



# Understanding and overcoming unconscious bias

Resources *for Living*®

# Objectives

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- Understand how the unconscious mind works
- Understand unconscious bias
- Understand how unconscious bias affects our decisions
- Examine common messages that influence our thinking
- Review skills to help address unconscious bias



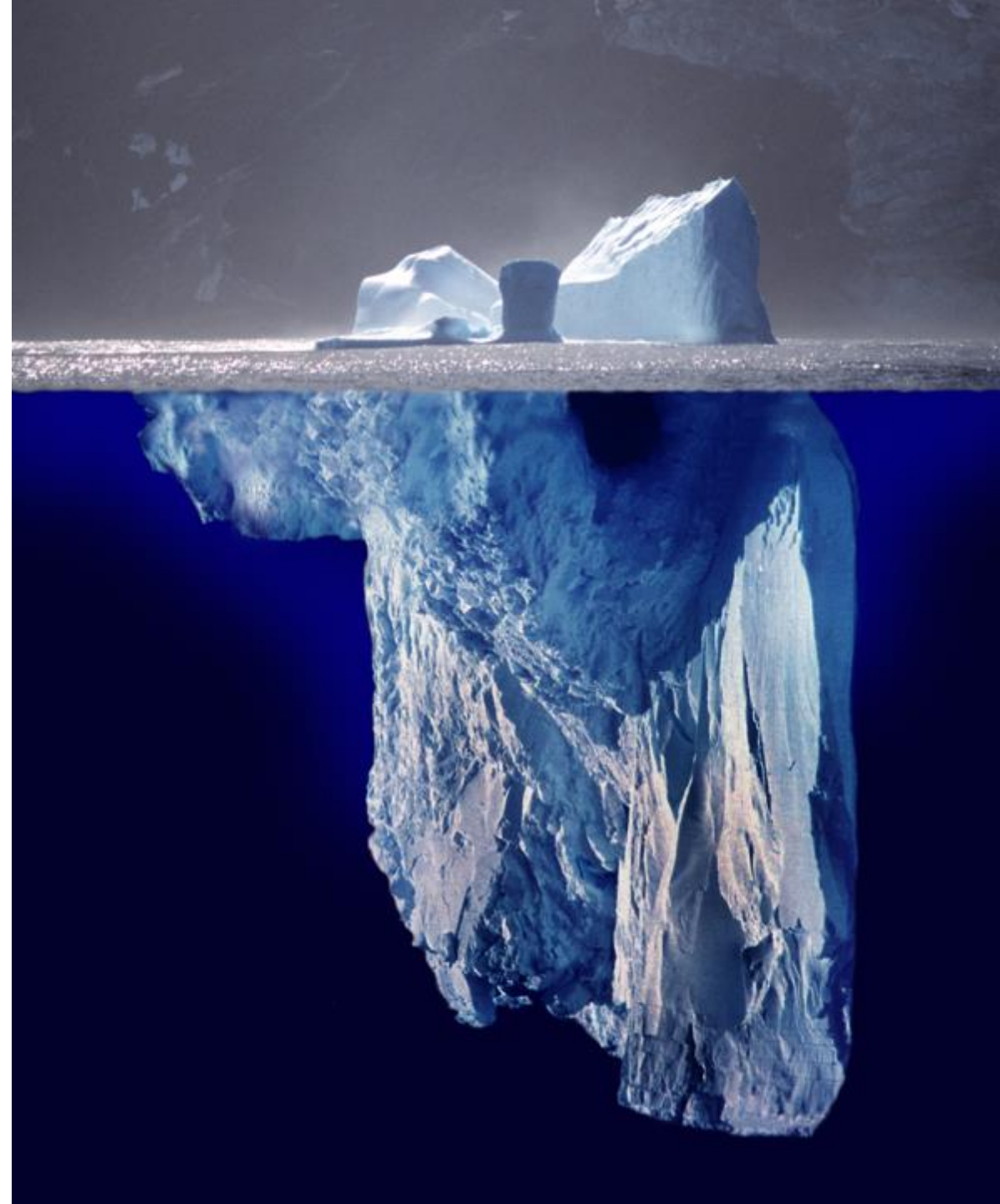
# Understanding your unconscious



# We have two minds

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- The conscious mind
  - Within your awareness
  - Logical
  - Rational
  - Slow to respond
- The unconscious mind
  - Outside your awareness
  - Based on feelings, urges and memories
  - Quick to respond



