

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## The Non-Performativity of Implicit Bias Training

by Jessi Lee Jackson



IMAGE: NYCEDUCATOR.COM (2018).

In recent years, implicit bias trainings have emerged as a popular strategy for teaching people to understand and respond to present histories of racism in the United States. In particular, the trainings have been offered to police departments as a pedagogical intervention to reduce racist actions by officers. In February 2018, the New York Police Department announced plans to implement implicit bias training for all officers over two years, with Police Commissioner James O’Neill stating, “Training like this is happening at law enforcement agencies across the nation.”<sup>1</sup> Local and national leaders have called for implicit bias trainings in all police departments.<sup>2</sup> These trainings promise to apply contemporary psychological research on bias towards the reduction of racism and other forms of prejudice. They are presented as an effective, research-based strategy for guiding people to encounter, reflect on, and ultimately shift their own potential for biased action. Anti-racist scholars and activists have questioned these claims, suggesting that the trainings are falsely presented as a “fix-it-all” solution, that they focus too much on individual change, and that time and money would be better spent elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Legal scholar Destiny Peery raises doubts about the effectiveness of one-time trainings and writes of the necessity of a “multi-pronged approach focused more on fixing a broken system and less on fixing broken individuals.”<sup>4</sup>

As a counselor and educator invested in anti-racist practice, I was curious about how these trainings mix together education, psychological expertise, anti-racism, and critiques of policing. Educational spaces have taught me to interrogate my role in relationships of power and inspired me to action. I have seen classes and workshops impact my students similarly. Could they do the same for some police officers? As a counselor, I often see the application of psychological research towards the process of transforming problematic behaviors, as clients learn to manage anxieties, cope with shame, acknowledge harms, and build relationships of equal power. I wondered how implicit bias trainings could challenge police to acknowledge their part in racism and shift their actions and institutions in response. At the same time, I had a healthy skepticism about the ability of this trendy new intervention to meaningfully shift the complex and painful realities of American racism.

In my efforts to understand more about the problems and potential of these trainings, I reached out to the largest training organization on implicit bias in policing. Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) is an organization led by University of South Florida criminologist Lorie Fridell. It emerged to meet the demand for training in implicit bias.<sup>5</sup> FIP expressed that they “love grad students” and allowed me to observe a 2.5 day train-the-trainers session, the most intensive of their three training options.<sup>6</sup> In addition to observing the training, I also reviewed the curriculum developed by FIP, reviewed participant feedback forms for over thirty FIP trainings, analyzed local news accounts and interviews, and reviewed popular accounts of implicit bias recommended by FIP trainers.

Apart from what occurs during the actual training time, some might argue that hosting the trainings is an important first step that performs a commitment to ending racism. In

this line of thinking, the speech act of stating, “we are confronting our implicit bias” is performative in the sense that J.L. Austin articulated in *How to Do Things with Words*.<sup>7</sup> In having a workshop, the department is enacting an opposition to racism. When a police chief shows up to introduce this training, he communicates to his officers that the department opposes racial bias. Reporting on the trainings in local media often follows this logic—the performance of the training is celebrated as proof that departments are tackling racism.<sup>8</sup>

Sara Ahmed’s concept of non-performative speech acts suggests a different understanding of how implicit bias trainings work. In non-performative speech acts, “the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, *but is actually what the speech act is doing*.” The failure is the function. Non-performative speech acts are “taken up *as if* they are performatives (as if they have brought about the effects they name) such that the names come to stand in for the effects.”<sup>9</sup> The act of training stands in for the actual transformation of practices and policies. In this article, I examine a series of moments that illustrate how the trainings non-perform anti-racism, simultaneously stating a commitment to anti-racism and reinforcing racism. The trainings exhibit at least eight overlapping techniques of non-performance. They support police departments in claiming opposition to racism, while simultaneously:

1. defining racism as an individual, inevitable human neurological process,
2. assuming white innocence and black and Latinx criminality,
3. coaching people to give up explicit racisms in favor of dog-whistle racisms,
4. disorganizing behavioral prescriptions about how to act against racism,
5. soothing guilt and shame related to racist actions,
6. elevating scientific research over specific historical, community-based, or cultural knowledge,
7. treating individual bias, gender bias, heterosexism, and racism as interchangeable, and
8. reinforcing the authority of privileged white people to name and describe the world.

