

# Learning to Unlearn

Identifying and Interrupting Bias in the Workplace

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# Meet your presenter, Kennedy Schultz

20+ years in language and culture education

Expertise in culturally responsive communication and intercultural competence

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# Workshop Goals

1. Define cultural frame of reference and bias
2. Understand the cognitive science behind bias
3. Reflect on how bias can be present in workplace environments
4. Identify effective strategies for interrupting bias

# Community Agreements

- Speak your truth
- Honor confidentiality
- Listen to understand, not to reload
- Speak from an “I” perspective
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Remember, we can only change ourselves



*Adapted from Courageous Conversations about Race by Glenn E. Singleton*

# Activity: Acknowledging Associations

In your small group, open the folder and write down as many words as you can think of that come to mind when you see the photo.

Do not show your photo to another group.





*From “Facing History and Ourselves”*

*<https://www.facinghistory.org/>*

**What does it mean to belong?**

**Define a 'good team member.'**

**What does 'professional' mean to you?**

**Define 'good leadership.'**

# Differences in Perspectives

Our understanding of these phrases or terms is defined by our previous experience, perceptions, and assumptions.

Since we each have differing lived experiences, we are not always aware of the perceptions and perspectives of others. We often assume people see things as we do.

**This is our cultural frame of reference, or cultural lens.**



# Why should we broaden our perspectives?

## Employee Retention

A company culture that demonstrates value of diverse identities and perspectives leads to higher employee retention.

*A 2013 report from Deloitte showed that 75% of employees across diversity dimensions hide a portion of their identity at work for fear of negative perceptions.*

*Covering*

## Financial Impact of Retraining

The cost of retraining and onboarding new employees is high. When employees remain with an organization, these costs are minimized.

*A SHRM report showed that the cost of replacing a disengaged leader is 250% of their compensation. Onboarding and retraining are costly for organizations.*

## Increased Innovation

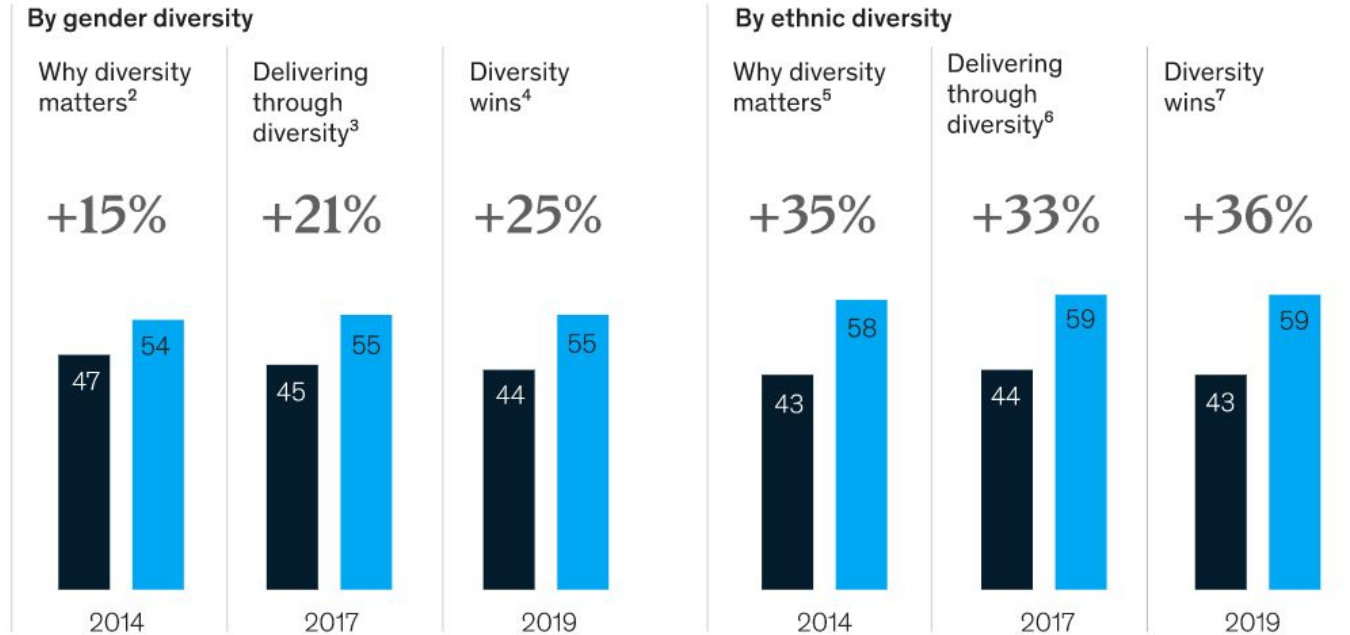
Organizations that embrace and discuss multiple perspectives are able to identify stronger, more innovative solutions to their business goals, leading to improved financial outcomes.

