

Understanding and Unpacking Un/Conscious Bias and Mental Models - Implications for Service Delivery

August 16, 2023
Southwest Virginia
EPIC

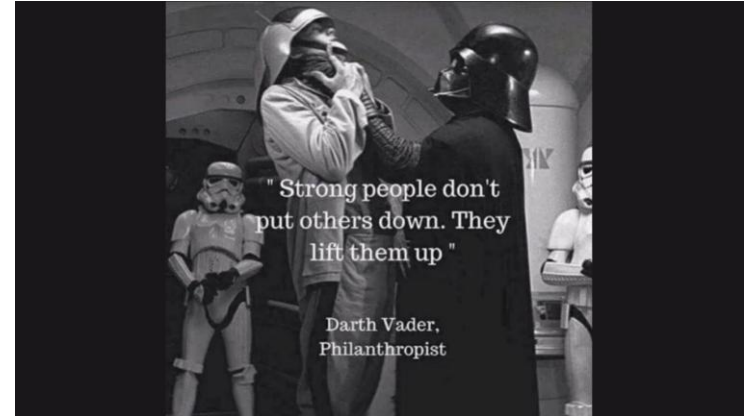
Bio: Adrienne Robinson - Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

- Creator of Good Vibes, Fashion/Shoe Lover, Redux Runner
- Professional Background
 - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor
 - VR Deputy Chief/Director (AR)
 - Educator
 - Vocational Expert
- Education
 - Licensed School Counselor (AR)
 - Master's Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling (CRC)
 - Doctorate-Higher Education Administration
- Areas of Expertise
 - Leadership/Administration
 - Multiculturalism/Trauma
 - Training/Education



Bio: Nichole Tichy - Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

- CrossFit Enthusiast, Disney Adult, Millennial, Bookworm & Coffee Lover
- Professional Background:
 - Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
 - Director of Community Engagement and Outreach
 - University Instructor
- Education:
 - Doctoral Candidate - Counselor Education and Supervision
 - Master's Degree - Rehabilitation Counseling
- Areas of Expertise:
 - VR counselor identity and development
 - Codes of Professional Ethics
 - Long COVID and the impact on persons with disabilities
 - Supported Employment
 - CRP and VR Relationships



Bio: Sandi Miller - Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

- Strength-Training Junkie, Outdoor Enthusiast, & Lover of Ted Lasso
- Professional Background
 - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor
 - VR Statewide Transition and Training Coordinator
 - VR Blind Agency Director
 - Technical Assistance - NTACTION
- Education
 - Master's Degree - Rehabilitation Psychology
- Areas of Expertise
 - Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Transition
 - Administration
 - Working with individuals who are Blind or have low vision
 - Supported Employment



Bio: DJ Ralston - Pronouns: They/Them/Theirs

- Non-Binary, Queer, Geriatric Millennial, Foodie, & Muppet Fanatic
- Professional Background
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Public Workforce Development
 - Technical Assistance – Disability and Employment
- Education
 - Certified (Partner) Work Incentive Coordinator
 - Master's Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
 - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
 - Social Social Security Work Incentives and Financial Empowerment
 - Relationship Building, Partnership Development, and Training Development
 - Integrated Resource Teams (IRT)



Objectives

After participating in this session participants should be able to

- Understand what mental models are and what role they play in our lives.
- Explain the different types of bias and how this impacts the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services to marginalized and underserved populations.
- Describe the importance of critical reflection as it relates to increasing counselor self-awareness of privileged and marginalized intersections of identity.
- List strategies or practices that facilitate purposeful and intentional critical reflection.
- Use critical reflection to deconstruct existing mental models to ensure that individuals with significant disabilities receive effective supports and services to achieve their employment goals.

Intention and Noticings

Kindness

Grace

Assumption of Positive Intent

Challenge to Opportunity

Sitting with Discomfort



Session Layout

- Case Study
- Social Identity, Mental Models, and Bias
- Critical Self-Reflection as Practice
- Implications for Service Delivery

Case Study Example

Client AW

AW is a 20-year-old, cisgender, African-American male (he/him) entering his final year of high school. AW currently receives special education services and will receive a Modified Standard Diploma upon his graduation in the next year. Throughout high school, AW received special education services and had an IEP for Multiple Disabilities, including Intellectual/Developmental Disability and Other Health impairments. While in high school, AW received support from a one-on-one aid who assisted with medical-related tasks and completing school-related assignments. Over the past year, AW has been working with his one-on-one aid and his Life Skills instructor to learn various work-related skills to help explore a potential career path once he completes high school. AW has been working in an elderly care facility and his school's cafeteria, cleaning tables and delivering meals; however, his one-on-one aid reports difficulty completing the assigned tasks.

