

College of Liberal Arts
Diversity and Inclusion Resource Module
TOPIC: Discrimination in the Workplace: Using Psychological Research for
Prevention

AUTHOR: Dr. Carrie A. Langner, Psychology & Child Development Department

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I. Overview

Bias in the workplace is a problem across the private and public sector. There are a set of tools in social psychology that are useful to other disciplines in preventing and responding to discriminatory behavior. An awareness of these largely unconscious processes and potential interventions for combatting bias can make the difference for an organization that aims to treat applicants and employees fairly. Most employers do not want to discriminate and almost all would like to avoid lawsuits. Knowledge about addressing discrimination is a valuable feature for Cal Poly graduates on the job market. Further, organizations benefit from diversity due to greater creativity and quality decision-making. In this module, psychological research on discrimination and diversity is distilled into a lecture that contains research findings, tips for improving organizations, and a classroom activity.

Diversity Module Contents

The powerpoint template covers the following:

- Definitions and terminology related to diversity and discrimination
- Statistics on discrimination and example of empirical study of workplace discrimination
- Brief description of some of the psychological research examining why people discriminate
- Empirically backed tips on how to reduce discrimination
- Research on the benefits of diversity

Articles listed below that are not hyperlinked (denoted with an author name in parentheses) are included in the folder as individual files.

II. Annotated Bibliography for Instructors

1. Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders

The role congruity theory of prejudice posits that when individuals have identities that are stereotyped in ways that are perceived as incompatible with leader stereotypes, they are then seen as less fitting for leadership positions. In other words, gender roles for women may be seen as incongruent with the role of leader. "Through self-regulatory and expectancy confirmation processes, gender roles can induce sex differences in behavior in the absence of any intrinsic, inborn psychological differences between women and men" (590). In a US context, this often means that stereotypes of European American men are most overlapping with leader stereotypes. Consequently, female leaders are viewed less favorably than male leaders. Changes to societal expectations of female gender roles as well as the content of leader roles may reduce prejudice toward female leaders. For example, valuing the communal characteristics that many women bring to leadership roles may make female gender and leadership appear more congruent.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573- 598. doi:10.1037//0033-295X.109.3.573

2. Talking about race (Tatum)

Noted scholar of race, Beverly Tatum, outlines some of the common emotional responses from students when discussing race as well as some strategies for overcoming student resistance to learning. She outlines working assumptions for learning about race and guidelines for discussion. Sources of resistance include: the taboo nature of race in the U.S., the desire to see the U.S. as a just society, and denial of one's own prejudices. Strategies include setting guidelines for discussion, creating opportunities for self-generated knowledge, supplying a framework for students to understand their own educational process, and empowering students as change agents.

Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, 1- 25. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.62.1.146k5v980r703023>

3. Diversity training (Paluck)

Diversity training is discussed in the context of the field's need for action research that will help translate scientific research to implementation in practice. While diversity training has the potential to positively affect myriad workplaces, the research supporting these interventions needs development. In the research study outlined, a peer training program implemented by the Anti-Defamation League in U.S. high schools is randomized and evaluated. Peer trainers' attitudes improved but personal comfort with other groups was not improved. Importantly, peer trainers were more likely to stand up to prejudice-

based teasing following the intervention. Applied to the context of the workplace, the use of diversity training should be based on research findings and assessed for intended impact.

Paluck, E. L. (2006). Diversity training and intergroup contact: A call to action research. *Journal of Social Issues*, 62, 577-595. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00474.x

4. How to Be Allies (Lee Mun Wah) (pdf attached)

Practical ways for European Americans to be good allies to people of color. "Racism is not just what you see, do or hear, but it's also about what you don't see, do or hear. I think that one of the great illusions in this country is believing that if you study the history of racism, gather data and read lots of books about racism, you will have "arrived"... What kind of privilege rewards us if we only see our similarities and not our differences, encourages us to celebrate our differences, but does not make use of any of our differences in our workplaces, schools and communities? When we will have "arrived" is when we integrate our unique differences into our everyday business, educational and government practices in the way we hire, teach, or make policies."