*A McKinsey report showed that organizations with greater representation and engagement of diverse employees and leadership outperformed the least diverse companies by up to 36%.*

# The business case for diversity in executive teams remains strong.

Likelihood of financial outperformance,<sup>1</sup> %

■ Bottom quartile ■ Top quartile



<sup>1</sup>Likelihood of financial outperformance vs the national industry median; p-value <0.05, except 2014 data where p-value <0.1. <sup>2</sup>n = 383; Latin America, UK, and US; earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) margin 2010–13. <sup>3</sup>n = 991; Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, UK, and US; EBIT margin 2011–15. <sup>4</sup>n = 1,039; 2017 companies for which gender data available in 2019, plus Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; EBIT margin 2014–18. <sup>5</sup>n = 364; Latin America, UK, and US; EBIT margin 2010–13. <sup>6</sup>n = 589; Brazil, Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, UK, and US; EBIT margin 2011–15. <sup>7</sup>n = 533; Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, UK, and US, where ethnicity data available in 2019; EBIT margin 2014–18.

# Diversity does **not** equal inclusion and belonging.

Overall sentiment on diversity is positive

**52%**  
positive

**31%**  
negative



But sentiment on inclusion is the opposite

**61%**  
negative

**29%**  
positive



# Some Definitions

## Diversity:

The **presence** of a broad range of individuals, representing diverse identities such as ages, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, religions, etc.

## Inclusion:

An environment that provides **equal access to resources and opportunities** for those who might otherwise be marginalized so that one can fully participate and thrive.

# Cultural Lens and Identity

Developing awareness of our own identities

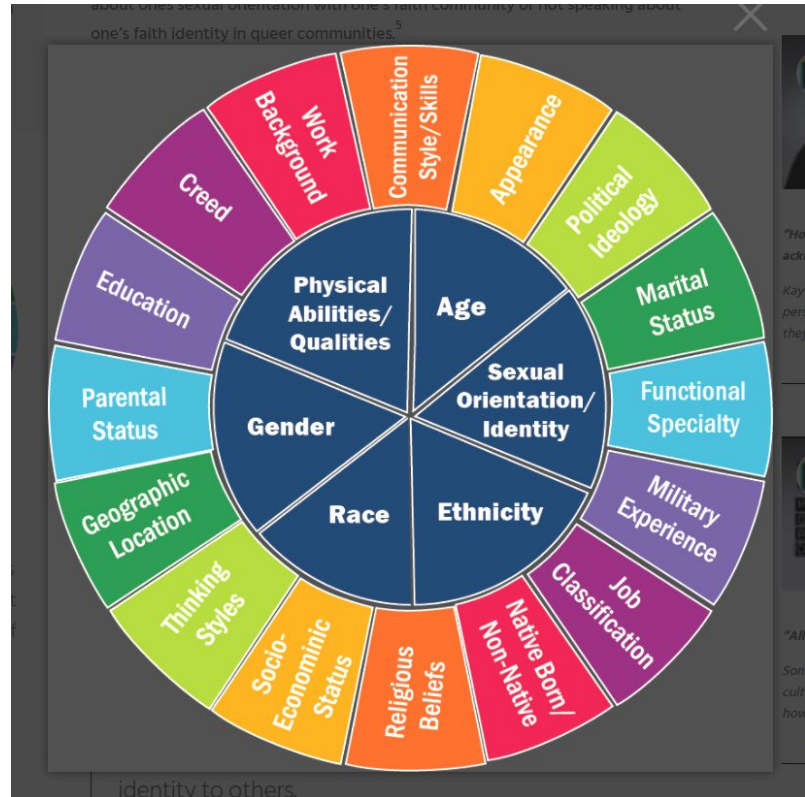
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# Components of our identities