Individual Reflection



- What are your initial thoughts/reactions when reading through this case study?
- What are the first questions you would ask?
- Who would you ask those questions of?
- What are the steps would you take?
- Why those steps?

Social Identity, Mental Models, and Bias

Early Social Identity Research

Henri Tajfel, the founder of social identity theory, defined social identity as a person's sense or understanding of who they are in relation to group membership.

Tajfel's research asserted that the groups people belong to give persons a sense of pride and self-esteem.

Group membership is a primary connection to the social world and thus helps give us a social identity.

Social Identities not only describe who people are, they can also prescribe people's behavior based on those social expectations associated with the group.



McLeod, S. A. (2019, October 24). Social identity theory. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>

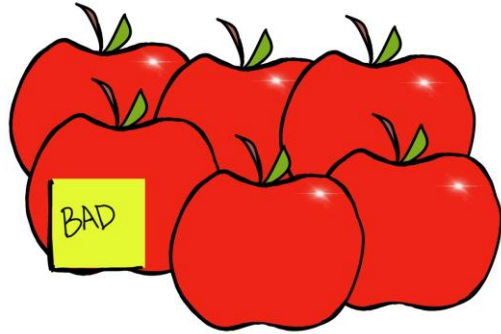
Early Social Identity Research (2)



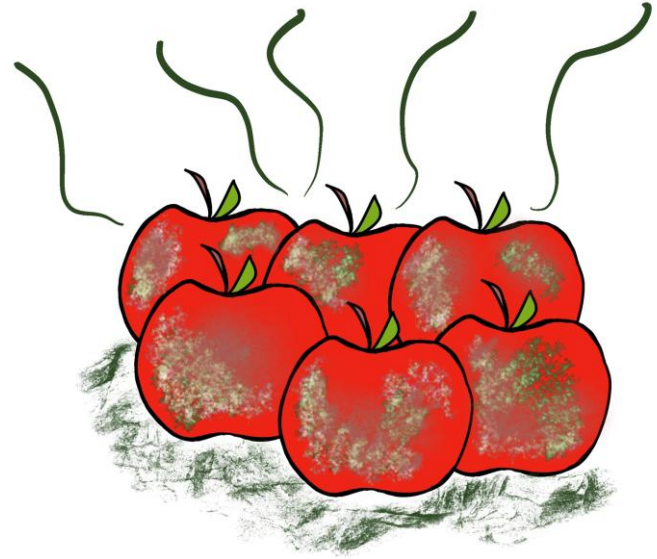
Tajfel also asserted that humans, as part of their typical cognitive process, categorize things and in doing so tend to over-exaggerate the differences between groups and similarities within groups. These groups are then referred to as the “in group” and the “out group”.

This idea of the human cognitive tendency to categorize things coupled with social identity theory’s assertion that humans are prone to over exaggerate differences and similarities helps explain how identity is socially constructed and how implicit bias occurs.

Social Identity Theory In-Action



VS.



Common Examples of Embodied Social Identities

Macro Level

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Dis/Ability
- Class/Socioeconomic Status
- Education
- Religion/Faith

Meso/Micro Level

Identity by Profession

- VR Counselor, Lawyer, Student, Teacher, Plumber, Pastor/Priest etc.

Identity via Community

- City Council Member, School Board Member, Pole Worker, etc.

Identity via Family

- Grandparent, Parent, Sibling, Kid, etc.

