

Recognizing Bias and Privilege



Purpose

It is natural to hold stereotypes about others. As we grow up in families, communities, and spaces where historical stereotypes have grown over centuries, we unknowingly internalize many beliefs about others and their culture, social norms, and way of life. In this lesson, we will examine why and how we hold biases (and how we can counteract them). Further, we'll examine power and privilege, understanding why our biases and stereotypes may be intensified toward certain groups who have historically not held power and been denied opportunities.

Empathize

To start off, let's define six key terms:

Bias: Bias is judgment or prejudice against a thing, person, or group, versus another. For example, believing that a group of people are less good or capable at something. This bias can also be reversed, believing that a group is *more* good or capable.

Stereotype: Stereotypes are widely held beliefs that oversimplify ideas and cast a wide net that everyone from a certain group acts or does a certain thing. For example, believing that all people of a certain gender are _____.

Privilege: Privilege is a certain right or advantage as a result of one's background (and the stereotypes and biases of their group). For example, wealthy people tend to have privilege as people treat them with additional respect as they tend to hold power.

Power: Power, in the context of these terms, refers to certain actions that one group can take because of their privilege. For example, being able to enter certain spaces without being questioned or stand up for oneself in a meeting without ample objection.

Allyship: Allyship is where someone who has relative power and privilege becomes a partner with those who do not. Allies take time to reflect on their privileges and seek to better understand themselves and others.

Accomplices: Accomplices are a step further than allies, putting their power and privilege at-risk to demand better conditions and treatment of those without power and privilege.

Consider...

What stereotypes exist against young people? In your life as a young person, what are stereotypes that people hold against you?

What power and privilege do you have as a young person?* Who, if anyone, has more power and privilege?

*Depending on your background, you may hold less power and privilege due to other demographic groups you identify with. This concept is called **intersectionality**, where certain elements of your background provide power/privilege, and others detract from it.*

What would be an example of being an ally?

What then, would be an example of being an accomplice?

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Activity

In order to better understand the biases, power, and privileges we hold, we'll analyze different scenarios.

Note that the purpose of activities like this is *not* to feel shame for having relative power or privilege, nor to harm those who do not. These are historical concepts that are part of the human experience that *everyone* has. Instead, purposes of activities like this are to reflect on who one is so we can consider possibilities for a more just and holistic future.

In each of the following scenarios, *background* refers to demographic information about yourself, such as your race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, ethnicity, age, and more.

Scenarios	
Growing up, did you have easy access to gifts, fun toys, and family activities?	
Have you ever felt like someone was watching you as being "out of place"? As in, they felt like you, specifically, may do something wrong?	
Is it easy for you to make friends who have similar backgrounds to you? Is it easy to find others who have similar backgrounds?	
When learning about school subjects, do you often find people like you represented?	
Have you ever been asked to provide an opinion based on your background? Such as: What would a girl think about this? What would someone from Mexico think about this? etc.	
Has someone ever assumed something about you due to your background, such as a language you speak or custom you practice?	
When talking to a superior, such as a teacher or manager at a business, are they typically someone from your background?	

Has anyone ever questioned if you should have access to a public facility, such as a restroom, drinking fountain, library, or park?	
When shopping, is it easy to find products that feature and advertise your background?	
If you ever got in trouble for something, can you assume that people would focus on the facts rather than something about your background?	

Then consider...

Why might it matter, in the context of what we're talking about in this lesson, to be able to easily find other people with similar backgrounds to yourself?

Why might it matter, in the context of what we're talking about in this lesson, to not assume that someone can speak for their entire background, such as their entire race or religion?

If you're answering "no" to most of these questions, and are struggling to come up with an answer, why might that be?

Should you feel bad about not being able to answer yes to these questions?

Likewise, should you feel bad about being able to easily answer these questions?

How does an activity like this help identify power and privilege? Why may this be good information to know?

Reflect

How would you rate your understanding of this concept? <i>Place an "X" in the corresponding box below.</i>				
				

How has your understanding of this concept changed as a result of this lesson?

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Which individual or community actions could this activity inspire?

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What is bias? Likewise, what is privilege? Why would it matter to understand these terms?

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