



American
Occupational Therapy
Association

Addressing Unconscious Bias

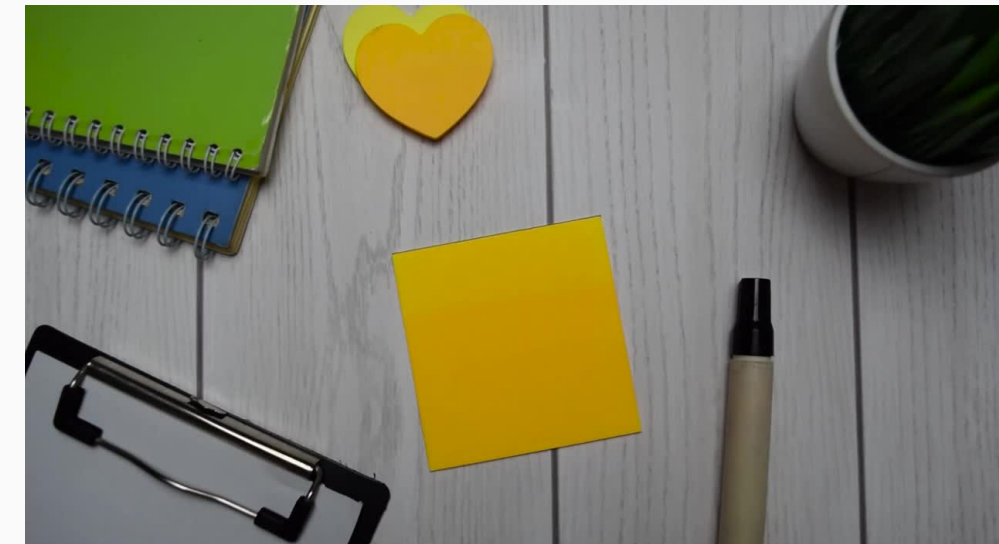
MODULE 2

Learning Objectives

Bias

Welcome to the learning module, Addressing Unconscious Bias. In the last module we learned about the fundamentals of diversity, equity, and inclusion and this module will seek to:

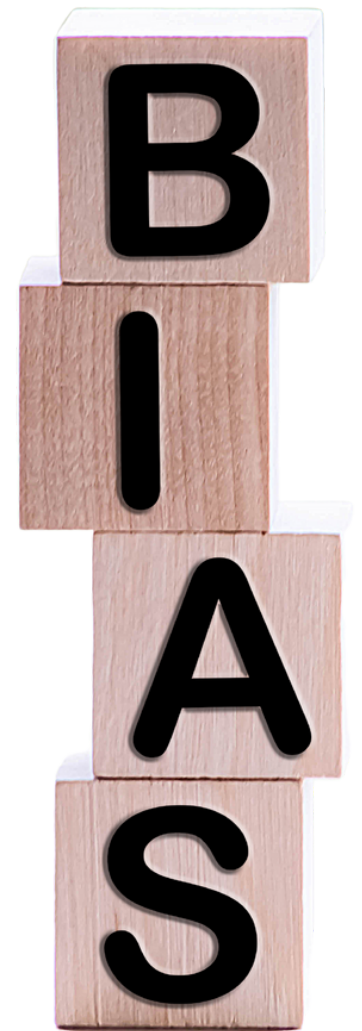
- Define bias and category types.
- Discuss environmental examples of unconscious bias.
- Identify benefits of addressing bias.
- Recommend strategies to address unconscious bias.
- Present assessment resources.



What is it?

Bias

The term **bias** refers to unfair prejudice either in favor of or against a person or group in comparison with another person or group. Biases, whether conscious or unconscious, may be held by individuals, groups, organizations, or academic institutions, resulting in negative or positive consequences.



Spotting the Difference

Bias

Conscious Bias

Explicit bias

Views, beliefs and attitudes are directly expressed about a person or group; person is aware of the bias and outwardly and consciously operates with biased perspectives and ideas.

Example:

Faculty members who are mothers are not serious about their research.

