

Using bystander intervention to address bias in the STEM workplace **Shaila Kotadia, Synberc Education, Outreach, and Diversity Manager**

The second Expanding Potential meet up centered on using principals of bystander intervention to address bias in the STEM workplace. Finn Schneider of UC Berkeley's Bears That Care Program and Cat Adams, a graduate student at UC Berkeley and Expanding Potential seed project awardee for the Unconscious Bias Project, co-facilitated the meet up by sharing practical and empowering advice on how members of the STEM community can help protect one another from bias-related harm. Handouts for the meet up are included at the end of this document.

Two types of bias occur in all workplaces: 1) unconscious bias (also referred to as implicit bias) is an unconscious prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way considered to be unfair, and 2) explicit bias is a conscious or deliberate prejudice. Unconscious bias often stems from stereotypes, widely held but fixed and oversimplified images or ideas of a particular type of person or thing. Unconscious bias can lead to barriers to entering STEM, barriers to rising in STEM, and many underrepresented groups leaving STEM and thus reinforce a negative stereotype, creating a particularly harmful cycle.

So, why does this matter? Underrepresented groups face unconscious and explicit bias driving them away from STEM (and many other fields), which results in a lack of diversity in STEM ultimately hurting the entire field. Also, these biases are incredibly harmful to individuals. How do we solve this problem and eliminate bias? One way is to become an active bystander.

An active bystander is an individual who witnesses an incident or behavior and decides to take action and intervene to reduce the chance of someone being harmed. The three basics to bystander intervention are to recognize the situation, decide to take action, and intervene effectively and safely and follow up as appropriate.

While these steps are practical, humans often experience common cognitive obstacles to taking action. The common cognitive obstacles to taking action are diffusion or responsibility, cause of misfortune, and evaluation apprehension.

- Diffusion of responsibility refers to the fact that we are more likely to intervene if we are by ourselves. In other words, the more people that are present, the less likely we feel individually responsible to act.
- Cause of misfortune is more casually referred to as victim blaming or having unconscious or explicit bias. We are less likely to help if we perceive the person to be responsible for their own misfortune. The key word here is *perceive*, as our biases can lead to incorrect conclusions about blame.
- Evaluation apprehension describes when we are concerned about being negatively evaluated or judged by our peers, particularly if we are in any way unclear about the situation at hand.

Bears That Care, led by Finn Schneider at UC Berkeley, offers four strategies to take action using the acronym CARE:

- C refers to confronting the situation.
- A is for alerting others.
- R stands for redirecting attention.
- E is for engaging peers.

These offer four actions that can be used individually or in conjunction with each other. While these strategies seem straight-forward, they can be difficult to follow through on and need to be

done in a sensitive and conscientiously aware manner. The key is confidence! These require one to step into a position of discomfort proportional to their own level of privilege. By taking responsibility of the power that we each own and using that power to intervene in a situation that is harmful, our individual actions work toward a collective culture shift toward great equity and inclusion in STEM. .

The discussion then moved onto putting all of this information into action. Using case studies, the attendees discussed how they could approach biased situations as a bystander. Perhaps one of the most useful pieces of advice was to have a “bias buddy” or someone to partner with in negative situations. This buddy can help stand up for you and in some instances, their voice might be stronger. It also takes the onus off of the victim to have to continuously defend themselves against bias. In the end, this works because it is beneficial to have a support system.

Many other suggestions came up amongst the group. In regards to biased or stereotyped statements, one could ask the offender what the intention of their statement was and use that as a teaching/learning moment. Often, when people stop and think more deeply about their words, they gain new perspective and recognize their own bias. Building on this, one could explain the impact of the statement through the many times that they have heard similar biases and referencing published data exposing the effect of such a statement. When implementing these strategies, it is incredibly important to speak on your own volition and make it clear that you are not speaking on behalf of the victim. One way to do so is to relate the bias to a personal experience of your own. Another idea is to flip the stereotype for a positive spin.

The topic then moved to sexual harassment since this is rampant in STEM environments, including the lab, in the field, and at conferences. Given the incredibly sensitive nature and power dynamics in regards to sexual harassment (we specifically discussed a situation where a male professor is harassing a female trainee as this is often the case), it can be very difficult to be an active bystander but not impossible. If one sees something happening, a quick tactic is to be disruptive to redirect attention away from the victim and stop the harmful behavior in that moment. This disruption could be knocking something off of table or bench, playing loud music, or making your presence known by speaking loudly. Depending on your own comfort level and the power structures, a bystander could directly confront the professor.

