

# Avoiding Unintended Biases: Strategies for Providing More Equitable Care

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Community Health and Advocacy Talks (CHAT)

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Why did music sound better when played by a man in open auditions...



...but when they auditioned from behind curtains, judgments of quality were the same for men and women?



Why do white people interpret facial expressions of black individuals as more hostile...

... than the same (computer morphed) facial expressions on white people?



Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003  
APS, 2005

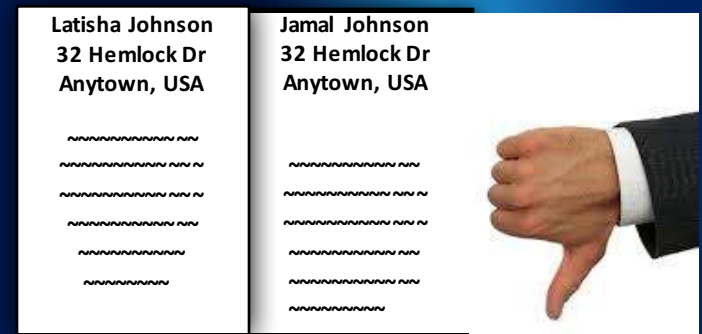
**Why did law firm partners find more errors in a legal brief when they were randomly assigned to the group that was told it was written by a black 3<sup>rd</sup> year associate...**

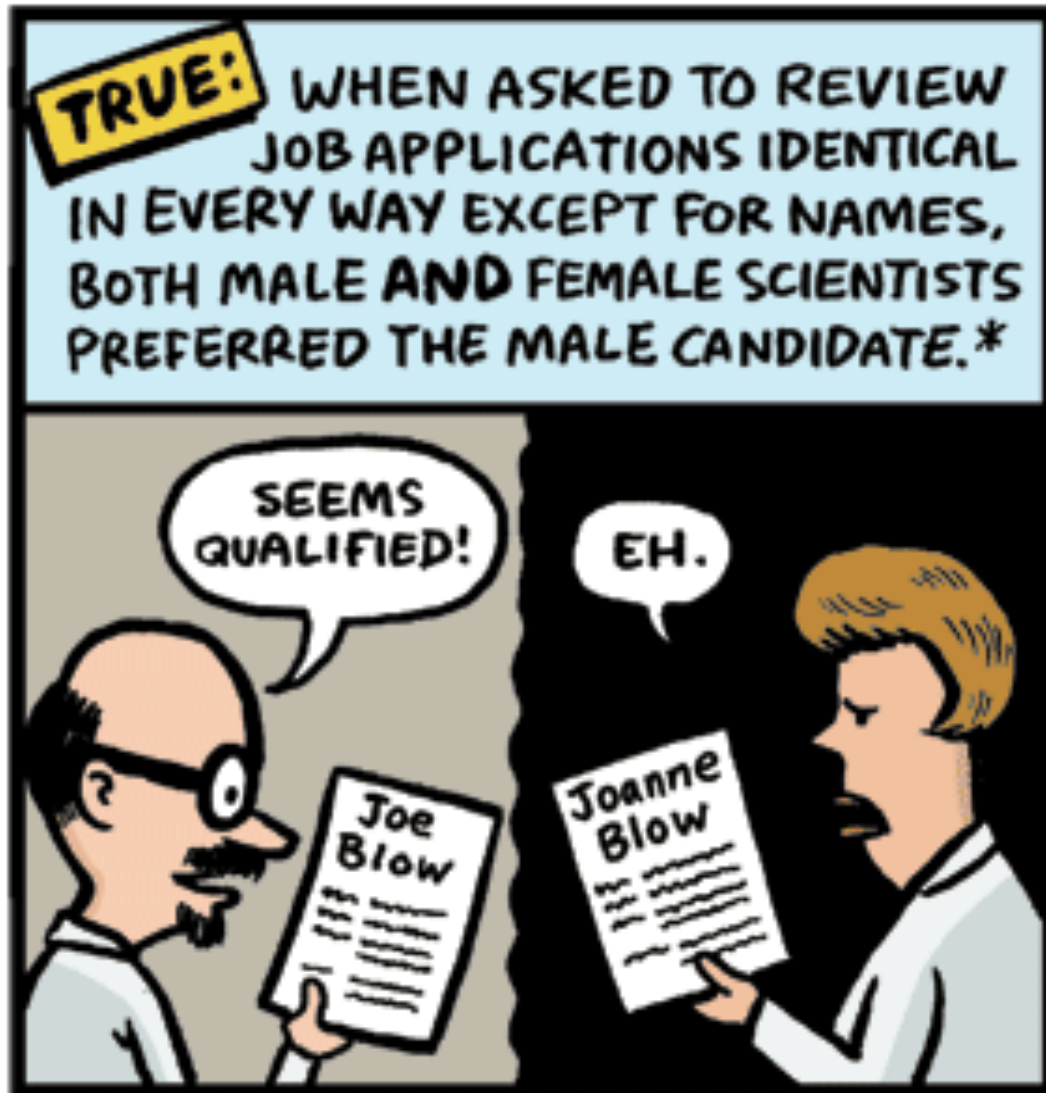


**...than they did when they were in the group that was told it was written by a white 3<sup>rd</sup> year associate?**



Why did the exact same resumes responding to 1300 want ads get 50% more call-backs when they had a white sounding (vs black sounding) names?





*Why?*

Why were consciously unbiased pediatricians more likely to report they would prescribe a narcotic for pain control following surgery for white children ...



