.⁸

This type of discovery only made Greenwald continue to push the limits for his testing. In pushing the limits, he stumbled across an interesting finding when it came to race and stereotypes. He replaced and paired names of flowers and insects with stereotypically racially associated white names like, “Adam” or “Chip,” and stereotypically associated African American names like, “Jamal” and “Alonzo,” with pleasant and unpleasant word associations. His intent was to play the same association game. Test results opened the door to a new discovery. He realized it was more difficult to associate the stereotypical white names with the unpleasant words, in the same manner it was difficult to associate the word “flowers” with unpleasant words. What was revealing was that Greenwald found it was easy to associate stereotypically African American names with unpleasant words. The results was that Greenwald’s brain easily associated

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⁶ Banaji, 39.
pleasant words with stereotypically white names. He certainly did not think of himself as a racist, so what was he to learn about these results? He was shocked and in disbelief, yet inspired. With mixed emotions, he contacted his colleague, psychologist Banaji and asked her to take the word association test on her computer as well. The startling revelation was that the results were identical to Greenwald’s. The test results caused much mixed emotions as well as excitement because the results of these sequences of sorting tasks suggested that there was a potential method to measure one’s attitude, thus fueling the creation of what we now know as the IAT and that it may also have the potential to measure racial attitudes as well.

**Project Implicit**

Project Implicit was created as a non-profit organization made of an international collaboration of diverse researchers who are interested in learning more about all types of implicit biases across the globe. It contributes on-going and current participant information concerning biases. According to their website, individuals can access implicit bias tests on-line and take advantage of an opportunity to participate in scientific research by choosing from over ninety different topic areas that include ethnic groups to athletic teams, political issues to pets, and entertainers to different kinds of music. It was founded in 1998 by Greenwald, who was then from the University of Washington, Banaji from Harvard University, and Dr. Brian Nosek from the University of Virginia. Its mission is to provide education concerning bias to the general public by providing a “virtual laboratory” that served to collect data from its internet portal. The

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analyzed results creates a foundation of high-impact research for scientific knowledge concerning bias and disparities.\textsuperscript{10}

Data is collected as interested participants take tests on the Project Implicit website, and made publicly available so that others, especially scientists, educators, and journalists, can readily access information to understand stereotypes and implicit bias attitudes better.\textsuperscript{11} Analyzed results made space for more questions concerning the source of the many biases and facilitated the creation of the Racial IAT. More questions were generated concerning race and attitudes. Was the bias in attitude influenced solely within the mind or by outside forces stimulated by or within the environment? Project Implicit data supported that implicit attitudes are certainly influenced and shaped by our culture, and also that these implicit attitudes are positive and negative evaluations that are mostly unconscious, therefore, we are often unaware, and are mostly out of our conscious awareness.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Racial IAT-Race Bearing Bodies}

Project Implicit analyzed data that alluded to the long history of racial discrimination that exits in the United States. For example, African American groups and other groups of color were often portrayed and associated with negative images across culture and through mass media. In turn, it created a strong implicit preference for the white group. Though negative attitudes of African Americans were represented within culture, it must be noted that these attitudes were

\textsuperscript{10} “Project Implicit, Who We Are Team,” accessed January 15, 2022, \url{https://www.projectimplicit.net/who-we-are/team/}.

\textsuperscript{11} There is also a list of work published of work that used the Project Implicit website.

\textsuperscript{12} Banaji, xii. Hidden biases have the capability to guide human behavior without a conscious awareness of their role.
imagined within our minds. These same imagined subtle psychological implicit bias attitudes influence our behavior every day, therefore, once we are aware we must be vigilant in acknowledging and addressing their influence.

In an effort to focus on racial disparities, Project Implicit facilitated a collaboration with artist and activist, Bayete Ross Smith. The result was the creation of two Implicit Association Tests based on race, the Race Attitudes IAT and the Race Weapons IAT. The unique feature of these tests was that they introduced selected images from the artist’s collection of diverse photos entitled, “Our Kind of People,” in an effort to measure how strong the associations were between concepts, evaluations and racial stereotypes.

Bayete Ross Smith brought much talent as a celebrated interdisciplinary artist from Harlem, New York. The “Our Kind of People Project” added depth to the IAT test, because it included a collection of multicultural artwork that examined perception. It focused on appearance and probed the way clothing, race, gender, and class signifiers not only affect our attitudes, but also how race, gender, and class signifiers affect our daily interactions and social systems. The “Our Kind of People” collection consists of people across the globe who are dressed in their own clothing and photographed with the same lighting and facial expression. The observer views the

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13Smith’s work collections are included in The Smithsonian Institution, the Oakland Museum of California, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the Brooklyn Museum to name a few. He is published in many publications, including, The New York Tomes, Question Bridge: Black Males in America (2005), Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1980s to the Present (2009), Dis:Integration: The Splintering of Black American (2010), and Black: A Celebration of Culture (2005). He is also a Presidential Leadership Scholar and a POV N.Y. Times media maker. Additional information about this collaboration or the Implicit Association Tests, can be obtained by contacting the Project Implicit Team at collab@projectimplicit.net. His website is: http://www.bayeterosssmith.com, accessed January 15, 2022, https://www.projectimplicit.net/brs/.
photos through their own personal lens, placing their own cultural bias onto the image based on appearance.\textsuperscript{14}

The results of the Racial IAT discovered even more unexpected data. When it came to in-group preferences, white participants generally showed a preference for white people. It would explain the implicit bias for white respondents. What was unexpected was that approximately one third of black participants revealed an implicit preference for white people relative to black people, which could not be explained as in-group bias. Black people were not members of the white people in-group, by definition. When it came to exploring the unexplained phenomena of in-group preference for a group, of which you are not a member, it posed yet another issue that was also surprising: there were many results that revealed people prefer one group or another when they are not members of either group. An example given was that Asian participants tended to consistently show an implicit preference toward white people as opposed to black people. It was discerned from these IAT results that black people are not as highly regarded as white people. Even in other marginalized groups, such as gay and older people, there were many results that revealed a moderate preference for the more socially valued group of which they were not members. The reason given was that stigmatized groups develop negative images and associations for themselves and their group because of the negativity generated within the environment.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. These images are provided by “Project Implicit.”

\textsuperscript{15} This is also described as internalized racism, defined by sociologist Karen D. Pyke and elaborated upon by Donna Bivens in \textit{Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building}. She adds that when people of color are victimized by racism, they internalize it, “developing ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviors that support or collude with racism.” Taken from: https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals/core-concepts/internalized-racism, accessed April 10, 2022. An Analysis of Internalized Racism and Oppressions can also be found here.
Neuroscientists generated much excitement around the Racial IAT. There was a high expectation that test results would create new ways of viewing unconscious behavior to better understand discriminatory behavior. This hope was sustained as test result after test results consistently found “statistically significant correlations between IAT scores and some criterion measures of discrimination.” Additional research supported the findings that the IAT score indicated a greater predictive validity than most explicit bias measures when it came to predicting discrimination against African Americans, as well as other minorities.

**Pros and Cons—Made in the Image of God**

Since its design the IAT has received much attention. More than 200 papers have used the method. Hundreds of scholarly papers have reported upon its effectiveness and more than 4.5 million tests have been completed from the online Implicit website. As with any scientific tool it has attracted much criticism and facilitated commentaries on interpretation. As powerful as it has proven to be over the years, the IAT is not perfect. There are strengths and weaknesses. When it comes to its use, there are pros and cons.

To begin, the test does not highlight or affirm all identity categories. Doesn’t this pose a challenge? Theologically, it is proclaimed all humans are made in the image of God. The human personality is very complicated. More identities for the way we see and describe ourselves are still emerging. The IAT creators stated, “It is our view that the positives of understanding the

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17 Greenwald, Poehlman, et al., 2009.
18 Oswald, 188.
19 [www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu).
20 Research was collected by Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, in press for a review.
many ways in which bias operated outweighs the negatives that come with emphasizing binary categories.”21 The good news is that information is also periodically updated to include more recent findings and more current understanding of human thought and feeling in the unconscious realm.

Another feature to be aware of is that sometimes the preference strength results indicate errors. It is human to error. Certainly being nervous could easily be a factor. The good thing is the creators are very aware. The explanation is that the IAT requires a pattern of a certain number of correct responses to get results. If there were a certain number of errors indicated in responses while completing the test, the result will indicate too many errors to indicate the results. It is noted that this feedback is quite different from results that indicate little or no association between concepts. In that case, it would indicate a weak emotional value or valence. That would not be considered an error.

There are other influential factors. If one takes more than one test and there is some difference in results, it is noted that not every testing session is perfect. But, the IAT has been consistently validated within the field of psychology.22 Results are unlikely to change significantly from test to test and in different testing time frames. Yet, some variation can occur and is expected. Results can be influenced somewhat by personal factors such as fatigue or distracting thoughts. Other factors related to the test, such as the way the categories are labeled or the particular words used to represent categories can also have the potential to effect results, though they are noted as usually minor.

21 “Project Implicit.”
22 Oswald, 188; Carney, Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, in press; Greenwald & Nosek, 2001); Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002a; Nosek, et al., in press.
Even the order in which you take the test can have some influence on the overall results. In order to minimize this order effect, more practice trials are inserted before asking the second pairing of associations. Also, each participant is randomly selected for a particular pairing order. The order is not the same each time for each participant. Half of the participants get the “good” versus “bad” paired concept first. The other half of participants get the “bad” versus “good” concept pairing first.

One may wonder whether people with faster hand eye coordination score higher than those who are slower? The tests results confirm that when it comes to hand eye coordination, or cognitive ability, there is no evidence that these factors influence the IAT score. The test scores how long it takes a participant to categorize a concept with a “good” versus “bad” connection. The cognitively faster participant may be quicker to respond, but there is no indication that one category would be uncharacteristically slower or faster to one pairing versus the other.

Repeated IAT test scores also revealed that familiarity with one group versus another group does not influence the IAT results and does not influence the individual categorized items. However, it is noted that faces used in the tests should be somewhat unfamiliar to everyone. But it makes this question a bit challenging because psychological research also revealed that people generally like what is familiar. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that familiarity is likely to be a factor in liking categories. People generally also avoid things they don’t like, but it is noted that implicit bias may be a factor in that unfamiliarity.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
Scholarly discussion include summaries of consistent results obtained using the IAT\textsuperscript{24} details concerning the method and development of scoring,\textsuperscript{25} and various discussions concerning unique reactions to the IAT.\textsuperscript{26} In addition to the scholarly engagement, the IAT and its origin have revolutionized scientific study in the area of unconscious bias and the study of prejudice in the last decade. Millions have taken the self-administered test available over the internet.\textsuperscript{27}

The IAT designers believe that the Implicit Bias Association Test has enabled access to contents of our hidden-bias blind spots: “And where the demonstration of the retinal blind spot allows us to know that the visual blind spot exits but not much more, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) lets us look into the hidden-bias blind spot and discover what it contains.”\textsuperscript{28} Both Harvard and Yale support and identify with the IAT site and stand behind its findings.\textsuperscript{29} I believe it is worth considering by our churches and, therefore will introduce this research into the Bible design.

**Four Feats of the Brain that Cause Implicit Bias: Brokenness\textsuperscript{30}**

Sifting through the IAT data, there are processes the brain performs that constantly engage our brain activities in generalizations and stereotypes that make reaching out to others in

\textsuperscript{24} Carney, Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, in press; Greenwald & Nosek, 2001); Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002a; Nosek, et al., in press.
\textsuperscript{25} Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003; Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005.
\textsuperscript{27} The IAT test is available at [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)
\textsuperscript{28} Banaji, xiii.
\textsuperscript{29} This claim is supported the IAT site, and can be found at [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html), but the hosting universities make no claim to the test results interpretations.
\textsuperscript{30} Feats are also referred to as processes of the brain.
different groups and attempting to love others who are different from us very difficult, especially when it comes to those of a different racialized social category or construct. Because stereotyping and generalizing are a huge part of the way our brain sifts through information quickly, there are four brain feats that work against our work of racial reconciliation because they work hard to make associations quickly as groups, according to categories. A main focus of racial reconciliation is to see people as individuals, beyond categories.

In *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, Banaji and Greenwald describe these particular four “feats” as mental processes that human minds subconsciously perform every day without our conscious knowledge. These four feats are referred to as “multidimensional categories,” “millions of person categories creatable on the fly,” “leaping beyond the available information,” and “cooperative categorization.” Each feat demonstrates the brain’s ability to sort bits of information simultaneously quickly. But it is also the part of our brains that clumps and lumps things and people together in generalized groups instead of looking at each item or person individually, which would take much time. This means that the brain’s strength can also be its weakness. This indicates that when we attempt to see things and people individually, it takes time.

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31 The name for this category comes from an influential essay by Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, titled, “Going Beyond the information given (Bruner, 1957).
32 Ibid, 80-89.
33 It is part of what Allport referred to as the multiple categories that support “orderly living.”
Feat One: Multidimensional Categories: Loose Associations

Information that the brain senses and receives is constantly organized and reorganized into different concepts and placed into categories. It is noted that many of the concepts cannot be strictly defined but are organized with the best matched mental examples, also called prototypes. These prototypes have the most similar qualities. While this makes our brains more efficient when sorting huge bits of information, this feature also makes space for errors or fumbles caused by mental mind bugs.

Feat number one, “multidimensional categories,” is our brain’s ability to process many categories together at once. The idea is that our brain can combine different identifiers or descriptors, such as a car brand, or parts of a car, to come to a specific intended conclusion. The beauty is that our brain has the ability to imagine distinct images by stringing together these individual identifiers with particular and distinct characteristics. Our brains are miraculous machines.

When we say that our brain processes multi-dimensional categories, it is the brain’s ability to see multiple distinct words and place these words into categories that make sense. An example would be if there was a list of sixteen nouns that describe a car, such as “front-wheel drive,” “automatic transmission,” “four cylinder engine,” and “four door sedan,” your brain would probably recognize that the descriptors referred to cars or trucks. If the word, “station wagon,” was added to the list, the brain’s mental image would more than likely change. The word “truck” would probably be eliminated from the mental picture. This means the brain is steadily

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34 As Allport reported in his work “The Nature of Prejudice” and supported by many psychologists thereafter, our brains work by placing information into categories.

connecting terms and creating a specific image as the list is mentally processed. Adding a specific car to the list would make the sorting task more complicated, but many would still be able to recognize and categorize the general or loose word descriptors as a car or truck.

