

# MIND SCIENCES KEY CONCEPTS

for citations and more information, visit [www.perception.org](http://www.perception.org)



**PERCEPTION  
INSTITUTE**

Research. Representation. Reality.

[perception.org](http://perception.org)

## DEFINITIONS

**Implicit bias:** the brain's automatic, instant association of stereotypes or attitudes toward particular groups, often without our conscious awareness.

- The split-second decisions our brains make (e.g. reactions to or assumptions about someone).

**Identity anxiety:** the brain's stress response before or during cross-group interactions.

- Out-group members fear they will experience bias, through discrimination, hostile treatment, or invalidation.
- In-group members fear their actions will be perceived as biased.

**Stereotype threat:** impaired cognitive functioning on a task when a negative stereotype is activated.

- When we are worried about confirming a negative stereotype about our identity group, we have a physiological reaction and often end up confirming the stereotype.

## INTERVENTIONS

### Implicit Bias Interventions

#### "De-Biasing" – Efforts to Reduce Implicit Bias

*Stereotype Behavior Replacement:* Recognize when a response is based on a stereotype, label the response as stereotypical, reflect on why the response occurred, and consider how this biased response could be avoided in future. Replace the biased response with one that is consistent with your values.

*Individuation:* Gather specific information about individuals, to prevent making stereotypic inferences. This strategy helps people evaluate others based on personal, rather than group-based, attributes.

*Perspective Taking:* Imagine oneself to be a member of a stereotyped group. This increases empathy toward the group and reduces automatic group-based evaluations.

*Counter-stereotypic imaging:* Surround yourself with media/images that counter stereotypes. Imagine, in detail, counter-stereotypic others (whether real individuals, characters from television, or imaginary).

*Seek Opportunities for Contact:* Seek opportunities to encounter and engage in positive interactions with others. Contact decreases bias by altering mental representations of the group and improving evaluations of the group. Meaningful relationships with others also increase empathy toward other identity groups.

## Break the Link Between Bias and Behavior

*Doubt Objectivity:* Presuming oneself to be objective actually increases the role of implicit bias in decision-making. Acknowledge the presence of bias in order to counter its impact.

*Improve Conditions of Decision-making:* Think slow: engage in mindful, deliberate processing to prevent implicit biases from kicking in and determining behaviors. Reduce time pressure, load, and multi-tasking: focusing on decisions can help us make more mindful decisions and prevent reliance on unconscious processing. Reduce ambiguity: gathering information prevents the tendency for our brains to “fill in the gaps.” Use clear and fair criteria, develop protocols: adding structure and clarity to decisions can prevent implicit biases from determining our behavior.

## **Identity Anxiety Interventions**

*Manage Your Mindset & Build Muscle:* Envisioning a positive cross-group experience prior to engaging in a new one will help reduce anxiety and reset energy for the encounter. Be mindful of your body language: engage in appropriate eye contact and open body language, to demonstrate confidence in the interaction and convey respect.

*Reset Conversations:* Learn how to “fail fast” when you misstep.

1. **Reset.** Let your colleague decide whether to continue with the discussion.
2. **Acknowledge** your role and take on the burden of racial navigation.
3. Briefly **share recognition** of the misstep, but don't self-justify.
4. Take **responsibility**. Ideally, this includes a commitment moving forward.

## **Stereotype Threat Interventions**

*Create an Identity-Safe Environment:* Increase the sense of belonging for individuals in stereotyped groups. This makes social identity less salient as a marker of difference. Use inclusive language, to affirm the belonging of all identities.

*Promote a Growth Mindset:* Abilities can be conceptualized as either fixed (“you have it or you don't”) or able to be developed (“you can learn it”). When thought of as fixed, poor performance is equated with inadequacy, but with growth mindset, there is just more work to do.

*In-group Peers and Experts:* Connecting to peers of the same identity group can increase the sense of belonging. Relationships with aspirational individuals affirms that such achievements are attainable.

*Wise Feedback:* Give feedback that communicates both high expectations and a confidence that the individual can meet those expectations. If feedback is purely critical, it may be interpreted as the product of bias; if feedback is purely positive, it may be interpreted as racial condescension. Wise feedback reduces uncertainty about the reason for feedback.