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Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions: Examples and Impact

Disclosure

“None of the planners for this educational activity have relevant financial relationships(s) to disclose with ineligible companies whose primary business is producing, marketing, selling, re-selling, or distributing healthcare products used by or on patients.”

Objectives

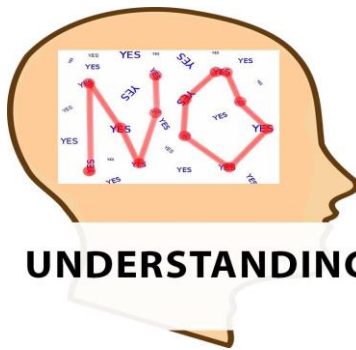
- Define the concepts of unconscious bias and microaggressions
- Discuss the impact that bias and microaggressions have on individuals
- Develop a toolkit to respond to microaggressions
- Learn how to be a bias interrupter



Unconscious Bias

The lack of full integration of individuals representing diverse backgrounds has to do with the persistence of unconscious bias.

Even the best organizations/HRs can be undermined by unconscious biases.



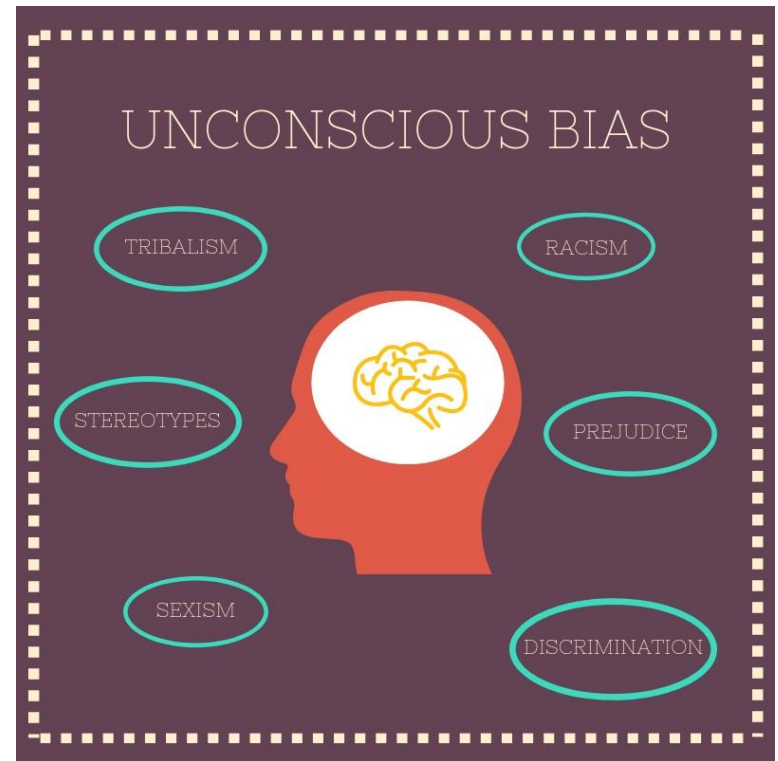
UNDERSTANDING BIAS

- What are they? Attributes that we quickly assign to people based on their social identities
- Exist without realizing it
- Everyone has a bias—it does NOT make us bad people
- Represent neural connections within our brains
- Result of cultural conditioning
- Often are contrary to our personal values

Identifying Unconscious Bias

1. Talking over or interrupting others
2. Taking credit for others' ideas
3. Failing to take others' ideas seriously
4. Making assumptions you will speak for an entire group
5. Making assumptions your opinions count more
6. Articulating others' ideas for them

These behaviors reinforce the very biases that are at the root



Microaggressions

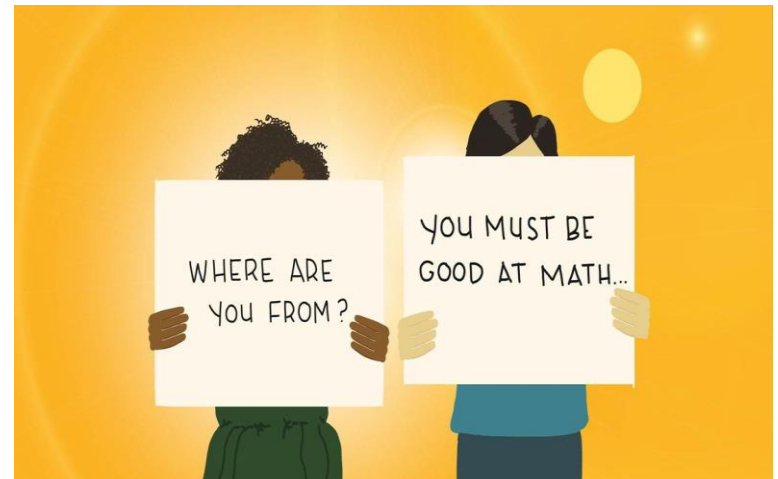
“Brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral and environmental assaults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.”

-Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

- Based on social identities
- Perpetrator views **intent**, recipient views **impact**
- Microaggressions typically have positive intent
- Perceived minimal harm; lack of knowledge of cumulative effects
- “Death by a thousand wounds”

Examples of Microaggressions

- Expressing racially charged political opinions
- Failing to pronounce or continuing to mispronounce names
- Using belittling language: “You speak English well” for an immigrant
- Using sexist language: “Why aren’t you married yet?”
- Disregarding different religious traditions/celebrations
- Assuming gender
- Continuing to misuse pronouns after indication of gender pronoun
- Making assumptions about people’s backgrounds



Bias Interrupters and Strategies

- The “catch 22” of responding to microaggressions (doubt, fear of reporting, anger if left unreported)
- Perspective taking
- Individuating
- Stereotype replacement and counteracting negative stereotypes
- Practice bystander intervention and support colleagues
- Engage in microaffirmations
- Stay engaged and celebrate diversity

Take Home Points

- We are human and all have hidden biases
- Practice being non-judgmental and interrupt your own bias
- Commit to having difficult conversations with others
- Listen carefully and reflectively
- Speak your truths and allow others to do the same
- Speak up and support colleagues/patients
- Educate others about implicit bias and microaggressions
- Participate in and respond to equity; put these ideas into daily work

*Take advantage of the Harvard Implicit Bias Test to gauge unconscious bias

Source: <http://cornell.edu>

Group Discussion and Questions

Can you identify an experience where you were “othered” or subjected to a microaggression or witnessed one? How have you encountered this in the workplace? In society?

- What was said/done to you? What did you witness?
- How did it make you feel?
- What did you do in response? Or would have liked to have done in hindsight?
- What would you advise others to do, should they be victims of the same type of microaggression?



Any questions? Please feel free to email me at mhassanien@northernlight.org