Unconscious bias

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Hi everyone. Thanks for listening to this recording on understanding and overcoming unconscious bias. My name is Erica Hanlon, I'm a licensed professional counselor and a life coach. And I am honored to be able to bring this really important topic to you. Now, before we jump into this whole thing, I just want to say that we recognize that this can be a touchy subject for people. And it tends to be problematic in one of two ways.

One, talking about a person's bias can bring up really uncomfortable feelings, it can bring up feelings of shame. And when we feel ashamed, here's what tends to happen, we tend to shutdown, we tend to get defensive, and then we stop learning. So, that is one danger of today's webinar. The other thing that can happen especially when we talk about unconscious bias is that we normalize it. Now, it is true that this is normal and I do want to stress that this is just a function of you having a human brain, but here's where that backfires. Sometimes people listen to that and they think, oh, well, it's just totally normal, I can't do anything about it, oh well, then they go about business as usual.

My hope for you today is that you will get just uncomfortable enough that you will want to maybe make some changes on how you treat your human brain, so then you can be much more intentional with the kinds of decisions that you make in your life related to bias. So, that's my hope for you today. But, most especially I would like you to think about what your hope is for this webinar, what do you want to walk away with at the end of this training? What do you want to understand better about yourself, in particular? So, let's dive in.

Objectives

So, today's webinar is going to first and foremost talk about your brain. You have a human brain and the human brain has both an unconscious and a conscious function. And so, today we're going to talk about that unconscious mind and how it is working, sort of like the wizard in "The Wizard of Oz", it's behind the curtain. It's more then just like that big green face, you see the green face, but what's really going on is behind that curtain. We're going to pull that curtain back a little bit for you today. And you will have the opportunity to understand unconscious bias, how it functions, where it comes from, and how it's effecting your decisions. We'll also talk about some common messages that tend to influence our thinking. And finally, we'll review some skills to help you address unconscious bias moving forward.

Understanding your unconscious

So, in order to understand this whole unconscious bias thing, we first have to understand how the unconscious mind works. A quick side note here just about nomenclature, about language. You got the term unconscious and you got the term subconscious. Now those two terms tend to be used interchangeably, but for the purpose of today's training, we're going to stick to the term unconscious.

We have two minds

Now, here's a really interesting idea I want you to consider. We all have two minds, almost like two brains, two ways of knowing, two kinds of memory, two levels of attitude. And one of those is above the surface in our moment to moment awareness and the other is below the surface where we can't really see it, it's a little harder to access, and it's operating on an autopilot that guides us through most of life.

Now, Sigmund Freud, you probably heard of, he actually compared our minds to a large iceberg. And in this iceberg you've got your conscious mind, consisting of all those mental processes that we have awareness of because we are above the surface, just like that sort of 10% of an iceberg. Now, essentially, what we know about our thinking is literally just that tip of the iceberg. Much of how we respond to our environments is actually dictated by mental operations and judgments that are actually happening outside of our conscious awareness. And our conscious mind is not only within our awareness, meaning, here, you can sit right now and you can observe your thoughts. What are your thoughts about this training so far? Are you thinking why am I here? Maybe you're thinking, I can't wait to learn about this, or this is really interesting, or this is so boring. Whatever those sentences are in your mind right now are within your awareness, they are part of your conscious mind.

Now, those thoughts tend to be based more on logic, it tends to be much more rational, but it's also a lot slower. Think about when you decide what you're going to have for dinner. You may slave over that thought, what am I going to have, well, I had this last night and we're going to have this tomorrow night and I had this for lunch. It's all kind of slow to decide what am I going to do about dinner. But, on the other hand, our unconscious thinking is not only outside of our awareness, it also tends to be less logical, it's based on feelings, urges, memories, but it also allows us to respond really quickly. If you are out and about and there is a gunshot, you're going to runaway, you're not going to think about it, you're not going to be like, wait, what was that sound, where's it coming from, why is everybody running? No, you're going to run, you're going to have a reaction. That is your unconscious mind and it is an important part of how your brain functions.