**....than black children – in identical clinical case vignettes?**





# Why do people who have genuinely unprejudiced, respectful attitudes towards people with disabilities:

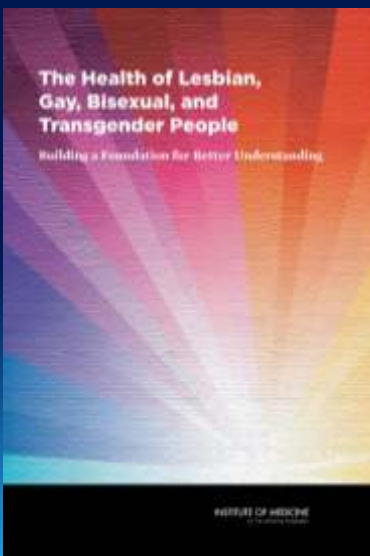
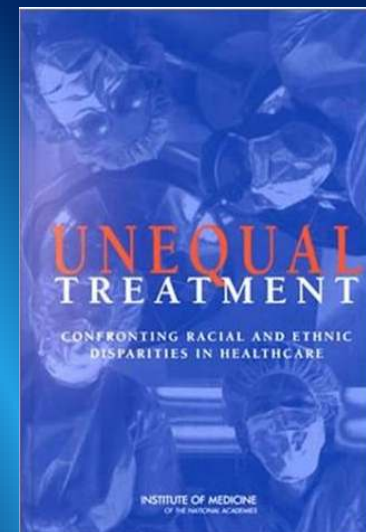
- Show substantial **discomfort** around people with disabilities (electrodermal activity, heart rate, and facial EMG activity)?
- **Avoid** people with disabilities?







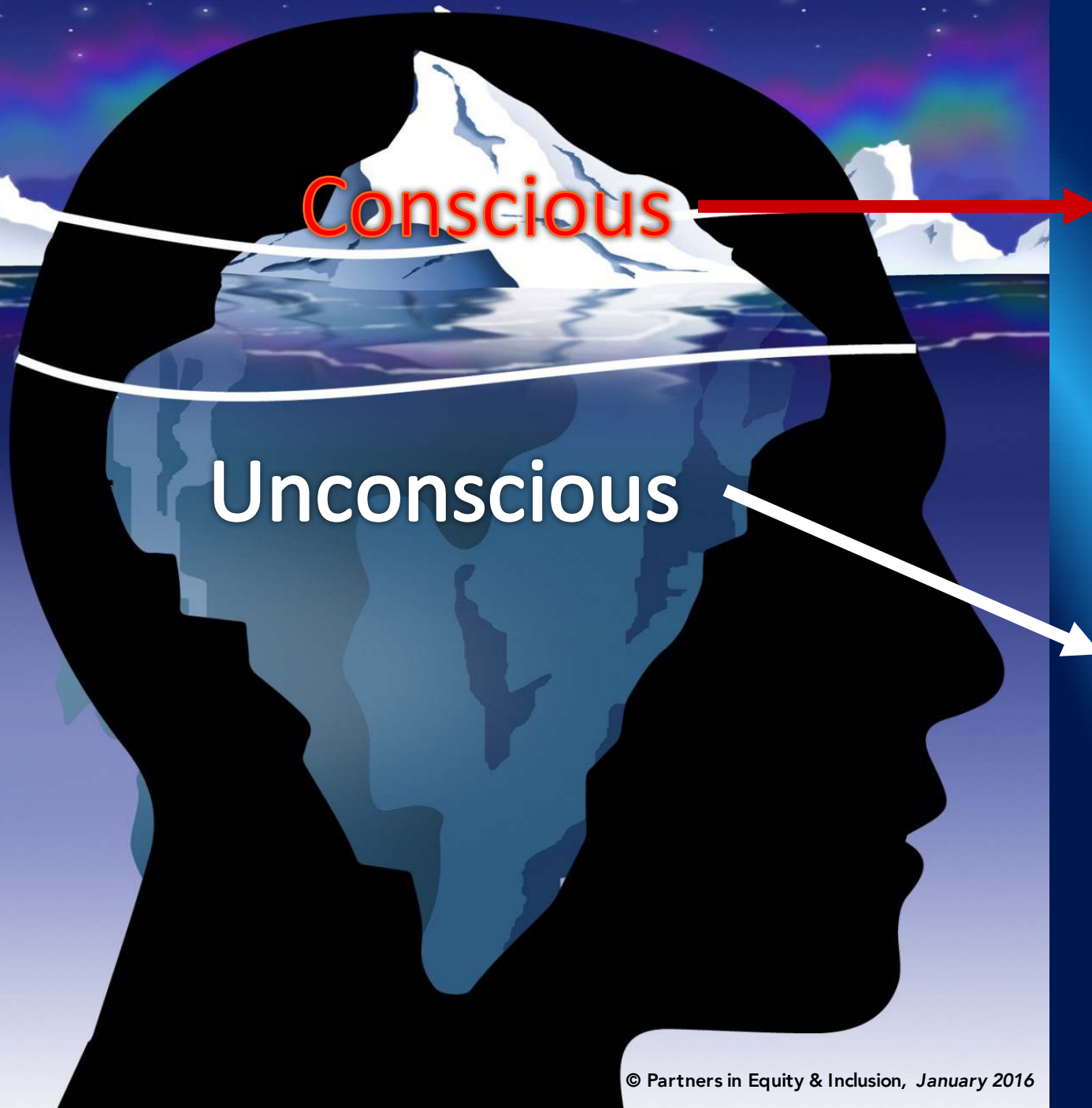
Why is it that over 1000  
peer-reviewed studies  
found inequalities in  
medical care – even with  
same insurance in same  
facilities?





We don't think the way we  
think we think.





