

## Tips for Mitigating Implicit Bias

Resources in support of the CIC BELONG Network & ACUE Webinar Series, *It Takes a Village*, Part 1: What the Campus Community Can Do to Mitigate the Impact of Biases and Increase Belonging

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We know from research and experience that implicit biases can lead to erroneous assumptions and deficits in effective decision-making. In certain professions, they can even lead to life and death. In this article, I offer four strategies and a clever mnemonic to help you remember!

### TIPS FOR MITIGATING IMPLICIT BIAS

**B** Be mindful of blind spots

**I** Individuate strangers

**A** Acknowledge Assumptions

**S** Sidestep Stereotypes

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## B - Be mindful of your blind spots

You need to learn to see what you don't see. This is not as nonsensical as it may sound. Just like when we are driving a car, our blind spots are not invisible, they simply require that we make some adjustments before we can see them. Here are two tools to reveal some of your blind spots:

Take a few of the [Harvard Implicit Association Tests](#). These online assessments are designed to measure attitudes and beliefs that may be lying below the surface of your awareness. Be forewarned, the results can be uncomfortable. Rather than let your defenses rise, sit with it and contemplate what it might mean.

Do a diversity audit. Take a closer look at who you know, who you like, who you trust. First, try the [Trusted 10 activity](#), which asks you assess who is in your inner circle in terms of identities that are similar to and/or different from you. Next, do the same type of assessment with your social media circles. Who do you follow? Whose point of view shows up on your feed? Are you exposed to perspectives and ideas from people of different races, genders, ages, industries, and geographies?

By taking a closer look at who you know and whose voices/perspectives you engage with, you can reveal who is NOT represented in your personal and social media circles. These are groups of people who may be in your blind spots because you don't have specific, individualized, accurate information about them stored in your brain.

## I - Individuate Strangers

This strategy involves focusing on specific individual traits rather than group-based attributes to decrease your reliance on stereotypical ideas and images (Lebrecht et al., 2009). Of course, this is easier to do when we have the opportunity to meet and talk to new people, but there are individuation practices that you can do without actually talking to people. For example, when I go out in my neighborhood and encounter people of different races, or people with disabilities, or homeless people, I ask myself questions about them such as "I wonder if they like carrots?" or "I wonder if they have siblings?" Truth is, the answers don't matter that much, but the practice of focusing on their individual characteristics distracts my brain from the group-based stereotypical images and ideas it might automatically be drawn to and instead allows me to focus on the individual.

## A - Acknowledge Assumptions

Identifying and acknowledging our assumptions entails some [metacognition](#) or thinking about our thinking. One great tool for identifying and rethinking our assumptions is called the Ladder of Inference. The Ladder of Inference describes the (often unconscious) mental path that happens in our thinking when we encounter a data point (e.g. an action taken by a person), make meaning of it, and respond to it (Argyris, 1982). Going through this process helps us identify assumptions and alternative interpretations. This short animated [TEDEd Talk](#) walks you through it!

## S- Sidestep Stereotypes

Our assumptions can be made based on stereotypes. Stereotypes are readily available bits of information (ideas, assumptions, images, causal explanations) about people and their behaviors that are stored in our brains. Whether we agree with the stereotype or not, we are all exposed to them through media, social media, and socialization. And unfortunately, sometimes those stereotypes are reinforced through experience. But we also know that stereotypes are distorted, incomplete, and often inaccurate ideas that can lead to deficient if not damaging decisions about people. So, next time you find yourself making an assessment of or judgement about someone (particularly from an identity group other than your own) check your thinking for any stereotypes and set it aside!

To learn more about implicit biases, check out my [4 Part Series of articles](#).

## References

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