The unconscious mind saves us energy

So, you may be sitting here thinking, well, gosh the conscious mind sounds a little bit better than the unconscious mind, but I want you to consider this. You process millions of pieces of information, always. And if you had to think through each item consciously, it would be extremely inefficient for you brain, you would get nothing done. So, our unconscious mind saves us energy, it saves us time, it works much more quickly than our conscious mind, it tells us what we need to notice, like what is safe versus what is dangerous. And it saves us all kinds of time with things like habits, you don't have to think about how to brush your teeth. You just do it because you have those neural pathways already established in your brain, it's automatic.

Fight or flight, as I mentioned before, if you hear a gunshot, you're not going to sit around trying to examine what's going on, who did what, is it safe, is it not safe, no, you're going to run and you're going to make snap decisions. This saves your brain tons of energy. But, your conscious mind and your unconscious mind are both working at the same time.

Let me give you my favorite example of this. Let's say you're at a party and you're having a conversation with somebody, but someone across the room mentions your name, or maybe they mention a topic or subject you're really passionate about. Suddenly, that catches your attention. This is called a cocktail party phenomenon. And what it does is it demonstrates how your conscious mind and your unconscious mind are both working at the same time. Consciously, you focus on the person with whom you're having this conversation, you're listening to them, you're nodding your head, you're having thoughts about what they're saying. Meanwhile, your unconscious mind is taking in information from all around you, from the entire room. Your unconscious mind is listening in to every other conversation in the room. And it's sifting through it and it's discarding most of it as being not important, but if somebody says your name, they say something you're really interested about, your brain latches onto that data as being worthy of your attention and then brings it to your conscious awareness, so your like, wait, somebody said my name, what is that, what's going on, what's going on in that conversation?

So, I love that example of how the unconscious mind is always sifting through all of the information in our environment and deciding what's important and what's not important, but will bring things automatically to your attention that it deems to be worthy and dangerous, or a risk, or interesting. I love this quote here from Joelle Emerson, "We don't have unconscious biases because we're bad people, "we have them because we are people."[1] Y'all, unconscious bias is simply a function of having a human brain. One of the ways your brain saves time and energy is by chunking information, it links certain things with positive feelings and others with negative feelings. And this is mostly a unconscious process, but it can be within our awareness, too.

Now, a bias is basically an unfair prejudice either in favor of something or against something, maybe that's a thing, a person, or a group. And this bias is also based on stereotypes, which are basically exaggerated beliefs about a group of people that can be positive or negative. Here's an important note about stereotypes. Some may be true, many are wrong, but all of them are incomplete. It's like seeing a tiny little piece of a picture and then deciding what the entire picture is going to be. That part of the picture may be right, it may be misplaced, but it's always going to be just a teeny little part of the picture, it's not going to give you all of the information. But, again, our brains use these stereotypes to help us chunk information together and create those shortcuts to save us time and save us energy.

Conscious bias and unconscious bias

So, bias really effects us on several levels. On one level you have your perception, which is how you see people, how you see the world. Then you have your attitudes, bias effects how we react toward certain people or things. And then bias effects our behavior, how we treat other people with our actions. Now, bias can either be conscious or unconscious. Conscious bias is, again, it's on the tip of the iceberg, it's above the water, it's within our awareness, we can recognize it and it tends to be intentional.[2] So, here's an example. If you know you love your sports team, you love them, and you hate fans of the rival team, this is conscious, this is an example of conscious bias.

But, unconscious bias tends to be much more common, it's much more pervasive than conscious bias 'cause remember 90% of those thought processes are below the surface outside of our awareness. Bias is not immune to that. It's much more common and pervasive than conscious bias and it shapes our responses, it shapes our perceptions, our attitudes, our behaviors, even without us realizing it. And here is something that is really important to point out. And something that I think makes unconscious bias so uncomfortable and so tricky. Is that it's often in conflict with our conscious values.[2,3] So, you may respond to somebody based on a stereotype just automatically without even thinking about it, even if that is in conflict with what you consciously believe.

So, I was actually listening in on another training on unconscious bias. And the trainer was talk, I mean this is a professional, this is a professional psychologist who's an expert in bias. And he talked about being in a car and his car was parked and a group of young African American teens walked by his car and they were all kind of looking at him in a certain way. He was like, oh, gosh, they think I'm racist because here I am this white man in this car and they're looking at me, I bet they think I'm racist. And then he realized that without even paying attention to it, was actually reaching over to lock his door. So, consciously he was having this sort of awareness conversation about race and racism and prejudice, and then without even knowing it, he was having this response where he was responding to these young men as if they were a danger. And I think that happens for all of us, we

all have unconscious bias. And a lot of times it is at odds with what we consciously believe about people, or things, or groups. So, that's important to be aware of.