Conscious

Unconscious

Explicit  
Effortful  
Slow  
Deliberative  
Considered  
Learning

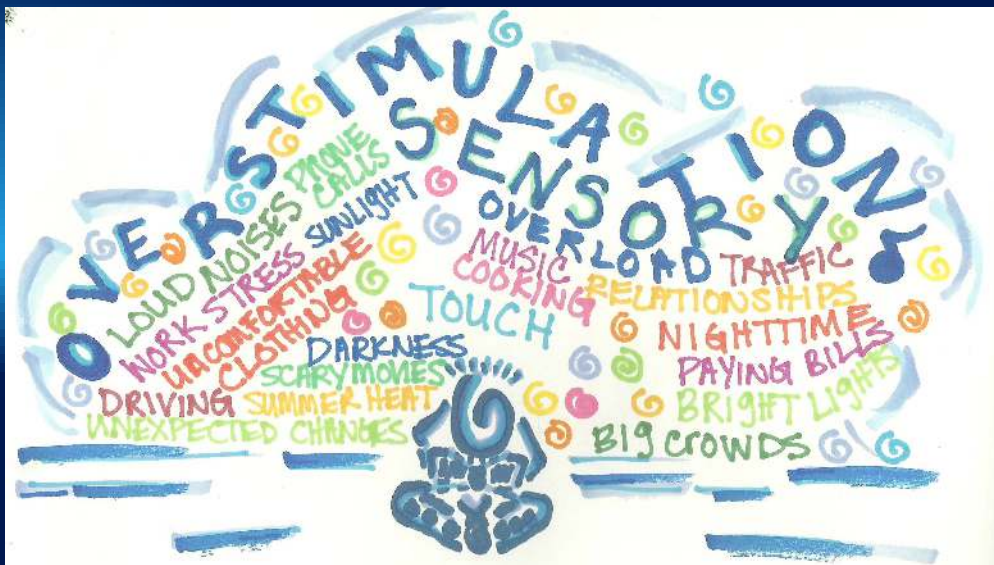
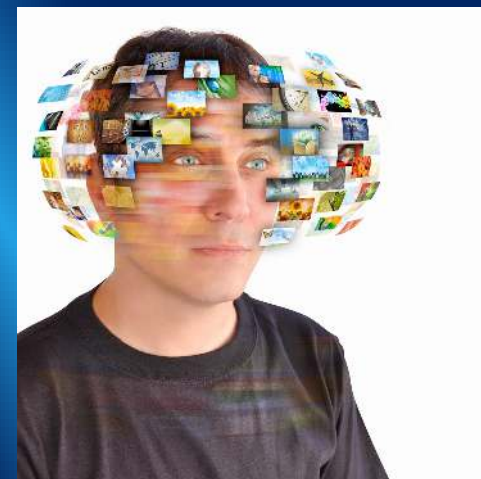
Implicit  
Effortless  
Automatic  
Fast  
Automatic  
Associated  
Learning

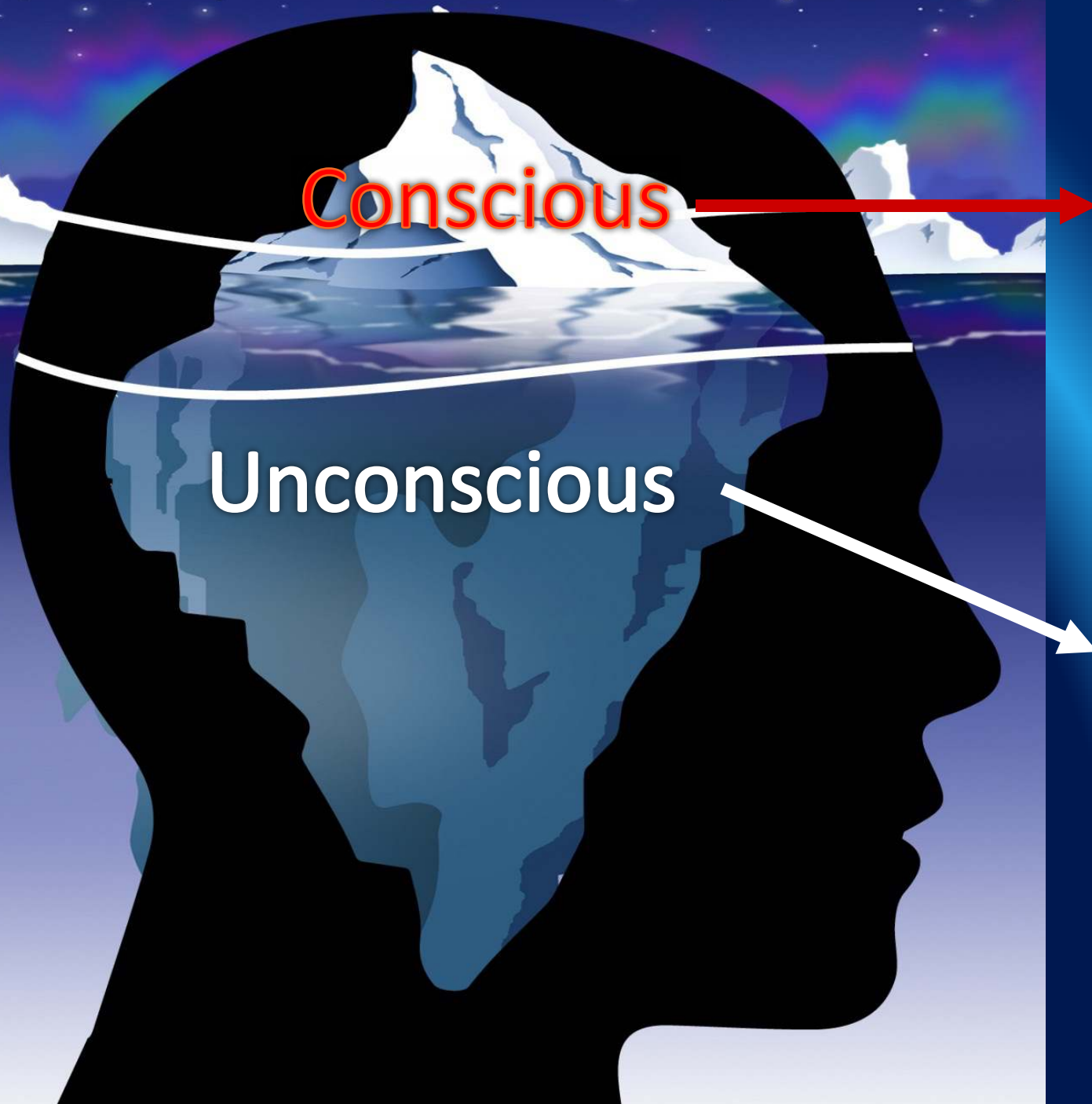




Unconscious,  
implicit,  
effortless,  
automatic  
fast

Unconscious mental processes help  
us deal with the millions of bits of  
information that surround us





