JUDY WOODRUFF: Next: Research shows that millennials, young people between 18 and 35, as we mentioned a few minutes ago, compared to their parents, are more racially diverse and more accepting of other races.

Many were surprised and frankly upset by the University of Oklahoma students who were caught making racist chants on video.

Well, Hari Sreenivasan wanted to learn more about racial bias among millennials, and he brings us a story about his visit to a research lab focused on race.

His report is another installment in our series Race Today.

JONATHAN MENTOR: I believe that there is less racism in this particular generation.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Many millennials were shocked this month by the blatant racism shown in this viral video from the fraternity at the University of Oklahoma coming from people their own age.

SUMMER ANNE: In no way, shape or form should that video represent my generation as a whole. Part of my generation by no means is racist, by no means houses prejudices at — and at least, if they do, you know, carry stereotypes with them, are intelligent enough not to voice them to anybody.

MAN: Well, I feel that our generation is less racist, due to exposure of events and social media and on TV. And, like, word is spreading and people are becoming more conscious to racism and trying to make a change.

HARI SREENIVASAN: But it’s not always that simple. And millennials themselves will be the first to admit it.

JONATHAN MENTOR: There is less racism, but the racism that does still pervade everyday interactions with people, it’s so much more subtle and quiet. And it’s almost like: “I don’t like black people. Oh hey, Shaquan, how are you?  Welcome to the office.”

HARI SREENIVASAN: A 2010 report by the Pew Research Center noted that the millennial generation, ages 18 to 29, was more racially diverse, better educated, and seen as more racially tolerant than their parents and grandparents.

But while millennials are more likely to say they’re not racist or use racist expressions, some psychologists say that they often show the same subconscious prejudices as their parents.

David Amodio, a psychologist at New York University, studies racial biases.

DAVID AMODIO, New York University: If you’re an American, you’re exposed to similar culture, similar information in the media, similar social structures. And it seems that all of those influences come into the mind.

You could be passive and these things will come in. Memory is kind of like a sponge. And it gets into your mind. Once it’s there, it might come out.

HARI SREENIVASAN: When these prejudices soak up in the mind, they’re what psychologists call implicit biases, unconscious thoughts that shape our actions. They are harder to observe and study than explicit biases, like a racist chant on a bus.

So Amodio tests subjects by forcing them to act on instinct, to make quick racial judgments in a controlled setting. It is a way to see just what has been soaked up in that mental sponge, regardless of generation. I decided to give it a try.

So unpleasant or white left, and pleasant or black right. OK, no problem.

First I took the IAT, or Implicit Association Test, which is freely available online. It measures how quickly I associate positive and negative words with skin color. Then I went through a more difficult exam. In this test, I had under a second to decide whether or not to shoot the person that flashed on screen based on just one thing, whether or not they were holding a gun. Sometimes, the men were white. Sometimes, they were black.

I’m killing innocent people left and right. Oh, man. You know, I am trying really hard to figure out where the person’s hand is. But more, often than not, if I do it fast enough, the only thing I’m registering is the person’s race. And that’s not a very good decision-making process.

DAVID AMODIO: So you experience that.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Computers in the next room tracked exactly where my eyes were looking on screen to measure what I actually saw before pulling the trigger or deciding not to. Almost all participants, out of instinct, look first to a person’s face before seeing what’s in their hand.

DAVID AMODIO: They go to the face. They get down and toward the hand. But this is the decision point. So they’re still making a decision, and I don’t know if it was to shoot or not on this trial, but they’re making a decision before they even get right on to the object, before they fixate on the object itself.

HARI SREENIVASAN: So they’re deciding to shoot before they even see the gun?

DAVID AMODIO: That’s right.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Or the wallet.

DAVID AMODIO: That’s what we find.

HARI SREENIVASAN: We will get to my findings in a minute.

Other tests track, in real time, exactly what parts of the brain are activated when making these race-based decisions. So why does this matter?  Research finds that implicit biases are not just an issue between whites and blacks. It exists among all races. In the real world, these biases play out in courtrooms, where jurors have implicit biases against defendants, and with doctors and what treatments they prescribe their patients.

DAVID AMODIO: When you look around, you see people from all different backgrounds. You have no idea where they’re from really or what they’re thinking or what they’re doing here. But we categorize them instantly.

HARI SREENIVASAN: And how much of it is human instinct, human nature to make that decision?  Right now, I’m not threatened by these dogs that are right behind us, but some part of me as a human being looks out at a street and says, am I threatened by that person or am I not?  It’s kind of a survival instinct.

DAVID AMODIO: It is. This is going on all the time in the back of your mind. You have to — as a human being, to survive, you have to be ready for anything at any moment. So it’s always there. It’s just a matter of trying to stay focused and treating people like humans.

HARI SREENIVASAN: And in this increasingly virtual world, our biases, explicit and implicit, follow us online, where many millennials spend much of their time.

CHRISTIAN RUDDER, Author, “Dataclysm”: Racism is a thing, sexism is a thing, regardless of whether it’s online or offline.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Christian Rudder was one of the co-founders of OkCupid, an online dating site that was bought by Match.com. He also authored “Dataclysm,” a book that dives deep into the human mind using big data to observe, among other things, how people found their mates. And there are clear patterns when analyzing hundreds of thousands of heterosexual profiles, including those of millennials.

There were three interesting findings. All races were likely to select their own. All women, regardless of race, had preference for white males. All non-black profiles, both men and women, had a statistical dislike of black profiles.

CHRISTIAN RUDDER: In dating, you judge people reflexively, in the same way that you might — it’s maybe not the same, but similar to how you might judge someone at a job interview, or when they try to rent your apartment or apply for a loan. It’s very much the data of the first impression.

SUMMER ANNE: Like, I have piercings. People judge me based on that. They think that, you know, I’m a punk, oh, I don’t have a job, or I’m young.

MAN: I mean, everyone has…

MAN: Stereotypes.

MAN: Stereotypes. Yes, everyone has stereotypes. Everyone does.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Similar to the words in the hit Broadway musical “Avenue Q.”

SINGERS (singing): Everyone’s a little bit racist. It’s true.

HARI SREENIVASAN: Including, it turns out, me.

Interestingly enough, Amodio’s first test results found that my sentiments actually showed a slight preference toward black faces, that I had no problem associating positive words with darker skin. That’s not the norm. More than half the population who have taken the exam find take less time to put negative words next to black faces.

So I’m shoing a preference in one way or another, according to the test.

DAVID AMODIO: Yes.

HARI SREENIVASAN: It’s just not the way that 51 percent are showing it, right?

DAVID AMODIO: Yes, that’s right.

HARI SREENIVASAN: But this is where it gets interesting. In the second test, where I had to react almost on instinct and decide whether to shoot or not based on what I thought in someone’s hand, I was faster at shooting armed blacks than armed whites. And I was far more likely to shoot an unarmed black man than an unarmed white one.

Sadly, that is the national norm, including for millennials.

For the PBS NewsHour, I’m Hari Sreenivasan reporting from New York.

JUDY WOODRUFF: For more on our series Race Today, please visit our home page. That’s PBS.org/NewsHour.