

Unconscious/Implicit Bias Exercise

Unconscious or implicit bias refers to beliefs or attitudes that are activated automatically and without an individual's awareness. These hidden biases are different from beliefs and attitudes that individuals are aware they hold but choose to conceal for the purposes of complying with social or legal norms.

Our unconscious social biases form involuntarily from our experiences. For example, as we are repeatedly exposed to actual incidences or media portrayals of females as collaborative, nurturing and homemakers, and men as assertive, competitive, and bread-winners, those associations become automated in our long-term memory. These biases are reinforced on a daily basis without us knowing, or thinking consciously about it. Stereotypes reflect what we see and hear every day, not what we consciously believe about what we see and hear. It is possible for us to hold unconscious stereotypes that we consciously oppose.

Because we are, by definition, unaware of our automatic, unconscious beliefs and attitudes, we believe we are acting in accordance with our conscious intentions, when in fact our unconscious is in the driver's seat. It is possible for us to treat others unfairly even when we believe it is wrong to do so. Cognitive neuroscience research has taught us that most decisions we make, especially regarding people, are "alarmingly contaminated" by our biases. Our assessments of others are never as objective as we believe them to be.

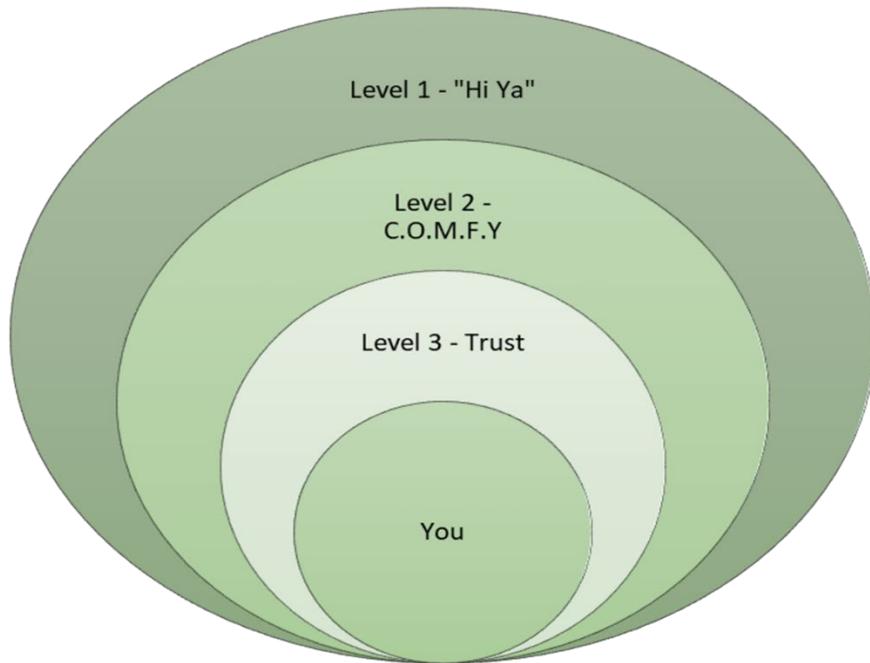
One way that we can test our bias is to assess ourselves with the following activity:

- Step 1: Write down the names of 5-10 people (non-family) that you trust and/or go to for advice
- Step 2: Next to each name, write their approximate age
- Step 3: Next to each age, write their gender
- Step 4: Next to each gender, write their race
- Step 5: Next to each race, write their income level
- Step 6: Next to each income level, write their sexual identity

You can keep going with additional descriptors or you can stop here. From here, you will allow participants to review their list and then share any observations that they might have. This activity is an awareness of where participants might need to expand their spheres of influence. Here is a good time to have a conversation about how participants can expand their spheres of influence.

Bias and Trust

Bias and trust are related. When we trust someone, we might have less bias towards them. Many people that we encounter exist in the Level 1 category of the circle below. Those are the people we might wave to or say hi to, but never really engage in full conversation. People in the Level 2 category are people that we would consider ourselves C.O.M.F.Y (come over to my front yard) with. These are the people who we may invite to dinner our homes. People in the Level 3 category are those who we trust wholeheartedly. These are the people who are the closest to us. Typically, in order to get to this level, there needs to be a significant relationship.



Guiding Questions:

- How do we begin building relationships across lines of difference?
- How can we begin the work of expanding our worldview?