Conscious

Unconscious

Energy  
Intensive

Energy-  
Saving

# Implicit Social-Cognitive Processes are Highly Developed and Nuanced

- When individuals are mentally assigned to a particular class or group, the characteristics assigned to that group are often unconsciously & automatically activated & applied .
- Can be as simple as an “affective flash”.
- Can be a complex set of beliefs & expectations.
- Ingroup vs outgroup status.

A diagram of a human head in profile, filled with a dark blue color. Inside the head, a large iceberg is depicted. The tip of the iceberg, which is above the water line, is labeled 'Conscious' in red. The much larger part of the iceberg, which is below the water line, is labeled 'Unconscious' in white. A red arrow points from the 'Unconscious' section up to the 'Conscious' section. The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient with a faint, colorful aurora borealis effect at the top.

**Conscious**

**Unconscious**

**MOTIVES**

Unconscious mental processes  
respond automatically in service of  
core motives.

**Maintain self concept**  
**Access to Resources**  
**(survival & survival of progeny)**

**Explicit**  
**Effortful**  
**Slow**  
**Deliberative**  
**Considered**  
**Learning**

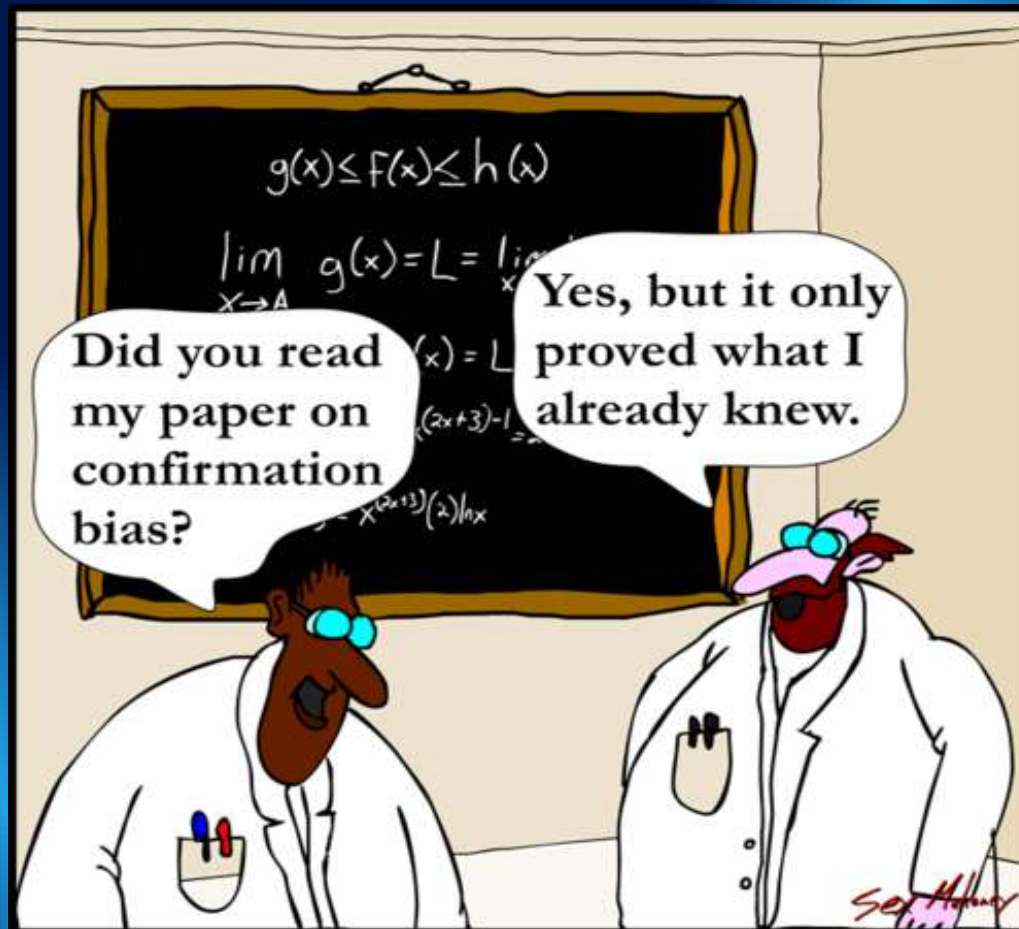
**Implicit**  
**Effortless**  
**Automatic**

**Fast**  
**Automatic**  
**Associated**  
**Learning**

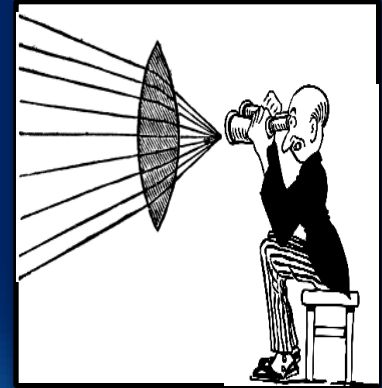


# Automatically guides what we notice and remember

“Selective Attention  
Selective Recall Bias”



Creates a lens through which  
information is interpreted.