I examine moments in which these techniques emerge in the training. By becoming more aware of how nonperformance manifests, I hope both to critique how many implicit bias trainings operate and to provide tools for assessing how other educational initiatives may non-perform their stated commitments.

**Nonperformance Technique #1: Say you oppose racism, while defining it as an individual, inevitable human neurological process.**

The FIP training begins with the assertion that racism is a feature of the human brain. This message is consistent with the popular literature on implicit bias, which often frames human neuropsychological processes as the cause of criminal legal system inequities. In his bestseller *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell describes police decision-making in the police shooting of Amadou Diallou as an example of the universal brain process of “thinking without thinking.”<sup>10</sup> In *Unfair: The New Science of Criminal Injustice*, Adam Benforado describes racist legal outcomes as a phenomenon that requires Americans to “look into the deep recesses of our brains.” Benforado recognizes that there is “grievous unfairness in our house of law,” which he blames on “human psychology.”<sup>11</sup> While both Benforado and Gladwell identify racial injustice as a problem, they locate the problem in typical human brain processes.

Continuing within this frame, FIP founder Fridell explains, via video, that police departments are prone to bias, “because they hire humans.” The first section of FIP’s implicit bias training reiterates this perspective repeatedly, emphasizing the neurobiological basis of implicit bias. This message works to minimize white and/or police shame, through an argument that racism is normal and universal, a natural process of the human mind.

Naturalization is one of the central frames of color-blind racism critiqued by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: “By suggesting these preferences are almost biologically driven and typical of all groups in society, preferences for primary associations with members of one’s race are rationalized as nonracial.”<sup>12</sup> The naturalization of racism marginalizes people whose life experiences led them to avoid developing, or helped them to unlearn, biases. These life experiences include being a person of color. They also include experiences such as being a part of interracial families, relationships, workplaces, communities, and friendships; active engagement with a variety of cultural expressions; or participation in political movements opposed to racism or confronting other forms of oppression through an intersectional lens. It also suggests that being able to see and notice one’s own bias is a strange, unusual skill, one that flies in the face of the behaviors determined by the “deep recesses of our brains.”

In suggesting “all humans” are characterized by implicit racial biases, implicit bias training centers socially segregated white experience as the model for what counts as human. It does this not because it is written by humans, but because those developing the curriculum do not engage with contemporary theories of racism. Scholars in critical race and gender studies have called for theorizing social power relations from the margin, highlighted the construction of the category of “human” through the exclusion of blackness, and drawn attention to the specific historical role of police in maintaining gendered racism.<sup>13</sup> Engagement with their work offers an immediate critique to the idea that “racism is human” or that police racism is caused by human neurological structures. For example, if one recognizes police work as pushing humans into bureaucratic systems, categorization may be understood as

a product of bureaucratic systems rather than human nervous systems.<sup>14</sup>

***Because it is grounded in this claim to universality among all humans, implicit bias training has difficulty addressing the specificity of contemporary U.S. police racism.***

Because it is grounded in this claim to universality among all humans, implicit bias training has difficulty addressing the specificity of contemporary U.S. police racism. It fails to substantially address the specific tasks and work environments of police, and how these specific factors intersect with racism. Further, it offers a hopeless take on racism, failing to mark major historical differences in the manifestations of racism and to imagine social worlds not structured through racial difference. A singular focus on neurological processes nonperforms anti-racism because it under-represents the possibility of social change, encouraging resignation to the “fact” of racially biased brains.

**Nonperformance Technique #2: Say you oppose racism, while assuming white innocence and black and Latinx criminality.**

After presenting the idea that bias is human, the FIP trainers run through a brief overview of social psychological concepts about biases and stereotypes. They then present a short clip from the movie *Crash*, designed to start conversation around biases. The clip features Anthony and Peter, two young black men played by actors Chris ‘Ludacris’ Bridges and Larenz Tate. Anthony is complaining to Peter about biased treatment in the restaurant they just left. Walking down the street, the two men notice as a white couple moves away from them and the woman pulls her jacket closely around her. Anthony continues his critique:

this white woman sees two black guys, who look like UCLA students, strolling down the sidewalk and her reaction is blind fear. I mean, look at us! Are we dressed like gang-bangers? Huh? No. Do we look threatening? No. Fact, if anybody should be scared around here, it’s us: We’re the only two black faces surrounded by a sea of over-caffeinated white people, patrolled by the trigger-happy LAPD. So you tell me, why aren’t we scared?