Unconscious Bias

Implicit bias

Views or ideas that are indirectly expressed about a person or group; person is unaware of the bias and unconsciously operates with a biased perspective.

Example:

Not providing research or advancement opportunities to women with families.



What is Unconscious Bias?



Bias

What are you thinking?

- Unconscious bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our views, our actions, and our decision-making abilities.
- Research demonstrates that unconscious bias is automatically activated and affects our daily thoughts.
- These unconscious thoughts influence hiring and evaluation processes, which contribute to a lack of workforce diversity.
- Making decisions based on favoritism, or a similar background, is unconscious bias.

Who does bias impact?

Bias

- Conscious or unconscious biases leading to discriminatory practices are not limited to ethnicity and race.
- Any social group or characteristic is subject to bias:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Gender identity
 - Physical abilities
 - Religion
 - Sexual orientation
 - Weight



Who is Biased?

Bias

Everyone!

According to cognitive science studies, our brains receive 11 million pieces of information each second.

We can only process 40 of those details consciously.

More than 99% of our cognition is unconscious!

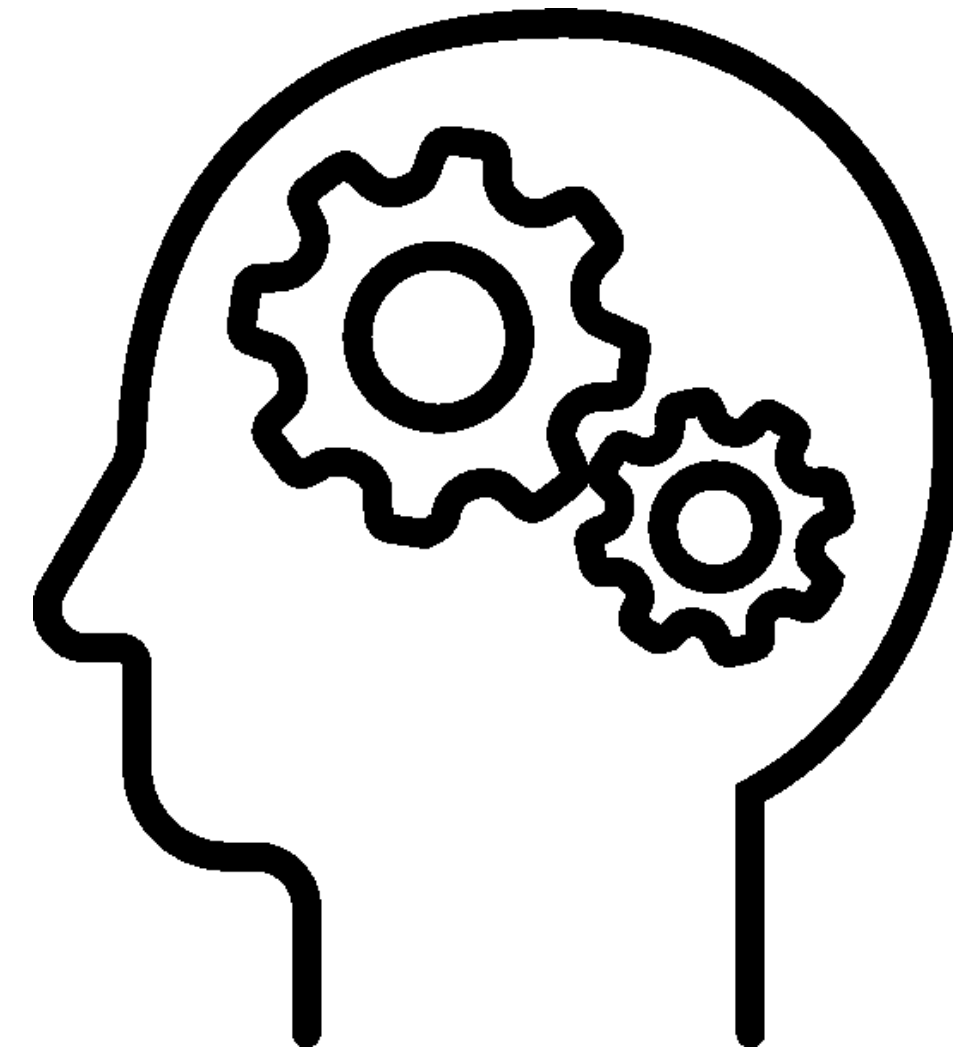


Behaviors

Bias

Our thoughts **influence** behaviors, and our behavior **impacts** those around us.