If intervening in the moment is not feasible, you can seek out campus resources (see <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu/> for resources from UC Berkeley) and report through formal or anonymous procedures and policies in place. Or, talk to another faculty or staff in the department that is trustworthy and empowering. Regardless, it is crucial to follow up with the victim one-on-one to explain your actions in a respectful manner. Be mindful not to take away any power from the victim. An interesting point came up that it might be a consensual relationship, but that in and of itself, is riddled with problems. Given any situation, it is crucial to educate everyone on asking consent. And if consensual, it must be acknowledged that this creates a power dynamic that affects one’s career (e.g. a Ph.D. advisor has power over their graduate student’s next career move) and others that are in the environment (i.e. other trainees in the lab).

In the end, bystander intervention is an effective strategy. While it can be tricky to navigate or difficult to do especially when confronting a stranger, the more we practice being active bystanders, the more likely the climate will become inclusive. Situations might not always go to plan but it is better to be embarrassed than it is to be regretful.

Expanding Potential: Diversity in STEM Meetup on Bystander Intervention

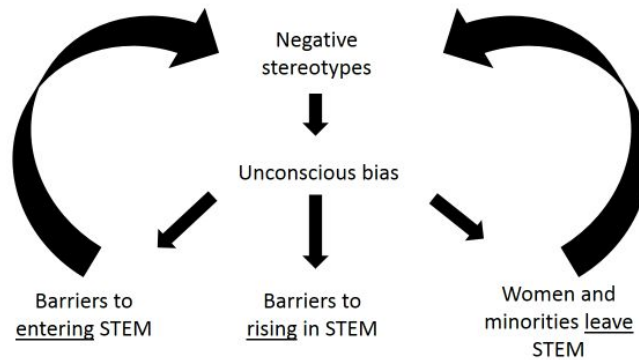


Handy Definitions




Stereotype: a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Unconscious Bias: unconscious prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Also called **implicit bias**. Can occur even when the person consciously thinks that prejudice is wrong.

Explicit Bias: a conscious, deliberate prejudice.



Active Bystander: An individual who witnesses an incident or behavior and decides to take action and intervene to reduce the chance of someone being harmed.

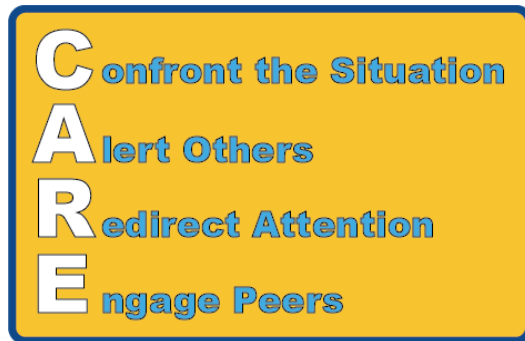
Bystander Intervention Basics	
1. Recognize the situation	
2. Decide to take action	
3. Intervene effectively & safely; follow up as appropriate	

Putting Bystander Intervention into Practice

Common Cognitive Obstacles to Taking Action:

1. **Diffusion of responsibility:** We are more likely to intervene if we are by ourselves. The more people that are present, the less we feel individually responsible to act.
2. **Cause of misfortune:** We are less likely to help if we perceive the person to be responsible for their own misfortune, ie – victim blaming, bias (unconscious or overt).
3. **Evaluation apprehension:** We are concerned about being negatively evaluated or judged by our peers, particularly if we are in any way unclear about the situation at hand.

Strategies for Taking Action:



Addressing Spoken Bias:



Guy 2 could say:

“Ouch. That’s reinforcing a hurtful stereotype.”

“You’re really dense, and I wish you weren’t so oppressive.”

“How come you never call guys bossy?”

“She’s not bossy; she’s a leader!”



If you were sitting at the table and overheard this exchange, how would you respond?

Case Study #1

You and a fellow GSI in your department are grading papers at a coffee shop when you hear them say, "I have so many Asians in my section. I really wish they would learn how to write articulately in English. Reading their papers is painful." You are uncomfortable with this comment. What action will you take?

Case Study # 2

You overhear this interaction in your lab. What action will you take?



Case Study #3

You have a great relationship with your faculty advisor, Dr. Hughes. Another PhD student in your lab, Jamie, shared with you that Dr. Hughes recently made comments that made them extremely uncomfortable, including commenting on Jamie's physical appearance and suggesting they should both stay late at the lab to "get to know each other better." One day, you walk into the lab and see Jamie busy at work when Dr. Hughes walks in, puts their hands on Jamie's shoulders, and starts rubbing Jamie's shoulders. Dr. Hughes says, "No need to stress out. Let me help you relax." Jamie is visibly uncomfortable. No one else is around. What action will you take?

Case Study #4

You are in the elevator. A female Latina grad student steps into the elevator with an older white male professor. The door closes. The professor says "I didn't know the Zang lab had a new dishwasher!" What action will you take?