Peter responds, “Because we have guns?” and the two proceed to car-jack the white couple. At this moment in watching the scene, the police trainees laugh. They had expected to get lectured about biases, and the scene surprises them. A trainer reinforces the intended takeaway with an accompanying PowerPoint slide: “Sometimes, stereotypes are true.”

The training reads that moment in *Crash* as evidence of the truth of anti-black stereotypes: the young black men were being stereotyped as criminals, and they were criminals. The reading of the clip encouraged by the training emphasizes the truth of black criminality. Rather than

challenging all stereotypes, or ending disproportionate impacts of policing on black communities, trainers appeal to the idea of fact-based policing.

This is in line with the logic of predictive policing, in which statistical practices are mobilized to legitimize the heavy policing of black communities. According to this logic, the police are not stereotyping—they are responding to the objective truth of increased crime in these areas. Critics of predictive policing have argued that in these practices, black and Latinx people are never seen as innocent; instead they are always already assigned “increased risk” as a result of historical and ongoing practices of racist criminalization by police, which the statistical predictions then replicate.<sup>15</sup>

The training goes on to discuss how, even when usually true, stereotypes can be dangerous. Yet the trainers have already endorsed the link between blackness and criminality as true. They do nothing to convey the dangers of flattening people’s complex lives to stereotypic descriptions, except to note that *sometimes* the stereotypes are wrong. This overlooks how stereotypes create people as objects (rather than subjects) of knowledge, flatten their experiences, and ignore their agency. Treating a person as a caricature is always untrue. Hershini Bhana Young highlights the refusal of police and legal discourses generally to engage meaningfully with black women’s complex lives, discussing one black woman’s decision not to confess to a crime:

Part and parcel of Eva’s refusal to explain herself to the police are the clichéd explanatory responses that her actions would elicit, no matter what Eva might say about them. In other words, even if Eva were to speak, she would not be heard. The interpretation for her crime by the criminal justice system would diminish the complexity of her actions as a black woman, always already infantilized, sexualized, and criminalized.<sup>16</sup>

Eva does not speak because even when she speaks her voice is distorted by police expectation. Police choose the “easiest answer they could get” instead of trying to imagine the complexity of her life. Similarly, even as Anthony and Peter speak, their critiques of racial profiling are not heard. Instead, their revealed status as “criminals” is used to disqualify their authority on the criminalization of blackness. The laughter of the training group reveals their delight in “knowing” Anthony and Peter’s status: black criminals whose behavior can be interpreted without engaging their words and worldviews.

Throughout the Fair & Impartial Policing implicit bias training, I witnessed attempts to communicate the humanity of black and Latinx people by suggesting that they might also be cops. In one story, they discuss an undercover cop getting shot by police; in another, they discuss an off-duty cop getting pulled over while on vacation upstate. This attempt to connect with cops through the possibility that the person of color they are encountering might be an undercover or off-duty cop seemed to be a strategic choice. It is an attempt to begin the process of unsettling racist expectations. However, it fails to address the idea that people of color who are not cops deserve to be treated as criminals. Rather, it divides people into populations of deserving and undeserving, linking expressions of black

culture to criminality and automatic guilt. Black cops are treated as occasional outliers to the assumed fact of black criminality.

### **Nonperformance Technique #3: Say you oppose racism, while coaching people to give up explicit racisms in favor of dog-whistle racisms.**

One “case study” discussed in the training involved a 911 call in which the caller reported a suspicious person, whose only suspicious behavior was being a black man sitting in a car in a white neighborhood—which they labeled a “race out of place” complaint. The trainers had just led a discussions of the danger of “profiling by proxy”—police responding to citizen complaints that are purely race-based. This seemed to be a clear place to state the absolute necessity of refusing to participate in the caller’s assumption of black criminality.