Understanding that we all have biases promotes the **intentional decision** to work together to be more conscious of our thoughts and actions in relation to others.





Bias Types

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Bias Types



✓ Bias Type	✓ Description	✓ Example	✓ Ways to Avoid
Affinity	Favoring or connecting with a person who shares similar interests, experiences, and backgrounds.	Hiring or collaborating with people who look like me or relate to me or people who make me comfortable.	Be mindful of the similarities you share to distinguish attributes that may cloud your judgement and limit diversity.
Ageism	Holding a bias against someone based on age.	Ageism affects older people more than younger people with 58% of workers noticing ageism starting in their 50s.	Discredit myths about workers of different ages and make age diversity a priority.
Attribution	Creating a perception and/or judging a person's behavior based on previous observations and interactions.	Judging or falsely assuming something about a person without knowing their background.	Do not assume; ask clarifying questions.



Bias Types



✓ Bias Type	✓ Description	✓ Example	✓ Ways to Avoid
Beauty	Believing that attractive people are more successful and treated more favorably and positively.	Those with perceived above-average socially acceptable beauty earn 10%--15% higher salaries than those with perceived below-average beauty.	Have an initial phone screening rather than a video call or in-person interview to avoid bias.
Confirmation	Drawing conclusions about an idea or person based on personal interests, previous beliefs, and prejudices.	Assuming an OT candidate who graduated from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) is not as qualified as candidate from a Predominately White Institution (PWI).	Create a standardized checklist or criteria that places more value on skills and experience.



Bias Types



✓ Bias Type	✓ Description	✓ Example	✓ Ways to Avoid
Conformity	Allowing influence from those in the same peer or work group, regardless if you share the same beliefs or ideas.	After a candidate's interview, you are easily influenced by others in a group setting; giving in to the majority rather than standing your ground.	Encourage others to anonymously track or submit feedback to decrease the influence of bias among the group.
Contrast Effect	A distorted perception when comparing two or more things that you have experienced, either at the same time or one after the other.	A faculty member harshly grades a paper with grammatical errors. He immediately reads another paper without grammatical errors and perceives it as a higher quality product because it lacked the same errors as the preceding paper, regardless of content.	Increase the time between reviews when possible.



Bias Types



✓ Bias Type	✓ Description	✓ Example	✓ Ways to Avoid
Gender	Assuming one gender is superior over another or preferring one gender over another.	A cisgender woman makes a recommendation in a meeting and is widely ignored. A cisgender man makes the same suggestion and it is enthusiastically accepted.	Promote an environment in which everyone feels valued and heard. Share ideas in writing and have a group leader read them aloud so they are not attributed to a particular gender.
Halo Effect	Putting someone on a pedestal after learning something impressive about them.	Overlooking a mistake by someone who graduated from an ivy league school, then criticizing others for making the same mistake.	Create two different perceptions of someone when you first meet. As you get to know more about the person, you will associate with one perception more than the other.



Bias Types



✓ Bias Type	✓ Description	✓ Example	✓ Ways to Avoid
Horn Effect	Viewing a person in a negative light after hearing something negative or harmful or associating a trait to someone due to a previous negative experience.	An interviewer evaluates a candidate negatively based on a single characteristic or because the candidate reminds them of someone with whom they had a negative experience.	Consider objective evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down pros and cons when deciding vs. looking at a singular factor. • Reflect on what provoked a first impression • Seek confirmation to support any noticeable patterns.
Name	Judging a person based on their name and perceived background.	A White male director of a rehabilitation center reviews a CV and cannot pronounce the name written on top. He bypasses the CV for the next one, which reads “Alison Smith” and thoroughly reviews her CV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black out the name on the CV or application for unbiased perspective. • Use a pronunciation website to assist you in phonetically pronouncing a name before calling. • Ask individuals to pronounce their names, and do not assume you can shorten a name.