Identity by Interest

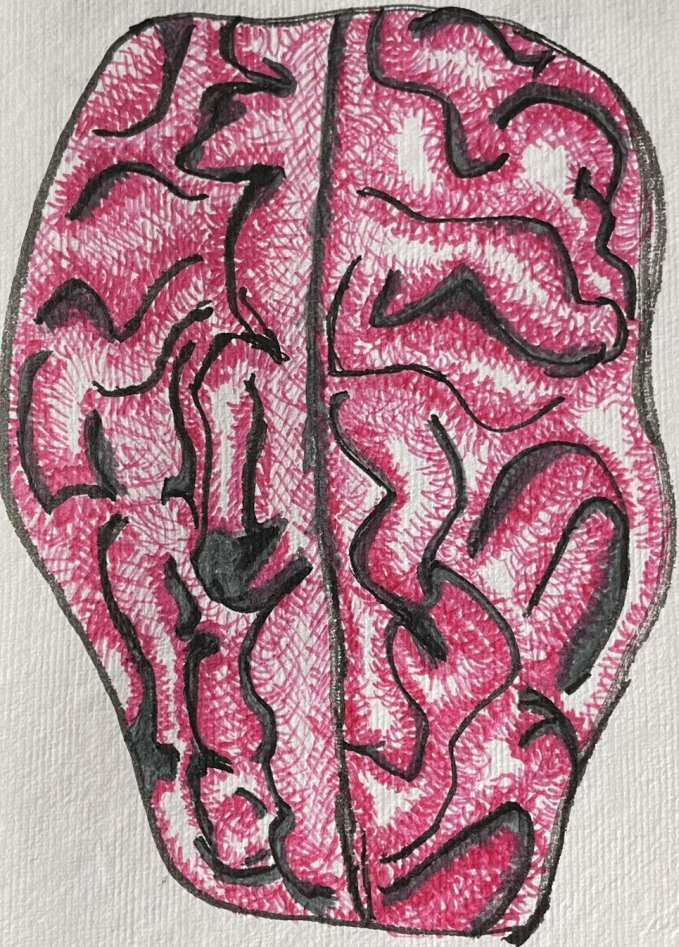
- Baker, Reader, Crossfit, Gardner, DND

Identity by Cause

- Cancer Survivor, Climate Change, Social Justice Issues

Let's Play a Game...

[Video](#)



The Human Brain & Mental Models

Information Processing

- Consciously aware of only a very small portion of the millions of bits of data we process every second, so our brain creates cognitive shortcuts to help us process.

Subconscious Mind

- Categorizes
- Creates Associations
- Fills in the Gaps

Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/healing_otherness_ppt.pdf)

Mental Models

- **Mental Models are the frames** we employ to help us make sense of and navigate the world. Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions, they shape our:
 - reasoning
 - what we think
 - how we understand
 - how we simplify complexity
- In essence, **mental models**, often play a big role in **what and how we “know”** something, however, mental models can also mistake experience for objective fact. In other words, mental models contribute to underlying assumptions which often lead to what is referred to as unconscious or implicit bias.



Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/healing_otherness_ppt.pdf)

Bias - bi·as - *noun* - Defined

Oxford Dictionary

Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Dictionary.com

A particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned.

Psychology Today

A tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something (object/idea) or someone (group/individual).

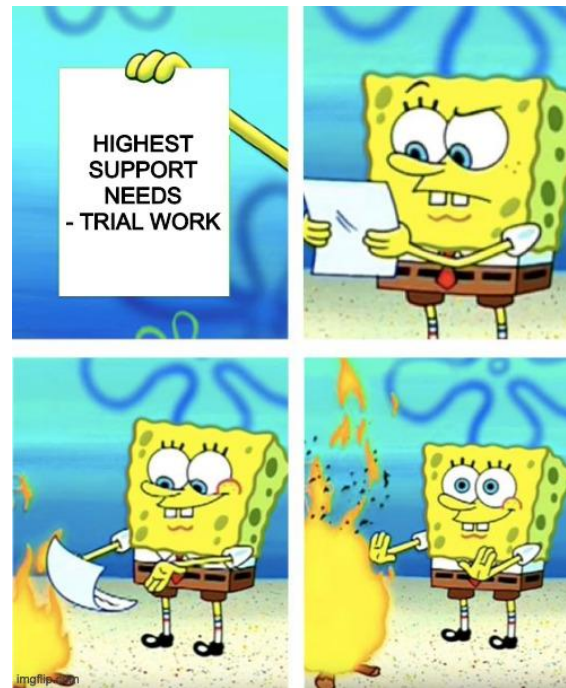
- Often characterized as stereotypes about people based on the group membership (Psychology Today, n.d.)
- a tendency to favor one explanation, opinion, or understanding over another perspective that is potentially equally valid.
- Synonym = prejudice