# Social Cognitive Biases

## (Automatic responses to others)

- Outdated criteria.
- Automatically applies whatever it has learned, through repeated exposures, to associate with the group category(s).
- Perceives the other through a framework or lens of automatic beliefs
- Activation can vary by situation.



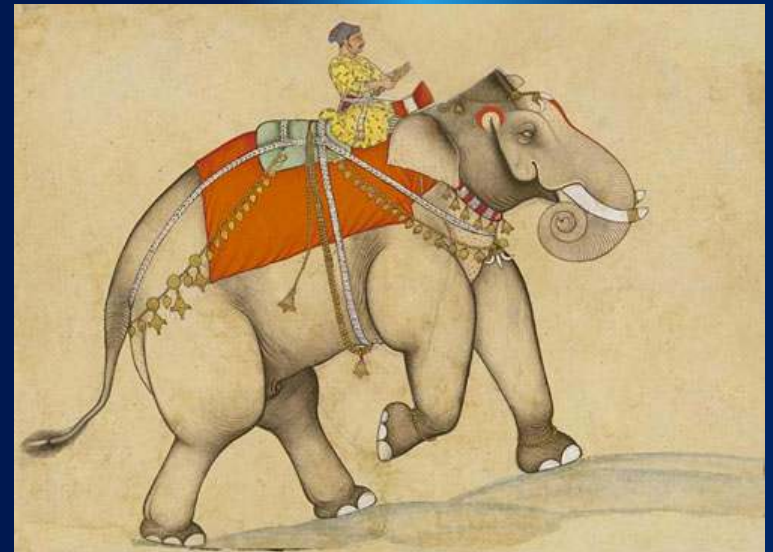
# The impact of the “Affective flash”

- Dozens of studies showing that we come up with cognitions, beliefs, that are consistent with our first emotional response.
- Influences non-verbal behavior, setting up negative feedback loop.



# Our conscious mind seeks justification for our unconscious response

- Often shared response so mutually reinforced (e.g. search committees).
- Listen for code words that indicate justification for an emotional response.
  - Abrasive
  - Witchy (with/b)
  - Difficult, unpleasant
  - Hard to get along with
  - Non-compliant
  - Hostile
  - Trying too hard



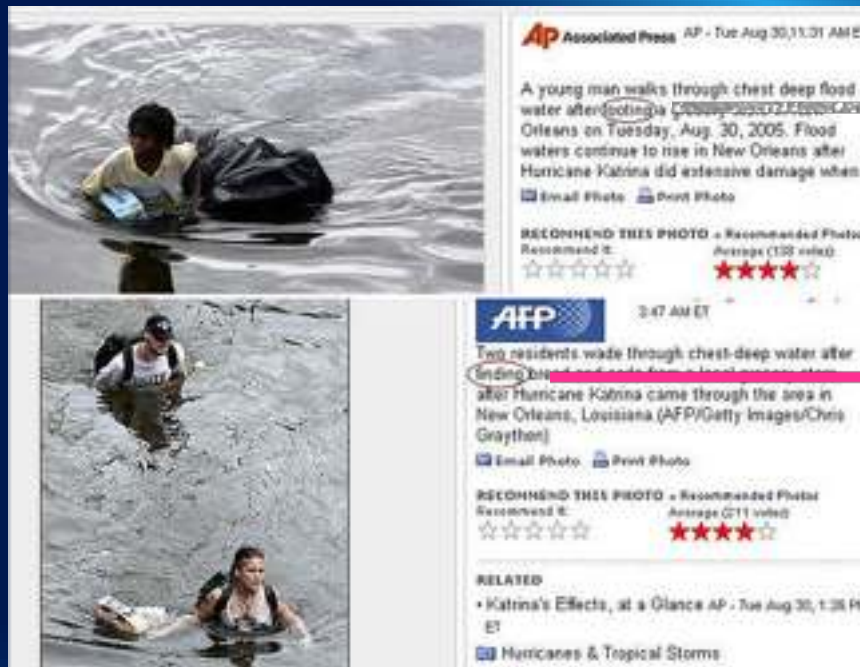
## Biases are self-propagating – domino effect

A study of over 300 recommendation letters for medical faculty:

- Women more often described as students and teachers , men as researchers and professionals
- Mentioned personal lives MUCH more for women than men.
- Were shorter, raised more doubts for women.

*(Trix & Psenka, 2003)*





"Looting"

"Finding"

- Unconscious, implicit cognitive system does not reason. It just associates stuff with other stuff.
- Repeatedly seeing Black individuals associated with a negative characteristic (e.g. criminals on TV) - store a connection between "Black" and negative characteristics.



# Biases are self-propagating - perpetuated & reinforced through communication



**AP** Associated Press AP • Tue Aug 30, 11:31 AM ET

A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it

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**RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO** » Recommended Photos  
Recommend It: Average (138 votes)  
☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★★



**AFP** 3:47 AM ET

Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana. (AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen)

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**RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO** » Recommended Photos  
Recommend It: Average (211 votes)  
☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★★

**RELATED**

- Katrina's Effects, at a Glance AP • Tue Aug 30, 1:26 PM ET

[Hurricanes & Tropical Storms](#)

Avenanti, A., Sirigu, A., Aglioti, S., 2010. Racial bias reduces empathic sensorimotor resonance with other-race pain. *Current Biology* 20, 1018–1022.

