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# Mitigating Bias in Work and Learning Environments

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*// Always exceed expectations through teamwork and excellent client service.*

# Roadmap for Today's Discussion

- **PART ONE:**

- Basic Framework for Understanding Implicit Bias

- **PART TWO:**

- The Impact of Bias in Work and Learning Environments

- **PART THREE:**

- Suggestions for Recognizing and Interrupting Bias

# POLL QUESTION

What word comes to mind  
when you think of  
BIAS

# Grounding: Terms and Definitions

- **Diversity** speaks to the immutable attributes and experiences that each individual brings to enhance plurality, creativity and innovation in work and learning environments.
- **Inclusion** is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure; a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging.

# Grounding: Terms and Definitions

- **Identity** is the condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing.
- **Social identity groups** are based on the physical, social and mental characteristics of individuals. They can be obvious and clear, or not so obvious and clear. They are often self-claimed, but are frequently ascribed by others.

# Implicit Bias

## ■ Implicit Bias

- Also known as “implicit social cognition,” implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner.
  - These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control.
- **The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University (2015)**

# Examples of Bias

- **Similarity/Affinity**
  - The tendency to gravitate toward those with whom we share similar backgrounds or identities.
- **Sufficiency**
  - The tendency to bypass a more critical, deliberative evaluation process and instead make a hasty decision or judgment based on minimal facts for the sake of expediting the process.
- **Spatial**
  - The tendency to gravitate toward those who are in close proximity to us in terms of physical location/space.
- **Safety**
  - The tendency to gravitate toward that which is familiar and within our zones of comfort and safety.
- **Survivorship**
  - Often referred to as “recency bias,” it is the tendency to base a decision on the most recent occurrence or interaction with an individual—whether positive or negative.

# Microaggressions (and their connection to implicit bias)

Everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether **intentional or unintentional**, which communicate hostile, derogatory or **negative messages** to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

In many cases, these **hidden** messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of **target** persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.

Sue, D.W. (2010). Microaggressions: More than Just Race. Psychology Today. Retrieved November 5, 2016.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>

“Research suggests that **none of us are immune from inheriting the racial, gender, and sexual orientation biases of our society.** We have been socialized into racist, sexist, and heterosexist attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Much of this is outside the level of conscious awareness, thus we engage in actions that unintentionally oppress and discriminate against others.”

Sue, D.W. (2010). Microaggressions: More than Just Race. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved November 5, 2016.  
[https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race.](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race)

# The Intersection of Implicit Bias and Illegal Discrimination

- **Employment laws have prohibited intentional discrimination for decades:**
  - Refusing to hire someone because of their race.
  - Choosing to fire someone because of their age.
- **Implicit bias is different, yet it has been recognized as an obstacle to achieving equity. What makes it different?**
  - Well-intentioned behavior? Unknown to the actor?
- **Employment discrimination laws may have shaped the way we think about bias in some unhelpful ways.**
- **Confronting and interrupting implicit bias includes recognizing that the law merely sets the “floor”—not the “ceiling”—for behavior, and that unfairness can arise from small acts of disrespect or distrust that lead to disparate outcomes and opportunities.**

# Affirmative Action vs. Equal Opportunity

- **Affirmative Action** focuses on eliminating present effects of historic discrimination; it is generally a specific program that applies to federal contractors.
- **Equal Opportunity** focuses on ensuring equitable access to opportunities for entry and advancement.

# Bias Creates “Opportunity Gaps”

- **ASSUMPTION:** The work environment is a meritocracy—the best and brightest employees reach greater levels of success.
  - Are opportunities to succeed equally distributed, or does bias play a role in who receives key assignments and projects that lead to advancement?
- **“Opportunity Gaps” can inhibit an individual’s progress:**
  - Hiring
  - Assignments
  - Performance evaluations
  - Promotions
  - Compensation
  - Sponsorships

# EXAMPLE: “Matched Resume” Studies

## Race/Ethnicity

“Jamal” needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as “Greg”

## Gender

“Jennifer” was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than “John”

## Sexual Orientation

Holding a leadership position in an LGBTQ+ organization made a woman who identifies as queer receive 30% fewer call-backs, and a male who identifies as gay receive 40% fewer call-backs than candidates who identify as heterosexual

## Parental Status

Membership in the Parent-Teacher Association made a mother 79% less likely to be hired than a non-mother, and offered \$11,000 less in starting salary

## Social Status

A candidate that listed “elite” hobbies of polo, sailing and classical music was 12 times more likely to get a call-back than a candidate who listed pick-up soccer, country music and mentoring other first-generation students

# Ways to Mitigate Bias

- Provide and participate in sustained opportunities to engage with one another
- Incorporate education and development opportunities, article-sharing, group discussions, coffee chats, etc.
- Acknowledge that barriers exist for historically marginalized identities/communities
- Engage in self-reflective exercises
- Listen fully for understanding – be mindful not to dismiss the lived experiences of others
- Take ownership of your thoughts/understandings/beliefs/actions (use “I” statements)
- Connect with people whose intersecting identities differ from your own – resist cultural voyeurism

# Ways to Mitigate Bias

- **Avoid making decisions based on protected identities**
- **Understand implicit bias**
  - We all have it; understand it so you can interrupt it
- **Implicit bias trainings should not be “one-and-done” and should not be targeted to one social identity group vs. another**
- **Review hiring, promotions and performance review processes**
- **Ensure decision-makers at every level are provided with ongoing training on how to recognize and incorporate “bias interrupters”; e.g.:**
  - Implementing structured interviews
  - Broadening recruitment efforts
  - Monitoring work allocation
  - Ensuring special assignments, trainings, mentoring and networking opportunities are inclusive



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