This list could easily be manipulated to include many car or truck descriptors with the human brain’s ability to decode the list in order to make some type of mental picture that matched the list of words. The brain would not only decode and make a single mental picture, but several mental images would be possible with one list of words in a column. Of course, one must be familiar with cars, and one’s brain must have acquired a vocabulary and somewhat familiarity with automobiles in order to be successful on this task sorting into categories. The truth is that the more unfamiliar one is with car terminology the more difficult the task will be. What makes this feature strong is the constant use in daily life. This feat is also based on generalizations, loose connections, and data that is prejudged to make a conclusion as information is processed. A negative impact of this is that the brain can get so used to sorting prejudged objects, and making conclusive generalizations, that it is easy to make a mental fumble and sort the same way for groups of people. As a matter of fact, that’s what happens in feat number two. A habit and constant practice of generalizing leads to and supports prejudging and prejudice. This process of predetermining that makes working with many objects successful causes another mindbug to kick in when it comes to people and can present potential harm.Feat one, as the way the brain processes multidimensional categories helps us understand the way the brain is able to process millions of categories of people quickly, in feat number two.
Feat Two: Millions of Person Categories Creatable on the Fly: Snap Judgment

The “millions of person categories creatable on the fly” is similar to feat one but applies to people. It is the brain’s ability to narrow a huge data set of combinations of group information into a small set. In other words, the brain is able to come to a conclusion quickly with very little information. It is the process we use for making a quick or snap judgment. It is what Malcolm Gladwell, in *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, refers to as thin-slicing. Thin-slicing is defined as “the ability of our unconscious mind to find patterns in situations and behavior based on limited information from a very narrow experience” to come to a conclusion.\(^\text{36}\)

There is a definite value to making snap judgments. We are not always able to take huge chunks of time to make decisions. Snap judgments use what psychologists call rapid cognition. It is the process we use to make quick decisions, like moving quickly from an oncoming car. The answer is that these decisions don’t simply emerge from thin air. They are the result of volumes of information and experiences stored within our subconsciousness.

As we gather knowledge cognitively, it is stored in a form psychologists call “schema.” These are knowledge representations made for people, groups, or situations. These schema represent past experiences and become our reference predictors for future events.\(^\text{37}\) They are the major influencers for how we feel about future events and people. Once activated, our schemas form judgments based on our internal assumptions and biases. They work along with the information already available that is picked up in the environment.\(^\text{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Worthy, 117.
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
a connection or reference, if the schema is more accessible it can be activated much more quickly and used first in a particular situation.

The data used to perform this feat is stored deeply within the unconscious mind. The brain performs an automated, quick unconscious decision. The main thing to note is that rapid cognition is engaged only when there is a small amount of data. This is the unconscious force that influences us when quick decisions, impressions, fast judgments and even first impressions are made.

It is rapid cognition that supports the brain’s ability to generate distinct categories of people based upon different provided terms. These terms can include a huge variety of people with descriptors such as “middle-aged,” “white” or “black,” “Christian” or “Detroit factory worker.” Even though many people may not know a Detroit factory worker, most Americans would not have an issue with creating a quick mental image of such a person because of cultural exposure. But the brain category forming ability is even more complex than we realize. Our brains have the ability to imagine a mental image of someone based on categories of unfamiliar word descriptors. This is a very complex task performed by the brain. For example, it’s more complex than simply recalling a story you’ve read, a conversation you’ve had, or an image on television you have watched. Your brain is able to make a mental image of someone who is totally imaginary with descriptors or dimensions, that are unusual and not real.\(^{39}\)

An example of this brain process is if you were asked to instantly imagine a person described by an unusual combination of descriptors or dimensions, your brain would deliver an image almost simultaneously. For example, if you were given the dimensions or descriptors of

\(^{39}\) Banaji, 82. Research supports that the brain is so powerful it can create a mental image of a person who you’ve never met, who is unlike you, with only descriptors.
“black,” “Muslim,” “French,” and “lesbian professor,” most of us would be able to imagine someone who fits or looks like this description. We more than likely would not know a person with all of these descriptors, but it does not stop the brain from constructing an image, based on what is already stored within the brain.

Once these schemas are developed and implanted within our minds, it is difficult to erase them. They influence our learning in a way that every new person and new situation is interpreted and understood in the exact terms of the knowledge that already exists. The point is that the speed the brain can imagine and produce millions of categories of people based of several item descriptors at once is almost unconceivable. It demonstrates the brain’s brilliance. It definitely confirms the brain’s agility and ability to generate, sort, connect, and use categories.

A problem with snap judgments is that our unconscious energy is a very powerful force that can be fallible. It can fumble. Our rapid cognition can fall short. Snap judgments help us navigate our daily lives, but they can also lead to negative outcomes. The reason this can happen is that alongside past experiences misinformation and biases are also stored. Our brains perceive the world through a lens than can be affected by many things, including distractions and especially preconceived ideas. Two damaging effects of snap judgements are that they are a root that feeds prejudice that can cause both discrimination in general and the Warren G. Harding Error.

Discrimination happens when a person acts negatively upon prejudiced attitudes toward others. This is usually a negative action toward an individual or a group of individuals based on

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Ibid.

one’s membership in a particular group.\textsuperscript{42} When people hold negative beliefs as stereotypes, the targeted person or group of people are usually treated negatively.\textsuperscript{43} Discrimination doesn’t stop with just groups and individuals. It can extend to practices that reinforce social norms, preferences, privilege, and limit access to certain services and many resources. These discriminatory practices are referred to as institutional discrimination and can be very harmful.

For example, research revealed that in the United States, Native American communities have higher rates of injury than other racial groups.\textsuperscript{44} African American communities have lower life expectancy, higher risks for cardiac problems, and higher rates of anxiety and depression than other racial groups.\textsuperscript{45} The racial disparities are a reality and are alarming. These facts represent systemic practices that treat and impact racial minorities differently. This is also a horrid effect of chronic prejudice and racism.\textsuperscript{46} In general, research supports that individuals who are stigmatized by society experience more exposure to discrimination and other forms of unfair treatment. These same groups also report higher levels of anxiety, anger, depression, and lower levels of satisfaction within their lives and overall happiness.\textsuperscript{47} These reports conclude that this type of exposure to chronic types of persistent discrimination is very harmful to one’s health.\textsuperscript{48}

The Warren G. Harding Error is a direct result of making snap judgments.\textsuperscript{49} First impressions and instinct can be powerful and accurate, but they can also be inaccurate and lead

\textsuperscript{43} Worthy, 284.
\textsuperscript{44} Williams, 1999.
\textsuperscript{45} Williams, 1999; Williams & Mohammed, 2009.
\textsuperscript{46} McGee & Ford, 2011; Williams. 1999; Williams & Mohammed, 2009.
\textsuperscript{47} Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001.
\textsuperscript{48} Worthy, 285.
The Warren Harding error happens when unconscious assumptions are made about a person or a group of people and when evidence is presented that proves those assumptions are incorrect, we continue to hang onto the original ideas or opinions. This information error can work in both directions. We may give credit where credit may not be due, or we may withhold credit even when evidence proves that credit is due. One of the most disturbing things about this error is that it may show that our unconscious attitudes are incompatible with what we believe or are out of alignment with our conscious values.

Understanding how this error originated helps us understand the way this error operates. Harding was the 29th president of the United States. By most standards he looked like he would make a great president. Many historians agree that he was one of the worst presidents in U.S. history because he was not considered particularly bright or articulate. He rambled when he spoke. His life was filled with drinking and illicit affairs. Yet, he was able to become the Republican candidate for president and was elected in 1920. He served two years and later died of a stroke. He was handsome, tall, and built. He looked like a president, but lacked suitability. Yet, many held onto his image and the idea that he would be a great president. Our 49th president, Barak Obama was born in Hawaii, but many believed that he was born in Kenya, Africa, in an effort to discredit his election as president. Even when evidence was presented to prove his birth place, there were those who refused to accept the evidence as truth.

These types of implicit biases can also be dangerous. When we assume things, whether positive or negative, and they are not true, yet hold onto these assumptions once evidence is

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[harding-error-implicit-bias-part-2/](#). Also referred to as the dark side of rapid cognition in Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, p. 76.

Ibid.
presented to prove our assumptions wrong, it can cause much harm. Because these biases are implicit and unconscious, we may not even realize this is what is happening. There are times when snap judgments can be just as good of a decision as a decision that takes longer to make, but there are times when our own instincts can betray us.

Feat Three: Leaping Beyond the Available Information: Erroneous Assumptions

Our world is complex. Our mind, body, and senses are constantly stimulated. We receive and organize information. We structure understanding by what we already know using representations that are familiar.\(^{51}\) Because our brain balances stimuli within the environment while sorting a billion bits of information at once, we often do not actually see what’s happening. We mostly see the world as our brains interpret it and not as it actually is. One never truly experiences the outside existing world of our brains in a perfect, objective, or simply pure way.\(^{52}\) Ideas, views, values, cultural norms, and the things we see and experience within our environment make a huge impression upon us. The brain has the ability to fill in information where it is missing, in order to make order and facilitate understanding. Our brains work by relying on assumptions and expectations. It works the same way the brain compensates for the blind spot in the eye.

The brain’s ability to go beyond information that is actually provided is also similar to connecting the dots between lines or discerning something from information that is not available or given, to come to a conclusion about who a person might be. It’s challenging to think of a

\(^{51}\) Worthy, 110.
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
person without assigning a gender or race, and sometimes an age. When we ask anyone to think
of a person, they usually assign characteristics and features they store as defaults within their
minds. These defaults are created with bits of information gathered from our environments and
experiences. The manner in which we think about others, gather and retrieve social information,
and navigate our lives both consciously and unconsciously refers to our social cognition. 

If you were asked to think of an American, what image would your brain imagine?
Would you think of a Hispanic teen? Would your description be an African American senior
female? More than likely you would think of a white adult male. Even if you did not choose a
white male adult, it more than likely ran through your mind as a choice. In other words, you
probably consciously chose someone else with features other than a white male adult because
those characteristics were available within your mind. These images fill your mind and tint your
imagination. These are the default characteristics for an image of the word “American.” The
reason that your mind connected the characteristics of “white,” “adult,” and “male,” is that those
are the characteristics of Americans we mostly see, hear, and more than likely, experience in
popular culture, even though these characteristics are not possessed by the majority of people you
come in contact with each day.

The point is that the brain adds default attributes or characteristics to images within our
heads so easily and so often, we are unaware. The interesting thing is when we refer to an
American other than a white American, we usually add additional description. We say African
American, Asian American or Native American. When we mean to refer to a woman, we usually

add the word, “female.” If we only say the word “American,” the default characteristic is more than likely “male,” if no other characteristics are given.54

The brain adds information that is not provided or is assumed in order to help us perceive quickly and construct an image that makes sense. Most of us are aware of what can happen when we make assumptions. There is much room for error. There is a higher possibility of a negative result. This is especially true when the brain assumes characteristics about a person or a group of people, especially when it comes to race. What we assume is gathered from the environment around us and viewed through a lens of our own culture. Millions upon millions of default images and combinations of images are stored subconsciously within our minds, as described in feat one and feat two. In sorting through choices of associations and connections, the brain can easily make an error or fumble in constructing its image.

I was a manager at Radio Shack in the early eighties. One day my assistant manager had an issue with a disgruntled customer. When the customer asked for the manager, I appeared from my office to address his request. The expression on his face showed that his brain must have sifted through about every stereotype he could imagine. My assistant manager was a middle aged, graying white male. I was a twenty-three year old, African American female manager. Considering this was also a field of technology and electronics, I can only imagine what stereotypes were shuffled in his mind.

The problem with this feat is these default characteristics are made of stereotypes we create about groups of people. They are filled with assumptions and become a part of our implicit biases. These stereotypes support ethnocentrism and feed confirmation bias. Because the brain works so efficiently adding default attributes we take for granted, it can facilitate what

54 Banaji, 84.
psychologists call ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is perceiving the world mainly through one’s own culture and belief systems.\(^{55}\) It opens the door for privileged attitudes and mentalities of racial supremacy and religious arrogance. It is the tendency to believe that one’s own culture, race, cultural group or religion is superior to others, therefore is the most important. Many refer to this attitude as cultural ignorance.\(^{56}\) I see it as cultural arrogance. Christians can be and often are guilty like Pharisees

Another problem with this feat is it facilitates confirmation bias. This happens when we tend to seek and favor information that confirms our expectations about what we already believe. They are often self-fulfilling. This is another way that our constructed schemas confirm our biases in many contexts and groups. When we interact with or encounter others, our brains leap beyond the available information and can make erroneous assumptions about their behavior. This happens mainly because it bases that assumption on our own norms, beliefs, values and experiences gathered from within our cultural environments. One can go as far as categorizing another’s behavior as wrong or immoral. In some cases that belief can cause one to forcibly attempt to convert the person to their way of thinking or believing.\(^{57}\)

**Feat Four: Cooperative Categorization: Misread Signals**

The brain’s ability to help other people assume what we want them to believe about us. It is the way we reveal ourselves to others. Our eyes are sensors that respond to outside stimuli to

\(^{55}\) Worthy, 28.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
create sensations the brain understands. It is referred to as transduction.\textsuperscript{58} It is done without conscious thought. Research concerning unconscious mental function is not only complicated but has changed dramatically with the increased understanding of human behavior.

Humans almost always send signals to others about the categories to which they belong. We each send a message or signals about who we are by the way we dress. Clothing also helps identify occupations. It is just one of the many ways we assist others in placing us in a particular category. The psychological process we use to make sense of different stimuli is called perception.\textsuperscript{59} It happens when we interpret and organize information received from our senses. This process determines how we process different information.