Each of us is comprised of many identity markers.

**Name five words that describe WHO you are.**

Where do these words fit within these circles?



# Who we are vs. Where we work

How diverse is your organization?

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Family Status
- Able-bodied

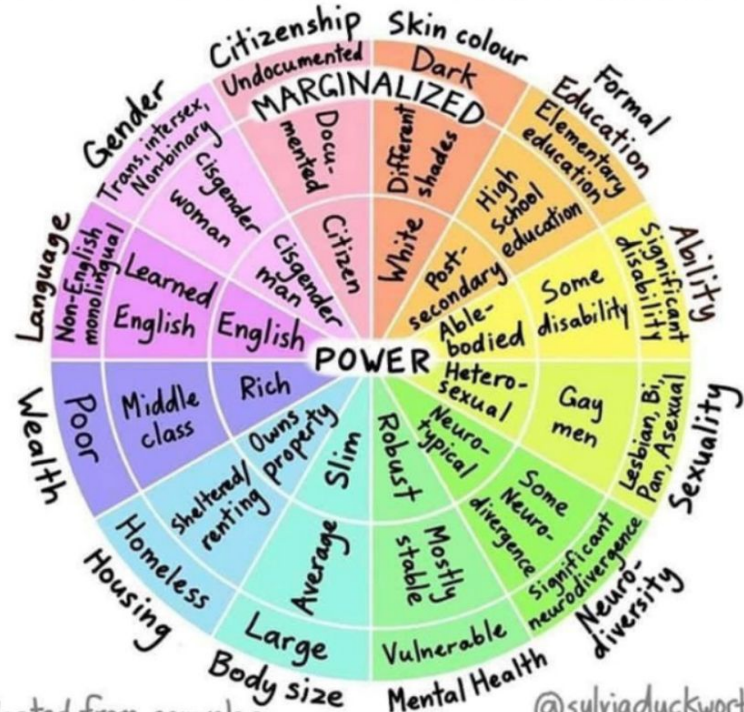
What policies and structures privilege certain identities?

- Flex time
- Parental leave
- Sponsored events
- Physical environment
- Hiring/Promotion/Pay Equity

# WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE

These systems were created long before we entered them.

- Acknowledge power and privilege
- Identify barriers to equity
- Dismantle barriers



Adapted from ccrweb.ca

@sylvriaduckworth



# Impact of identity and culture

**Our expectations:** what we anticipate based on our experiences

**Our assumptions:** how we interpret the world/others based on our experiences

**Our sense of belonging:** how comfortable we feel in a given setting

# Science behind Bias

How are brains make sense of the  
world

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# Memory and Cognition

Learning requires that we **encode, store, and retrieve information.**

Our brains process 74GB of information every day (equivalent of 16 movies).



# Mental Shortcuts and Bias

*"When we encounter a group member, we quickly categorize them and then activate a host of associations about them based on their racial group or other perceived identities. Now, for objects these mental shortcuts are great. When we encounter ice cream, we know what to expect, whether we like it, and how to eat it. **However, when we are talking about social groups these shortcuts come with high costs, as stereotypes and prejudices can be inaccurate and extremely harmful.**"*

--University of Delaware Professor Jennifer Kubota, 'The Science Behind Bias'



# Embedding Associations

We develop associations based on our own experiences as well as the repeated presence of these associations in our environment.