# The unconscious mind saves us energy

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- Conscious thinking requires a lot of energy and can be a slow process
- The unconscious sifts through information and tells us what to notice (like what is safe vs. dangerous)
- Brains save time and energy by making things automatic in the unconscious mind
  - Habits
  - Fight or flight
  - Snap decisions



**“We don’t have unconscious biases because we’re bad people – we have them because we are people”<sup>1</sup>**

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Joelle Emerson

## Conscious bias

Bias that is intentional and within our awareness. Conscious bias can be addressed with laws and policies.<sup>2</sup>

## Unconscious bias

Bias that shapes our feelings and behavior without us recognizing it. Unconscious bias is far more common than conscious bias and is often at odds with our conscious values<sup>2,3</sup>

# Common types of bias<sup>3</sup>

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- **Affinity bias.** Bias towards those who are similar to you
- **Confirmation bias.** Paying attention to information that supports your bias while ignoring information that challenges it
- **Labeling bias.** Making judgements based on what “group” people belong to
- **Selective attentional bias.** Choosing to focus on certain parts of a person and disregarding others





## **Halo effect**

We see one thing we like about a person. Then we let the halo glow from that thing drown out our view of any negative traits

## **Horns effect**

We see one thing we dislike about a person. Then we let that thing cloud our view of any positive traits

# What we see impacts our perception

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High levels of TV viewing in children

4-year-olds were more likely to believe boys and men are better than girls and women<sup>4</sup>

Media use among early adolescents

More accepting of sexual harassment dating violence<sup>4</sup>

Exposure to racial bias on TV

Increased racial bias among viewers (even though they didn't notice the TV bias)<sup>5</sup>

Exposure to anti-refugee sentiment on social media

Predicts violent crimes against refugees<sup>6</sup>

What does our culture say about:

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**Caucasians?**

**LGBTQ+  
people?**

**Millennials?**

**Women?**

**Overweight  
people?**

**Conservatives?**

**Latinos?**

**Asians?**

**Liberals?**

**Immigrants?**

**Men?**

**The  
elderly?**

**Different  
religions?**

**African  
Americans?**

# Bias and gender

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- U.S. orchestras revealed women's odds of making it past the first round of auditions increased 50 percent with blind auditions<sup>7</sup>
- Mothers overestimate their sons' crawling abilities compared to their daughters<sup>8</sup>
- Students read a case study about female venture capitalist, Heidi Roizen. They rated her unlikable, unworthy of being hired and "selfish." But when her name was changed to "Howard," they found "him" likable<sup>9</sup>





## **Case study 1**

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### **What's in a name?**

Job applicants with traditionally white-sounding first names are more likely to get called for interviews than those with Asian- or stereotypically African American -sounding first names<sup>10</sup>

## **Case study 2**

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### **Crime and punishment**

White male job applicants with a criminal record had more positive responses than African American male applicants with no criminal record<sup>11</sup>