Different Kinds of Bias

- Affinity Bias
 - Tendency to gravitate towards people who are perceived as like of similar to us
- Cognitive Bias
 - A mode of thinking that distorts reality such as negativity bias (giving more attention and weight to negative outcomes than positive ones).
- Confirmation Bias
 - The tendency to search for information that confirms/supports their established beliefs and values
- Conformity (AKA Bandwagon) Bias
 - Bias that is caused by peer pressure - if an individual feels or learns the majority of the group are picking one choice over another, they tend to go along with the group, rather than voice their own opinion.
- Blind Spot Bias
 - Bias where an individual sees other people exhibit bias and prejudice while making decisions but does not see their own bias - feels their decisions are rational.

Different Kinds of Bias – (2)

- Expedience Bias
 - Preference to act quickly without taking the necessary steps (data-driven decision making) needed to ensure meaningful engagement.
- Halo and Horns Effect Bias
 - When a first impression, be it positive (halo) or negative (horns), continues to inform your perception of someone/something
- Heuristics Bias
 - Decision-making affected by our tendency to stick to info and ideas we already have. Use of info we can recall easily to make decisions. Tendency to use cognitive shortcuts even if incomplete.



Different Kinds of Bias - Implicit/Unconscious





- Implicit bias, like other forms of bias, is an inclination or preference towards or away from someone/something but it occurs automatically and unintentionally and is often shaped by experiences and learned associations
 - Unconscious Bias is the result of our limited cognitive capacity
 - It is our unintentional preferences formed by our socialization and experiences, including exposure to (social) media
 - There are an overwhelming number of studies that have shown the significant impact unconscious bias can have on human cognitive processes

Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT)

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1

Implicit Association Test

Next, you will use the 'E' and 'I' computer keys to categorize items into groups as fast as you can. These are the four groups and the items that belong to each:

Category	Items
Good	Love, Enjoy, Pleasing, Joyous, Attractive, Celebrate, Glorious, Smiling
Bad	Ugly, Pain, Horrible, Hurtful, Disgust, Awful, Tragic, Poison
Joe Biden	
Ronald Reagan	

There are seven parts. The instructions change for each part. Pay attention!

Continue

· Project Implicit ·

Designed to measure implicit preference (bias).

Example – Preference for US Presidents

Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT) (2)

Based on speed with which you associate items via the stroke of your keyboard

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1

Press "E" for

Ronald Reagan

Press "I" for

Joe Biden

Part 1 of 7

Put a left finger on the **E** key for items that belong to the category **Ronald Reagan**.
Put a right finger on the **I** key for items that belong to the category **Joe Biden**.
Items will appear one at a time.

If you make a mistake, a red **X** will appear. Press the other key to continue.
Go as fast as you can while being accurate.

Press the **space bar** when you are ready to start.

Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT) (3)

Based on speed with which you associate items via the stroke of your keyboard



Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT) (4)

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1

Based on speed with which you associate items via the stroke of your keyboard

Press "E" for

Bad

or

Ronald Reagan

Press "I" for

Good

or

Joe Biden

Part 3 of 7

Use the E key for Ronald Reagan and for Bad.
Use the I key for Joe Biden and for Good.
Each item belongs to only one category.

If you make a mistake, a red X will appear. Press the other key to continue.
Go as fast as you can while being accurate.

Press the **space bar** when you are ready to start.

Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT) (5)

The associations switch.
Do you change speed? Is
the association harder to
make?

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1>



Press "E" for

Bad
or
Joe Biden

Press "I" for

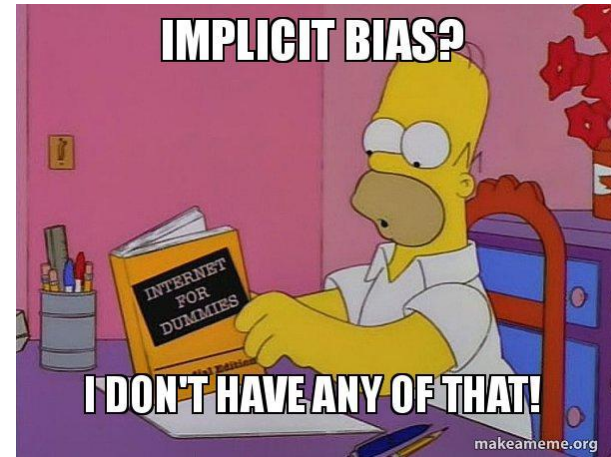
Good
or
Ronald Reagan

Harvard Project Implicit - Implicit Association Test(s) (IAT) ⁽⁶⁾

An invitation for you to try one (or as many as you'd like)

[Harvard Project Implicit](#)

Disability IAT
Race IAT
Sexuality IAT
Transgender IAT
Weight IAT
Age IAT
Religion IAT
And More



Let's all get on the same page...

