Mitigating Implicit Bias
Mentoring across Identity Differences

Sangeeta Lamba MD MS HPEd
Vice-Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion RBHS
Objectives/Roadmap

• Identity and Intersectionality
• Assumptions and Bias
• Mitigating Implicit Bias for healthy mentoring
• Creating a conducive environment
• Tips to succeed and bridge differences
Identity Differences/Intersectionality

- **Identity**: The way you define yourself or how others define you
  - Gender
  - Age Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Culture
  - Sexual identity
  - Religious affiliation
  - Ability

- “Intersectionality is simply about how certain aspects of who you are will increase your access to the good things or your exposure to the bad things in life.”
  - Kimberle Crenshaw
Who is on Zoom? (your visible or invisible identity-intersectionality characteristics that you view as important)
Assumptions and Bias

• IMPOLITE QUERY:

• As a mentor (or as a mentee)
  – Are you biased?
  – Do you discriminate?
I only judge based on…..

- Content of character
- Quality of work
- Demonstrated experience
- Merit

- NOT—gender, color, race…….
Our Brain is COMPLEX: Automatic processing…

# Professional

# Woman

# middle aged

# Indian or South-Asian
# Cloud memory associations

- South–Asian/Indian Woman
Automatic processing

- #South-Asian Professional Woman

- Attitude:

- Stereotype:
Our Evolved Cognitive Machinery

• The brain cannot consciously process or be aware of more than 40 bits of information/second.
• Can unconsciously process up to 11 millions bits of information of per second.
• To manage vast information the brain takes shortcuts that increase efficiency.
• **A bias is a shortcut that helps us categorize and process information efficiently**
• A bias can be positive or negative and is often helpful to navigate the world but makes us prone to errors.

Implicit bias creates blind spots....

ONE is a Convicted Felon
So do you have biases? How about if I ask you?

- On average are men better leaders than women?
- On average are Asians or South-Asians more likely smart with technology but lack the creativity we desire?
- On average are younger workers more likely to take time off than older? Leave job? Be loyal?
Discuss IAT

Where do I have biases?

Can you be biased against a group you belong to?
If so, how and why does this happen
Studies demonstrate implicit bias exists

- **Hiring** (Dovidio 2000; Moss-Racusin 2013)
  - Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? (Bertrand M 2004)
  - University psychology professors 2:1 prefer “Brian” over “Karen” (Steinpreis 1999)

- **Performance evaluations** (student rating women professors vs men professors)
  - Quicker judgements more disparity (Martell and Leavitt)

- **Letter of recommendation** (Trix F 2000)
  - Used significantly more standout adjectives to describe male as compared to female candidates.
  - Teaching, training vs skills research

“People confident in their objectivity may overestimate their invulnerability to bias”

*Eric Uhlmann and Geoffrey Cohen*

*Org. Behavior and Human decision Processes 2007*
Summary: Assumptions and Implicit Bias

• Bias is automatic and inherent in all of us

• Implicit and Explicit Biases
  – Impact decision making (hiring, recommending others for positions etc.)
  – Influence mentoring relationships
  – Alter opportunities

• Build strategies to mitigate implicit bias (become aware of your blind spots)

• Acknowledging real and/or assumed differences can be helpful for a dialogue
What are some benefits when mentor and mentee are different according to a specific characteristic?
What are challenges of initiating conversations about differences?

💡 Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.
Small group case: Is it OK to ask?

• Last year I worked with a scholar who left to go to another department. I think she had a positive experience with me but a negative experience with her research team. She was a young African–American Woman and actually the only woman in our lab and in fact, the only African-American in our entire department. I wanted to ask her how she felt, but I worried I might be politically incorrect or insensitive to do so. I never asked. I still wonder about her experience here, how she would describe us to others, but I could never broach the subject as her mentor.

• What is a theme raised in this case?
• What might be the mentor’s intent have been in asking the question and what might be the impact on the mentee?
• If the mentor is asking so this could inform future faculty retention, how could that influence if and how a query is made?
• How would you engage in this conversation without feeling or expressing a judgement?

(UW ICTR- National Research Mentoring Network – Mentor Training module)
Relationships

• **Similar identity relationship**
  – Psychosocial support
  – ?Too similar may impact depth and breadth due to similarity

• **Cross identity relationship**
  – May take time for connection
  – May provide diverse perspective, rich cross fertilization of ideas

• **Developmental networks**
  – Are BEST (Mosaic to fit the many facets of our needs)
  – Seek diversity in many dimensions: Identity, organizational positions, and functional roles
How Do We Do This?

• Safe and courageous space that invites trust and openness
• Initiate conversations on differences BEFORE a crisis
• Acknowledge differences in identities and experiences shape our approach

• Contextualize discussion (research is good)
  – Research shows that bias impacts organizations and individuals

• Broaden discussion with impact of differences on
  – Interprofessional relationships
  – Team dynamics
  – Organization culture
Final Tips

• **Don’t make assumptions** about identity(ies) or about what you might have in common.

• **Be curious** about history and research related to differences and how this affects individuals, health systems/disparities, career achievement/satisfaction. This will help you understand and anticipate the challenges your mentee might face.

• **Advocate** for your mentee/peer mentor.

• **Work together** to name the challenge, identify and sharpen the navigation skills.

• **Embrace exploration of difference**—both in the relationship will learn and benefit. Use non-judgmental, open-ended questions to **explore**
Summary

• Acknowledge differences
  – Perception that another identity (generation, race, sex) “had/has it easier/harder” depends on the view of the individual. Experiences may be equally difficult, but in different ways.
  – Individuals from “different” groups don’t always have the same access as those from “like” groups, and might not be comfortable in exploring the difference.

• Value differences
  – Bridge differences by making the issues transparent.
  – Balance awareness of differences with values and expectations across identities and consideration of what might resonate or is important for one another.

• Make difference discussable
  – Recognize perception of differences and expectations
  – Ask mentees about their experiences
  – Understand the difference through appreciative inquiry
• Discussion?