Yet, in discussing how to respond to the call, the officers present were not willing to state, “Just don’t respond” or to name the call as “profiling by proxy.” Instead, they discussed ways to coach the caller to identifying non-race-based suspicious characteristics. They entertained the possibility of sending a car to do a “drive by” without explicitly stopping or questioning the black man; or perhaps checking in with the “suspicious” man to “see if he was okay”—perhaps lying that he had been reported as unconscious in his car. Rather than responding negatively to explicit racism, they brainstormed strategies to move their actions towards those that had been deemed strands of “implicit” racism, and thus perfectly innocent and excusable. Rather than challenging racist practices, the exercise served to coach officers in how to shift expressions of explicit racism into colorblind racist language, which would have a racist impact but could be attributed to other factors.

A review of the training agenda suggests that the message “don’t engage in profiling by proxy” is the intended takeaway of this section of the training. Yet, in action, it transformed into a coaching session for masking explicit racism. The impact of those racist police actions on the person being profiled was not considered.

### **Nonperformance technique #4: Say you oppose racism, while disorganizing behavioral prescriptions about how to act against racism.**

Another way in that the training nonperforms antiracism is through avoiding clear behavioral directives. Instead, mixed messages about potential behavior changes are offered. Learning “the science” becomes the action taken, rather than the action of refusing to engage in profiling, or shifting departmental control to communities, or disarming officers.

A part of the FIP training curriculum contains a slowed-down encounter between undercover police and a person they deem “suspicious.” At the end of the exercise, in which the officers were able to identify the “correct” set of actions that avoided use of force, the trainers reveal that the case

follows the fact pattern of the Amadou Diallo shooting. The moral of the story, as presented by trainers, was this: slow down. They suggested that biased assumptions might be usefully overcome if officers were able to gather more information, as opposed to operating based on quick observations and assumptions that tend toward bias. In this case example, the training acts out Malcolm Gladwell's discussion of the Diallo case in *Blink*.

The next day, presenting the "new science" about implicit bias tests, the trainers state that there is "a very interesting new study" coming out. They describe this as the "Reverse Racism Effect" study, and explain that is so new that it has not been included in the earlier sections of the training. The trainer reviews the study's claim, which is that in shooter simulations there was a slight delay in officers shooting black suspects with guns.<sup>17</sup> The trainer summarizes the research by noting the threat to officers posed by this supposed new bias against shooting black people: "This hesitation—may cost lives." Black people are described as getting an extra break—a few undeserved seconds of consideration that white suspects don't get. Replicating the biases of the study, the trainers suggest that these extra seconds translate into police deaths. The lives of black people being shot by police are not considered.

One participant, clearly confused, asks, "but doesn't that go against what we learned yesterday?" He cites the "slow down" exercise. The trainer responds, "Well, we just want you to have the science. We'll be watching this and see what develops. Our goal is that you have the science."

One of the main messages of the training, "slow down, think about what you're doing, and question if it's linked to bias," has just been undermined. Instead, officers are given the opposite message: "Don't slow down to think, because then you might die." The muddle of conflicting "science" leaves officers with no clear message about how to actively avoid racist actions. At the same time, it tells them that their own racism is inevitable and natural. I hear the participant's question as one concerning the larger point of the training—he appears to be trying to figure out how to translate his learning into action. At this request, the trainers have no recommendations. The trainers' spontaneous statement of the goal of the training shifts from the official goal of transforming implicit bias in behavior. Rather, the goal is stated as giving scientific authority to officers: "Our goal is that you have the science."

**Nonperformance technique #5: Say you oppose racism, while working to alleviate people's guilt and shame around racist actions.**

The training functions according to the principal that shame and guilt are not helpful states for learning. It normalizes biased beliefs and actions, seeking to put participants at ease. According to feedback forms, it appears to succeed at this task. In participants' reviews of the FIP trainings, the "guilt-free" nature of the training was emphasized. One wrote, "It was refreshing to discuss these topics without being told how bad cops are."<sup>18</sup> At the Elon University Police training, these views were repeated: "It was a no judgement zone. The way it was done promoted openness and prevented defensiveness." Part of how the

trainings address guilt was through naturalizing bias throughout the population, as reflected by one review: "Deals with the root cause—human nature."<sup>19</sup> Another participant wrote that the training "explains how each person has bias in them even if they don't realize it." Another put it more simply, "I really thought this class was gonna suck. But it didn't suck!!!"<sup>20</sup> And others: "Wasn't what I expected." "Didn't allow political correctness to hinder the training."<sup>21</sup>