- Biases can be positive or negative.
- Biases, both conscious and unconscious/implicit biases, become problematic when they result in treating individuals and groups of people differently, unfairly, and poorly based on perceived stereotypes.
- Unconscious biases are unavoidable we all have them, however we can and should work on mitigating their effects.
- Rehabilitation Counselors are ethically obligated to actively address their biases.



Ethical Responsibility: Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC)

The CRCC Adopted a [Revised Code of Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors](#) in January 2023

D. 1.c. - Awareness of Client Worldview

D.2 - Avoiding Harm and Value Imposition

D.2.b. - Avoiding Microaggression

D.2.c. - Implicit Bias

D.3.a - Personal Awareness

Strategies to Address Bias

Part 2: Self-Awareness and Critical Self-Reflection as Practice

INTRODUCTION

Self-Awareness

Research suggests that when we see ourselves clearly, it frees us from assumptions and biases, allows us to see issues from multiple perspectives and helps us build better relationships

Oxford Dictionary Definition

Conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

Broadened Definition

Self-awareness is the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions, thoughts, or emotions do or don't align with your internal standards. Highly self-aware people can more effectively interpret their actions, feelings, and thoughts objectively.

Are YOU self-aware?

PREPARE

Knowing and Understanding the Two States of Self-Awareness

“What are the two
states?”

Public and Private or possibly
known as internal and external.

Public

Being aware of how we can
appear to others.

Private

Being able to notice and reflect
on one's internal state.

Pros/Cons

Pros of Public:

Likely to adhere to social norms
Behave in ways that are socially acceptable

Pros of Private:

Introspective
Notice triggers/feelings

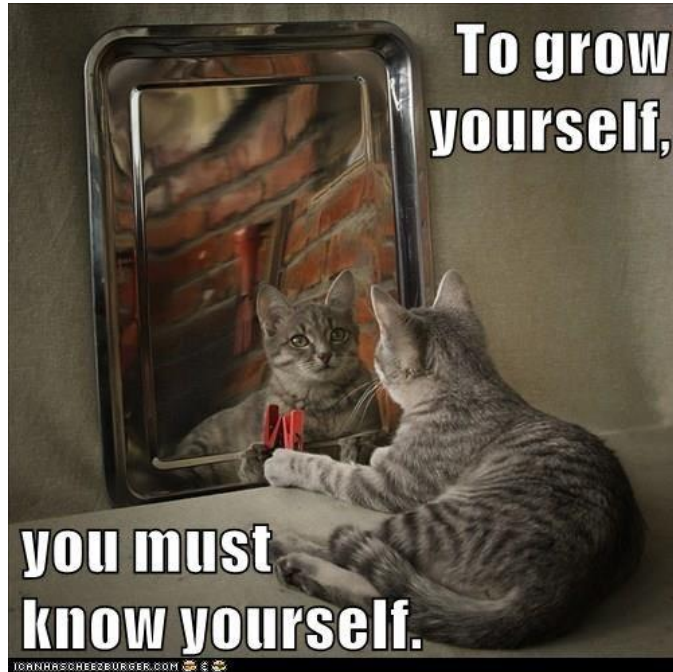
Cons of Public:

The danger of tipping into self-consciousness
Spend too much time worrying about what others think of them

Cons of Private:

Reluctant to share certain aspects of ourselves
Could develop a persona that lacks authenticity

From Self-Awareness to Critical Self Reflection in Counseling



What does this mean?

- Critical self-reflection is the process of analyzing and evaluating one's experiences, beliefs, and actions to develop a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.
- I'm not ableist, why do I need to do this?
- Everyone has implicit biases, engaging in critical self-reflection helps mitigate bias, promote learning, growth, and professional development.