## **Case study 3**

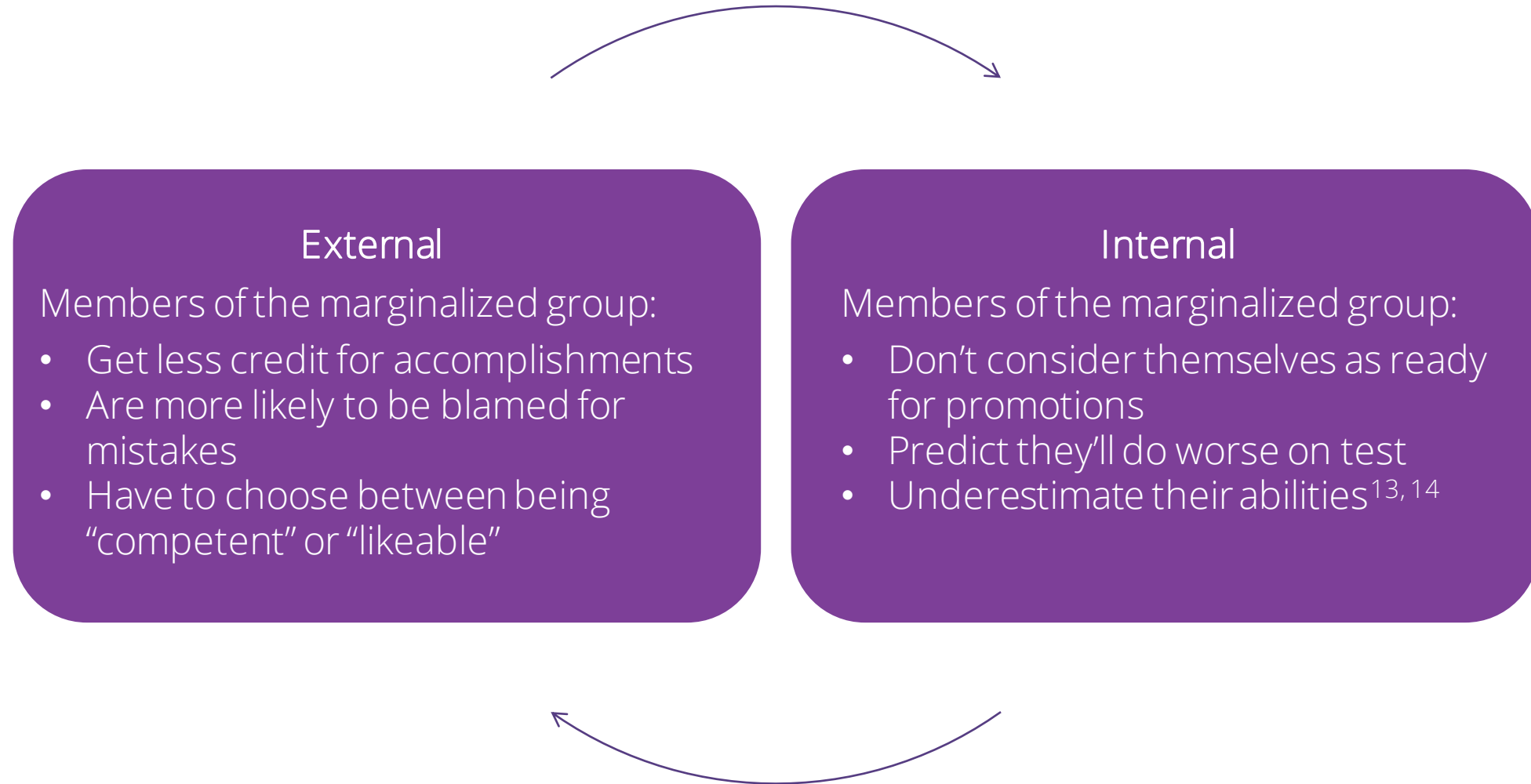
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### **Making the grade**

Law partners graded a mistake-laden memo. They gave higher scores when they thought the author was white and said the person had “potential.” When they thought the author was black, they gave a lower score and said he was “average at best.”<sup>12</sup>

# Bias can be internalized

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**“A recent study even shows that [unconscious bias] trainings can backfire and make people more likely to stereotype because they’re told everyone has bias.**

**That makes it seem more socially acceptable and lessens the motivation to avoid it.”<sup>15</sup>**

Committing to  
change





You can use your conscious mind to challenge your subconscious thinking and put in organizational safeguards