In addition to race, one of the most dominant areas by which we categorize each other is gender. Results using the “Our Kind of People Project,” in the Racial IAT helped us realize how much humans naturally categorize each other not only by race but also by facial features, body shape, clothes, posture, and many other aids. American society spends much money on jewelry, makeup, manicures, hair styles and particular stylish dress that accentuates one’s gender. Stereotypically women wear more form fitting clothes. Males stereotypically wear looser fitting clothes. These items are “markings” that basically advertise and send messages about the way we express our person. These markings usually assist others in placing us into categories within their minds.

Psychologists regard the tendency to act and think like the people around us as conformity. Conformity is the tendency to be influenced by what others think. This human

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 110.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 111.
tendency appears to be quite universal. It also is affected by interaction between an individual and their culture. It is the “cooperation category” at its best. There is also a powerful human need to belong. Research described this need as “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful interpersonal relationships.” Nonconformity is the desire to advertise or market oneself in a non-stereotypical manner. This is when the cooperative categorization phenomenon engages what psychologists call the uncooperative variant. This contributes to misreading signals. Demands of culture cause individuals to integrate, synthesize, and coordinate worlds differently, which produces differences in self-concept. Cultural norms are reinforced and maintained by cultural practices and social structures. There are also occasions when we send visual signals that misrepresent who we really are. It is called the uncooperative variant of cooperative categorization. An example would be what is called the phenomenon of white suburban teenagers dressing in what is described as “ghetto” in order to make a particular statement. In this case, one sends a signal to misrepresent the category they are normally assigned.

The problem with this feat is that it is often grounded in false truth and stereotypical expectations. An example is when African Americans replace ethnic names and experiences from resumes in an effort to level the playing field concerning prejudice in job selections due to racial bias based on “naming” stereotypes. It is a practice that misrepresents who they authentically are

60 Bond & Smith, 1996.
61 Worthy, 287.
63 Worthy, 147.
64 Banaji, 85.
65 Worthy, 201.
66 Banaji, 85.
as job candidates. Removing traditionally African American colleges, sororities and fraternities from job applications is a realistic experience for many African Americans. It is called “resume whitening.”

Another result of this feat is that people engage in cooperative categorization when they are in stigmatized racial and sexual orientation groups. Instead of avoiding the category, they embrace it. They force themselves into a category that does not fit. This may suggest that actually sending a signal concerning their category avoids misrepresentation in the first place. The power is in their hands to signal their group as opposed to being forced into a group by stereotypical expectations. Rather than avoid their category or group, their orientation is known, mainly to others of the same orientation, but also to everyone. It makes it easier for those with the same orientation to identify each other for support and potentially avoid some levels of misrepresentation. In some cases, the knowledge of identities may outweigh the disadvantages.\(^{67}\)

The damaging effect of this feat is that it is so engrained within our society that it prevents people from being who they really are and affects how people exist and navigate this world in their own authentic personalities. Signals can also be misread. It creates behavior in people that uses energy to create an image for themselves that is not always true. This type of behavior creates images of who people want to be and how they want to be seen and received instead of how they really are. Cooperative cooperation is stereotypes at their best because they can be used for one’s own perceived advantage even though deceptively, and can even appear to “take on a life” of their own. For example, when “long hair” is observed it is often instantly associated with the stereotype for “female,” without knowing someone’s category as “female” then inferring

\(^{67}\) Banaji, 85.
“female” from the stereotype “long hair.” Cooperative categorization further demonstrates how deeply engrained stereotypes are and how prevalent they operate in every day operations of our lives.

The Racial IAT helps us see the damaging effects that general loose associations, snap judgements, erroneous assumptions and misread signals can cause. Together they operate as psychological barriers to reconciling relationships with others who are different from us, especially when it comes to race. At the same time, we are able to acknowledge a part of our human brokenness as a concrete reality. It is powerful to know these biases exist and how they operate. This knowledge fuels our passion to address negative effects of stereotypes as people of God.

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68 Banaji, 87.
3. Dismantling Mind Bugs: Hope for the Future

**Why We Can’t Wait: Stereotype Threat**

We are who God says we are. We are fearfully and wonderfully made\(^1\) in God’s image, after God’s own likeness. We are God’s handiwork\(^2\) created in Christ Jesus\(^3\) to do good works\(^4\), which God prepared in advance for us to do. Because of God’s grace\(^5\) we are not what the world thinks. Acting upon implicit biases is part of our human brokenness that fuels the stereotypes constructed in our brains and feed our minds. Negative stereotypes not only inflict much harm when engaging other people, they can also potentially pose a huge threat to our self-image, self-perception, and self-esteem. Stereotypical thoughts and beliefs we harbor about groups and other individuals also influence our performance, both positively and negatively. The seeping effects of negative stereotypes can eventually erode how we see ourselves and corrode the very essence of our being.

Negative stereotypes are so deeply engrained within our society that they produce what psychologists call stereotype threat.\(^6\) It occurs when there is a disconnect between the positive image we have of ourselves, skills, and abilities, and the effect of the negative stereotype predicting a poor performance.\(^7\) These negative influences within the mind can potentially cause

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1 Psalms 139:14, 26:7, 40:5 (NIV).
2 Ephesians 2:10, also in Romans 1:20.
3 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15.
4 Galatians 5:13, 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Timothy 2:14.
5 Titus 2:11, 14. It is God’s divine grace that is gifted first. Good works are fruit.
6 Introduced by Claude Steele. When members of a negatively stereotyped group are even subtly reminded of a stereotype, they underperform.
negative emotions, apprehensions, anxiety, and even doubt. When we begin to believe that we will perform poorly, we experience “unease and status threat.” A negative expectation can easily become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Examples of stereotype threat are well documented, though there are critics who disagree.

Research revealed that negative stereotypes play a huge role on African Americans in academia. This research also supports the hypothesis that African American students in the United States do not perform as well on standardized tests, receive lower grades, and are not as likely to continue an academic journey in comparison to white students, even when family income, parents’ education, and other related elements are monitored. Results suggest that these type of performance differences may be partly attributed to activation of negative stereotypes. The hypothesis considers that African American students are aware of this inaccurate stereotype and it creates a negative expectation. As a result, this negative expectation interferes with students’ ability to perform academic tasks due to fear of confirming the stereotype. It creates much pressure. One of my former Duke professors referred to it as the “fight or flight mode” for African American students, especially when attending predominately white institutions. Under the pressure to defy stereotypes and perform well, the academic task is perceived as threatening or stressful and creates an automatic physiological reaction. It activates the sympathetic nervous system and causes an acute stress response to fight or flee. The heart rate increases, blood vessels and pupils dilate, blood flow pulsates, sugar levels increase in the liver and blood flows away

8 Worthy, 330.
9 Critics disagree in four main areas: (1) mixed effects in operational high stakes testing environments (Cullen et. al, 2004; Stricker and Ward, 2004; Sackett and Ryan 2012); (2) conditions of necessary boundaries, (Sackett, 2003; Sackett and Ryan, 2012, Ryan and Sackett, 2013); (3) low percentage of field studies (Kray and Shirako, 2012; Kalokerinos et. al., 2014; Kenny and Briner, 2014; Streets and Major, 2014).
10 Steele and Aronson, 1995, and also Banaji, 224. Footnote 7.
from essential body functions to the muscles in preparation to run. Thoughts race and attention focus is affected. It can also cause panic attacks. Stereotype threat affects the body psychologically and physically.

An interesting discovery was that when students performed a test and were not asked to indicate their race, they performed better. It is what researchers, Steele and Aronson, argued was mainly due to stereotype threat. They explained that it can lead to a decreased performance because negative stereotypes that are directly related to the task at hand create much pressure to perform, which becomes performance anxiety. Their research ultimately supported that the impact of race on standardized tests may be partially caused by the performance situation itself.\(^{11}\)

Stereotype threat was proven to be true in other marginalized groups who were also targeted by negative stereotypes and where performance decline was noted.\(^{12}\) The research goes further to additionally support that socially advantaged groups also experience diminished performance when stereotypes were engaged. White males performed worse when they were told their scores would be compared to Asian males.\(^{13}\) White students performed more poorly when they were told their athletic ability scores would be compared to African American students.\(^{14}\) This highlights that this research is even more meaningful because it is evidence that stereotype threat is real and can affect almost anyone under the right conditions.

The good news is research\(^{15}\) has supported that stereotype threat is not an absolute mindset. Positive energy that unfolds as actions, statements, and body language are able to reduce

\(^{11}\) Ibid.


\(^{13}\) Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, & Steele, 1999.

\(^{14}\) Stone, 2002.

\(^{15}\) Research by Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, & Ruble, 2010, confirms the reduction techniques for stereotype threat.
the effects of stereotype threat. Knowing that stereotype threat exists is the first step in dismantling its effect. In fact it may positively influence performance and potentially erase its negative impact.\footnote{Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005.} There may be critics who disagree whether stereotype threat exists, but I’ve experienced this for myself. In fifth grade, I was an only black child in an all-white classroom with a white teacher. I made a perfect score on a spelling test, but my teacher wanted me to take the test again. I didn’t understand. My mother explained to me that the teacher could give me as many tests as she wanted because “I was smart.” My mother looked me in the eyes and said, “They can’t take what you know.” I still didn’t understand and aced the second test as the teacher glared. I now believe the eyes were glaring to see that I was not cheating. It made me nervous. I was too young to fully understand what was going on, but I knew my stomach was queasy and I spent much energy on wondering what the teacher thought. As an adult, I realize this teacher had a low expectation of my performance and probably believed that my good grade was due to cheating. It is interesting how negative childhood experiences remain so vividly a part of your memory. This experience could have had a negative impact, but I had a mother who knew how to navigate this situation. In retrospect, I realize my mother’s positive attitude toward this situation greatly reduced my anxiety. I was nervous, but I was able to perform.

Stereotype threat research is powerful data that helps us better understand yet another way mindbugs negatively affect our unconscious biases. It confirms that as efficient as the brain is, it can unintentionally cause mental fumbles along the way. These fumbles as stereotypes can have devastating potential, but there is hope for the future. We cannot wait to address these issues as people of God. Many of God’s valuable and capable people are affected negatively because these biases threaten to override the mental image of our Christian identity. They impose doubt
where God implants confidence and victory through His power. Therefore, there is an urgency in addressing the effects of mind bugs as psychological barriers to reconciling people of different races.

**Outsmarting Mindbugs: Formation through Faith**

How do you outsmart a mindbug? That is exactly the question researchers asked. If you are wondering why total elimination of mind bugs all together was not suggested as an option, there is a simple answer. The human mind is extremely complicated. The human body is a miracle in progress. Of all the accomplished work completed in understanding mindbugs and human bias, the one thing agreed upon is mindbugs are relentlessly persistent. Research has not revealed a consistent pattern of eliminating mindbugs, as of this writing. Previous attempts suggested that the least necessary requirements when attempting to dismantle mindbugs include, awareness, a desire to improve, and a method for improving.

One of the first promising attempts to isolate the race stereotypes mindbugs was recorded by Nilanjana (Buju) Dasgupta in the late 1990s. Dasgupta worked with Banaji and Greenwald, the creators of the Race IAT, when she first began work in this area. She wanted to see if there was a way to at least “weaken” the associations of Race IAT results. She examined whether the results of the Race IAT would indicate a reduced “automatic” white preference for the participants who began their task being exposed to images of ten very famous and highly

17 Studies conducted by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004), and Asgari, Dasgupta, and Cote (2010), Phelan (2010), completed similar studies that support this claim.
18 Banaji, 149.
19 Ibid, 147.
20 Ibid, 149.
esteemed African Americans. The images included people like, Martin Luther King, Jr., Colin Powel, Denzel Washington, and Michael Jordan.

Dasgupta designed an original advanced test that used the facial images of twenty well-known Americans. There were ten highly esteemed African American faces, with two alternative descriptions of each. Both descriptions were positive, but only one of them was correct. The other description was incorrect. Participants were directed to select the correct identification description for each person. Mixed in with the ten images of African Americans were images of ten infamous white Americans. The images included people like serial killers, “Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, Charles Mansion, and Ted Kaczynski. Also included was an image of mass murderer, Timothy McVeigh.”21 The ten images of white Americans were accompanied by two descriptions, as well. Both descriptions were extremely negative. Examples of the negative descriptions included phrases like, “Unabomber who injured and killed using letter bombs,” which was a correct answer, and “convicted pedophile.”22 To make sure participants had good exposure to the twenty images, the task was completed twice. At the end of the testing session, the participants completed the Race IAT.

Dasgupta’s results were promising. Participants who viewed images of the ten prominent African Americans with the ten images of contemptible white Americans showed a weaker IAT measured “white” equals “good” association than participants who took a comparison exercise that included initial exposure to admirable white Americans. In order to increase reliability, Dasgupta completed this examination of race and associations several more times. The results were the same. She later followed these tests with ones that used the same procedures but

21 Banaji, 150.
22 Ibid.
substituted elderly people. Results again indicated a weakened IAT score which measured associations between “young,” and “good” once participants were exposed to admirable images of elderly people, like Mother Teresa.\textsuperscript{23}

About the same time Dasgupta completed her research, another researcher, Irene V. Blair\textsuperscript{24} was conducting research at the University of Colorado. Her work focused on consciously using the imagination to think of images with “strong women.” She used brief imagination exercises that involved asking a series of questions. Examples of questions asked included, “What is a strong woman capable of?” and “What types of hobbies would a strong woman enjoy?” These simple mental exercises were effective in weakening the “male equals strong” association stereotype, when compared to those who participated in a different mental exercise.

These results were worth getting excited over as a pivotal moment and fueled motivation for this project on racial reconciliation. The good news was these consistent results showed that the biases were immediately affected by simple methods, and the Race IAT measured hidden bias results were malleable. The not so good news was that further research revealed that these results were not permanent. Biases were affected but for only for a short period of time. The measured weakened associations results lasted anywhere from three to approximately six weeks.\textsuperscript{25} Researchers now understand the temporary changes in the IAT score as an elastic band effect. It happens when measured IAT associations are weakened, but over time they return to their original position.