Common types of bias[3]

So, bias tends to show up in lots of different ways. One of these is affinity bias. We like people who are similar to us. And affinity bias helps us feel like we know where we belong in the world. If you see someone wearing a hat from your college and you feel a rush of positive feelings towards that person. I've been in that boat, I was in the car once and this car cut me off and I was like, I was having lots of negative thoughts about that person and that driver until I saw that they had a sticker on their car from my alma mater and I was like, well, well, maybe they're not so bad. That is an example of affinity bias, we all have it. Then we have confirmation bias. This tends to be, again, a very common type of bias. We tend to pay attention to information that supports our bias, that supports our beliefs while ignoring information that challenges it. And if we run into information that doesn't fit our bias, we tend to frame it as being an exception, and so we don't really have to challenge the stereotype that shapes our bias. So, the statement like, you know some of my best friends are blah, blah, blah, captures this tendency and explains why some people feel like those statements are an indication of bias. Then we have a labeling bias. And this is where we make judgments based on what group people belong to. So, let's say you're a Yankees fan and you see somebody in a Red Sox hat, ugh, that person's a jerk. You're a Red Sox fan and you see someone in a Yankees shirt, they're a jerk. This is labeling bias, it also tends to come up a lot with political affiliation, for example. You find out somebody is in a different political group then you, they have different political beliefs, they're registered differently than you, politically, you will instantly label them as being either a good person or a bad person. And then we have selective attentional bias. This is where we choose to focus on certain parts of a person and disregard others. So, one good example of this is within the medical field. So, doctors tend to spend less time educating obese patients and are more likely to blame their weight for health complaints without doing any other testing. They tend to blame any health complaint on the person's weight instead of exploring that issue further. That's an example of selective attentional bias.

Halo effect and horns effect

So, our unconscious mind is, basically, like speeding along the interstate, moving a million hours an hour, taking in bits of information, making judgments, and we're sort of along for the ride. You've heard the term, first impressions count. And within the first seven seconds of meeting somebody, people will have an impression of who you are. And some research actually suggest that a tenth of a second is all it takes to determine traits like trustworthiness. So, you can see how you'd form a bias whether it's positive or negative, very quickly. And people who create positive feelings and you will

probably get away with more things, this is called the halo effect. So, for example, when you're looking through someone's resume, you may see that they went to a highly regarded college. And then after you see that, you tend to see everything else about that person surrounded by the glow of that achievement. Or maybe when your parents get nostalgic about the good old days, while ignoring all the hardship and negative things about that time. Those are all examples of a halo effect. Now, the horns effect is the direct opposite of the halo effect. The horns effect is when we see one bad thing about a person and we let it cloud our opinion of their other attributes. For example, we tend to judge somewhat more harshly if we find them to be physically unattractive. So, those are to examples of very common biases, the halo effect and the horns effect.

What we see impacts our perception[4,5,6]

So, let's give some examples of how what we see impacts our perception. I want you to think of this as like the air that you breath. You are taking in information all the time just like you have to take in oxygen to breath. And your body is processing the oxygen and keeping you alive, but all of that's happening outside of your awareness. Now, we get messages all the time within our environment that we are breathing in oxygen. And these messages are coming in without our awareness and they are shaping our perception of the world. And so, here are a few famous studies that demonstrate how this can show up.

So, we know that having high levels of TV viewing in children means that those children, and in this particular study they studied four-year-olds, so very young children, that when they saw lots of television, they were more likely to believe that boys and men are better then girls and women.[4] And that was linked directly to how much TV they viewed, which makes you wonder how boys and men and girls and women being portrayed on TV.

We also know that a high level of media use among early adolescents is linked to those adolescents being more excepting of sexual harassment and dating violence.[4] We also know that exposure to racial bias on TV is linked to an increased racial bias among viewers, even though they didn't notice the TV bias.[4] And then finally, exposure to anti-refugee sentiment on things like social media because we don't just play video games and watch TV, we're also on social media all the time reading messages and seeing articles, so if you see anti-refugee sentiment on social media, that can be a predictor of violence, violent crimes against refugees.[5] So, again, we're taking in these messages all the time. I've actually seen one researcher describe these messages being like smog, we're just breathing it in all the time without even knowing it. And it's impacting how we perceive and respond to the world.