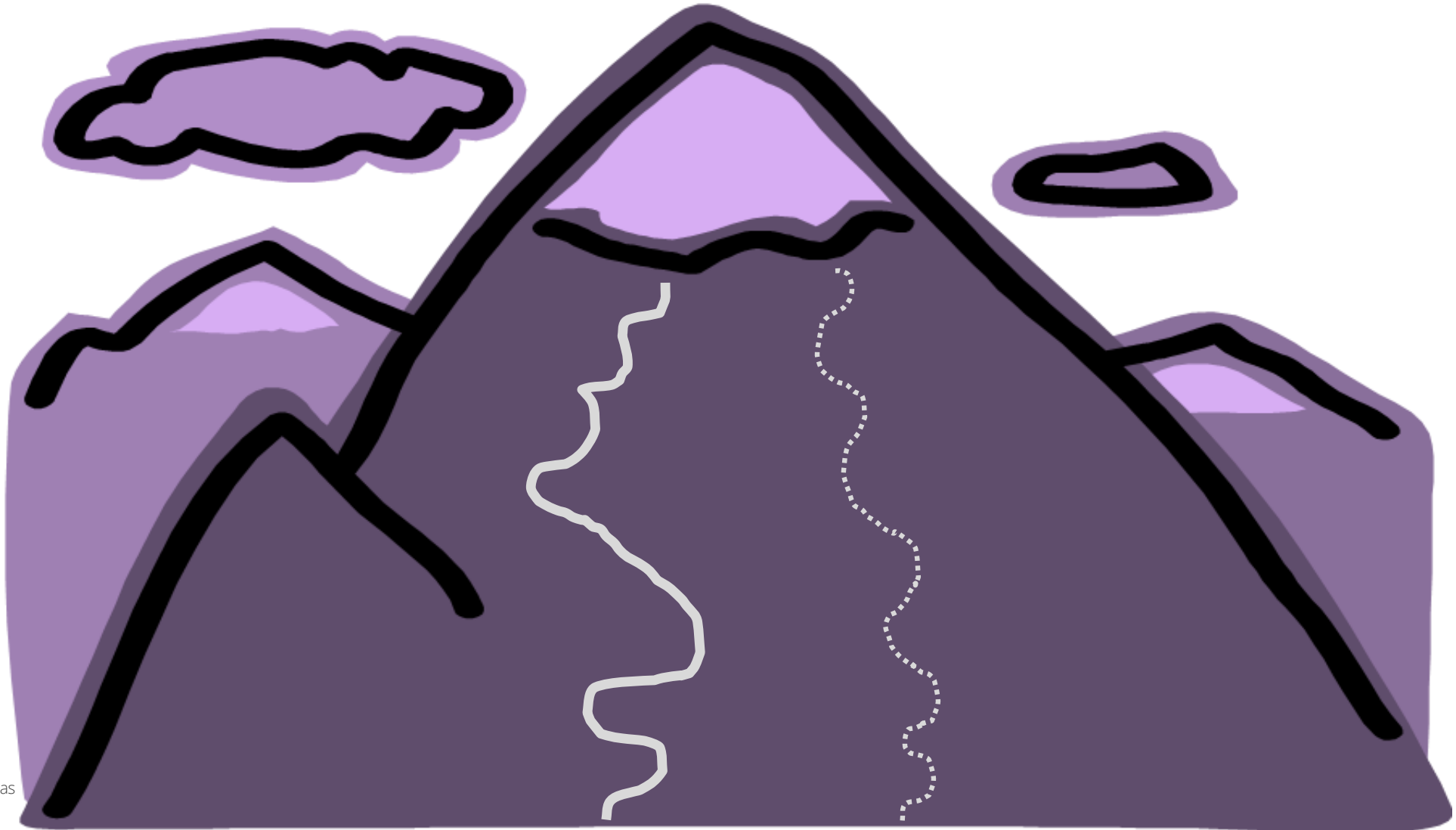
# The Stroop Test

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<b>red</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>yellow</b>	<b>purple</b>
<b>yellow</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>green</b>	<b>red</b>
<b>blue</b>	<b>purple</b>	<b>green</b>	<b>red</b>
<b>yellow</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>red</b>	<b>green</b>