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\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} PhD. Yale University, 1995. Blair’s Research demonstrated a brief intervention effect that modified implicit bias, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination attitudes in laboratory use.
\textsuperscript{25} Banaji, 152.
Hope was refueled when reintroduction of countering methods or strategies caused another weakened shift in stereotypical associations measured by the IAT. The cycle continued with repeated stimulus. Mindbugs were affected temporarily, but not eliminated. While these were not the results researchers hoped for originally, which was the total elimination of mind bugs, this finding was still extremely promising. Mind bugs could be affected immediately, and the strength of mental associations were reduced with very “minimal interventions.”

Excitement continues to build because these research results make space for sustainable possible interventions to retrain the brain.

**Retraining the Brain: Shaped by God’s Word**

We are aware that mindbugs, stereotypes, and prejudices create barriers to racial reconciliation because these mindsets obstruct our ability to recognize people as individuals. Our minds work to clump and lump things and people together in categories that make navigating our worlds faster and much easier, but they can also cause discrimination. When discrimination targets a particular race, it becomes racism. Racism is not of God. Jesus said, “Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”

As people of God, our desire is to exercise Christian obedience when it comes to sincerely loving others, as Jesus commanded us. We pray to do God’s will by addressing stereotypes and prejudices as a part of the “darkness” caused by sin within us. This is essential work because these biases present barriers when truly

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26 Ibid, 151.
reaching out to love Christian brothers and sisters who are different from us, especially when it comes to race. In attempting to address the four selected psychological barriers to racial reconciliation, we must remember that reconciliation work is God’s work. Our method is to pray and plan, before we proceed.

**Feat One: Countering Loose Associations**

Feat one is the brain’s ability to sort many categories at once, quickly, as loose associations. Countering loose associations as a deeply engrained automatic bias is extremely difficult for several reasons. It is constantly used daily and is the basic foundation for the majority of the other three mental sorting categories. It overlaps with the other processes which makes it difficult to separate, and it works intimately with feat number two, which directly affects snap judgment. Since mindbugs that cause our biases cannot be eliminated, as far as neuroscientists have discovered, research suggests that the repetition of new practices that would engage people that do not look and think like you have a positive effect on category association strength in our brains’ automatic sorting. There are several practices that have the potential to be effective.

First, interact with someone of a different race, regularly. This intentional act can potentially interrupt your normal practices. If every member in your church congregation looks like you, ask yourself why there are no others who look differently than you. Look around at work. Is there someone there of a different race or ethnicity than you? Extend a kind gesture, like offering a cup of coffee or bottled water for no reason. Watch their face. Offer to sit with them at lunch. Offer to buy lunch. If you feel uncomfortable, ask yourself why? Examine your heart. Be honest. God’s work extends beyond our church walls or Zoom screens on Sunday.

Make it a habit to see people as individuals. Our brains sort in categories and lumps us all together. Can we intentionally make it a practice to look at someone and actually see them? By
“seeing” them, I mean imagine your person of interest invested in the same emotions as you have, for example, desiring to do well at work or in school with a motive only to do their best or buying a home at an affordable price in a safe neighborhood, without barriers, or jog in a neighborhood without being stalked like an animal, or take a nap in a restaurant parking lot without being racially profiled, shot, and killed. Examine images of different people on social media, in office magazines, advertisements, or look at the pictures in photo frames in stores, and imagine what that person eats for breakfast or does for a hobby. Have you ever looked to see how diverse those pictures are? Do you have to look through several selections to find someone other than a white face or family? Yes, it takes time and intentionality, and that is the point. It helps us practice seeing people of different races as God’s creation. Our relationship with others is “inseparably” rooted in our relationship with God.

Buy toys and cards of another race or ethnicity. For example, buy your child, grandchild, god child, niece or nephew, or friend’s child, a doll or coloring book of another race. Does it feel weird to even think of that? Black families and people of color have purchased dolls, cards, toys and PJs, Disney characters, books and Hallmark cards for years with faces that do not look like them. Ethnic items are still harder to find and many times are much more expensive. Give your family a card with a family of another race and watch their reaction. If it is hard to imagine or evokes an emotion deeply inside upon reading this suggestion, that is the point.

**Feat Two: Countering Snap Judgments**

Feat two is the brain’s ability to sort millions of characteristics of people at once, and construct a mental image.Feat one and feat two work so intimately together, that the brain can get so used to sorting prejudged objects and making conclusive generalizations, that it can easily
make more mental fumbles when it continues to sorting the same way for groups of people. As a matter of fact, that’s what happens in feat two. Quick decisions can easily lead to discrimination.

**Countering Discrimination**

In feat one, the brain gets much practice sorting and connecting without sensing. Discrimination happens when we act negatively upon prejudiced attitudes toward an individual or a group of individuals based on one’s membership in a particular group. To counter discrimination we must discipline ourselves to not act so quickly on the first thought that comes to mind, especially when it comes to people. Even if you have the gift of discernment to distinguish between what is right and wrong, it is a “best practice” to have a little talk with Jesus. God will guide us to our best decisions. We must learn to take some time to pray and think before we act, whenever possible. If we are selecting friends, choosing a seat at church or at a conference, give it some thought. Ask yourself some questions. Why are you choosing to sit or not sit by a particular person? It draws the awareness, understanding, and the action associated with a decision, into your consciousness. Every thought, word, action, relationship, habit, and every emotion we hold shapes us, either toward the image of Christ or away from it. Paul reminds us that whatever we do, in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord, Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through Him.

Another practice is to make curiosity and wonder your default mindset. You can avoid making snap judgements that may be potentially harmful by engaging “curiosity” and “wonder,”

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28 Worthy, 284.
29 1 Kings 3:13.
30 1 Kings 3:9.
31 Colossians 3:17.
first. When you encounter someone or a situation that is “different” or “unfamiliar” and default to “curiosity” or “wonder” instead of “judgment,” we open ourselves to learning and receiving new information. We can pose questions that allow us to better understand. An example is to ask the meaning of a statement or explanation of a new perspective or an opinion, rather than making erroneous assumptions, especially if they are negative. Even Jesus grew in wisdom.\textsuperscript{32} The Bible reminds us that it is God’s glory to search things out,\textsuperscript{33} when it comes to invoking an humbled spirit and a desire to grow and learn. Explore, look at things differently. Create time to wonder and explore together.

Be aware of body language. Our bodies speak without words. Personal space, eye movements, facial expressions, cast glances, hand gestures, folded or outstretched arms, clinched teeth, voice tones and volume pitch often speak louder than words. A frown and a body shift away from a person, instead of toward a person can suggest a negative perspective of the person you are shifting away from. The Bible reminds us that our bodies can expose a person’s intentions.\textsuperscript{34} Jesus’ touch was gentle when he lifted a sick girl to her feet,\textsuperscript{35} cast His eyes toward heaven when he spoke to His Father\textsuperscript{36} and gently broke bread and offered wine with his hands.\textsuperscript{37} We fold our hands and bow our heads when we pray.

Be aware of the tendency to judge. This is a really hard one. Christians are often highly judgmental. We should not make conclusions about other people based on skin color, clothes, or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Luke 2:52.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Proverbs 25:2.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Proverbs 16:30-32.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Mark 5: 21-23, Matthew 9:18.
\item \textsuperscript{36} John 17-1-26.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Matthew 26:26.
\end{itemize}
where someone lives. This is superficial judgment.\textsuperscript{38} It is another negative habit that does not reflect the ways of God. God is the only judge of human character. The best way to stop judging is being aware that it is a bad habit. When we have a habit of judging other people, we must realize that we are tuning people out. When we jump to snap judgments as final conclusions,\textsuperscript{39} we stop listening. When we stop listening it often leads to inappropriate decisions. We can easily be wrong about something we thought we were right about because we had a skewed perception.

The Bible reminds us that we should not judge, because we too will be judged and by the same measures we use, will be used on us.\textsuperscript{40} We should keep this as a screen saver or as a daily pop up on our computers as a constant reminder.

Look at someone and see them as someone you love. If you look at someone and imagine that you love them, it will be much harder to see that person as a reflection of a stereotype, or to racially profile them. It opens the door to possibilities of seeing that person for who they are and for what gifts they possess. When you can look at someone of another race or ethnic group and see or imagine them as someone we love, it changes your whole perspective and mindset. As Christians, we don’t love someone because we feel like it, or because they will love us back. We love them because God first loved us.\textsuperscript{41} We are commanded to love each other. I wonder (taking

\textsuperscript{38}John 7:14.
\textsuperscript{39}Proverbs 18:13; Luke 7:36-50.
\textsuperscript{40}Matthew 5: 1-7.
\textsuperscript{41}John 4:10.
my own advice), if the officer,\textsuperscript{42} who kneeled on George Floyd’s neck,\textsuperscript{43} saw him as his brother, or imagined him as someone whom he loved, if he would have allowed him air to breathe?

**Countering the Warren G. Harding Error**

If we include people who have different opinions often in our circle of interactions and allow them to voice them there are immediate positive effects. First, it reminds us that there are other perspectives. It exercises the practice of selecting others who are different from us and engages listening. When others who look differently than us are included regularly in our daily lives and conversations, this habit will be easier to practice. It will take intentional practice and selection, but when we make a habit of asking others to share their opinion who we know have a different perspective, we make space for their story. It’s harder to feed our own bias. The Bible was compiled over hundreds of years and includes inspirations from human witnesses from diverse backgrounds such as fishermen, shepherds, tax collectors, lawyers, kings, farmers, and physicians from three different continents and written in more than one language. God touched many diverse different lives to inspire us today. We should do the same. Everyone has a story to tell. Not everyone gets an opportunity to share their story. If it is shared, not everyone’s story is heard and validated. Christians should make habits of listening to the stories of those who are different than they are, especially when it comes to race. It builds patience, the habit of listening, and eventually leads to some level of empathy. Besides, racism hates contact. When different

\textsuperscript{42} Derek Chauvin, 44, a white American officer in the Minneapolis Police Department, who was filmed pressing his knee into the neck of an unarmed black man, George Floyd’s, for approximately 44 minutes and 46 seconds, resulting in his death.

\textsuperscript{43} The 46 year old, unarmed black male, who was accused of buying cigarettes with a counterfeit twenty dollar bill, and murdered by Officer Chauvin, after he and onlookers called out for help that he could not breathe, on May 25, 2020.
Christians come together, it has the power to erase fear, and provides opportunities for relationships to take root.

Pay attention to positive examples and accomplishments of different racial and ethnic groups. It helps shift your biases and add to your mental associations. The Race IAT results supported that viewing positive images of other races reduced stereotype mental associations. Regularly viewing a diverse group of individuals and groups with positive energy has the potential to eventually strengthen your positive mental associations with on-going exposure. An example would be to read about and celebrate Juneteenth, research accomplishments of African Americans in addition to those you already know, or engage African American voices through various media venues.

We should make sure facts support our conclusions and consider those conclusions with careful thought and consideration. This may alleviate the effects of “hunches” and “perceived charisma” from being considered fact. This is another one that will take much practice because the urge to confirm our own bias is strong. We should intentionally look for the facts and ask someone who has a different opinion to engage another perspective for the same reasons that we should not judge each other. This certainly will not be easy, but every day is new and filled with God’s grace and mercy to try again.

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45 Lamentations 3:22-23.
Feat Three: Countering Erroneous Assumptions

Countering Ethnocentrism

When our brains leap beyond available information and make erroneous assumptions, it can contribute to ethnocentrism and feed confirmation bias. Psychologists suggest that ethnocentrism can be lessened with cultural relativism and confirmation bias can be countered by allowing ourselves to be wrong. Cultural relativism is the practice of valuing practices of a culture from the point of view of that particular culture. In order to prevent ethnocentrism from becoming harmful we must be intentional in relating as much as possible to the perspectives of other cultures. Jesus became flesh and lived among us. He showed much compassion for humanity mainly by stripping himself of His glory in the Incarnation and walking in our human shoes. God sent his only Son, in the “likeness of sinful flesh.” Jesus knows human struggle and understands the human point of view. Jesus operates from a stance of understanding and humility. If we are to reflect Jesus, we must humble ourselves and pray to consider another’s person’s perspective and cultural practices. When we position ourselves to allow someone else’s ideas and thoughts to have priority, we are in a position to learn and disengage our own pride. Cultural relativism deters the notion to immediately think the worse of, dehumanize, demonize, or even make snap negative judgments about another culture or another way of living that is different from ours. A culturally relative mindset focuses on understanding instead of relying on stereotypes of unfamiliar cultural practices. The ultimate goal is to promote cultural differences as

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46 Research is still unfolding in these areas.
47 Worthy, 28.
48 Philippians 2:7.
49 Hebrews 2:17, Hebrews 4:15.
a positive, but it is not a perfect solution. There will almost always be issues. We should lift them to God in prayer.

A problem with human cultural relativism is that there is not much space for healthy discussions of differences in opinions or perspectives. In its extreme form, it too can cause harm. One must be careful not to use a mindset of cultural relativism to avoid hearty discussion and debate when differences emerge. Differences matter and are important. Social scientist and theologian Dr. Christiana Cleveland writes in *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart*, that, “we should never forget or ignore our very substantive ideological differences or refrain from making strong statements concerning how we view faith in God and how we live out our faith in practical ways.”50 Healthy disagreement makes a relationship stronger and more authentic. We don’t want to be patronizing, assuming that cultures other than our own are not strong enough to withstand questions and robust discussion concerning their practices.51

Christians especially should cultivate cross cultural relationships because of our commandment to love others. In doing so, we begin to acknowledge, respect, and understand the other person’s life style and practices thereby diminishing the possibility of forming erroneous assumptions. It creates space for possibilities one could never imagine, and that is a step in the right direction toward loving those who are different from us, especially when it comes to race.

**Countering Confirmation Bias: Allowing Ourselves to Be Wrong**

Allowing ourselves to be wrong is one of the hardest things we must do as humans. I say we “must do,” because no one is right all of the time. Confirmation bias feels good. It boosts self-

50 Cleveland, 18.
51 Worthy, 29.
esteem and jolts the ego of the person who engages. Christians should remember that being humble is one of the first and most important requirements of being a disciple of Christ. Scripture reminds us in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that humility is absolutely essential in establishing a solid relationship with God and other people. It is also necessary for maintaining a proper perception of ourselves. C.S. Lewis reminds us that “true humility is not thinking less of yourself it is thinking of yourself less.”