# Challenges to Empathy

Oxytocin modulates the racial bias in neural responses to others' suffering

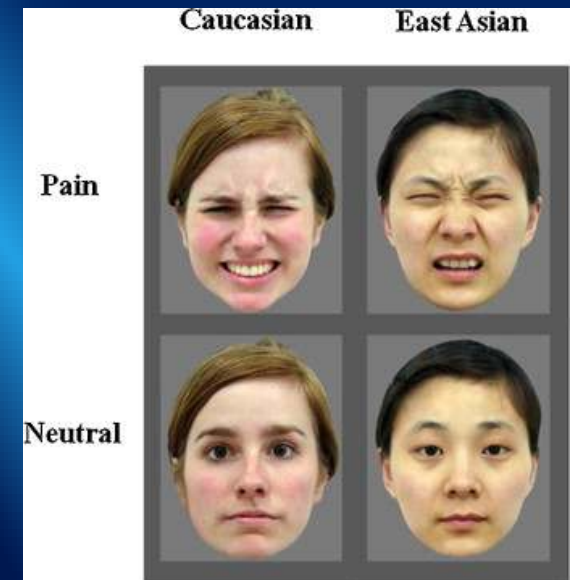
Feng Sheng<sup>a,b</sup>, Yi Liu<sup>a</sup>, Bin Zhou<sup>c</sup>, Wen Zhou<sup>c</sup>, Shihui Han<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, Peking University, Beijing, PR China

<sup>b</sup> Guanghua School of Management, Peking University, Beijing, PR China

<sup>c</sup> Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, PR China

- Responses to pain/ingroup vs outgroup
- Use of neuropeptide (oxytocin) intensifies difference.
- Perhaps part of the explanation for the massive evidence of disparities in pain treatment...



What can be done?



# First, Address Organizational Culture Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Climate



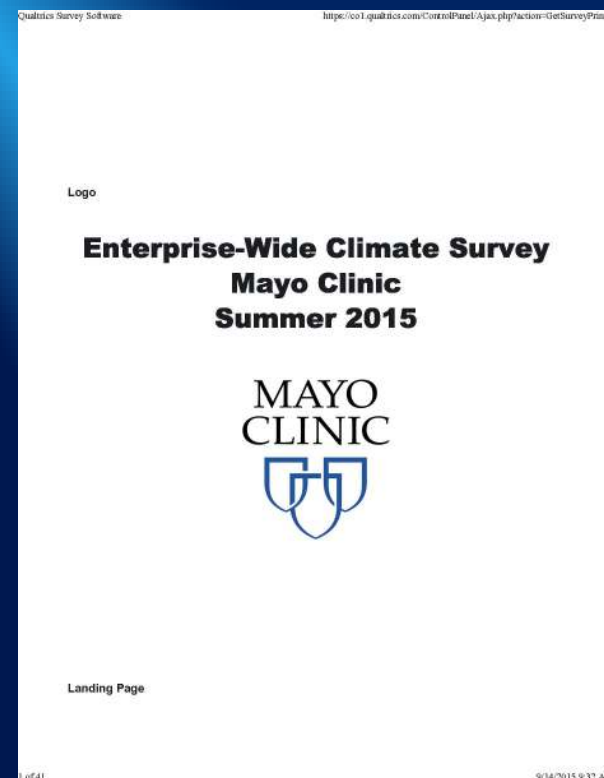
# Organizational Strategies

Creating an inclusive, diverse & equitable climate for health care workforce is an essential prerequisite to equity in health care.

# Assessment (Diversity Climate)

Face your demons.

- The assessment question should NOT be: “Are there barriers to full inclusion in our organization?”
- The assessment question: “In what ways do barriers to full inclusion manifest in our organization?”



# Assessment (Diversity Climate)

Exclusion & Disadvantage (& inclusion & advantage) are “in the air

- “I have to keep proving I am good at my job”
- “I have to change who I am to fit in”

To guide strategy, must also assess employee attitudes that predict or protect from biased behavior

- Implicit attitudes
- Motivation to control prejudice
- Social dominance orientation



# Physical Environment Matters.

- Conduct an environmental audit for stereotype-consistent or reinforcing cues.
  - Images, artwork, educational materials, pamphlets, magazines, TV channels in waiting room.
- Physical space – what does it say about who matters? How does the décor reflect the diversity of stakeholders?
- Ask teams of stakeholders representing relevant groups to conduct audit.

# Most common magazines in waiting rooms.



# Take Every Opportunity To Insert Counter-stereotypic Images





# Assess Policies and Procedures for Implicit Bias Vulnerability & Identity Threat Triggers

## Examples:

- Write job descriptions and performance standards in a way that does not unintentionally evoke negative stereotypes about a group.
- Examine hiring process for bias leakage
- Send applicants out for blinded review – check on last few hires.

# Assess Policies and Procedures for Implicit Bias Vulnerability & Identity Threat Triggers

## Examples:

- Develop evaluation procedures that specify measurable outcomes and specific behaviors.
- Reduce evaluation criteria that depend on the feelings of the evaluator(s).
- If possible, conduct evaluations in a way that allows the evaluators to be “blind” to employee group membership (age, race or ethnicity, gender etc).