Bias Types

Bias



Bias Type

Weight



Description

Disapproving or discriminating against a person based on weight.



Example

Healthcare professionals informing patients their symptoms are based on their weight, and not investigating complaints.



Ways to Avoid

Employ respectful language, behavior, and empathy during patient interactions. Discourage derogatory comments from colleagues regarding patient sizes.



Environmental Impact

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Environment Examples



Bias

Academia

- Faculty members making assumptions about students' learning behaviors and potential academic success by tying these traits to students' identities and backgrounds, which hinders student growth.
- Instructors treating students with physical disabilities as if they also have mental disabilities and require additional attention.
- Expecting students of certain groups to have a specific contribution style—quiet, argumentative, or agenda-oriented.
- Prospective students of color experiencing unconscious bias from faculty members in the following ways: being overtalked, avoiding eye contact, and limiting conversation.

Environment Examples



Bias

Health Care Facility

- Underrepresented patient groups in the United States suffer the effects of unconscious biases stemming from cultural stereotypes in ways that continue health inequities and disparities.
- Unconscious bias can impact health care professionals in the following ways: client interaction, opportunities, and promotion, and interprofessional interactions.
- The method in which information about an individual is processed may be influenced by unconscious bias, which leads to potential disparities.
- Focusing on patient demographics may lead to missed diagnosis and premature release.

Environment Examples



Bias

Workplace

- Unconscious biased behavior and attitudes allowed in the workplace influence decision making in the hiring and promotion process and narrows the pool of qualified diverse candidates.
- Unconscious bias decreases a diverse and inclusive staff, which limits creativity in the workplace.
- Unconscious bias also impacts innovation and productivity and the ability to form collaborative working relationships.



Advantages & Benefits

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Benefits



Bias

Advantages

Using standardized structures that apply to everyone decreases a biased influence in decision-making processes.

Standardization also reduces the cognitive process to encourage methodical and deliberate action and replace an unconscious gut reaction.

Benefits

Addressing unconscious bias is beneficial in numerous ways, including:

- Increased group innovation
- Productivity
- Creativity
- Enhanced relationship and community-building
- Greater inclusion and equity
- Appreciation for diversity.



Strategies

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Mitigating Unconscious Bias



Bias

Organization Responsibility	Individual Responsibility	Co-Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership must commit to a change in culture • Leadership must commit to diversity training across the organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assess and reflect on personal bias and the potential for stereotyping. • Question stereotypical thoughts and actively work to counteract them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek opportunities to promote and establish a diverse environment and experience. • Increase cultural humility and encourage cultural awareness. • Serve as a mentor to support equitable treatment and advancement.

Ways to Address

- **Meditation:** Practice mindfulness reduces the stress and cognitive load or memory resources that may lead to biases.
- **Perspective adjustment:** Look beyond personal viewpoint to consider how someone else may think or feel about something.
- **Training:** Incorporate specific implicit bias training in educational and practice settings.
- **Education:** Understand what unconscious biases are, how they present in various environments, and how to recognize them in yourself and others are necessary and progressive steps in overcoming biases.

Bias





Assessment & Reflection

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Implicit Association Test



Bias

- Created by researchers from Harvard University, University of Washington, and the University of Virginia who are interested in unconscious bias with a goal to educate the public about hidden biases by providing a “virtual laboratory” for collecting online data.
- Visit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- View the unconscious bias resource for further dialogue on addressing unconscious bias in a group setting.

AOTA DEI Toolkit

For more information, please see the DEI Toolkit for resources and assessment tools.

Visit: <https://www.aota.org/About-Occupational-Therapy/diversity.aspx>



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Reflection

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