We must humble ourselves. In order to put others first, the “selfish” human flesh requires extra energy and more prayer. One of the most popular Scriptures is when John prays to “decrease” so God can “increase.” This is an example of a prayer to humble ourselves in this world. We must seek Jesus before we seek anything else, especially our own gain. When we take the time to get to know someone else by the content of their character, it opens the possibility that we could be wrong about that person. We don’t like to be wrong. This is the result of confirmation biases emerging and taking over our behavior.

Be careful what you think. You must take some time with your thoughts. They should be well considered. How do you do that? Don’t make assumptions, in the first place. The alarming harm about confirmation bias is that this often involves many other biases at once, such as those related to age, gender, and height, as well as race. We can easily make an erroneous assumption in any of these areas. There is a quote that reminds us to be careful about what we think because thoughts become words. Our words become our actions. Our actions become our habits. Our habits determine our destiny. It brings to mind Proverbs 4:23, “Above all else, guard your heart,

52 This quote comes from the Jewish moral tradition that deliberate attempts to achieve humility can be self-defeating.
53 John 3:30.
54 This quote is cited as author unknown.
for everything you do flows from it. It reminds us that we must have the “right” beliefs about all other brothers and sisters in Christ, in our heart and minds. The “right” belief is that they too, are created in God’s image and loved by God, and therefore they deserve our love, respect, and our time in consideration. Those beliefs will feed our thoughts, aid in the transformation of our mental infrastructure, and discipline our tendency to make and follow our snap judgments. If we believe the best intention of others before we believe the worst about them, those intentions will feed our words, actions and habits. Our actions will be more life-giving, than life-threatening, especially to those who are different from us. We will move in the right direction and that is toward the love of Jesus and away from the darkness and hate of this world. When we move closer toward Jesus, we automatically move closer to each other.

Ask more questions. We lessen assumptions by asking more questions and listening deeply. If we make the assumption that we know who others are, how they think and how they feel, there is no reason to pay attention to them. We stop listening. It is the ultimate form of arrogance. When we ask a question it opens a door to discovery. Asking a question is a form of being humble. How is it humble? It allows the person you are asking to step into your space and invites their opinion. Dr. Christina Cleveland believes that “Cultural differences in the body of Christ enable different types of people to draw nearer to the heart of Jesus.” What a gift.

Listen deeply. Listening is an essential element in learning. Many of us do not do it well. One of the most popular Bible stories that illustrates listening is the account of Mary and Martha hosting Jesus. The story of Mary and Martha emphasizes priorities in an atmosphere of busy. Mary listened to Jesus even though she had many things to do. She chose to listen. She chose to

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55 NRSV.
56 Cleveland, 20.
remain in Jesus’ presence, listening intensely, even when Martha was steadily complaining that she needed her help in preparing a meal for their guests. This is a great lesson for Christians today. We must make priorities and choices that feed our relationship with Jesus, in spite of many life distractions. The choice “to listen” and “who we choose to listen to” says much about who we are. Listening deeply to someone is the ultimate gift. How is it a gift? We actually stop what we are doing and give another person our undivided attention. It draws us “out” of ourselves into the life of the person sharing. This is a rare thing in today’s society that values “busyness.” It is also a vulnerable gesture to allow someone else to “have our ears” and listen without interruption. When we listen to another without our own thoughts or answers running around in our head, it is a way to truly see and value the other person’s thoughts, ideas and opinions. Listening builds relationships. Listening without judgment builds trust. The habit of listening with trust builds community.

**Feat Four: Countering Cooperative Categorization: Misread Signals**

*Countering Misread Signals*

Acknowledging our authentic selves is becoming self-aware. We acknowledge and admit that we are sinful and broken. It is also a part of our humble posture. Since we all fall short of God’s glory,\(^57\) we must remember that we too are sinners saved by God’s abounding grace.\(^58\) If it were not for the blood of Jesus, where would any of us be? The good news is Jesus redeemed us all with His blood on the cross and his resurrected life.\(^59\) It is the whole reason for our faith. We

\(^{57}\) Romans 3:23.  
\(^{58}\) Ephesians 2:8.  
\(^{59}\) Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24-25, 2 Corinthians 5:21.
are now able to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive God’s mercy and find God’s grace as our aid in our time of need. We are fallen, shattered and fractured by sin, but we are still able to reflect God’s light. As a matter of fact, shattered glass has the ability to reflect many prisms of God’s light. Biased categories force many of us to be “what we are not” in the world. When we operate according to the world’s expectation of us, we get out of alignment with God. We also become vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. We must learn to look into the mirror and see ourselves as we truly are: wounded, broken, imperfect, with nothing to offer but our vulnerable self, yet loved unconditionally. We submit our broken authentic selves to God for His purpose in our lives. We must allow ourselves to receive and give love because God created us and redeemed us in love.

Humans almost always send signals to others about the categories to which they belong. Items such as hair styles, clothes, sorority and fraternity regalia, pastor robes, stethoscopes around our necks, music, wedding bands, engagements rings, and even the books we read speak volumes about how we are perceived. Because the world puts us into boxes, sometimes we are compelled to act according to the “checked box” or how we are “perceived.” We deny who we really are inside. We send wrong signals to the world because we often feel pressure to conform and thus we contribute to the misread signals that others act upon. At the same time we also misread signals from others, who also feel the same pressure to conform. It is a never ending cycle of confusion. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. When we misread signals and view others’ actions, life decisions, and opinions through this erroneous lens, it can cause potential

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60 Hebrews 4:16.
62 1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV).
harm. Actions we may consider to assist us in overcoming these biased stereotypes, after we acknowledge our authentic self through prayer include, confessing and repenting of our sins, and speaking life to empower our siblings in Christ for God’s purpose.

Confession and repentance are a part of our Christian discipline. When we engage issues of justice in the world, sometimes we depend too much on our own abilities. We must remember to invoke the character of God because both restoration and hope are rooted in a dependance on God’s covenant loyalty to us. Because of God’s covenant loyalty we are able to appeal to God. We can lift our hearts and hands to heaven with confidence that God will hear our sincere cries of repentance. In the whole book of Lamentations, people’s hope is directly connected to submission to God, and not to confidence in their own human abilities. When we confess and repent, we are submitting to God’s authority and His divine will.  

Speak life. The tongue has the power of life and death. Even the tone of our voices speaks volumes. We must allow our words to be shaped by the Word of God. Reconciling speech is not our native language. It comes as a result of our baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit. This new way of speaking wells up in us and our communities. We speak, teach, and preach toward reconciliation but “from a reservoir of forgiveness that, had we not received it and shared it among ourselves, we could not speak it.” As Christian leaders, propelled by our love for God and each other, it is our duty to remind all of our siblings in Christ of the good news of Jesus

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64 Proverbs 18:21.
66 Ibid.
Christ. Negative stereotypes do not define who we are. We are not what we do, or what other people think. We are who God made us to be. We are loved unconditionally, regardless of lifestyle, past choices, past sins, or the color of our skin. When we allow our words to begin to reflect God’s Word, it becomes part of our transformation.

We acknowledge and engage our biases through, prayer, repentance, and committing to actions that are opposite of our biases. When we do so, it weakens the emotional valence that holds a stereotype securely within our mental images. As we begin to mentally transform it affects our interactions with others. We slowly begin to experience another level of human connection. We take a step toward Jesus and a better understanding of what it means to be a part of a beloved community.
4. A Step Toward Building a Beloved Community: Embodying God’s Love

What Is A Beloved Community?

As disciples of Christ we are called to live as an example of God’s love toward us. In exploring some key reasons why it is so hard for Christians to love racially different Christians, we’ve examined over eighty years of neuroscience research, probed implicit bias, blind spots, and the social constructs of racism from a theological perspective, and discovered four psychological barriers to racial reconciliation. These automatic mental processes operate as biases we are often unaware of that can cause “blindness” to true knowledge about individuals when living our everyday lives and connecting with different groups, especially when it comes to race. We now have a better understanding of what is needed to take the first step toward cultivating a beloved community.

I define a beloved community as a group of Christians who recognize that all fellow Christians who make a commitment to Christ are worthy of respect because they are made in the image of God. We are all considered the same Christian family no matter our race, color, or denomination and acknowledge that it is the love of God that holds the community together as beloved by the power of the Holy Spirit. This definition is based on Ephesians 2:19: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.”¹ But, when information about different groups is received and stored in our brains, biases are not recorded as such. Because we are unaware of them, these hidden biases have a powerful influence over our behavior and are the root of stereotypes, which can lead to prejudice and racism. Instead of loving each other as siblings in Christ, our mindbugs facilitate

¹ NRSV.
division, fear, and injustice. Our arrogance often prohibits us from taking the time to get to know people individually. When we take the time to stop, be still, and allow God to be God,\(^2\) we realize our comfort with our patterns of thought is destroying our relationships and communities God desires for us to inhabit.

We all are affected by racism. Despite the many gains made in the civil rights era, the scourge of racism continues to divide and destroy our country, in large part due to unconscious neural processes. It can be seen painfully in the increase of anti-Asian violence, which included the fatal shootings of six Asian American women at three spas on March 16, 2021, in Atlanta, Georgia. According to Mai-Anh Peterson,\(^3\) co-founder of Britain’s East and South East Asian Network,\(^4\) “It also has a wider ripple impact on the Asian diaspora worldwide.”\(^5\)

African American hearts continue to break due to a pattern of attacks on brown and black bodies within their communities that result in death: seventeen year old Trayvon Martin, on February 26, 2012, eighteen year old Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, twelve year old Tamir Rice on November 22, 2014, twenty-three year old Elijah McClain on August 30, 2019, twenty-six year old Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020, forty-six year old George Floyd, Jr. on May 25, 2020, and twenty year old, Daunte Wright, who was stopped by police for a traffic violation, and

\(^2\) Psalm 46:10.
\(^3\) Besea.n is a grassroots organization that focuses on improving representation of ESEA people in the UK and highlights various voices within the community. Promoted the #StopAsianHate hashtag which gained much attention in the US after the increase in violent attacks on members of the Asian community.
\(^4\) Also referred to as (Besea.n.), in the complete title.
shot at close range. It was reported as a police error in Brooklyn, Minnesota, on April 11, 2021. These race related incidents only name a few.

Violence has fractured our communities, and racism has divided us in our own cities, though many of us live side by side. Christians cannot afford to sleep soundly at night while racism and violence lurk, black bodies suffer, and brothers kill each other. Americans, claiming the love of Jesus and patriotism, are simultaneously storming Washington and churches are isolated behind their Scriptures and Zoom screens carrying on isolated segregated church business as usual. Churches on many levels appear blinded to the darkness growing thicker and lurking in the world, especially when it comes to the conflict between the races. What are we, as the church, doing in response to this senseless violence?

**A Bible Study: Addressing Four Psychological Barriers to Racial Reconciliation**

Stereotypes are a part of our world. They are the oversimplified, exaggerated assumptions, and very generalized beliefs, we believe about a person or a group of people. They can be both positive and negative. However, stereotypes are usually negative and can be very

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A full AP’s coverage of the case can be found at https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-daunte-wright.


8 A mob of approximately 2,000 former President Trump’s supporters attacked the capitol city in Washington, DC, January 6, 2021, defying presidential win of Joe Biden. Also: https://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/without-help-christian-nationalism-decades-making-might-not-been-insurrection
harmful, especially when it comes to race as they involve pre-judging, snap judgments, erroneous assumptions, discrimination, prejudice, and racism.

Racism is sin. It is a blind spot in our Christian character. Blind spots are those areas we do not see or care not to see. It happens when we act negatively toward others because of stereotypes and assumptions about people as a group. It is a part of our human brokenness. They are those spaces and places within us where we are out of alignment with God’s intentions for us. God made each of us unique in His image. We are commanded to love each other, as disciples of Christ. Yet, we struggle to address this issue as the Church and wrestle with theological solutions as people of God.

As a diverse group, we will attempt to answer the question: What do the spiritual expressions, “fellow citizens,” “saints,” “stranger,” and “the household of God” really look like in the everyday Christian realities of our current diverse contexts filled with sin and brokenness? We will especially take note of strengths and weaknesses of our multiple lenses in biblical interpretation. By integrating Scripture and incorporating the Harvard Implicit Association Test provided by Project Implicit, and other secular anti-racism tools in a diverse community, I seek to take an important first step toward creating a larger program focused on cultivating love between “alien” groups within the Christian community separated by race by overriding automatic perceptions and prejudices lurking in our minds as stereotypes. Through the creation and deployment of a Bible Study in an intentional community of faith, we will explore some key reasons why it is so hard for Christians to love racially different Christians by looking at implicit bias, blind spots, and the social constructs of racism from a theological perspective, in an effort to take the first step toward cultivating a beloved community.
Fumbling With Love

This Bible Study will involve five weekly, one and half hour sessions, and will explore, discuss, and reflect upon four processes of the brain that are performed without our knowledge that contribute to bias and feed stereotypes. The goal is to create connection across racial differences through this shared experience of diverse church leaders and lay persons. The recommended maximum group size is 20. My approach involves Biblical interpretation, group psychology, and theological reflection. Each session will begin and end with prayer. Recognizing stereotypes and addressing them in five sessions is only a beginning to addressing these issues as the Church. The last session will include repentance in community, a prayer of lament, sharing of the Lord’s Supper, and a commitment to intentional ongoing practices as disciples for Christ.

Love and being God’s disciple animates this Bible Study. Love acknowledges, values, is connected to, and is the essence of God. Love is patient, long suffering, and enduring when it is a part of God. Professor J. Kameron Carter states in *Race: A Theological Account* that love becomes distorted when it turns away from or against God. It is not love if its object is any “thing” of the world. Love is distorted when the desire of the creature is no longer the creator. As disciples of Christ, we are called to love. But we can easily fumble when it comes to extending love to each other. Even when we mean well, we can still cause harm. Stereotypes do not point to God and love. Blind spots do not allow our actions to reflect Jesus’ love and what it looks like in our world today. Bishop William H. Willimon, in “Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love” states that we cannot afford to fear “the other” more than we fear the God who commands us “to love.”