# Review Performance Reviews, Letters of Recommendation

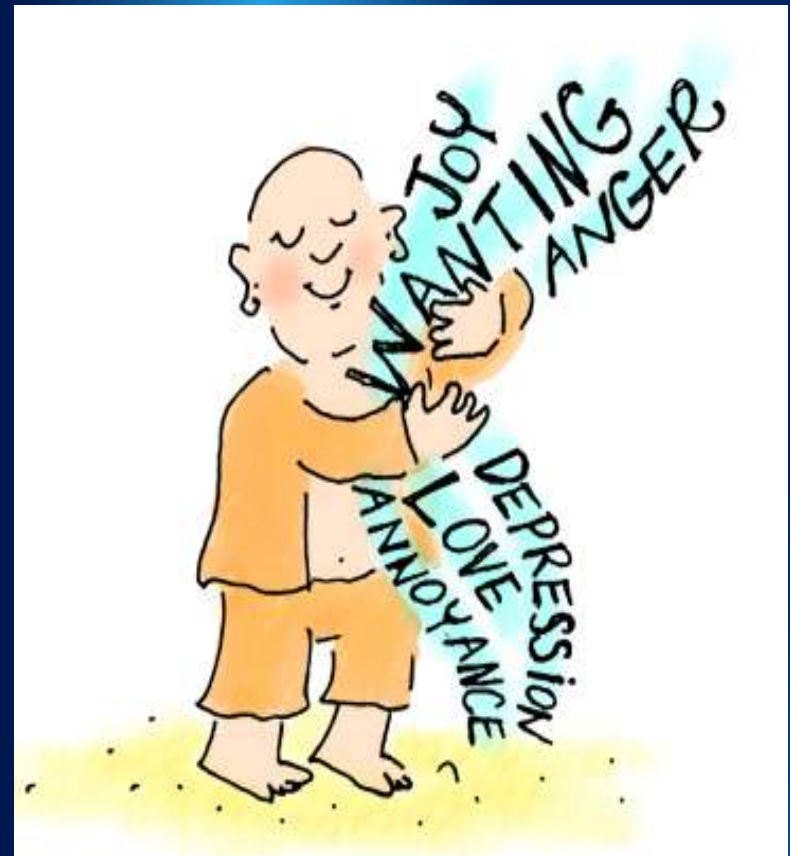
*Jane is delightful*  
*John is brilliant*

Jeff is a leader

*Jamal is hardworking*  
*Juliet is a team player*

*Jim's work will change the field*  
*Jen's work will make a contribution to the field*

# Fearless Self-awareness





Believe what you are told about  
exclusion and discriminatory  
experiences until proven wrong.

Catch yourself seeking alternate  
explanations. This is motivated bias. It  
is also insulting and marginalizing

# Assess Group Processes

- **Time:** Who has floor and for how long?
- **Interruptions:** How many? Who is interrupted? Who interrupts?
- **Traction:** Whose ideas, opinions, or thoughts get no response or follow-up? How often?
- **Bring the conversation back around to those who were interrupted or ignored.**



# Change norms, set an example

- Ask more questions. Make fewer assumptions.
- Notice others assumptions and connections and point them out.
- Bring the conversation back around to individuals who were interrupted or ignored



# Fearless Self-Examination

## Who's In Your "In-Group"?

- Who are your confidantes and trusted advisors when you make decisions?
- Whose opinions do you value most?
  - **Other than your family, who are the 5 people you trust most?**
  - **Experiment:** Practice deep listening to the people you are most likely to discount.

# Train all Supervisors in a Feedback Style Shown to Reduce Stereotype Threat

There are 4 key things that supervisor must communicate:

- High standards for the employee's performance
- Belief that the employee can live up to those standards.
- Mistakes or failures are learning opportunities and necessary for growth.
- Mistakes or failures are not due to some fixed characteristics of the individual (e.g their core abilities, “having what it takes”, their personality).



# Develop and Disseminate an All-Inclusive Multicultural Diversity Philosophy

- Develop and widely disseminate a diversity philosophy that explicitly recognizes and values contributions from all groups, majority and minority.
- Ensure all employees (minority and majority group members) report feeling included when they read/hear the philosophy.
- In many cases, organizations will have to help white employees understand why the organization is moving away from a color-blind philosophy.

# Take advantage of the known strategies to build Team/Group Cohesion & Improve Intergroup Relations

- Teams (In-Group Identity):
  - Emphasize shared values/goals, highlight similarities, affiliations, to build reciprocal trust and obligation to the team/each other.
  - This does NOT mean “everyone act like the white folks”.
  - Trust, trust, trust

# Universal Employee Training

- Start with identity threat.
  - Everyone can relate & benefit
  - Pulls on altruism
- Promote “growth mindset”- learn from mistakes
- No shaming

Skills & strategies for preventing identity threat in others overlap with skills & strategies for preventing automatic bias hijack.

# Mindfulness

- Told study was about “the relationship between listening to an audiotape and reaction time.”
- Randomly assigned: 10-minute introduction to mindfulness vs 10-minute discussion about natural history.
- The mindfulness talk, “instructed participants to become aware of bodily sensations (heartbeat and breath) and fully accept these sensations, and any thoughts, without restriction, resistance, or judgment.”

# Mindfulness

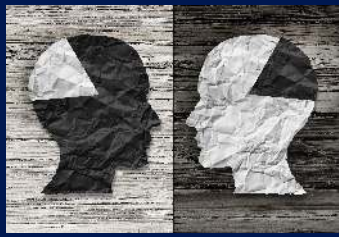
- Mindfulness group had lower implicit bias on black/white & age Implicit Associations Test.
- Mindfulness also lowered discriminatory behavior associated with trust/investment of money (Trust” Game)



# Mindfulness

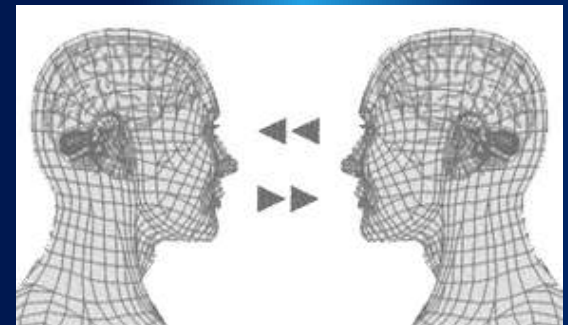
- Mindful people show less automatic biases and are less likely to have automatic strong negative emotional reactions.
- Why? Increase awareness and view of thoughts and feelings as transient mental events separate from the self – inhibits natural tendency towards automatic reaction and evaluation.
- Weakens automatic associations between a group category and a negative characteristics.
- Interrupt automatic threat response?