***Yet the pedagogical strategy of reducing shame may have negative impacts on people's motivation to take action. A recent research study found that strong negative affect associated with awareness of one's previous biased behaviors predicts reduction of those behaviors.***

Yet the pedagogical strategy of reducing shame may have negative impacts on people's motivation to take action. A recent research study found that strong negative affect associated with awareness of one's previous biased behaviors predicts reduction of those behaviors. After being made aware that they had been stereotyping others, negative self-directed feelings such as guilt and shame motivated participants to work hard to avoid stereotyping.<sup>22</sup> This may seem intuitive—if we feel bad about doing something, we try hard not to do it again. This is one of the primary social functions of embarrassment and shame; feeling these emotions reduces the odds that we will do the same things over again.

By relieving feelings of guilt, the training may further de-motivate participants to take antiracist actions. At the Weston, MA Police Department training, one participant wrote, "the fact that we could admit to some bias was actually a relief." This feeling of relief and comfort by participants is cited over and over again as a mark of success. But it is another example of how the training succeeds in nonperformance.

**Nonperformance technique #6: Say you oppose racism, while elevating scientific claims over specific historical, community-based, or cultural knowledge.**

Implicit bias training centers psychological experts and marginalizes communities of color. This marginalization makes it possible for participants to conclude that black communities are ignorant of the scientific dynamics of racism, and that they have no specialized knowledge in how police racism operates. The training fails to grapple with the obvious: police have been sent to this implicit bias training because of a pattern of racist police violence occurring in the present in the U.S. It distances participants from that reality.

The training omits any specific information about the role of police in maintaining contemporary racism, instead working hard to reinforce the idea that police departments are only racist "because they hire humans." While this might avoid immediately alienating defensive officers, it offers no space to grapple with ways that policing is specifically racist.

This omission non-performs anti-racism, obfuscating historical and community-based knowledge of police racism. The training curriculum's only admission of the historical realities of police racism was one slide, which showed a black-and-white photograph of cops with dogs attacking civil rights activists, followed by a picture of a news article about the Stonewall Riot. In talking about the slide, the trainer emphasized that, historically, cops had supported racist Jim Crow laws in their role as law enforcers. The problem was posed not as the specific actions of police, but rather the fact that they were sometimes tasked with enforcing unjust laws. In this telling, the burden of guilt is shifted from the officer to the law itself.

Far from situating police departments as especially involved in the production of racism, the training leads some to the conclusion that police might have expert knowledge on anti-racism.<sup>23</sup> Participants suggested that the training might usefully teach people in communities about racism. "[T]his should be pushed out into the communities." Some police participants thought that community members might be less likely to accuse police of racist violence after being taught that implicit bias is universal and natural. "The class also teaches not to automatically accuse an officer of something. Let them explain it."<sup>24</sup> FIP further reinforces this perception by leading "command-community" trainings, in which community members, local NAACP officials, and police leadership are trained side-by-side in the science of bias. This training encourages the idea that "both sides" of police encounters need more education about racial bias. Rather than leading the training, the local NAACP leadership is positioned as needing to be educated about racism alongside police.<sup>25</sup>

**Nonperformance technique # 7: Say you oppose racism, while treating individual bias, gender bias, heterosexism, and racism as interchangeable.**

Though the terms "implicit bias" and "unconscious racism" are often used interchangeably, this practice suggests a false equivalence between the two concepts. In media accounts, the bias training was often presented as an anti-racist initiative. Yet in the training, the term racism was rarely used by trainers, who presented examples of race, gender, sexual orientation, occupation-based, and personal taste biases interchangeably. For example, one trainer spoke about the perception that she, as a woman police officer, would be more likely to be gay. She then shared that she was happily married. Others spoke about the danger of assuming that women are less likely to be violent than men, sharing examples of times when petite women acted with surprising force in their attacks on officers. The one training moment that addressed the historical reasons for fear of police presented both anti-gay and anti-black policing as interchangeable. Showing slides of Jim Crow and Stonewall, the trainers suggest that both situations of police discrimination ended when the law changed. At one point, participants were encouraged to name biases against cops—that they all like donuts, or that they're all uneducated. In addition to treating different biases as interchangeable, this activity, like the example from the heterosexual officer unfairly assumed to be a lesbian, reinforces the idea that it is cops who are often the "true victims" of bias.