What does our culture say about...

So, I want you to take a moment to consider what messages you get about different groups. Let's go through some common ones. This is by no means a comprehensive list, by the way.

So, first of all, what does our culture say about white people, about Caucasians? What comes to mind? What does it say about Latinos or African Americans? Or Asians, or men, or women? How about LGBTQ+ people? What about different religions? What about immigrants? Or people who are overweight, or the elderly or millennials? How about people who are politically conservative or people who are politically liberal? Those are all things to consider. And think about what comes up for you, what are the first thoughts that come up for you when you see those different groups?

Bias and gender

So, I want to provide you here with some really interesting research studies. We could have a training about all those different groups that we just reviewed on the last slide, but we would be together all day long and you have things to do. So, for the purpose of today's training, we're only going to talk about gender and race. So, let's talk about gender first.

What we know is that based on research U.S. orchestras used to be all male, they only had men playing in them. But, then a few decades ago, they started instituting blind auditions. And the blind audition is where the musician would try out behind a screen. So, if you've ever seen the show "The Voice", this is kind of like the original concept for "The Voice." But, even then, orchestras remained primarily male. And it wasn't until they addressed the issue of footwear that significant changes were made because here's what was happening, they could hear the sound of women's high heels. And then once they addressed those gender cues, they found that women's odds of making it past the first rounds of auditions increased by 50%, 50%.[7] Now, you can imagine the people who are sitting there making these decisions about who goes into the orchestra, they weren't consciously deciding, oh, we want a man in the orchestra versus a woman, but their brains were taking in those little cues, those subtle cues like what do the shoes sound like on the floor, and then influencing their decisions.

And we know that our bias, for males, actually tends to start pretty early, in fact, mothers over estimate their son's crawling compared to their daughters.[8] And here is a case that I find to be particularly interesting. Students at Columbia Business School, they were given a case study about Heidi Roizen. She is a successful Silicon Valley venture capitalist. Heidi is a real person by the way. And half of the class was given the study with Heidi's name and the other half received the exact same study, the only things they changed, Heidi's name to Howard. Now, students really liked Howard, they thought he was great, but they did not like Heidi. Specifically, students felt like Heidi

was significantly less likable and she was less worthy of being hired than Howard, and they perceived her as being much more selfish than Howard. So, this is really interesting. And another professor, Deborah Gruenfeld, she works at Stanford Graduate School of Business, she is sited that she found that the more assertive a student found the female venture capitalist to be, the more they rejected her. But, again, these were traits that when it was described with a male name, were seen as being positive qualities.[9]

Case studies

Now, there are several research studies examining the bias associated with names and whether we imagine a person to be white, or if some other race based on the sound of their name. And, overwhelmingly, these studies indicate that people with white sounding names, get more call backs for interviews. Now, one recent study that showed no bias was actually conducted a little bit differently, they used all the same first names, but only changed the last name, which indicates we do tend to associate race with a first name rather than a last name.[10]

Now, many of us would think a criminal background would reflect poorly on a job applicant. And while that's true, one study indicated that white male job applicants get more positive responses than African American male applicants with no criminal record, even when the white male job applicant had a criminal record.[11] And finally, in a study published by the American Bar Association. Law partners were given a law memo and it was filled with just tons of mistakes. And the name of the imaginary author was the name for both groups. And partners gave higher scores when they believed the author was white than when they believed he was black. And their bias was further demonstrated in their comments when they described the white author as having potential, but indicated that the African American author was, eh, average at best and needed a lot of work.[12]

Now chances are all of the people involved in all of these studies, the gender studies, the race studies, any of the ones I just talked about, would say that discriminating against someone based on their gender, based on their race is wrong. That is the conscious mind at work. But, remember, unconscious bias happens outside of our awareness and it's often at odds with our conscious values, I can't reiterate that enough. So, again, it's important to think about how does unconscious biases develop and how they're perpetuated by what we see and hear and the messages around us start to become a critical viewer of the kind of media you take in and the messages that you're taking in.