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9 Carter, 347.
10 Mark 12:30-31, Ephesians, 4:2, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13.
11 Willimon, 39.
Prayer will keep us humbly connected to God and to each other. We will pray to turn from our wicked ways, repent of our sins—both conscious and unconscious—and courageously face the prejudice within us. We will intentionally work to prevent actions that cause others harm, especially if they are of another race. Repentance as confession and forgiveness are partners on our journey. Both keep us and our ministries communal and mutual.\(^{12}\)

Theological reflection is a main part of our pilgrimage together. It will allow us to critically discern together where we are going,\(^ {13}\) discover who we are in relationship to others, and engage our faith foundations as God is revealed within us. We will pray to think with the mind of Christ, and announce to the world the ways we discover that Jesus Christ is working within us to lead people out of mental forms of slavery that binds us to our biases, toward a new kind of imagined freedom through and in Christ.

**Lesson One: Fumbling with the Right Intention**

Opening Prayer: Gracious Lord, You are our almighty God. Thank you for this day that you have given us. We pray to go as deep into the heart of darkness within ourselves as You will lead us toward and see a part of ourselves that we have never confronted before. We pray that our theological reflection will allow us to reflect on the painful and joy-filled truths of our past and in our present contexts, in an effort to raise our human consciousness of the stories lived and shared by our siblings in Christ, especially those of another race. Sometimes it is hard to see you, God, reflected within us. We pray to be still in our discomfort as we fumble toward love together.


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
Lord, be our witness, drowning out the noises of our world caused by our biases and negative stereotypes. We lean toward the voices and stories that are unheard and need consoling or validation. We pray to be courageous leaders with outstretched arms, unafraid of who may need to run into them and need comforting. It is in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.

Introductions: How Do We Present Ourselves? Who Are You? Share your identity in a way that is comfortable for you. Tell us who you are. What Makes You Special? What do you hope to gain by being here?

Creating Community: “Show & Tell” Something that Represents YOU. Everyone was asked to bring something that represents “You.” We have a short period of time together to get to know each other. Learning what people care about is a way to see a part of our hearts.

Establishing Community Norms: What Do You Need to Feel Safe? As we discuss racial issues many may feel uncomfortable. You may realize things or something about yourself you did not know. New experiences and new information concerning sensitive areas about race and racism may bring new feelings you were not expecting. Share characteristics of an environment where you would feel safe: Examples are: (1) Listen, without Judgment, (2) Speak Your Truth in Love, and (3) Allow for Disagreement and Other Perspectives. Customize needs.

Goals: Understand how the brain contributes to racial biases. Create a shared experience. Listen.

Neuroscience: Multidimensional Categories

Multidimensional Categories is our brains’ ability to sort things, making loose and generalized associations by clumping and lumping things and people into categories for easy sorting. It sorts
efficiently without sensing. It works well when it comes to “things,” but it can cause mental
mistakes when it to comes to people. Neuroscientists cause these mistakes mindbugs. We will
refer to them as fumbles. They cause stereotypes, prejudging, and excessive generalizations. We
will define a mental fumble as an attempt to communicate with another person, when our words
don’t always point to the right meaning or the intended emotion we wish to invoke. This can
happen for several reasons. One, we just don’t know what to say. Our words fail us. Or we intend
one meaning and the meaning lands so far off, that we end up sounding foolish. Let’s share some
examples.

Theological Frame: Proverbs 21:2 (AMP)

“Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs and examines the hearts of
people and their motives.” The Bible is filled with people of God falling short of extending God’s
love when doing God’s work. They meant well but they ultimately caused harm. We can use the
Apostle Paul as an example. When referring to the people of Crete, Paul used stereotypical
conclusions, and referred to them all as “always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”

Paul actually did not mean to refer to every Cretan. He meant to refer to only the Cretan
teachers or influential members of the Cretan Church. Even that reference can be examined
closely. But the point is, in his zealousness to make sure people were sound in faith, Paul grabbed
a quote by a very popular Cretan prophet, Epimenides, who used the same statement extensively,

14 Titus 1:12-13 (NSV).
15 Titus 1:12 as One of Their Own Prophets Has Said, "Cretans Are Always Liars, Evil Beasts, Lazy
Interpreter's Study Bible New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon
Press, 2003), 2144.
and referred to it as the absolute truth for all. Epimenides was a highly regarded poet and philosopher, during the sixth century B.C. This was a description of his own people.

That is the danger of stereotypes. They sometimes contain a tidbit of truth. I am sure there were Cretans who were liars, as there are liars in any community, but not “every” Cretan can be categorized this way. But this statement was accepted as an absolute truth, and applied to a whole group of people. The intention was not to harm, but they both used a very misleading stereotype in their zealously that the people be sound in their doctrine.

Another example was when Paul described “the cross of Christ” as foolishness to Gentiles and a stumbling block for Jews.16 Not “every” Gentile thought the cross was foolish and not “every” Jew stumbled because of the gospel. Again, Paul did not mean to reinforce a stereotype, but he did. He meant to simply relay the message that different people and different cultures responded differently to the gospel. His larger message was that we should be careful of our methods, and our words, when we are trying to deliver the precious good news of the gospel. We must be aware of the culture we are attempting to reach. That’s our message. Paul fumbled in his love for the people to be saved and be led by sound doctrine. His intention was good. His heart was in the right place, but his words and actions fumbled his intent.

There is potential harm when we use stereotypes in the first place, but more harmful when they are negative and refer to a whole group of people, especially when it comes to culture and race. We don’t want to continue to facilitate the “bad habit” of applying negative stereotypes

16 1 Corinthians 1:23.
to all people. The good news is that God looks at our heart.17 Paul was “entrusted by the command of God our Savior,”18 but he still made a human fumble.

As we reach out to love those who are different from us, we may fumble in our attempt to love them and share the gospel with them. But, like Paul, we are still held accountable for the hurt and harm we cause. As beloved children of Christ, we reach out to love those who are different from us because that’s what Jesus did. Our goal is to become more like Christ, imitate His ways.19 This means that our goal is to follow by Jesus’ example and see others as Jesus sees them, individually, compassionately,20 with souls, hearts, hurts, desires, and their own individual depth of brokenness. In our obedience to God, we will be positioned to let go of our stereotypical views, generalized conclusions, and not cast judgment according to what we only can see, or by what we “think” we know, or what others say, but instead, perceive others correctly.21 We desire to see people through God’s eyes, not ours.

Theological Reflection: Small Groups

In what way could you identify with Paul? Suggest ways Paul could change his response(s) to not include stereotypes? How would these suggestions impact us as disciples of Christ?

Activity: Engage Conversation:

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17 1 Samuel 16: 7.
18 Titus 1:3 (NRSV).
19 1 Corinthians 11:1, Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 2:6.
20 Matthew 9:36.
(1) Find Your Physical Blind Spot. This is a simple exercise with a sheet of paper and a pencil drawn dot on the page. We see how the physical blind spot operates. What implications and enlightening thoughts come to mind?

(2) Circle: Countering this biases is with activities that work to make us aware of our stereotypes, and practice listening. Key Learning Objective: Level the Playing Field. We all are affected by stereotypes. Arrange seats in a circle. Pass a designated object, such a stuffed animal or another small object, as each person speaks. When each person finishes, the object is passed. No response is added.

Round 1: Each person shares a time when they know they stereotyped an individual or a group in their leadership. Share and pass the object.

Round 2: Share a time when you were the victim of a stereotype in ministry. All of us have either been a victim of stereotypes or have victimized others. In some cases, we may have experienced both. Those who occupy places of privilege may suffer less or in a different way. The group leader begins and passes the object around the circle until all have shared.

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22 Instructions in “Blind Spots: Searching for the Light” section, page 1, footnote number 4.

23 Though this may seem like an ideal time to take the Race IAT, the desire of the facilitator is to build a sense of community in an effort to make more participants feel safer in volunteering to discuss test results, after more time has been spent together in conversation and discussion.

24 A simple communication process structured to build community. Participants reconnect with appreciation of themselves and others, from sharing and listening without judgment.
Embodiment: What did you discover about yourself in this circle listening activity? What implications does this have for the Church? In what ways can this circle listening activity serve your context? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Anything enlightening to share?

Homework: List five meaningful ways to counter stereotypes.

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, Help us to listen and see each other as individuals, created in your image. Give us the eyes and heart of Christ. Touch my leadership. Help me learn my own habits, tendencies and practices and those of my congregants. Help us use this information to build your Kingdom. We pray that our response is pleasing to you, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson Two: Fumbling with Snap Judgments

We live in a hectic world. We constantly have a need for quick decisions. Our brains serve us well, shifting and sorting and merging information to make navigating our hectic world much easier. That is until the brain makes a fumble. We are human; sometimes our brains make an association based on what is already available, therefore a hunch or instinct may give the quickest answer or response to a situation we perceive as needing a quick solution.

Opening Prayer: Gracious Lord, Thank you for this day to gather in love with my colleagues to examine our quick decisions. Help us slow down and take time with our conclusions. We pray not to make snap judgments that may be harmful to others. Help me be aware of the outcome of my decisions and know when I am engaging a stereotype. Amen.
Reestablishing Community: Revisit Norms. Share one thing that resonated with you from previous lesson.

Neuroscience: “Millions of Person Categories Creatable on the Fly”

Our brains process everything in categories in order to navigate the world more quickly. The “millions of person categories creatable on the fly,” is similar to “multidimensional categories,” but applies to people. It is the brain’s ability to narrow a huge data set combinations of group information into a small set. In other words, the brain is able to come to a conclusion quickly with very little information. It is the process we use for making a quick or snap judgment. It is what Malcolm Gladwell, in *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, calls thin-slicing. Thin-slicing is defined as “the ability of our unconscious mind to find patterns in situations and behavior based on limited information from a very narrow experience” to come to a conclusion.25 Snap judgments use rapid cognition. It is the process we use to make quick decisions, like moving quickly from an oncoming car. Therefore, rapid cognition helps us respond to danger or answer a question quickly.

As we gather knowledge cognitively, it is stored in knowledge representations called “schema.” These representations are made for people, groups, or situations. Schemas represent past experiences and become our reference predictors for future events.26 Once activated, our schemas form judgments based on our internal assumptions and biases. They work along with the information already available that is absorbed from the environment.27 Once these schemas are

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26 Worthy, 117.
27 Ibid.
developed and implanted within our minds, it is difficult to erase them. They influence our learning in a way that every new person or situation is interpreted and understood in the exact terms of the knowledge that already exists.\textsuperscript{28} The point is that the speed the brain can imagine and produce millions of categories of people based on several items, descriptors, or dimensions is almost unconceivable. It demonstrates the brain’s brilliance. A problem with snap judgments is that our unconscious energy is a very powerful force that can be fallible. It can fumble. Our rapid cognition can fall short. Snap judgments help us navigate our daily lives but can also lead to negative outcomes. Decisions we make “should” reflect that we are a Christian. Everything we do “should” glorify God and promote the well-being of our neighbor.\textsuperscript{29}

Two negative outcomes of this process are the Warren G. Harding Error and discrimination. Discrimination happens when a person acts negatively upon prejudiced attitudes toward others. This is usually a negative action toward an individual or a group based on one’s membership in a particular group. The Warren Harding Error happens when unconscious assumptions are made but when evidence is presented that proves those assumptions are incorrect, we continue to hang onto the original ideas or opinions. This information error can work in both directions. We may give credit where credit may not be due, or we may withhold credit, even when evidence proves that credit is due. A modern example is when our 44\textsuperscript{th} president, Barak Obama was born in Hawaii, but many believed that he was born in Kenya, Africa, in an effort to discredit his election as president. Even when evidence was presented to prove his birth place, there were those who refused to accept the evidence as truth.

\textsuperscript{28} Piaget et al, 1962; Taylor & Cocker, 1981.
\textsuperscript{29} 1 Corinthians 10:31.
Theological Frame: Romans 14:10-12

Scripture reminds us that every person seems righteous to himself in his or her own eyes. This message is repeated\(^{30}\) to confirm its importance. If we are discriminating against someone, it is often not in our consciousness that we are discriminating. It is easy to surmise that what we think and believe is correct. It is what Scripture calls self-righteousness. Though, we must be aware of what is inside of the heart because God looks at the heart.\(^{31}\)

We can use the Apostle Paul as another example. In Romans 14:10-12 Paul asks why would any Christian would want to judge or despise another sibling in Christ when God will also judge them? He explains that judgment will come at the end of times. Paul asks, “Why do you condemn another Christian?” Christians certainly have enough to do to make sure their own lives align with God. There should be no time for judgment of others. Paul reminds us that “judging other Christians is not our job.” Highlighting examples of Paul and the human tendency to judge makes us think about our own sin and fallibility, as well as provide a way to overcome the Harding Error. Faith gives us resources and tools that are often lacking in our general culture for generating transformation.

Paul reminds the church at Corinth that there would be a judgment, but they would not be in the judgment seat. Why do you look down on another?\(^{32}\) They too would sit with every other Christian in history for their judgment, as well. We all come to God through faith in Christ.\(^{33}\)

\(^{30}\) Proverbs 21:2, 16:2, 16: 25.
\(^{31}\) Repeated from last session. Take note.
\(^{32}\) Romans 14:10.
\(^{33}\) Final judgement of whether we go to heaven or Hell is expressed in Ephesians 8:2-9. It is Christ who will judge Christian works.
Scripture reminds us that “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.” Jesus will reward good works. In the end, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. Christians will be held accountable for every life choice, thought, mental association, habit, word, and action that was considered worthless. We will not be judged by human standards, but by Christ’s standards.

Activity: Countering Warren G. Error or Confirmation Bias

Journaling Activity: Respond to the theological reflection prompts.

Theological Reflection: Share a time you experienced discrimination or the Warren Harding error? Which message about judgment resonates with you the most and why? According to Paul, what is most dangerous about judging others?

Embodiment: What does this look like in your context?

Small Group Discussion: In what ways does discrimination or the Warren Harding Error emerge in your context? What does a “default attitude of wonder” mean to you? In what ways would it be effective or not effective?

34 2 Corinthians, 5:10.
35 1 Corinthians 4:5.
36 Romans 14:11.
37 1 Corinthians 3:8.
Make a list of constructive ways these two biases could be countered. Anything enlightening to share?