Discussing the NYPD implicit bias trainings, trainer Noble L. Wray insists that "the 800-pound gorilla in the room is racial bias."<sup>26</sup> While racism may be the implicit "main point" of the training, the replacement of race with bias has consequences. "Bias" is a term used to reflect individual prejudice. It is often referred to in the literature as a "preference" for members of a dominant group. As a term, it can be used unlinked from systems and specific historical contexts. It lends itself to a practice of discussing personal preferences divorced from social, economic, and institutional structures. In contrast, "racism" is a term that reflects the context of social systems organized by race. For example, Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism centers its material impact on the lives and bodies of those it targets. "Racism is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies."<sup>27</sup> This definition highlights the violence of racism, its production and exploitation of death. Focused on racism as it impacts material bodies in political geographies, this definition contrasts sharply with social psychology definitions of bias that limit inquiry to the individual mind.

**Nonperformance technique #8: Say you oppose racism, while reinforcing the authority of privileged white people to name and describe the world.**

At one point in the training, we break into small groups around separate round tables. Participants take the opportunity to refill coffee and grab a late-morning snack. I sit at a table with a small group of white men, their ages ranging from mid-20s to mid-30s. One officer turns to me, the observing grad student, with a question. "Have you or your friends ever experienced bias from cops?" We are both eating breakfast pastries. I sip on my coffee refill, feeling that the question is a test. It seems strange that this white man is asking me, a white woman, about my experiences of bias. This may be linked to the frame of bias, which shifts attention away from an explicit discussion of race towards any form of difference.

I tell him, truthfully, that I have not experienced racial profiling. I note that police have always acted professionally in their interactions with me. I also share that a friend has been repeatedly followed and questioned by a cop on the campus she teaches at, and it seems to be a fairly obvious case of racial profiling. She is black, her white colleagues are not experiencing the same scrutiny, and only one officer is repeatedly profiling her. I expect him to acknowledge that the cop in question is being inappropriate, but to emphasize that this scenario is an exception—a "bad apple."

The interaction doesn't play out as I expect. The officer looks at me incredulously. "That's it? He's following her? That's his job." He presses for clarification, "Did he say something racist to her?" I explain that verbal disrespect isn't necessary for it to be harassment—he is clearly singling her out because of her race. Her white colleagues are not being followed. The officer scoffs, "But that's nothing. That's not a case." He ends the conversation abruptly, turning away to talk with his colleagues at the table.

The officer could not or would not understand the harms in the scenario I was describing. Meanwhile, I couldn't make sense of his inability to do so. At that moment, we were engaged in what Derald Sue has called "a clash of racial realities"—I could see the racism, and he could not.<sup>28</sup> To him, the officer who harassed my friend was clearly innocent. He was imagining the "case" against him, noting its weaknesses. Throughout the implicit bias training, he hadn't been asked to try to imagine things from my friend's perspective, what it was like for her to feel her body marked as potentially criminal, as suspicious even in her daily place of work. In the course of 2.5 days, he had only further consolidated his sense of expertise, his sense that his point of view was authoritative and that his actions would therefore be just.

It is significant that FIP facilitators are almost entirely current or retired police who hold positions of leadership within their departments. Unless it is a "command-community" training, it is likely that everyone in the room during an implicit bias training will be a police officer. This training structure is based on the idea of using credible messengers: police are assumed to be more open to learning challenging material when it is delivered by "one of them." Participants repeatedly cite the use of officers to facilitate as an important strength of the training. One participant commented that the training "would not be as well received from civilian instructors."<sup>29</sup> However, if the goal is learning how to function at work without enacting bias against people who are racially and culturally different, the choice of police trainers and the police-only attendance do little to provide practice in this relational skill. Instead, the training reinforces police officers as experts in anti-racism.