Bias can be internalized

For the purpose of this training, I'm referring to people on the receiving end of a negative bias as being marginalized. And in general members of a marginalized group tend to get less credit for their accomplishments. So, if they do something well it's much more likely to get chalked up to luck, or they had a good mentor, or someone felt sorry for them, or somebody's just trying to reach some kind of quota, and they're much more likely to be blamed for mistakes. So, remember that horns effect, this is that horns effect. And for many people there's a conflict between being competent or being likable, such as what was demonstrated in the Heidi/Howard case study. And these messages also tend to be internalized by the person on the receiving end. They don't tend to consider themselves as ready for promotions, which means they're less likely to put their name in for a promotion. They tend to predict that they will do worst on tests. And they underestimate their abilities, they are very likely to suffer from things like imposter syndrome. So, in one example, college-aged men who didn't think they'd ever be qualified to run for office, we're still 50% more likely than women with the same doubts to consider running anyway. So, just consider that.[13, 14]

So, it's important to call this out, I mentioned this at the beginning, but this is a good place to revisit it. Unconscious bias trainings have become popular, but sometimes they can backfire.[15] Because is unconscious natural, yes. Do we all have it, you bet ya. I have it myself, but we can't just leave it there. Awareness is only the beginning. So, where does that leave us? You can choose to just go about business as usual, 'cause unconscious bias, it means that you're told everyone has a bias and it's socially acceptable and so no big deal, you don't need to avoid it. You have that choice, but remember that's a conscious choice. This is where you have the ability to make a conscious decision about what you want to do about your unconscious bias.

Committing to change

Now, this is where we travel into the unknown a little bit. Unconscious bias and changing our bias is still a relatively new field of study. There isn't a lot of evidence that says, hey, here's how you fix it and we can't all carry around screens to help us orchestra style, help us address it when we interact with somebody. But, when we understand something, we can decide of we want to change it. And if we're motivated to change it, we can start to take steps to do so. So, let's talk a little bit about what that looks like.

You can use your conscious mind to challenge your subconscious thinking and put in organizational safeguards. Bias isn't permanent, it can be changed. And evidence suggests that we can use our conscious minds to help rewire your unconscious thinking patterns. So, for example, you can change

an old habit and you can build a new one. And we still have control over our actions at the end of the day, and actions are what ultimately lead to results.

The Stroop test

So, to help illustrate how we can change our thinking, we're going to use this test. This is called the Stroop test, it's named for John Ridley Stroop. And what I would like you to do is read aloud the names of the colors of each world, not the word that's written, the color. So, I'm going to give you a second to do this.

Visual cue:

Red (color red)	Blue (color blue)	Yellow (color yellow)	Purple (color purple)
Yellow (color yellow)	Blue (color blue)	Green (color green)	Red (color red)
Blue (color green)	Purple (color red)	Green (color purple)	Red (color blue)
Yellow (color blue)	Blue (color red)	Red (color green)	Green (color yellow)

So, chances are the first couple of lines were pretty easy for you to read and then the bottom two lines were a little trickier, they probably took you more time. Now, what this Stroop test does is it demonstrates a kind of interference in the reaction time of a task. There's a conflict on the bottom two lines between the color name that's written and the color of the font. And when we encounter our bias, there may be a conflict between your conscious thinking and your unconscious. And here's what we know, when we're stressed, we're much more likely to default to the unconscious thinking. So, we're going to actually take a moment here and talk about something that's called neuroplasticity, which is the ability for you to rewire your brain and reshape your thinking.

Change is possible

Visual cue: Mountain with solid line windy path up the mountain.

So, change is always hard at first. And you've probably noticed that no matter how hard it is to learn something new, that new thing eventually seems like the new normal. A lot of this relates to how your brain works, again, this is called neuroplasticity, your brains ability to adapt and change. And to explain this, I'm going to use a metaphor of a hike. And this comes from a psychologist I used to work with, his name is Kevin Powell, here, in Colorado. So, imagine that you go on a hike. You follow a trail. Now, lots of people have hiked this trail, it's really well worn, it's easy to follow. Now, this trail is easy, it's comfortable. This is like the old way of doing things, it's automatic, it reflects what's going

on in your brain. Your brain has already formed those neurological pathways and it knows what to do, it's well worn.