- Interracial couples on TV: 1968, Star Trek; by 2004, 21% of shows included interracial relationship
- First gay couple featured in an advertisement: IKEA, 1994
- First model wearing a hijab in an advertisement: L'Oreal, 2018



# Activity: Turn and Talk

With a partner, discuss a time when you did not feel that you belonged.

- What aspect of your identity/experience was in play?
- Was the assumption about you positive or negative?
- How did this experience impact your engagement in that moment or your willingness to engage with the group further?

# Kinds of Bias

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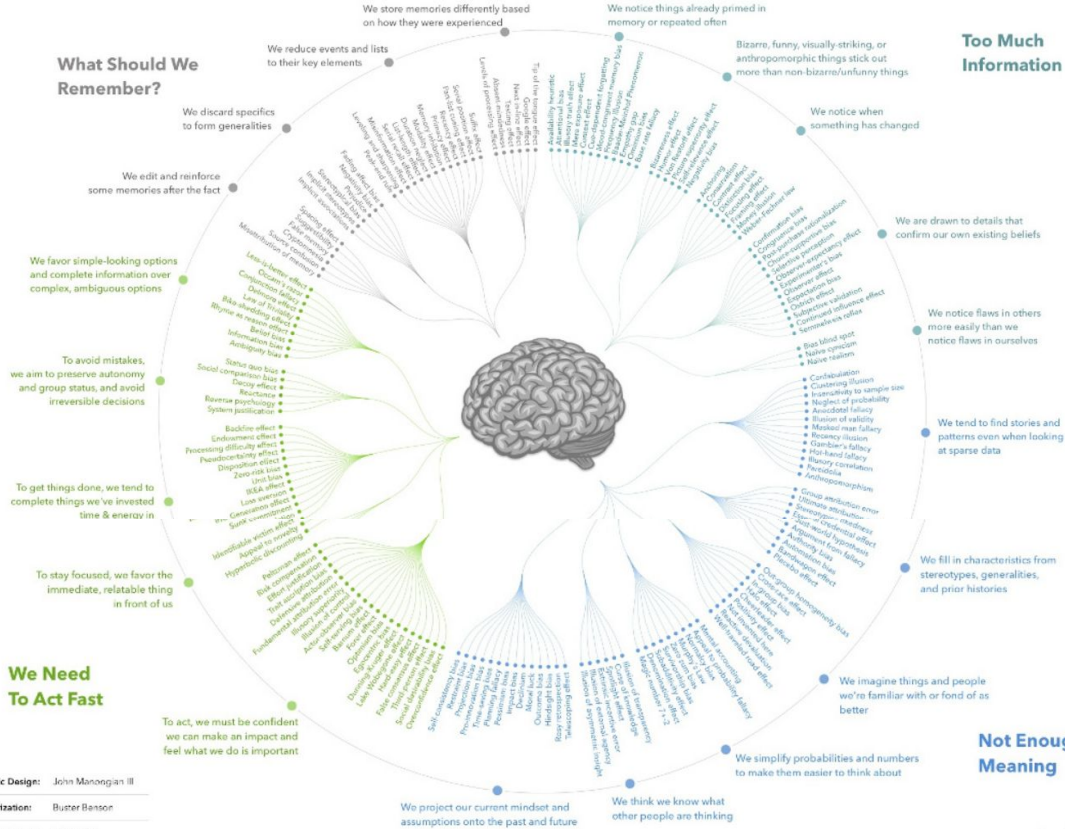


# Bias Definition

(n.) A prejudice or inclination in favor or against a person or group in a way that is generally perceived as unfair or unmerited.

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# COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX



**& Algorithmic Design:** John Manoogian III  
**pt & Categorization:** Buster Benson  
**188 Cognitive Biases:** Wikipedia

## Implicit or Unconscious Bias

Definition: Attitudes or stereotypes we attribute to groups without being consciously aware.