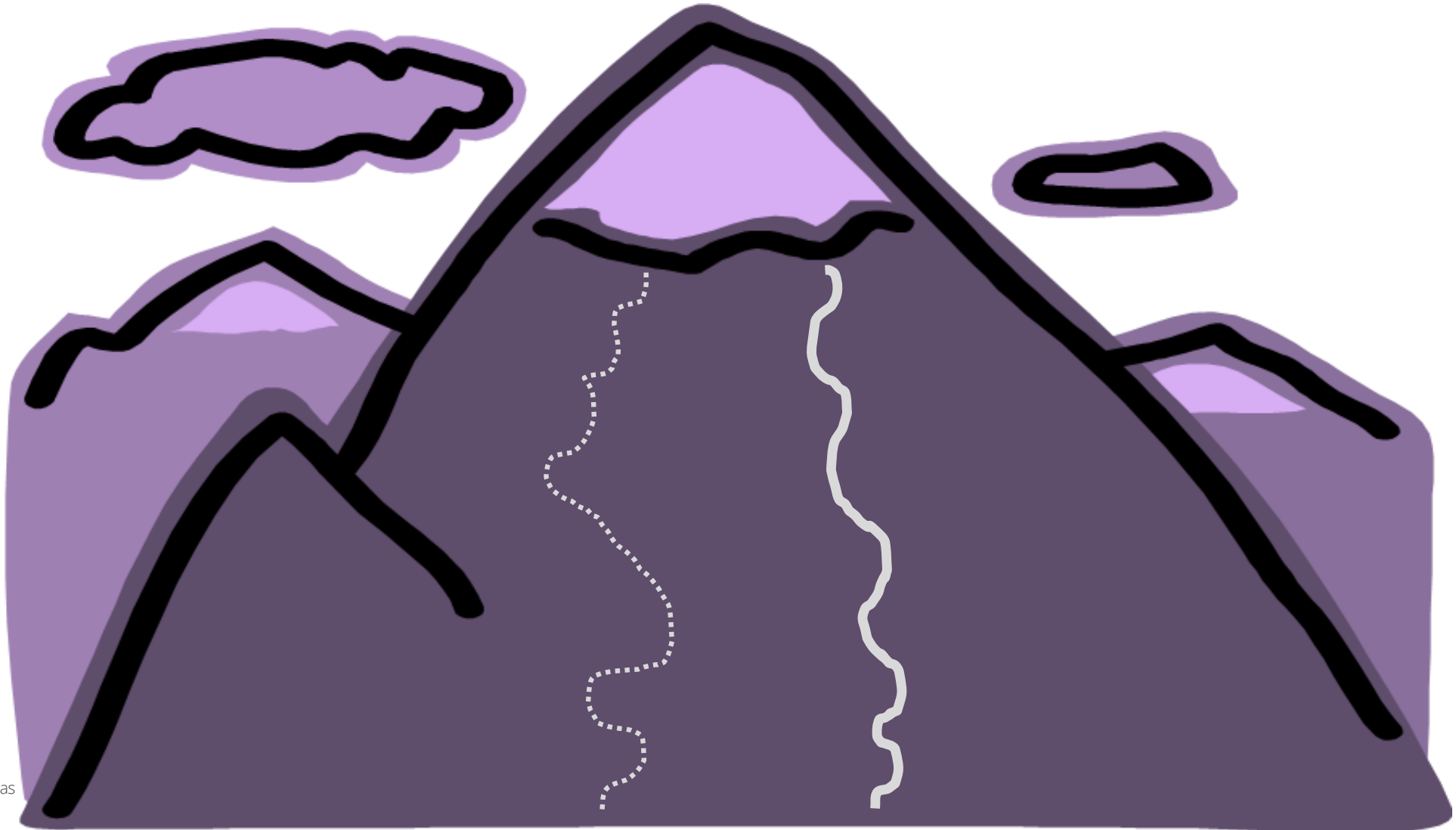
# Change is possible

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# Change is possible

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# The Stroop Test

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<b>red</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>yellow</b>	<b>purple</b>
<b>yellow</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>green</b>	<b>red</b>
<b>blue</b>	<b>purple</b>	<b>green</b>	<b>red</b>
<b>yellow</b>	<b>blue</b>	<b>red</b>	<b>green</b>

# Get uncomfortable!

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You can't change your thinking without letting go of what's comfortable

- Many of us were raised so we don't know how to talk about race, religion and diversity
- Many of us associate "racism" and "sexism" with "intentional, hateful thoughts and actions"
- Many of us were taught that prejudice is wrong so we want to deny its existence within ourselves
- Many of us learned that the best way to deal with diversity is to pretend differences don't exist (being "colorblind")



# Identify your bias

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## You can't address what you don't know

- Notice your own bias, especially when you have a strong reaction to someone, whether positive or negative
  - Your thoughts
  - Your feelings
  - Your actions
- Try to avoid the knee-jerk reaction to respond, “Not me,” when bias is discussed
- Get feedback from others on how your bias shows up
- Listen to and learn from people in marginalized groups



# Changing your own bias

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## Reframe your thinking

- How would you feel if the behavior by the “in group” person was done by someone in the “out group” and vice-versa?

## Answer these questions:

- “What’s one thing I can do to change my bias?”
- “What’s one thing I can do to prevent my bias from leading to discrimination?”





# Challenge bias in others

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- Engage in empathic conversations with others
- Avoid terms that can feel judgmental to the other person:
  - Racist
  - Privileged
  - Sexist
  - Xenophobic
  - Homophobic
  - Prejudiced



# Closing thoughts

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Unconscious bias is normal and natural. And raising awareness of bias is only the beginning<sup>16</sup>

- Accept that bias affects you
- Be concerned about the consequences
- Take steps to make sure your actions more closely match your values





**“The difficulty isn’t  
that we have negative  
thoughts. The  
problem comes when  
we believe our  
thoughts are true.”**

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Barbara Markway, Ph.D



# Thank you for attending!

All calls are confidential, except as required by law.

Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date;  
however it is subject to change.

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# References

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- <sup>5</sup> [TV racism equals real world racism](#). Greater Good Magazine. Berkeley. Accessed March 2019.
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- <sup>7</sup> Rice, Curt. [How blind auditions help orchestras eliminate gender bias](#). The Guardian. Accessed March 2019.
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- <sup>9</sup> Katsarou, Maria. [Women & the leadership labyrinth: Howard vs Heidi](#). Leadership Psychology Institute. Accessed March 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Mercado, Mia. [Our culture still discriminates against names that don't sound white or male & it's proof we're definitely not in a post racial society yet](#). Bustle. Accessed March 2019.
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