(Fledderus, et al 2010; Lueke & Gibson, 2015; Ostafin & Kassman, 2012)



# Perspective Taking Skills

- Perspective-taking is the cognitive component of empathy.
- Perspective-taking and emotional empathy have been shown inhibit the activation of unconscious stereotypes and prejudices.
- Practicing perspective taking with others will make them less likely to experience Identity Threat due to unintended biases.



# How to Practice Perspective-Taking

- *Imagine yourself in their shoes.*
- *If possible, check your perceptions.*
- “I am wondering how I might see it if I were looking through your eyes...”
- “I was imagining being in your shoes here and it occurred to me that I would (feel/think/be).... Am I close?”

# Learn Partnership-Building Skills to Promote a Common In-group Identity

- Potentially most powerful approach to reducing bias
- Facilitates empathy
- Reduces implicit bias
- Increases trust
- Does NOT mean everyone acts like the white men.



## Partnerships can create an unconscious sense of the other as a part of your in-group

- Similar to some team building exercises.
- Mindhack, cognitive shortcut: use words like "we" and "us" and "our" instead of "I" "yours" and "mine".
- Find the common goal.



## Practice Emotional Regulation skills

- Experiencing positive emotions makes us less likely to put others in an “out-group” category.
- We use of more inclusive social categories,
- View are more likely to view ourselves as being part of a larger group.... which can facilitate empathy and increase the capacity to see others as members of a common “ingroup”.

# Mindfulness

# Protect and conserve your mental resources

Recall: Automatic processes serve need for efficiency.  
Kick in when we do not have the resources to override them.

# Resource: Leaflet on How To Protect Yourself From Identity Threat

## UNDERSTANDING & PREVENTING STEREOTYPE THREAT

### What is Stereotype Threat?

Hundreds of studies have shown that when something in a situation calls attention to one or more of a person's group identities (e.g. woman, black, elderly, white male) and cues awareness of a stereotype associated with that group (e.g. bad at math, unintelligent, feeble, racially biased), they are at risk of experiencing the negative effects of stereotype threat.

### What negative effects?

- Behaving in ways that confirm the stereotype.
- Lowered performance on cognitive (e.g. math, problem-solving, chess), physical and/or interpersonal (e.g. negotiating, social) tasks.
- Dis-identification and disengagement with task, career/organization, profession.
- Anxiety.
- Physiologic stress effects (e.g. sympathetic nervous system activation, raised blood pressure, heart rate variability, inflammation).
- Lowered ambitions.
- Quitting.



### What are some examples?

- Simply asking the gender question at the beginning (vs. at the end) of a math test lowers performance in women and girls. Danaher & Crandall estimated 4700 more girls a year would receive AP calculus credit if the question that asks about the student's gender was moved to the back of the test.
- Black test takers performed worse than white test takers when told it was a test of intelligence. When told test was a lab task that did not indicate intellectual ability, black and white test takers performed at same level.
- White golfers did worse than black golfers when told they were taking a test of "natural athletic ability". Black golfers did worse than white golfers when told the test required "sport strategic intelligence".
- When female chess players believed their opponent was male they performed worse than male chess players. When they were told (falsely) they were playing against another female they performed as well as male players.
- Men did worse on a test that assesses accuracy in interpreting others' expressive behavior when told it was a test of "social sensitivity" than when told it tested "complex information processing".

## You Can Protect Yourself from Stereotype Threat

- \* Identify the situations & people that are most likely to trigger stereotype threat for you. You may not realize it is happening - so pay attention to your level of anxiety, your body sensations.
- \* Think about your personal unique characteristics, skills, values, or roles. These are the things you value about yourself, that are important to you. If possible, jot them down & why they are important. Let your attention be filled with your deep, core values.
- \* Remember that even if you are triggered - you find yourself "de-skilled" - you can bring yourself back.
- \* Remember that the anxiety and "de-skilling" caused by stereotype threat is not relevant to your actual abilities.
- \* Activate "alternate identities" or group memberships.
- \* Everyone has multiple identities/belongs to different groups. You can use the identity wheel on page 2 to start thinking about all your different groups and identities.
- \* Bring to mind and focus on an identity that does NOT have negative stereotypes that are relevant to the situation.
- \* Bring to mind a time you felt competent, powerful, strong (whatever is relevant). Focus on experience - take on that identity in whatever way makes sense to you.

## You Can Protect Others from Stereotype Threat

- \* Examine your immediate environment for stereotype-reinforcing or triggering images, documents, artwork. Remove. Add counter-stereotypic imagery, artwork, documents etc.
- \* Emphasize tasks and abilities as skills that can be learned. Focus on growth, not fixed ability.
- \* State that no one group is better at task than another (just telling girls that girls and boys do equally well on a test eliminated stereotype threat.)
- \* Develop a partnership - emphasize things you have in common - to create a sense of a "common in-group identity". Feeling part of your in-group lowers threat, increases safety.
- \* Teach about stereotype threat and remind people that when they feel anxious or temporarily unhappy with lower-than-expected performance, it could be stereotype threat and is NOT related to their actual ability.
- \* Help others see low performance as situational, malleable or temporary. Counter impression that it is due to some fixed characteristics they have - again, take a growth perspective.
- \* Encourage self-affirmation - that is, encourage others to think about their characteristics, skills, values, or roles that they value or view as important. Ask them about their deep values; what matters to them.

- Credits
  - When a team works together its difficult to attribute the intellectual property to any one person. Please refer to our leadership team.
  - Most of the slides were developed by Michelle van Ryn
  - Some of the slides w.ere developed by Sean Phelan or adapted slides he developed
  - A few slides were adapted from slides developed by Michelle van Ryn for a presentation given at Mayo Clinic by Michelle van Ryn, PhD & Sharrone Hayes, M.D.
  - All of the information on the slides are derived from empirical (research) evidence developed by a host of scientists. See [www.p-e-i.org](http://www.p-e-i.org) for references.
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