Example:

You assume that some staff members, particularly some women, won't attend an event after work hours because they are caregivers.

## Confirmation Bias

Definition: Seeking out or overly relying on information that conforms to our preconceived ideas or attitudes, and ignoring evidence that challenges us.

Example:

You design an employee survey to solicit positive feedback on a training program you created (Which portion of the training did you like the best?) rather than asking neutral questions (How applicable was this training to your work?)

## Affinity Bias

Definition: A preference for others who align with or are like us. Attributing positive associations to others based on their likeness to our identity/circumstances.

Example:

Giving preference to a candidate's resume who attended the same college as you, or had similar jobs that you valued.

## Examples of Confirmation Bias



Not seeking out objective facts



Interpreting information to support your existing belief



Only remembering details that uphold your belief



Ignoring information that challenges your belief

# Confirmation Bias

"If you learn that your new Canadian friend hates hockey and loves sailing, and that your new Mexican friend hates spicy foods and loves rap music, you are less likely to remember this new stereotype-inconsistent information."

Nationality      Gender      Socioeconomics  
Ability      Age

# Where does bias show up in the workplace?

## Hiring

- Evaluating resumes
- Interview questions
- Job descriptions/criteria

## Training Programs

- Limited modes of delivery
- Lack of needs assessment

## Retention

- Providing limited supports/options
- Opportunities to receive and give feedback

## Promotion

- Job evaluation/feedback
- Stereotypes and expectations
- Opportunities for access and visibility

# Activity: Identify a System/Structure

Hiring

Promotion

Retention

Training

Think about your own workplace environment and identify a system.

**What barriers might exist to diversity and inclusion within this system in your organization?**

# Strategies to interrupt bias

Actionable Steps and Systems  
Evaluation

## Equity Literacy Framework

- Paul Gorski, Equity Literacy Institute
    - Recognize
    - Respond
    - Redress
    - Sustain
-



# Evaluating our Cultural Lens

We can't change  
what we can't  
name.

## Assessing Cultural Frameworks

- Intercultural Development Inventory
- CQ Assessment

## Survey of Organizational Culture

*Recognize*

# Goal Setting

## Envision ideal environment

- Utopia-thinking vs. problem-solving
- Gather input, surveys

## Organizational Audit

- Evaluate systems and policies
- Identify barriers to ideal environment
- Set norms for communication

What outcome  
are you hoping to  
address?

***Redress***

# Actions and Behaviors

## Interrupt

- “That phrase is hurtful. I don’t like those words.”

## Question

- “Why would you say that? What do you mean?”

## Educate

- “Do you know the history of that word?” “I used to think that too, but then I learned.”

## Echo

- “Thanks for speaking up, I agree that is a harmful expression.”

*Respond*

# Feedback and Evaluation

Continuous  
improvement is better  
than delayed perfection.

*--Mark Twain*

## Communication Strategy

- Share out actions/processes
- Regular updates

## Feedback Cycle

- Regular check-ins
- Involve all stakeholders
- Data tracking

***Sustain***

# Impact

Bias impacts a sense of workplace belonging.

"If workers feel like they belong, companies reap substantial bottom-line benefits. High belonging was linked to a whopping 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in sick days. For a 10,000-person company, this would result in annual savings of more than \$52M."

--from *"The Value of Belonging at Work"*

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# Learn more:

<https://hbr.org/2019/11/how-the-best-bosses-interrupt-bias-on-their-teams>

<https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance>

<https://askearn.org/page/inclusion-at-work-a-framework-for-building-a-disability-inclusive-organization>

<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/covering-in-the-workplace.html>

<https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/The-win-win-of-disability-inclusion#the-win-win-of-disability-inclusion>

[https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/speak\\_up\\_pocket\\_card\\_2up.pdf](https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/speak_up_pocket_card_2up.pdf)