Choose Your Words Wisely
Reducing Bias in Language
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Objectives
- Define implicit (unconscious) bias
- Identify how implicit bias originates
- Discuss effects of implicit (unconscious) bias
- Define Bias Language
- Identify bias language in communication and written material
- Explain why biased language should be avoided
- Identify strategies to reduce bias in language

The Lunch Date
Discussion
Let’s talk about Implicit Bias...
What is it?

- Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner.¹

- These biases are ingrained in our preferences influencing what we like and dislike

Implicit Bias

- Stanford Med describes implicit bias as, a positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing, or group that a person holds at an unconscious level.

- In other words - it’s our thoughts and feelings outside conscious awareness and control.

Source: [http://med.stanford.edu/diversity/FAQ_BDE.html](http://med.stanford.edu/diversity/FAQ_BDE.html)

Why do we have Implicit (unconscious) Bias?

- Biases are necessary to help us make sense of the millions of pieces of data we encounter daily

- Unconscious bias is hardwired in each of us and a normal part of how we make decisions

- Sigmund Freud’s research states, unconscious thoughts have the largest influence on human behavior²
“...the human mind takes in 11 million bits of information every second. But is consciously aware of only 40.”

- Timothy Wilson, University of Virginia

Our Brain and Bias

Since the brain cannot effectively process 11 million bits of information a second, it takes mental shortcuts

Implicit Association Test (IAT)

Website for Project Implicit:
http://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html

Website to view IAT Tools:
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/
Where does bias come from?

- Each of us have a different story and come from backgrounds with various characteristics such as:
  - age, personality, gender
  - culture, environment, and personal experiences
- Our background and personal experiences shape our preferences for or against something.

Perceptual Lens

- Everyday our brain filters through information we are exposed to using our own perceptual lens.
- This perceptual lens develops over time based on our interpretations, preferences, and biases - it filters out some information while letting other information in.
- Let me illustrate this in everyday life...

What Is Biased Language?

- The word “bias” refers to something that is unequal.
- Biased language refers to words and phrases that are considered prejudice, offensive, and harmful.
- Key components: offensive, prejudice, not inclusive, stereotypes & does not create a sense of community.
Bias in Language can stand out
- Offensive or prejudice words

It can also be hidden
- Vague words indicating superiority or inferiority of groups of people

Examples of Bias in Language
- The use of ethnic, racial or sexual slang
- Terms once used but now outdated
- Colloquial terms or expressions

Why is it important to avoid bias in Language?
- To avoid offending others
- To prevent alienation of various individuals or groups
- To prevent losing credibility & respect
- To demonstrate you can be neutral in your thoughts
Strategies to Reduce Bias in Language

- As an educator we have a responsibility to reduce bias in the educational setting to facilitate fair treatment of others and diminish demeaning attitudes and inaccurate assumptions.
- We should be sensitive to avoid labeling groups and individuals.
- To help with this, some educational establishments have created style guides or approved standardized terminology for classroom use.

Strategies to Reduce Bias in Language

- Be sensitive to Labels
- Avoid Using Outdated/Inaccurate Terminology
- Only mention differences when relevant.
- Call others what they want to be called. Don’t know? Ask!
- Use people-first language to create positive attitudes toward people with disabilities
- Use one group (often your own) as the standard may be perceived as trying to dominate over other groups
- When in doubt, be more specific when describing someone’s background (i.e. nationality, tribe, ethnicity, sexual orientation)

Review, Wrap Up, Q & A

- Defined Implicit bias and examples in everyday life
- Identified we are all biased, but it’s OK
- Discussed the Implicit Association Test (IAT)
- Identified where bias originates
- Considered our background and how it affects our unconscious bias
- Discussed the affects of our perceptual lens in relation to bias
- Defined bias in language
- Reviewed examples of bias in language
- Identified the importance of avoiding bias in language
- Reviewed strategies to reduce bias in language

Source: Permission to share granted by Seuth Chaleunphough, Dean of Students https://www.ius.edu/diversity/reduce-bias.php
References