Visual cue: Mountain with dotted line windy path next to the solid line windy path up the mountain.

Now, when change comes along, you're asking your brain to form new neural connections, new synaptic connections, new neurological pathways. Now, this is hard for your brain, it's like blazing a whole new trail on your hike. You have to go through brush, your feet might get wet, you might even get lost, you have a machete, you're getting scratched up, it's not easy work, but you have to be intentional about it.

Visual cue: Mountain with dotted line windy path is now where the solid line path used to be. That dotted line path fades away, and what used to be dotted line path now appears as a solid line path.

But, here's what happens over time. You would adjust to the change. Those old synaptic connections that were so easy, they start to grow over just like the trail nobody hikes on anymore. It starts to fade away. And your brain creates those new connections and becomes more efficient. So, what was once really unfamiliar and uncomfortable, eventually becomes easy and comfortable and more automatic. So, think of anytime you've tried to learn something new. Maybe you've learned to play an instrument or drive a car. When you first had to do it, it was really awkward, you had to think about every little thing that you did, where's the brake, where's the gas, where are the little levers that turn on your turn signal, where is all that stuff? But, eventually as you drive over and over, you don't even have to think about it, it becomes automatic. This is what's going on in your brain with all those neural connections. So, what I'd like to do here is demonstrate just how quickly your brain begins to rewire those connections by doing the Stroop test again.

The Stroop test

I would like you to, again, quietly read aloud the names of the colors of each word, not the word that's written, but the colors. I'm going to give you a few seconds to do this.

Visual cue:

Red (color red)	Blue (color blue)	Yellow (color yellow)	Purple (color purple)
Yellow (color yellow)	Blue (color blue)	Green (color green)	Red (color red)
Blue (color green)	Purple (color red)	Green (color purple)	Red (color blue)
Yellow (color blue)	Blue (color red)	Red (color green)	Green (color yellow)

For most people, you will notice that the task was easier this time around. And that's because your brain's are already making those connections just by having done it one time, one time. Just trying to make a change even one time thinking differently, one time, is going to help your brain start to change.

Get uncomfortable!

It's probably important to address the fact that for many of us our biases are not only shaped by our backgrounds, but the way we think about and talk about things like diversity, and prejudice, and discrimination is also shaped by our backgrounds. And for many of us that means we have no idea how to talk about this stuff. It feels impolite, it feels like maybe it's even kind of wrong to talk about. As a white person I can tell you I was raised to believe that we should say we're colorblind, I don't even see color, I don't see your race. Well, that is, first of all, it's not true. When you see somebody, you're not blind, you can see the color of their skin. It's also an important part of a person's identity. so saying that you don't see it is problematic in all kinds of ways.

So, a lot of us were raised in a way where we don't know how to talk about these things, we don't know how to think about this things. We're raised to believe that racism, and sexism, and prejudice, and discrimination, that they're all bad. And so then we feel like we acknowledge that we have any of those things within ourselves or even with our society, it's like we're saying that we're bad or our society is bad, it can feel like, well, gosh, if I have this bias inside of me, then I must be bad, too. And that line of thinking doesn't go anywhere that's helpful, it keeps us stuck with our unconscious bias running the show, and we don't make any changes. Now, many small acts of discrimination and bias are based on that unconscious thinking or it's based on a lack of understanding, like not knowing that a term is offensive, for example. And if we can remember the definition of unconscious bias, it's common and it's often at odds with our conscious values. But, denial, which is what many of us were taught to do, isn't the answer because that allows our bias to continue running around influencing our actions, like an unsupervised toddler. We have to get involved, we have to expand our thinking, observe our thoughts, and take action.

Identify your bias

Here's something that's really important to consider. You are not your thoughts. You are not your thinking. If you were your thoughts, you wouldn't be able to listen in on your thoughts the way that we're able to do as humans. But, even with the ability to listen in, many of us let our thoughts run around unsupervised, again, like that toddler. But, when you begin to pay attention and notice how you think about things, how you respond to things, you can begin to make changes, so that your unconscious thinking isn't running the show.