Homework: List sustainable practices that would help Christians not judge each other.

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, Help us not to discriminate toward each other. Keep our hearts and minds open to hear your voice when we are faced with choices. Help me take time with my decisions and discern what is pleasing to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson Three: Fumbling With Assumptions

When was the last time you made a wrong assumption? If you’ve not made a wrong assumption, think of a time when someone else did. We make assumptions from what we see, hear, think and imagine. It is a human tendency, but Christians must be aware of them as our sinful flesh often wants to think negatively about someone else to “puff up” ourselves. This is dangerous because Christians don’t want to be self-righteous or harm our neighbors. Assumptions too often reflect what is inside, and nothing about the “other” person.

Opening Prayer: Gracious Lord, We humble ourselves on this day because You alone are God. Help us not make assumptions. Lord, we pray not to be self-righteous, thinking that we are better than anyone else. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

38 Colossians 2:18: Filled with knowledge, as idol notions in an unspiritual mind. Yet, this is misinformed knowledge.
Reestablising Community: Revisit Norms. Share one thing that resonated from our previous lesson.

Neuroscience: Leaping Beyond the Available Information

Our brains work by relying on assumptions and expectations. The brain’s ability to go beyond information that is actually provided is similar to connecting the dots between lines to come to a conclusion about who a person might be. It’s challenging to think of a person without assigning a gender or race, and sometimes an age. When we ask anyone to think of a person, they usually assign characteristics and features they store as defaults within their minds. These defaults are created with bits of information gathered from our environments and experiences. The manner in which we think about others, gather and retrieve social information, and navigate our lives consciously and unconsciously refers to our social cognition. The brain adds information that is not provided or is assumed in order to help perceive quickly and construct an image that makes sense. Most of us are aware of what can happen when we make assumptions: there is much room for error.

Assumptions can lead to ethnocentrism and confirmation bias. Ethnocentrism involves perceiving the world mainly through one’s own culture and belief systems. It opens the door for privileged attitudes and mentalities of racial supremacy and religious arrogance. Confirmation bias happens when we tend to seek and favor information that confirms our expectations and what we already believe. They are often self-fulfilling. Cultural relativism, the practice of valuing

40 There’s the popular expression that when we assume, we “make an ass out of you and me.”
41 Worthy, 28.
practices of a culture from the point of view of that particular cultures offers a potential antidote to these ills. When we are able to look through the eyes of others, it changes our perspective.

Theological Frame: Romans 14:13, Matthew 12:36-37, and John 7:24

There are nearly 200 Bible verses that warn against judging each other.\textsuperscript{42} \textsuperscript{42} “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.”\textsuperscript{43} \textsuperscript{43} Making erroneous assumptions can create stumbling blocks. The story of Pentecost\textsuperscript{44} is an example of assumptions. The disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit for the very first time, and people broke out speaking in tongues. When this happened people were shocked and assumed they were drunk. They made an assumption that was careless.\textsuperscript{45} \textsuperscript{45} They confirmed their own biases and made an assumption from their own view based only on what they saw. “In the last days, God will pour out his spirit on all people. Sons and daughters will prophesy, young men will see visions, and old men will dream dreams.”\textsuperscript{46} \textsuperscript{46} Scripture reminds us not to make judgments about what we can only see superficially.\textsuperscript{47} \textsuperscript{47} Assumptions cause us to sometimes jump to conclusions. “The problem with this brain process is the default characteristics are made of stereotypes we create about groups of people. They are filled with assumptions and become a part of our implicit biases.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[42] I Googled the question, “How many Bible verses warn against judging?” The return was 194, on March 14, 2022 at 10:54 PM (Eastern Day Light Savings Time).
\item[43] Romans 14:13 NIV.
\item[45] Romans 14:3.
\item[46] Acts 2:17 NIV.
\item[47] John 7:24.
\end{footnotes}
Another example of assumptions is the story of Eli and Hannah. Hannah was a godly woman. She was one of two wives of her husband, Eli (Elkanah), the priest.  

48 Eli’s other wife was Peninnah. She had given birth to sons and daughters, but Hannah had no children. Her heart was distressed because she was unable to bear children. Hannah cried and prayed often. During one of her visits to the house of the Lord, she was observed by Eli. She was in much emotional turmoil as she wept and prayed. As she continued to pray, Eli was watching. Hannah stopped praying out loud and continued praying silently within her heart. Only her lips were moving. Eli immediately thought she was drunk. He heard her sound of her voice initially, but when he could no longer hear her words, he could Hannah’s only see Hannah’s moving lips. This looked very unusual to Eli. He assumed she was drunk. Eli made a conclusion that was a negative assumption. He did not take time with his thoughts. He did not ask questions. He was so sure of his own conclusion that he spoke firmly, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.”  

50 Hannah answered in her own defense, “No, my Lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.”  

51 She asked Eli to please not consider her a worthless woman.  

52 Eli realized his mistake. He realized he was wrong, and responded,

48 1 Sam 1:1-2 NRSV.
49 1 Sam 1:9-13 NRSV.
50 1 Samuel 1:14 NRSV
51 1 Samuel 1:15 NRSV.
52 1 Samuel 1:16 NRSV.
“Go in peace; the Lord Israel grant the petition you have made to him.”\(^{53}\) Eli’s assumptions could have added additional harm to Hannah’s already fragile state and saddened countenance, but he listened and realized his error. Scripture reminds us, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”\(^{54}\) Eli was Hannah’s husband and a priest, but still fumbled in his assumption of Hannah.

In this same manner, when we don’t humble ourselves and invoke arrogant attitudes of ethnocentrism and confirmation bias, we are tempted to believe that one’s own, culture, race, cultural group, religion, ideas, conclusions, or beliefs are superior to others. When we attempt to reach out, interact, or encounter others or a situation that we are unfamiliar, our brains leap beyond the available information and make erroneous assumptions about others’ behavior. When these assumptions are negative, they can be hurtful in many ways. Because ethnocentrism and confirmation bias are often supported by lack of familiarity with people from other cultures, and situations we are unfamiliar, forming friendships with diverse people can help counter these inclinations. Giving others the benefit of the doubt, and “thinking the best” before “thinking the worst,” is the beginning of loving your neighbor as yourself. Can you identify in any way with Eli or Hannah?

\(^{53}\) 1 Samuel 1: 17-18 NRSV.

\(^{54}\) Proverbs 18:13 ESV.
Activity: Awareness: Ethnocentrism, Confirmation Bias: Let’s review various images of Jesus. Reflect on them in various ways. For example, which images would fit in with existing church decor? Which would not? Why? Which image speaks to you? In what way?

Theological Reflection: In what way does religious or Christian arrogance emerge in the story of the Pentecost? How does confirmation bias play a role in both Eli and Hannah? In what ways can allowing ourselves to be wrong have positive effects? Share any enlightening moments.

Embodiment: How does ethnocentrism lead to white supremacy or attitudes of privilege in the church? Give examples of ways to counter these attitudes that will help the church? What would these ways look like in your context? Homework: Reflect upon today’s lesson.

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, We are humbled before you. Only you are perfect. Help us discern attitudes of arrogance and superiority when dealing with others, especially when it comes to another race. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson Four: Fumbling with Misread Signals

Humans regularly send signals about the categories to which they belong. Items such as hair, music, wedding bands, and even the books we read communicate how we want to be perceived. Because the world places us “into boxes” that describe us, sometimes we are compelled to act according to the “checked box.” A list of “checked boxes” includes, male or female, single or married, citizen or noncitizen, and Black, White, or “other.” Stereotypes can be
so engrained within society that we begin to think “in stereotypes.” For example, when we hear “married,” it conjures an image within our minds of what “married” looks like. For many of us, “married” is closely associated with “family.” Though the “family” image is constantly changing the ideal American family portrait remains, a mother, father, and children. The 2010 Pew Report revealed that 99% of Americans defined family as a couple married with children. It also revealed that 54% of the general public do not think of a man and woman who live together, are not married and without children are a family. The stereotype for what a family “looks like” is so pervasive that couples can feel inadequate who are unable to bear children, or choose not to have them. The pressure to confirm can be great because the “stereotypical expectation” of a married couple is to have children. If we are not careful, we begin to allow “stereotypes” to dictate our major life decisions.

Since we live in a world of visual signals, we not only “send” signals “to” others that place us into their mental categories, we also “read” signals “from” others in order to place them into our mental categories. It works both ways. Sometimes we manipulate signals, because we know our signals are being read. “It is not possible to be human and to avoid making use of

55 Banaji, 88. When a particular stereotype is presented, it alone determines how we respond. Research supports this tendency with a study using the statement, “Ducks lay eggs.” It illustrates that a statement that applies to “some”, is almost always inappropriately applied to “all. This illustration was borrowed from cognitive psychologist Sam Glucksberg (Khemlani, Glucksberg, & Rubio Fernandez, 2007.)

56 Statistic reported by the 2010 Pew Report. See details in next footnote, #56.


59 2010 Pew Report: Only 88% considered childless married couples as a family. Only 86% consider a single parent with at least one child a family. Only 80% consider unmarried couples with children as “families.” These numbers support a huge stereotype of what a family looks like. A smaller majority 63% consider a gay couple raising at least one child a family.
stereotypes.” For example, when we think, “old,” “female,” or “physical beauty,” standards are often based on stereotypes set by society. It is reported that Americans spend about sixty-two billion dollars a year to improve their outside appearance, even though most of the “beauty aid” is temporary. Liposuction, tummy tucks, and lip enhancements are becoming more common every day. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) reported there were 17.5 million surgical and minimally invasive cosmetic procedures were performed in the United States in 2017. It was a two percent increase over 2016. An even more alarming fact was that minimally invasive procedures increased nearly 200%. Therefore, we contribute to misread signals. When we place our, actions, life decisions, opinions and conclusions according to misread signals, it can cause potential harm. The world sends mixed signals. The word of God does not. Scripture informs us not to be led by our flesh, but instead to follow the way of God, depending upon the Holy Spirit’s guided understanding of God’s Word. God sends signals to, warn, protect, correct, direct, and strengthen positive mental associations. The problem is that we focus much time, effort, and money, on superficial appearances. God’s desire for Christians is not to experience a

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60 Banaji, 91.


62 According to the Oxford English Dictionary on line, liposuction, also called “lipo,” is a type of excess fat removal from under the skin by suction, used during plastic surgery. It is the most common plastic surgery. Accessed March 20, 2022.

63 Cosmetic surgery is defined as elective procedures that re not necessary because they treat parts of the body that function properly.


65 Galatians 5:16.
“temporary” happiness, but a depth of “lasting” joy. Christians should not be so focused on outside appearances, like clothes, one’s profession, or race, that we take our eyes off God.

Opening Prayer: Gracious Lord, Guard our minds, thoughts and actions. We pray that the Spirit guide our steps, as we learn to love each other, and look beyond outside appearances, especially when it comes to race. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Reestablishing Community: Revisit Norms. Share one thing that resonated with you from previous lesson. Interacting, speaking, and listening to others creates relationship.

Neuroscience: Cooperative Categorization As Misread Signals
A simple way we each send a signal about who we are is by the way we dress or how we look. It is just one of the many ways we assist others in placing us in a particular category. The psychological process we use to make sense of different stimuli is called perception. It happens when we interpret and organize information received from our senses. The damaging effect of cooperative categorization is that it is so engrained within our society as stereotypical “worldly expectations,” that it sometimes prevents us from being who we really are (or seeing others as they are, individually). It affects how we exist and navigate this world in our own authentic personalities. Because we are influenced by societal pressure to conform, it can initiate behavior in us to create an image for ourselves that is not always true. We focus on “conforming” on the outside rather than “transforming” on the inside.

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66 Ibid, 111.
Theological Frame: Ephesians 2:10, I Peter 2:9

These passages describe who we are in Christ. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. We are created “new” in Jesus Christ. We belong to God wholly and absolutely. “We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Our identity is tied to what God did for us. It is not tied to the world’s “stereotypical” expectations. When we look at someone’s dress, physical stature, profession, or marital status and expect a certain behavior, we become victims of stereotypes and mindbugs at work. We must remember that Christians are warned not to conform to the patterns of the world, but look beyond outside appearances.

An example of God’s warning came when Samuel was ordered to anoint a new king over Israel to replace the rejected king, Saul. As Samuel considered several candidates, he took one look at Eliab and was sure he must be the one. Eliab was tall and handsome with a “stately” presence, and reminded Samuel of a vibrant young Saul, the former king. Eliab even had the “right” pedigree, as the oldest son of Jesse. Samuel believed Eliab would be the best candidate. But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” In the meantime, Samuel did not even speak to

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67 I Peter 2:9 NIV.
68 Romans 12:2.
69 1 Samuel 16:6 New Living Translation.
70 Jesse was the Bethlehemite whose eight sons Samuel considered for king, per the Lord’s instruction. I Samuel 16:1-4. Seven of his sons were passed over. The youngest son, David was not the one Samuel chose, but was the one chosen and anointed by God. (1 Samuel 16:12 NRSV).
71 I Samuel 16:7 NRSV.
David, whom God eventually chose to anoint as king. Samuel was influenced mainly by outside appearances, but the divine voice reminded him that outside advantages of mere human strength were no indication of “true greatness.” When stereotypes cloud our perception we easily misread signals.

