

EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO BREAK THE BIAS HABIT

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO REDUCING BIAS AND CREATING INCLUSION



SPEAKER INFO

William T. L. Cox, Ph.D., is the Principal Investigator of the Stereotyping and Bias Research (SABR) Lab in the Department of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Dr. William T. L. Cox

☎ (352) 275-1223

✉ william.cox@wisc.edu

🌐 sciencecox.com

📘 facebook.com/ScienceCox

🐦 [@ScienceCox](https://twitter.com/ScienceCox)

bit.ly/CoxAssets to download a copy of this document or Dr. Cox's CV.

UNINTENTIONAL BIAS AS HABIT

Stereotypes and biases spring to mind effortlessly and often without awareness, even among those who consciously renounce prejudice. Bias persists among those who renounce prejudice because we are all exposed to stereotypes early and often. These stereotypes and biases become “habits of mind”. Bias is therefore an ordinary, pervasive byproduct of socialization experiences. These habits of mind lead well-intentioned people to be unwittingly complicit in the perpetuation of bias. These habits of mind can be broken, however, with these necessary conditions:

Motivation to eliminate the habit

Awareness of personal vulnerability to the habit and how it manifests, to identify the leverage points for disrupting the habit

Tools to disrupt the habit and replace it with intended responses

Effort over time to break the habit

LEVERAGE POINTS FOR DISRUPTION: BIAS CONSTRUCTS

Impression Justification Stereotypes give us a good gut feeling when someone fits expectations, and a bad gut feeling when someone doesn't fit expectations. Then we look for evidence to support that impression

Prescriptive Norms Stereotypes set up assumptions about how people should and should not behave, with social penalties for violating these norms

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Expectations lead you to behave in a way that causes others to behave the way you expected them to act

Attentional Spotlight Stereotypes lead your attention to stereotype-consistent information and away from stereotype-inconsistent information

Confirmation Bias Giving confirmatory information more weight than disconfirmatory information

Untested Assumptions People often treat their own untested assumptions as if they were confirmatory information

INEFFECTIVE TOOLS

Suppressing Stereotypes Banishing stereotypes from one's mind (e.g., “just try not to stereotype!”)

Ignoring Group Statuses Trying to ignore group membership when interacting with members of different groups (e.g., “I just don't see race!”)

Believing in Personal Objectivity Attempting to be and believing that you can be objective when making decisions (e.g., “I'll just be objective!”)



EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO BREAK THE BIAS HABIT

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO REDUCING BIAS AND CREATING INCLUSION

EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO REDUCE BIAS

Tools 1-3 help to **Retrain Reactions:**

Detect the influence of stereotypes and biases,

Reflect on the source of the stereotype and its effects on people,

Reject the stereotypical portrayal or thought.

Tools 5 and 6 specifically help you to **Prevent Bias.**

Tool 1: Replace Stereotypes Replace stereotypical thoughts, assumptions or portrayals with another thought or idea.

Tool 2: Consider Situational Explanations Think about how the situation may have influenced a behavior more than a personal characteristic. Actively consider things outside of the person as possible explanations for behavior.

Tool 3: Do Perspective Taking Imagine what it would feel like to be in another person's situation.

Tool 4: Broaden Your Input Increase experience and exposure to actual people's experiences and complexity, via Contact (having genuine interactions with people), Media (expose yourself to movies, books, blogs, and other media from people different from you), and Images in the Environment (increase representation of underrepresented groups).

Tool 5: Seek Individuating Information Prevent stereotypes from filling in gaps by focusing on the details that make someone a unique individual. Obtain more information on specific qualifications, past experiences, etc., before making a decision.

Tool 6: Think Ahead Decide ahead of time how to handle a situation, make a decision, or talk about an issue. Decide what criteria are important before you're in the situation to make a judgment. Being prepared makes you less likely to fall prey to spontaneous biases.

Tool 7: Speak Up When Bias Occurs Target the behavior, not the person. The goal should be working together, not finger-pointing. Focus on concrete instances, not abstract accusations. When possible, offer explanations or viable solutions. Speak up about your own slip-ups, not just those of others. Allies and authority figures hold lots of sway.

For additional information, visit www.biashabit.com

