

# BIASES, ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

## GOALS:

- To learn more about biases, assumptions and stereotypes.
- To identify and analyze some of our own biases.

## RATIONALE:

Awareness is a first step in overcoming our biases, assumptions and stereotypes. This session offers participants an opportunity to become more aware of how biases operate in their lives and to decide whether or not they are productive.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers, pencils, paper, a couple of collages showing pictures taken from magazines of different types of people, copies of *The Story, Statements About The Story* and *Bias Worksheet* for each participant.

## METHOD:

### Warm up: Choose Someone...

Pointing to the collages, instruct participants to choose:

- Someone you would like as a neighbour.
- Someone you would like as a best friend.
- Someone you would choose as your doctor.
- Someone you would like to work for.
- Someone you would be able to count on in a crisis.



In dyads, ask participants to share their choices and how they made them. Briefly discuss in the large group how they made their choices.

## **Exercise 1: Identifying Assumptions**

Hand out a copy of **Statements about the Story** to each participant. Give a copy of **The Story** to each participant or read it out loud. Instruct group members to indicate on the handout whether they think the statements are True, False or Uncertain. If you choose to read the story, it will likely be necessary to do it a second time.

Review the statements about the story giving an explanation for why it is True, False or Uncertain. It may be helpful to hand out copies of the story at this time or have it on an overhead so participants can verify the information given.

### **Questions to Consider:**

- What is an assumption?
- Why do we make them?
- How do you feel when people constantly make assumptions while you are trying to explain something?
- When can assumptions be a problem?

**Theory:** See Theory Box

## **Exercise 2: Four Corners**

Place signs in four corners of the room which read (**Agree Strongly, Agree Slightly, Disagree Slightly, Disagree Strongly**). Explain that the centre of the room is for those who can't decide or choose not to. Read aloud the statements on **Some Social Biases and Assumptions** and ask participants to go to the sign that expresses how they think. Encourage the group to respond as spontaneously as possible and to avoid censoring their reactions to the statements. Move this exercise along quickly.

In groups of four, have participants share their views on the following questions. Request that one person act as a recorder to keep notes and report back to the large group.

### Questions to Consider:

- Where do our biases come from? (history, media, family, our own experience)
- Why do we keep them?
- What are the negative consequences of hanging onto them?
- What are the positive consequences of hanging onto them?
- What are some biases that you have that you can identify?
- How do you feel when you have been stereotyped based on biases and/or assumptions?

### **Exercise 3: My Contract**

Distribute copies of ***Bias Worksheet*** to each person. Remind everyone that biases can be either favourable or unfavourable. Instruct participants to identify one bias to work on and indicate on the worksheet how they will do it.

### **EVALUATION:**

## THEORY BOX

- It is human to hear what we want to hear and see what we want to see. For many of us, that is the way we operate in the world; we may view the world through our biases and fail to recognize how automatic our responses are as a result. When we speak of biases, we refer to our predetermined attitudes or conceptions about anything - - a person, an event, a situation - - based on our past experience, or our belief system. We also inherit some of our biases from our culture or family without realizing it.
- Biases are either negative or positive. We are inclined towards a certain type of person or idea because we have had favourable experiences in the past with them. The opposite is also true.
- When we operate from our biases rather than our immediate experience, we make assumptions about someone or something to complete the gaps in our information or knowledge. Such assumptions reflect our biases and often lead us to stereotype people according to generalized character types. This denies us the chance to appreciate people as unique individuals without the label we attach to them.
- In examining our biases, we also need to examine which biases are useful to us and which ones limit us. Once we determine which biases are harmful we can take steps to minimize or eliminate them.

# THE STORY

A business man had just turned off the lights in the store when a man appeared and demanded money.

The owner opened a cash register.

The contents of the cash register were scooped up, and the man sped away.

A member of the police force was notified promptly.

Source unknown

## STATEMENTS ABOUT THE STORY

Indicate whether you think the following statements are:

- |  | T - True | F - False | ? - Uncertain | T                        | F                        | ?                        |
|--|----------|-----------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. A man appeared after the owner had turned off his store lights.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The robber was a man.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The man did not demand money.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The man who opened the cash register was the owner.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The storeowner scooped up the contents of the cash register and ran away.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Someone opened a cash register.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. After the man who demanded the money scooped up the contents of the cash register, he ran away  |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. While the cash register contained money, the story does not state how much.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The robber demanded money of the owner.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. The owner was middle-aged and of Asian ancestry.   |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. The robber was a young, unemployed "drifter".  |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. The police officer was a man.  |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. The story contains a series of events in which only three persons are referred to: the owner of the store, a man who demanded money, and a member of the police force. |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. The following events were included in the story: someone demanded money, a cash register was opened, its contents were scooped up, and a man dashed out of the store.  |          |           |               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Source unknown

## ANSWERS AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS ON THE STORY

<u>Question #</u>	<u>Explanation</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	We do not know if the businessman was the owner of the store.	?
2.	We do not know if a robbery did occur. The owner may have scooped up the contents and the man then sped away without getting the contents.	?
3.	A man did demand money.	F
4.	We do not know that the person who opened the cash register was a man.	?
5.	We do not know that it was the owner who scooped up the contents of the cash register.	?
6.	The owner opened a cash register.	T
7.	We do not know if it was the man who demanded money that scooped up the contents of the cash register.	?
8.	We do not know that the cash register contained money.	?
9.	We do not know that the man who appeared was a robber. He may have been demanding payment of a legitimate invoice or debt. We do not know that the demand was made of the owner. We do not know that a man dashed out of the store, or in fact if he was ever in the store.	?
10.	This is uncertain because we do not know that the businessman and the owner are the same person.	?
11.	We do know that a man dashed out of the store.	?

Source unknown

## **SOME SOCIAL BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS**

- Social workers don't care about their clients.
- People living in fancy homes are snobs.
- Aids is a homosexual disease.
- Unemployment is caused by the number of immigrants entering the country.
- People on Social Assistance are lazy; they could work if they wanted to.
- Teachers don't care what kids learn as long as they don't make trouble.
- Police officers are racially prejudiced.
- Black people are better athletes than white people.
- Native people can't hold their liquor.
- All Canadians should speak both French and English.
- Motorcycle riders are tough.
- Politicians are dishonest.
- Women are more emotional than men.
- Old people are a burden on society.
- Prostitutes are immoral women who degrade society.
- Our justice system favours the criminal.
- Technology creates more problems than it solves.
- Men are by nature more mechanical than women.
- For the most part watching TV is a waste of time.
- Children are less educated than they were 30 years ago.
- Men don't pull their weight doing housework.
- Women are more manipulative than men.
- Political correctness creates more problems than it solves.

# BIAS WORKSHEET

I. Some biases (favourable and unfavourable) that I have are:

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II. One bias that I would like to work on is:

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III. Background information related to this bias:

- This bias comes from:

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- Some of the assumptions related to this bias are:

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- This bias is affecting my life by:

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IV. Action plan - I can work to change this bias by:

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