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Implicit bias trainings for police utilize a range of strategies that undermine the stated purpose of the training. The techniques that I have identified in this article are a partial list of ways to non-perform anti-racism. When they are used, they empty out the potential of the workshops to spark action, transforming the seminars into hollow monuments to institutional good intentions.

The implicit bias training fails to acknowledge how small gestures of violence signal both the historical and present-day acceptability of larger gestures of violence. It disengages from any theories of racism, adopting the colorblind ethic that any recognition of race is negative. This outcome shouldn't be surprising from a literature that repeatedly centers the subjective experiences of white officers and marginalizes the experiential reality, long historical trajectory, and current critical theorization of racism. Trainings directed at individual officers are a type of intervention incapable of creating systemic change. Research in the field suggests that implicit biases may be more effectively confronted by another means: finding ways to place communities subject to bias in positions of power over police. Perhaps this is effective, in part, because it encourages people to contemplate what those in their supervising communities are thinking, and what they want. It is a structural change that accomplishes what brief

trainings cannot; it incentivizes engaging with other perspectives.

I am not claiming that these trainings fail in all ways; they are clearly successful by many training measures. They utilize adult learning principles, engaging participants through role-plays, small group discussions, and other interactive exercises. When I observed, officers seemed to be listening and thinking about the material presented. The handout materials, video clips, and presentation slides were polished and professional. The breaks were well timed, helping everyone to stay focused during the presentations. The trainers expressed passion for the material and a belief in the work, seeing themselves as a progressive force in policing. On their own terms, these trainings are overwhelmingly successful—and they succeed in non-performing anti-racism. They create the appearance of addressing police racism, without ever addressing police racism.

## Notes

1. Laura Dimon and Rocco Parascandola, "NYPD to start 'implicit bias training,'" *PoliceOne*. February 18, 2018, <https://www.policeone.com/patrol-issues/articles/470642006-NYPD-to-start-implicit-bias-training/>.

2. Implicit bias trainings are one of the major recommendations of the *President's Report on Twenty-first Century Policing* formed in the aftermath of the Ferguson protests. See

*President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). In June 2016, the Department of Justice mandated department-wide training in implicit bias for all employees, including all FBI agents, DEA agents, ATF agents, and U.S. Marshals. See Department of Justice, "Department of Justice Announces New Department-Wide Implicit Bias Training for Personnel," 2016. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/departement-justice-announces-new-department-wide-implicit-bias-training-personnel>.

3. Kimberlé Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie argue that "the problem is not [...] whether the police officers in question [...] had been exposed to implicit bias trainings." Rather, the problem is that "police relations reinforce the structural marginality of all members of Black communities in myriad ways." Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women* (New York: African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015).

4. Destiny Peery, "Implicit bias training for police may help, but it's not enough," *Huffington Post*, March 14, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/destiny-peery/implicit-bias-training-fo\\_b\\_9464564.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/destiny-peery/implicit-bias-training-fo_b_9464564.html).

5. FIP has led trainings in police departments across the U.S. and Canada and was the recipient of a 2016 Department of Justice grant to train all DOJ officers. It is also the recipient of a \$4.5 million contract to lead the NYPD trainings announced in 2018.

6. The other trainings were a one-day officer training and a one-day supervisor training.

7. Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1975).

8. For example, see "Lovejoy hosts seminar on impartial policing, seeks to address bias," *Clayton News-Daily*. April 23, 2017, [https://www.news-daily.com/news/lovejoy-hosts-seminar-on-impartial-policing-seeks-to-address-bias/article\\_8d1079f1-d8f3-55f6-a369-ffaadad2721.html](https://www.news-daily.com/news/lovejoy-hosts-seminar-on-impartial-policing-seeks-to-address-bias/article_8d1079f1-d8f3-55f6-a369-ffaadad2721.html); Kelli Linville and Cliff Cook, "Here's what makes a successful partnership between a police department and a community," *The Bellingham Herald*. January 4, 2017, <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article124398014.html>.

9. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2012), 117.

10. Malcolm Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (New York, Little, Brown, and Company. 2005).

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