



Beyond Cultural Competence: An Anti-Bias Primer

(Session: “But That’s Not Who We Are”)

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Paula Forbes received her juris doctor from the University of Wisconsin Madison and is an attorney licensed to practice in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Her legal work over the last 32 years has focused primarily on the areas of education, labor, compliance and employment law. After working in private practice, Paula became the first General Counsel for Minneapolis Public Schools, Special School District No 1 in 1993 (MPS). She was part of the district leadership team and worked closely with the Superintendent, Human Resources Director and School Board. Her work at MPS included regulatory compliance related to public education, supervising student and employee investigations and any discipline which resulted, development and revision of policies approved by the School Board, and ensuring unwritten practices and customs were appropriate. After leaving MPS in 1998, she continued working in house handling compliance and regulatory matters before starting her independent employment investigation practice in 2004. In 2006, she became EEO manager for Northwest Airlines (Now Delta) and subsequently Labor Counsel for ground personnel. After leaving Northwest she formed her law firm Forbes Solutions PLLC and expanded her consulting practice to include coaching, training and facilitating in addition to investigations.

Paula currently trains school districts and other entity employees on harassment and discrimination laws, policies and procedures, and implicit bias. She consults on race and equity issues with school board members and administrators to whom she provides training and coaching on race relations, cultural competence and other considerations such as educational equity and student achievement.

As the daughter of a Civil Rights leader, all of Paula's work is undertaken with an equity lens. In providing her consulting, training and legal services Paula draws on her experience and knowledge as an attorney, consultant, and educator as well as her lived experience as a Black woman, mother of a Black son, sister, daughter and professional.

Beyond Cultural Competence: An Anti-Bias Primer

I. Objectives of This Primer

An understanding of implicit bias, how it shows up and impacts us at work.

An understanding of how our lived experience and perceptions of events can lead to assumptions and judgements we make and the actions we subsequently may take regardless of whether they are accurate or not.

An understanding how implicit bias can have a negative impact and create barriers to our success at work.

II. Important Terms

- Culture
- Cultural Competency
- Diversity
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Racism
- Implicit Bias
- Microaggression
- White Privilege

III. What Is Culture? Questions for You to Answer

Culture is about our own Self Awareness and Personal Narrative. The question we ask is who am I? We start with self-reflection and determining what is our story in our personal life. But we also have to answer, who we are in our job as employees and colleagues? How do we show up and how do others perceive us to be?

Wikipedia defines culture as:

Culture (*/ˈkʌltʃər/, from the Latin cultura stemming from colere, meaning "to cultivate,") is the social behavior and norms found in human societies. **Culture** is considered a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies.*

IV. What Is Cultural Competence?

National Education Association (NEA) defines Cultural Competence as:

“The ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching”.

Five basic skill areas of cultural competency:

1. Valuing Diversity
2. Being Culturally Self Aware
3. Understand the Dynamics of Difference
4. Knowledge of the Persons’ Culture
5. Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Adapting to Diversity

See Me!

1. Accept and respect differences—different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.
2. Culture is the sum total of an individual's experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests. This shapes our sense of who they are and where they fit in their family, community, and society.
3. Lawyers must have some base knowledge of the culture of the witness, client, juror, judge, and/or opposing counsel so that behaviors can be understood in their proper cultural context.
4. Culturally competent attorneys, and the institutions they work in, can take a step further by institutionalizing cultural knowledge so they can adapt to diversity and better understand and serve diverse populations.

V. What Is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity describes a grouping of people based on geographical region, nationality, or culture.

For example: Hmong, Japanese, Mexican.

Ethnicity is also socially defined and not biologically valid.

VI. What Is Race?

A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as a physical appearance (particularly color) ancestral heritage, cultural affiliations, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time.

(Adams, Bell, Griffin 2007).

People use race to interpret human differences and justify socioeconomic arrangements in ways that benefit one social group over another.

(Adams, Bell, Griffin 2007).

From a historical review we know the following:

- Slavery pre-dates race,
- In America, race and freedom were born together-the concept of race helped to justify why some people were denied freedom and subjected to slavery,
- As race concept evolved, it justified extermination of Native Americans, exclusion of Asian immigrants, taking of Mexican land.
- Racial practices were institutionalized through laws, practices and policies (e.g.:3/5th a man),
- Race is a powerful social ideal that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. (e.g.: segregation based on race).

VII. What Is Racism?

The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress people of color. (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, and Asians). *Adams, M., Bell, Lee Anne, Griffin, Pat (1997). Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice. Routledge New York, London*

Racism is a system of advantage based on race and supported by institutions, policies and practices that benefit dominant groups and disadvantage subdominant (Adams, Bell, Griffin 2007).

VIII. What Is Meant by Implicit or Unconscious Bias?

Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's considered to be unfair.

Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution. They usually have negative consequences.

Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.

There are two types of Bias;

- **Conscious bias** (also known as **explicit** bias) and
- **Unconscious bias** (also known as **implicit** bias)

Biases, conscious or unconscious, are not limited to ethnicity and race. Biases may also exist toward or from any social group. One's age, gender, gender identity, physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, weight, and many other

characteristics are subject to bias.

Examples of other biases:

- Affinity Bias
- Confirmation Bias
- Attribution Bias
- Conformity Bias
- The Halo Effect
- The Horns Effect
- Contrast Effect
- Gender Bias
- Ageism
- Name Bias
- Beauty Bias
- Height Bias
- Anchor Bias
- Nonverbal Bias
- Authority Bias
- Overconfidence Bias

Why is this important?

Have you ever formed judgments or beliefs about someone, or something based on inaccurate information or stereotypes of people, objects and ideas?

We are not born with bias; it is learned and can show up in very subtle ways.

We take action based on our implicit biases. Implicit biases impact our decisions, perceptions, and behaviors. Sometimes, these decisions conflict with our values of equity and fairness. Our lived experiences also impact how we see the world, accurately or not. At times, we can and do make decisions based on inaccurate information or implicit biases that can create barriers, inequities and totally block opportunities for people that we have wrongly judged.

IX. What about Stereotypes?

Stereotypes are beliefs that we associate with a group of people based on race, ethnicity, culture, geography, disability-you name it we categorize it and stereotype it. Even if we don't endorse or believe a stereotype, they can still actually influence our mental processes.

X. What Is a Microaggression?

Dr. Chester Pierce, a psychiatrist and Harvard University Professor, coined the term in 1970 and defined microaggression as:

“A brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.”

Examples of microaggressions:

To the Asian male, “you must be good at math.”

To the Asian female, “can you see well because your eyes are slanted?”

To the Biracial female, “what are you?”

To the Black male, “you don’t sound like a Black person when you speak.”

XI. What Is White Privilege?

This refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

“I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.”

Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women Studies."

XII. Why Does Your Personal Work to Develop More than Mere Cultural Competency Matter?

In order for us to have a conversation about race, privilege, discrimination and racial healing we first have to find a common language. We have to start with an understanding of who we are and how we find ourselves at this inquiry point. We must examine that history, the why.

Then we can move forward toward sharing our story, unique experiences and finally doing the inner work to do the outer work on race. If we want to have the race talk or address racism, we need to start from the beginning. No assumptions.

What does your story tell you about who you are and the way in which you see the world?