Critical Reflection - Key Characteristics

Self-awareness: Critical reflection involves a high level of self-awareness, as individuals examine their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

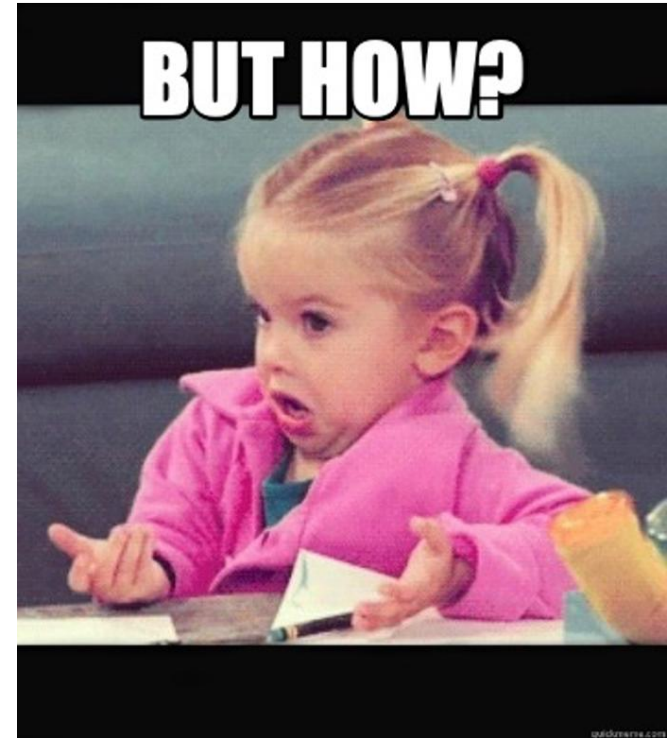
Openness to feedback: Critical reflection requires individuals to be open to feedback from others and willing to consider alternative viewpoints.

Analytical thinking: Critical reflection involves a process of analyzing and evaluating one's own experiences, beliefs, and actions.

Action-oriented: Critical reflection is not just about thinking, but also about taking action to improve oneself and the world.

Engaging in Critical Reflection

- Create a reflective space
- Set aside time
- Review your experiences
- Identify patterns
- Consider alternative perspectives
- Set goals for growth
- Seek support



Statements to Address Bias

1. "I recognize that I have biases, and I am committed to identifying and addressing them."
2. "I acknowledge that my personal experiences and cultural background may influence my perspective, and I am willing to consider alternative viewpoints."
3. "I am open to feedback and willing to learn from my mistakes."
4. "I understand that making assumptions about individuals based on their dis/ability, race, gender, or other characteristics is unfair and can be harmful."
5. "I will challenge stereotypes and prejudices when I encounter them, and I will speak up when I witness discrimination or injustice."
6. "I recognize the value of diversity and inclusion, and I will actively seek out opportunities to learn from and engage with people from different backgrounds."
7. "I will strive to treat all individuals with respect and dignity, regardless of their background or identity."

Implications for Service Delivery

Group Discussion

Group Discussion - How does Bias impact the VR Process?

In what ways might we see bias show up in the Vocational Rehabilitation Process?

What kinds of bias might be more common in a Vocational Rehabilitation setting?

Stella Young Ted Talk

THE GEORGE
WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

Case Study Example - Revisited

Client AW

AW is a 20-year-old, cisgender, African-American male (he/him) entering his final year of high school. AW currently receives special education services and will receive a Modified Standard Diploma upon his graduation in the next year. Throughout high school, AW received special education services and had an IEP for Multiple Disabilities, including Intellectual/Developmental Disability and Other Health impairments. While in high school, AW received support from a one-on-one aid who assisted with medical-related tasks and completing school-related assignments. Over the past year, AW has been working with his one-on-one aid and his Life Skills instructor to learn various work-related skills to help explore a potential career path once he completes high school. AW has been working in an elderly care facility and his school's cafeteria, cleaning tables and delivering meals; however, his one-on-one aid reports difficulty completing the assigned tasks.

Group Discussion

Reflect on what your initial thoughts/reactions were to this case study at the start of the session.

- Do you notice anything about your initial reaction and course of action?
- Would you do anything differently?

References

Betz, M. (2022, September 14). What is self-awareness and why is it important? *Better Up Blog*.
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