

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

OBJECTIVE

To understand that we all have biases, that these biases may contradict our expressed beliefs and that they can and do influence our actions.

GROUP AGREEMENTS

Remind participants of the [Group Agreements](#)

INTRODUCTION (3 minutes)

I want to share with you a riddle: “A father and son were involved in a car accident in which the father was killed and the son was seriously injured. The father was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident and his body was taken to a local morgue. The son was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital and was immediately wheeled into an emergency operating room. A surgeon was called. Upon arrival and seeing the patient, the attending surgeon exclaimed “Oh my God, it’s my son!’ Can you explain this?”¹ Give participants several seconds to think before asking volunteers for answers.

Around 40% of individuals will not come up with the most obvious answer when faced with this riddle—that the surgeon is the boy’s mother¹. If our brain automatically associates being a surgeon with being a man it will impact our problem-solving capabilities with this riddle.

DISCUSSION: What is Unconscious Bias? (10-15 minutes)

Unconscious bias can be defined as learned assumptions or unsupported judgments that influence our understanding, decision-making and actions without even realizing it. This often causes us to favor one person, group, or thing over another in ways that are unfair. We all have biases, they are the mental shortcuts our brain takes, often without our noticing, that allows us to “fill in the blanks” of what we don’t know about someone or something with what we expect to be true based on our past experiences, our background, and messages from the media and our social environments. We may be influenced by unconscious biases that even run contrary to our deeply held beliefs.

Watch the following video clip and then discuss as a group:

PAUSE to Disrupt Bias-Rosalyn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYQEj-Qk56k>

1. What was the bias that Rosalyn details in this clip and more importantly, how was she able to tune in to it and critically examine her thinking?
2. Have you ever had a similar experience? Either where you became aware of your own bias or had an experience where you were impacted by bias?

DISCUSSION: What is the Impact of Unconscious Bias? (10-15 min)

In the beginning, for some of us, our unconscious bias may have made it a little more difficult for us to solve the riddle but in real life the impacts of unconscious bias can be much greater. In the video, Rosalyn talked about how unconscious bias almost influenced a hiring decision. Bias can have big impacts on our decision-making. In fact, bias often leads us to favor one individual, group, or thing over another in ways that are unfair. It can impact who we see as competent, or dangerous, or trustworthy. It can impact how we respond to individuals and shape our expectations of others. We're going to watch a couple more video clips to explore this further.

Watch the following videos:

PAUSE to Disrupt Bias - Shipla (2:24)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61AHQNupaAA>

Let's Talk / NPR (2:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucEAcIMkS0c>

Afterwards discuss:

1. Unconscious biases are learned assumptions or unsupported judgements. What were some of the real-life examples from these clips of the assumptions and judgements that were made?
2. Research has shown that we have less empathy for people who seem different from us. The second video ends by asking, "If there's an empathy deficit in preschool, imagine where else that's true." How might an empathy bias influence juries, employers, landlords, educators, health care providers, police officers, politicians or even us without any of us even being aware of it?

3. The very fact that these are unconscious processes that occur in our automatic brain often makes it difficult to see the ways in which our decision-making and actions are affected by bias. How can we grow our awareness of our unconscious bias and what are some strategies that might combat unconscious biases?

OPTIONAL: REFLECTION (15-20min)

If time allows, have participants explore one of the articles/resources below and identify one action step they can take to address unconscious bias. Provide opportunity to share out.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Are You Aware of Your Biases?
<https://hbr.org/2022/02/are-you-aware-of-your-biases?ab=at art art 1x4 s02>
- Take an Implicit Association Test (IAT) at Project Implicit
<https://www.projectimplicit.net/>
- Strategies for Addressing Implicit Bias in Early Childhood Education
<https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2015-06//implicit-bias-strategies.pdf>
- How to Identify, Understand, and Unlearn Implicit Bias in Patient Care
<https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm/issues/2019/0700/p29.html#fpm20190700p29-ut1>

EVALUATION & CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS

1. The Strengthening Diversity Community of Practice would love to hear your thoughts on how well the content supported your learning. Please complete the [PD Mini Feedback Form](#). A link to the training certificate will be made available upon submission. Facilitators are encouraged to provide participants with the link to the feedback form.
2. Participants who are a part of the Wisconsin Registry can receive credit for completing a PD Mini. Refer to the [Registry Credit Instruction Document](#) for further details.

FACILITATOR SUGGESTIONS

1. The questions are just ideas. Feel free to follow the lead of the conversation and spend more time in one section and less time in another.
2. Talking about unconscious bias can sometimes feel difficult. Try to reflect on your own life and include examples of your own experience with unconscious bias. It can go a long way in helping people open up in conversation.
3. A lot of research has shown that simply raising awareness of bias doesn't necessarily change people or systems. It needs to be coupled with strategies to help mitigate bias. The reflection piece of this activity is really important. If you don't have time, consider asking participants to read an article/take a test and identify one action step they can take to manage implicit bias and then share it at your next meeting.

Sources:

1. 'A-ha' Activities for Unconscious Bias Training
<https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2018/08/16/a-ha-activities-for-unconscious-bias-training/#:~:text=In%20this%20exercise%2C%20participants%20stick,use%20to%20form%20the%20groups.>
2. Vanderbilt University: Unconscious Bias
<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/diversity/unconscious-bias/#:~:text=Unconscious%20bias%20>