5. Colorblindness – Effects on Ethnic Minorities (Plaut)

Colorblindness ideology stresses ignoring and minimizing group differences. In contrast, multiculturalism is the recognition and celebration of group differences. In a field study of diversity in the workplace, Plaut and colleagues found a positive association between whites' endorsement of multiculturalism and ethnic minorities' psychological engagement at work (e.g., valuing job success and organizational membership). Conversely, the endorsement of colorblind ideology among whites had a negative correlation with ethnic minority co-workers' engagement.

Plaut, V. C., Thomas, K. M., & Goren, M. J. (2009). Is multiculturalism or color blindness better for minorities? *Psychological Science*, 20, 444-446. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40575043>

6. Colorblindness and Social Interaction (Norton & Sommers)

Among many Whites, there is a reluctance to admit to using racial cues in their perceptions of others because of desire to appear unprejudiced. In this experimental work, participants were randomly assigned to same-race or cross-race race pairs and played a categorizing game. The use of a colorblind strategy led to decreased performance and less friendliness of nonverbal behaviors. In other words, pursuing a colorblind strategy in order to appear unprejudiced had the counter-intuitive effect of making cross-race interactions less friendly and less effective.

Norton, M. I., Sommers, S. R., Apfelbaum, E. P., Pura, N., & Ariely, D. (2006). Color blindness and interracial interaction: Playing the political correctness game. *Psychological Science*, 17, 949-953. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40064485>

7. Cognitive Effects of Racial Diversity (Sommers)

A set of experiments were designed to examine the effect of racially diverse (vs. non-diverse) groups on cognitive performance. The results suggest that the anticipation of discussing race-related topics in diverse groups improves cognitive processing among White Americans.

Sommers, S. R., Warp, L. S., & Mahoney, C. C. (2008). Cognitive effects of racial diversity: White individuals' information processing in heterogenous groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 44*, 1129-1136. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.01.003>

III. Annotated Bibliography for Students

1. Bias in hiring – resume studies

Many “resume” studies have examined the effect of racialized and gendered names on callbacks for fictitious resumes. In one study, white names received 50% more callbacks than black names for resumes that were exactly the same except for the name. Much of this prejudice may be unintentional and unconscious (“implicit”). Implicit biases are more likely to affect behavior, and potentially lead to discrimination, when an individual is distracted, information is ambiguous, and if there is greater time pressure and cognitive load.

Bertrand, M. (2016). This problem has a name: Discrimination. Chicago Booth Review. Retrieved from <https://review.chicagobooth.edu>

2. Prejudice Reduction: The Contact Hypothesis

The contact hypothesis refers to the testable proposition that prejudice may be reduced by a certain type of contact between majority and minority groups (equal status of groups while engaged in the pursuit of common goals). A broad literature in social psychology provides evidence in support of the contact hypothesis. Importantly, having contact with people from other groups is not enough to reduce prejudice. Rather, situations that include cooperative and interdependent interactions in pursuit of common goals will assist in the ability to re-categorize from “us and them” to “we.”

Plous, S. (n. d.) The contact hypothesis. Social Psychology Network. Retrieved from <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/>

3. Why Trying Not to Be Prejudiced Backfires

Social psychological research suggests that the more we try to push something outside our awareness (e.g., suppress a thought), only strengthens its activation (the “ironic rebound effect”). In a recent set of experimental studies, framing of prejudice reduction messages in prejudice suppression vs. embrace diversity had different effects on prejudice. Participants instructed to avoid stereotyping and control prejudice were actually more likely to display prejudice. In contrast, participants asked to focus on the value of non-prejudice and open-mindedness displayed less prejudice. This suggests that efforts to reduce prejudice will be best served by framing these messages in terms of the benefits of diversity and open-mindedness.

McGonigal, K. (2011). Why trying not to be prejudiced backfires. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-willpower/201107/why-trying-not-be-prejudiced-backfires>

4. Colorblindness is Counter-Productive

This article provides a review of the ways in which racial inequality has become more covert over time as compared to the era of open, legal segregation. Alongside this shift in the visibility of discrimination, explicit expression of racism has shifted to a discourse of

colorblindness. A risk of avoiding explicit discussions of race is that people will ignore current manifestations of discrimination in schools, neighborhoods, health care, and other social institutions.

