



People often have a hard time identifying and responding to individual actions and institutional policies that are biased against others. This sheet highlights some things to be cognizant of and what you can do to acknowledge and address bias.

Being An Active Bystander

(adapted from Lena Tenney, "Being an Active Bystander," Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2019)

Individuals can be active bystanders when faced with bias in interpersonal interactions. There are a variety of approaches to opening a conversation about bias. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to challenging every manifestation of bias. There is a difference between calling someone in (inviting continued discussion and learning) and calling someone out (shutting down the conversation). Both approaches are valid, yet might be more or less effective in various circumstances. The goals of these strategies are to educate people and invite them to do better, rather than to ostracize them.

Ask questions that invite discussion.

- "Do you know what that phrase actually means and where it came from? Most people have no idea that it actually has an offensive origin/meaning."
- "What do you mean when you say that?" or "Can you explain your thought process to me? I want to be sure I understand how we reached such different conclusions."

State that you are uncomfortable.

- "That phrase makes me uncomfortable. Could you please not use it around me?"
- "Assumptions about an entire group of people make me uncomfortable. I don't think that we can take that assumption for granted or make our decisions based off of it."

Create a conversation speedbump.

- "I'm not an expert, but my understanding is that that language is outdated. Does anyone know what might be a better way to phrase that? If not, I'll try to Google it."

Use direct communication.

- "That kind of language is not appropriate in the workplace."
- "I know you aren't intending to stereotype anyone, but as your friend I wanted to let you know that what you said could easily be interpreted that way. I would hate for you to accidentally say it again without realizing how it can come across."

Remind people of personal and/or institutional values.

- "You're new so maybe you haven't been told yet, but we don't talk about women like that here."
- "Clearly we have different personal opinions about this topic. Regardless, the handbook/code of conduct/non-discrimination policy does say that we do not discriminate/treat people differently/talk like that."

Actions to Take / Things to Keep in Mind

Confronting bias is an important part of being an ally; so is offering support to those who experience bias. Here are some actions to take and things to keep in mind to ensure you're being supportive, many drawn from the 2018 APSA Diversity and Inclusion Hackathon.

- In cases where you have taken action in response to bias in interpersonal actions, consider following up.
 - Offer support to people who may have been directly affected by the biased comment(s), but be aware they may not be prepared to share their experience of bias with you.
 - Consider what could be done in order to prevent the situation next time—such as having a follow up conversation with the person who made biased comments as well as being aware and intentional about the words and phrases you use yourself.
- Trust people whose experiences are different from your own. Don't assume something couldn't happen just because you haven't personally experienced it.
- Create a checklist reminding you to notice and correct gender gaps on syllabi and comprehensive exam lists, research you highlight, nominate for awards, lobby for on the job market, and who you invite to campus. Encourage others to do the same.
- Networks that are predominantly white, male, etc. tend to reproduce themselves unless active measures are taken to change that pattern.
 - Be cognizant of how some informal networking activities, like drinking in bars, can be more comfortable for some than others. Consider organizing activities at other times and places, including times when parents are likely to be able to attend.
 - Avoid “manels.” Ask who else is invited before accepting an invitation and suggest others who should be included.
- Match your public words and private actions. Advocating inclusion and diversity in public is important but can lapse into “performative wokeness” if it is not backed up by less visible work for which you might not receive credit.
- Make clear it is acceptable to have a life outside of academia and advocate for institutional policies that reflect this.

Additional Resources

Virtual training, “Did They Really Just Say That?! Being an Active Bystander”
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/active-bystander-training/>

Products from the APSA 2018 Diversity and Inclusion Hackathon
<https://connect.apsanet.org/hackathon/products/>

Ohio State Advocates and Allies for Equity
<https://womensplace.osu.edu/initiatives-and-programs/advocates-allies>