

Empowering People to Break the Bias Habit: Creating Inclusion and Reducing Bias

Patricia G. Devine & William T. L. Cox

Unintentional Bias as a Habit

Stereotypes and biases spring to mind effortlessly and often without awareness, even among those who consciously renounce prejudice. Bias persists among those who renounce prejudice, because we are all exposed to stereotypes early and often. These stereotypes and biases become “habits of mind”. Bias is therefore an ordinary, pervasive byproduct of socialization experiences. These habits of mind lead well-intentioned people to be unwittingly complicit in the perpetuation of bias

These habits of mind can be broken, however, with these necessary conditions:

Motivation to eliminate the habit

Awareness of personal vulnerability to the habit and how it manifests, to identify the leverage points for disrupting the habit

Strategies to disrupt the habit and replace it with intended responses

Effort over time to break the habit

Leverage Points for Disruption: Bias Constructs

Reconstructing Criteria - Unintentionally adjusting the value of specific criteria to favor an applicant from a stereotype-congruent group

Prescriptive Norms - Stereotypes set up assumptions about how people should and should not behave, with social penalties for violating these norms

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy - Expectations lead you to behave in a way that causes others to behave the way you expected them to act

Attentional Spotlight - Stereotypes lead your attention to stereotype-consistent information and away from stereotype-inconsistent information

Confirmation Bias - Giving confirmatory information more weight than disconfirmatory information

Untested Assumptions - People often treat their own untested assumptions as if they were confirmatory information

Ineffective Strategies

Stereotype Suppression - Banishing stereotypes from one’s mind (e.g., “just try not to stereotype!”)

Colorblindness - Attempting to ignore race when interacting with racial minorities

Belief in Personal Objectivity - Attempting to be and believing that you can be objective when making decisions

Effective Strategies to Disrupt and Replace Bias

Stereotype Replacement - *Detect* the influence of stereotypes and biases, *Reflect* on the source of the stereotype and its effects on people, *Reject* the stereotypical portrayal or thought, and *replace* it with one that is non-stereotypical

Modify Your Environment - Detect images in your environment that reinforce stereotypes, evaluate what messages are in the environment about who belongs and/or succeeds, increase representation of underrepresented groups

Seek Individuating Information - Prevent stereotypes from filling in gaps by focusing on the details that make someone a unique individual. Obtain more information on specific qualifications, past experiences, etc., before making a decision

Perspective Taking - Imagine what it would feel like to be in another person's situation

Seek Situational Explanations - Think about how the situation may have influenced a behavior more than a personal characteristic. Actively consider things outside of the person as possible explanations for behavior

Committing to Criteria - Decide what criteria are important before any applicant is seen

Increasing Opportunities for Contact - Seek opportunities for greater interaction with members of other groups; Seek opportunities for greater exposure to movies, books, and other media from members of other groups

Speaking up when bias occurs - *Source:* Allies and authority figures hold lots of sway. *Tone:* Not finger-pointing; the goal should be working together. *Content:* Concrete instances, not abstract accusations. When possible, offer explanations or viable solutions.

www.biashabit.com

Patricia G. Devine
Kenneth and Mamie Clark Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin - Madison
pgdevine@wisc.edu
<https://sites.google.com/site/devinesocialpsych/>

Twitter: @DevineLab
[facebook.com/devinelab](https://www.facebook.com/devinelab)

William T. L. Cox
Assistant Scientist
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin - Madison
william.cox@wisc.edu
www.sciencecox.com

Twitter: @ScienceCox
[facebook.com/ScienceCox](https://www.facebook.com/ScienceCox)