So, the best place to begin is to get curious about your thinking. We're not getting judgmental, we're not like, oh my god, I can't believe I think that, no. Pay attention to it without judgment, but with curiosity instead, what are your thoughts, what are your feelings, what are your actions, what's coming up for you? And try to avoid that knee jerk reaction to respond, not me, not me, not all white people, not all men, not all women, not all people in this political group, not me, when bias is discussed, which is what a lot of us do.

Also, get feedback from others on how your bias shows up. If somebody challenges you on it, take a moment. You probably are going to get defensive, it's not going to feel good, but listen to them. I sometimes think about my bias as being like spinach in my teeth. I'm running around a little bit with spinach in my teeth, and sometimes it kind of works its way into the front where people can see it. And if somebody says to me, hey Erica, you got a little something there in your teeth, oh my gosh, how embarrassing, super embarrassing, it does not feel good. But, thank goodness that person told me I have spinach in my teeth, so I can take it out and I'm not continuing to have conversations with people with that spinach in my teeth. It doesn't feel good, but it's important to listen to it and learn from it, so that you can do something about it. See what you see, notice what you notice, this is the best way to learn about your unconscious bias and understand it. Listen to people who are in the marginalized groups, they know that of which they speak, they have different experiences than those of us who are not in a marginalized group.

 Let me give you an example of this very quickly. My husband and I are both runners and we really just took up running a few years ago. And my husband runs at night all the time and we used to live in a house that was kind of downtown, it was sort of in the city, kind of urban area, and he would run at night all the time. And there was one night where he said, why don't you go for a run and I was like, heck no, I'm not going for a run, I'm not going to go out there, I'm a woman, no way, who knows what could happen to me. And he was like, what are you talking about? And I said, as a man, you don't have to think about this. Women think about our safety all the time. As women we're trained what to do on a daily basis to keep ourselves from getting assaulted, like park in a parking lot in a lit area, carry your keys in a certain way, make sure your friends know where you are, all of these things. These are things my husband has never had to think of as a man. And other people who are marginalized groups, people who are, they have black or brown skin, or they are in a certain religious group, or they're LGBTQ+, they have experiences that we have never thought about, that is normal for them, it's how they live. So, we don't want to tell them how they live, they know how they live, but we want to listen and understand. My husband had no idea until I told him because he never had to live that kind of reality.

Changing your own bias

So, once you better understand your thinking, you can start to take steps to change it. Do you have a strong reaction to something? Maybe look at that, reframe it. Imagine someone else did the same action that brought up strong feelings, how would you feel then? How would you feel about somebody who looked different or was in a different group, how would you feel if that person did the action? Are you really upset about the action or are you upset because of some other sort of bias that's operating? And ask yourself, what's one thing you can do to help change your bias? Maybe it's exposing yourself to new groups or listening more. And more importantly, what can you do to ensure your bias isn't causing you to engage in discriminatory behaviors?

Challenging bias in others

Let's talk about challenging bias in others. Now, this one is tricky. What do you do when you see bias in action around you? Now, while it may be tempting to remain silent, that just perpetuates the issue, but on the other hand, you don't want to go into attack mode because when people feel like you're criticizing them or attacking them, they're likely to get defensive, dig in their heels, stop listening to you, and that is not effective. What tends to be more effective is a direct and empathic conversation with somebody. So, talk to them about what you observed and what your concerns are. Now, there are certain words that tend to be very triggering to people that can make them very defensive. So, some of the words you want to avoid using or especially not accuse somebody of being, we've got terms like racist, privileged, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, prejudiced. So, those are terms we may want to consider using carefully in our conversations with somebody to help prevent some of that defensiveness, so they can really listen to what it is we have to say.

Closing thoughts

So, in closing, unconscious bias is normal, we all have it, if you have a human brain, you have it, but the conversation can't end there, you have to acknowledge it, you need to be concerned about it, and you need to take steps, so you can start to change it. Accept that bias affects you. Be concerned about the consequences of it. And take steps to make sure that your actions closely match your values and your conscious beliefs.[16]

I really like this quote from Dr. Barbara Markway, "The difficulty isn't that we have negative thoughts. "The problem comes when we believe our thoughts are true."

Thank you for attending!

So, that concludes our session for today. Thank you so much for listening, I hope it was helpful. I hope you can identify maybe just one small thing you can do to start to increase your awareness of your own bias and then decide what to do about it. Maybe make some small changes.

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