Roberson, J. (n2015). Color-blindness is counterproductive. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/color-blindness-is-counterproductive/405037/>

IV. Media Resources

- [IAT demo](#)

Project Implicit. (2011). Retrieved from <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

- [“Employers Less Likely to Interview Openly Gay Men for Job Openings: Study”](#)

Employers less likely to interview openly gay men for job openings: Study (2011). *University of Chicago Press Journals*. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencenewsline.com/news/2011100400350049.html>

- [“Undercover job hunters reveal huge race bias in Britain’s workplaces”](#)

Syal, R. (2009). Undercover job hunters reveal a huge race bias in Britain’s workplaces. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2009/oct/18/racism-discrimination-employment-undercover>

- [Interrupting Bias in Industry Settings](#)

Interrupting bias in industry setting (n. d.) *National Center for Women & Information Technology*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncwit.org>

- [Hidden Brain episode on implicit bias & police shooting](#)

Boyle, T. (Producer). (2017, June 5). *Hidden Brain* [Podcast Series]. Washington D.C.: National Public Radio.

V. Activities

Student Group Activity: “In Your Field”

Identify areas where discrimination could occur in your current or future workplace. Remember to think about unintentional discrimination/unconscious prejudice.

1. Recruitment
2. Retention
3. Assessment
4. Promotion

Generate a system or process that would reduce or prevent discriminatory behavior. For example, how would you institute a “blind” review of resumes?

Discussion questions:

- Where did you identify potential discrimination in recruitment/retention/assessment/promotion?
- What do these potential areas of discrimination have in common?
- What ideas did you generate for steps you might take to reduce discrimination?
- What is difficult about identifying unintentional bias and discrimination?
- What additional resources would you need as a manager attempting to reduce discrimination?

Facilitator notes:

- The difference between ‘masked review’ and colorblind ideology:
- Definitions
 1. Recruitment: selection of candidates for positions within the organization
 2. Retention: keeping current employees with the organization
 3. Assessment: evaluations of employees that may influence advancement
 4. Promotion: movement up the ladder within the hierarchy of the organization

Pair – Share Activity: “Gender and Job Fit”

Instructor can have all students evaluating the traits within the same domain, or can split the class into sections that evaluate traits with regard to different subfields.

Trait lists can be used separately (A: feminine and neutral traits and B: masculine and neutral traits) or combined into one list.

“With the person next to you, please rate the list of traits you are given in terms of how necessary they are to the field of _____”

Discussion Questions:

- Were stereotypically masculine traits less flexible/seen as more necessary to the job?
- Which traits might not be as necessary to the job as many people assume?
- How might some of the more gendered trait descriptions (e.g., assertive, sensitive) be reworded so as to be more specific to the job needs and less gendered?
- What are some of the “opposites” of the trait words that you were rating? Does describing someone as “Sensitive” lead them to be seen as **not** “Assertive”?
- Are any of these traits interpreted different depending on the person they are applied to? (e.g., does “self-confident woman” have different connotations than “self-confident man”?)

A. Job Candidate Traits	
Which are most necessary and which are least necessary to the job role?	
TRAIT	NECESSARY?
Self-confident	
Assertive	
Outspoken	
Original	
Thoughtful	
Self-Reliant	
Respectful	

B. Job Candidate Traits	
Which are most necessary and which are least necessary to the job role?	
TRAIT	NECESSARY?
Accommodating	
Emotional	
Sensitive	
Nurturing	
Original	
Thoughtful	
Respectful	

VI. Tips

- Student resistance
 - Framing students' learning about difference and discrimination in terms of process rather than outcome can help to shift the focus away from fears of looking ignorant
 - The distinction between intention and outcome can be important in dialogues around difference: We can pay attention to and try to address the effects of our comments, even if unintended.
 - [Article on talking about race in the classroom \(Beverly Tatum\)](#)
- Creating “brave spaces” rather than “safe spaces” (Arao & Clemens)
- [Fostering Civil Discourse](#)