Another example of misreading signals could be the story of Rahab. She was a prostitute who played a prophetic role in “anticipating Israel’s occupation of the land.” But can we even appreciate the story of Rahab without “thinking in stereotypes?” Rahab was a Canaanite woman who lived in Jericho and became a biblical hero in spite of the fact that she was a prostitute, and the stigma tied to her profession. According to Scripture, two male spies were sent by Joshua to see the land before the Canaan conquest. The spies stayed at Rahab’s house overnight. When the ruler discovered the male spies’ location, he demanded that Rahab turn them over to the authorities. Rahab defied the demand and hid the two men under the flax on her roof. She suggested that the army should chase the two spies because the spies had left. Before the two spies climbed out of her window to safety, Rahab asked that her family be spared when the Israelites attacked Jericho. She received a crimson thread to hang from her widow, and told the spies to remain inside the house with her family. The crimson marked her home in the same way the blood of the lamb marked those who were saved in the fate of the Egyptians. When the

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72 Harrelson, 416. Among his seven sons was the youngest, David who kept the sheep. 1 Samuel 16:11.
74 Joshua 2:1-23.
75 Joshua 2:1.
76 Joshua was son of Nun and described as an Ephraimite in Numbers 13:8, and 1 Chr7:27. Joshua’s name was changed from Hosea to Joshua by Moses, according to Num. 13:8.
77 Joshua 2:4.
Israelites destroyed Jericho. Rahab and her whole extended family were saved. They lived among the Israelites. Rehab defied the stereotype of her occupation and functioned as a prophetic voice. If we only looked at Rahab’s outside appearance or made a conclusion based on a stereotype of her profession, we would have missed the content of her character. Scripture reminds us: “Charm and grace are deceptive, and superficial beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord reverently worshiping, obeying, serving, and trusting Him with awe-filled respect, she shall be praised.” Rahab chose to serve God’s purpose. If we were as consumed with loving each other as we are with presenting false images to impress others or using stereotypes to guide our decisions, we would be a step closer to our beloved community.

Activity: Countering Misread Signals: (1) Write ten adjectives that describe you. (2) Place those adjectives in order. Eliminate until you have one. Anything enlightening to share?

Theological Reflection:
Share way(s) the stereotype tied to “prostitute” serves to hinder or accentuate understanding in the story of Rahab. Explain how “conforming,” and “transforming” play a role in Rahab’s life. Any enlightening moments come to mind when you revisited this story?

Embodiment: Small Groups. What Does This Look Like in your context? In what ways do you send signals about who you are? Share a time when you misread someone’s signals. How did it end? Where are opportunities to misread signals in your contexts, especially when it comes to

78 Joshua 6:17.
79 Proverbs 31:30 AMP.
race? In what ways are you able to help with not misreading signals in your ministry? What practices can we put into place that will help congregants embrace their authentic broken selves?

Homework: Reflect. Share any enlightening thoughts.

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, We humble ourselves before you, as we learn to be ourselves: broken, sinful, fallen, and unconditionally loved. Help us see ourselves the way that you see us, so that we are able to see others as you would have us see them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson Five: The Beloved Community: Overcoming Mindbugs

The Beloved Community begins with knowing who we are in Christ. Knowing who we are begins with knowing who God is. We are, loved, chosen, redeemed, favored, blessed, and healed with a specific purpose for our lives. Stereotypes do not point to our identity in Christ or God’s love for us. Our identity in Christ begins and ends with God.

Opening Prayer: Gracious Lord, Help us see each other individually as siblings in Christ. We corporately pray these activities this week make us better than we were last week. As Christ’s disciples, we pray to be open to learn and share this good news with all those we influence. We pray our actions are pleasing to you, Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

80 Romans 5:8.
81 1 Peter 2:9.
82 Ephesians 1:7.
83 Psalm 5:12.
84 Psalm 146:5.
85 1 Peter 2:24.
86 Jeremiah 29:11.
Reestablishing Community: Revisit Norms. Share one thing that resonated with you from previous lesson.

God’s work is always relational and unfolds within community. We are God’s community committed to building and maintaining God’s family, through observing God’s covenant, building the Kingdom, and nurturing the church. Whatever we do, “it should be to the glory of God” Martin Luther King Jr. imagined the Beloved Community that would not allow racism, poverty, hunger, and homelessness. The ills of the world like all forms of discrimination, prejudice, and bigotry would be replaced with an inclusive attitude and a spirit of fraternity, respecting and loving each other in Christ. Everyone is embraced. No one is excluded. Social and economic inclusiveness would be the pillars for the community. No one is discriminated against. When we bear fruit for Christ, we bear one another’s burdens, and fulfill Christ’s law.

When prejudice, stereotypes, snap judgments, erroneous assumptions, misread signals, racism and discrimination are rampant in the world, it becomes a threatening place rather than a thriving place, especially for people of color and those who are marginalized. In order to fully realize the Beloved Community we must imagine a “new way of being” in this world. We can do this in part by changing mental structures and dismantling implicit biases that feed stereotypes.

87 McKnight, 27. Add full citation here
88 Genesis 12 and 15. The covenant with Abraham, promising all descendants with a blessing. Samuel 7, Davidic Covenant, promising a continuation of earlier covenants; Romans 9:4.
90 Galatians 6:2.
that promote and allow racism. We begin with our own awareness of biases within us and engage practices that cause us to act opposite of our biases.

Theological Frame: Ephesians 2:19, 2 Corinthians 3:15

When the Bible states, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,” it speaks of unifying the Gentiles with the Jews, God’s chosen people, as part of the same family. Jesus Christ, himself, is the cornerstone. Those who believe are lovingly joined together as a holy temple for our Lord. Scripture says we were no longer “strangers,” which also can mean “alien or foreigner.” The main message is there was no longer a distinction that excluded, left someone out, or denied access to resources or safety in God’s community, which was the church. When we examine this passage in its original Greek language “strangers,” “aliens,” and “stranger” in this context, the word “foreigner,” meant a “resident alien.” Foreigners were more like “half” aliens because they interacted with the local citizens within the cities but did not have the rights of citizenship.

We are “fellow citizens,” which means we are part of God’s residence. Gentiles are included as a part of God’s chosen people, and the church’s responsibility is to make God’s wisdom known. The ultimate message is that once admitted into the household of the living God, the “strangers” and “aliens” and “foreigners” were not considered guests or treated like

91 Ephesians 2:19.
92 Ephesians 2:20-22.
94 “Foreigners” was also used in Acts 7:6, Acts 7:29, also used as “sojourner,” often in the LXX. Version. It was used metaphorically in 1 Peter 2:11.) “Sojourner” was not a full-fledged or absolute “alien,” like “the stranger,” in this sense, but was still excluded from power and privilege.
95 Full Verse, 1433.
occasional visitors. They were welcomed to fully engage within the city. They were allowed and expected to experience its protection, obey its laws, live and love within its society, hold communion, and claim municipal immunities. “Strangers,” “aliens,” and “foreigners” become permanent dwellers in God’s house and also become “complete” members of God’s family. The particular definitions of these terms are not the focus of this passage, but the fact that we are to love “those who we do not know,” especially those who may not have the privilege of citizenship.

The gospel calls us toward being one body, but Marl Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez share in Churches Cultures and Leadership a Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities that “individual concepts of self and self in relation to others constantly challenges the biblical call of living in unity in the midst of our diversities.”96 We cannot live in unity without invoking the Holy Spirit to guide us. Sin blocks our human capacity. But we must remember who we are working with, and that our God can do anything but fail.97 We operate, not in our own power, but under the power and authority of God.98

Since the gospel calls us to one body, it makes a modern connection to any group or individual who does not have privilege or citizenship. We are to welcome and respect those who are different from us with God’s reflected love. Some may be documented. Some may not be documented. Some may be privileged. Some may not be privileged. But those who are marginalized are not to be thought less of, stereotyped negatively within our minds, and targeted for negative treatment. No matter our own circumstance, we must remember that we are all human, made in the image of God, and a part of God’s creation. Our job as “saints” and disciples

96 Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, Churches, Cultures & Leadership a Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 168.
97 Luke 1:37.)
98 2 Corinthians 5:20.
is to love. Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

We now understand that there are at least four psychological barriers that generalize and categorize in order that we may live orderly, but they too often present barriers to Christians loving and living rightly. These barriers present hurdles when reconciling ourselves to each other and to God in several ways.

Neuroscience: Why We Fumble With Love

The four psychological barriers that feed biases all point to navigating this world using stereotypes. Engaging stereotypes impedes racial reconciliation and causes “stereotype threat.”

Activity: The Implicit Bias Test: Examine Our Biases: Each person takes the Implicit Bias Test On Line. Discussion is Optional. Examine yourself. Embodiment: How are you feeling about your results? Anything enlightening to share?

Reflection: What Have you learned? Who are “strangers” and “fellow citizens?” in today’s context? How do we understand the household of God? Do our actions align with our beliefs? How do you understand “fumbling with love?” What are the implications for the church?

100 Chapter 3.
Confession and Repentance: We must bring lament back into the Church. Let us break bread together. In the ancient world, the communal meal was the greatest symbolic hospitable gesture. To share the table with someone was to share life.\textsuperscript{101} The intimate act of eating created a bond of fellowship. Examples of fellowship included God’s meal with the elders of Israel,\textsuperscript{102} Jesus’ sharing food with tax collectors and sinners alike,\textsuperscript{103} the Lord’s Supper,\textsuperscript{104} Jesus’ post resurrection meals,\textsuperscript{105} Peter’s eating with Gentiles,\textsuperscript{106} and the common meals of many early Christians.\textsuperscript{107} They all demonstrated a powerful message of bonding, unity, and intimacy with those whom they were both alike and unalike. We will partake in corporate communion.

Closing comments and remarks. We hope this experience affected your heart and challenged some of your practices. Learning about implicit biases offers an opportunity to get closer to God. Maybe, that’s why they are there in the first place. God’s ways are not like ours. God has a way of revealing himself to us. We should sit still, listen, and be attentive to what God is doing in and around us. That takes time, focus, and humbled prayer.

Closing Prayer of Lament: Lord, You are all power. We humble ourselves and lay all our human sins at the foot of the cross. We know you are knocking upon the door\textsuperscript{108} of our biases to shed

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Exodus 24:1-11}
\footnote{Luke 11:37; 15:1, 19:5-6}
\footnote{Mark 14:17-26}
\footnote{Acts 10:48-11:3}
\footnote{Rev. 3:20.}
\end{footnotes}
light for growth toward wholeness in Christ. We pray for forgiveness of any hurt we may have caused because of race or any other stereotype. We pray to repent of our biases when we see others as separate from us. We pray to continue this work and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Theological Evaluation: We Are the One Body of Christ**

Scripture reminds us that we are one body in Christ.109 There is one race, the human race. Yet we focus on things that are not as important as loving each other, such as the color of one’s skin. The shade of flesh tone and amount of melanin in the body has more to do historically with location than intelligence, preferences, or choices. Christians should focus on the content of one’s character. Though we profess to be one body, Christians have wrestled with race and loving those who are racially different for longer than we care to admit. If we look closely, we can see sin operating as blind spots and psychological barriers throughout our biblical history. Mindbugs causing prejudices reared their ugly head as stereotypes, discrimination, and confirmation bias, ruling minds and decisions. People pull away from God led by the flesh, instead of being pulled toward God led by our love. Snap judgments, assumptions, arrogance, ethnocentrism, misread signals, and stereotype threats caused enmity and strife, and we continue to suffer from this today.

However, given the advances of science, we are now aware of how stereotypes and mindbugs contribute to racism and discrimination, and we have some tools that allow us to alter our conscious behavior and unconscious neural processing. We are lifting racism up for prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help us eradicate any behavior that blinds us to God’s love. We are first

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seeking the Kingdom of Heaven, as we approach love, knowing that we may fumble. As we lean toward that first step in becoming a beloved community, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us to reach out to each other, see our differences, welcome the challenges, have conversations about race, include more stories in our conversations, and listen to each other when someone shares a hurt or disappointment, especially when it comes to race. We ask God, what must “I” do to make this world a better place for us all, beginning in our own hearts and within our own contexts. It begins with God’s call on our lives. It is God’s will that we thrive and not live in threat, especially if you are a person of color or on the margins. It is our job as people of God to work toward reconciling the races.

“God does not show favoritism.”

Racism is sin because it shows favoritism and disrupts the human family. It denies the image of God among some members of the family, and violates the fundamental human right to dignity and respect of those siblings in Christ who are created by the same Father. All Christians belong to Jesus. Therefore, we are part of the movement for reconciliation, bringing people and hearts together, aligned with God.

It is part of our commitment as disciples of Christ to share in this life changing message of the Gospel. We are brought near to God and close together with the people we once considered so different from us.

The church today wrestles with many of the same issues as the early church. We are still guilty of selfish human behaviors. Races tend to segregate into their own churches and

110 Acts 10:34-35.
111 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.
113 Genesis 1:27.
neighborhoods, but choosing to be with one’s own race is not a sin. It becomes a sin when we stand in judgment and treat others negatively because they are different from us, especially when it is because of the color of their skin. If we are not conscious and intentional in our actions, we can easily discriminate. Christians can disagree without discriminating. When we model the love of Jesus by thinking of others as individuals, seeing them as human beings made in the image of God, imagining them as someone whom we are called to love, we can overcome our human tendency toward discrimination. When we model a humble attitude of service\textsuperscript{114} toward others, like Jesus, we begin to transform.

We must acknowledge and act opposite of our prejudices. Jesus became flesh and walked among us, suffered human afflictions, opposite of His divine nature, as an act of love toward us. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, knowing he was a traitor. Jesus ministered all through Gentile regions in Samaria.\textsuperscript{115} Jesus defied attitudes of discrimination and tore down the barriers between “us” and “them.” Prejudiced and prideful attitudes separated people. We should follow in Jesus’ footsteps and act opposite of our implicit biases, prejudices, and racist behaviors, at every opportunity.

Loving each other is not optional. We cannot keep allowing Asian Americans to be targeted in the streets, black bodies to be racially profiled, and people of color and other marginalized groups to live in threat because of stereotypes. If God, included Gentiles in the covenant, set the Israelites free, intervened at Corinth, opened Eli’s ears to hear Hannah (and her womb), helped Samuel understand how outside appearances can be misleading, and used Hagar as part of his divine purpose, we can begin to treat each other like true siblings in Christ and work

\textsuperscript{114} Matthew 20:28.
\textsuperscript{115} Mark 7:24,31; John 4:4.
for the thriving of all. We cannot wait until neuroscientists find ways to completely eradicate mindbugs that cause stereotypes and prejudices. God didn’t wait until we were ready to be saved, he saved us in spite of our sins,¹¹⁶ because He loved us. We must begin to love those who are racially different, today, simply because God first loved us.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Romans 5:8.
¹¹⁷ 1 John 4:19.
References


Biography


Janice is a wife, mother, grandmother, educator, writer, former high school librarian and current pastor at Mars Hill Presbyterian Church, in Hope Mills, North Carolina.