

OVERCOMING BIAS IN YOUR TITLE IX INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

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LEARNING OUTCOME

After participating...

- You will be better able to identify and overcome bias in your own practice
- You will be better able to identify procedural and institutional blind spots in systems of care
- You will be able to identify and plan for bias response within phases of the case: Preparing for the Interview, Report Writing and Decision making



■ Quick Refresh: Unconscious bias:



- Our world is our reality
- Who do we SEE? Who do we NOT SEE?
- Bias trip wires!



■ Unconscious bias:

“Embrace the fact that it is normal for all human beings to have unconscious preferences and biases and that those preferences and biases impact most, if not all, of the decisions we make, including those regarding people”


Cook, Ross Inc. (2011).






POLL

What motivated you to sign up for this webinar?

 **ACADEMIC**
IMPRESSIONS 5

What is at stake?

- OCR does not require colleges/universities to document the race of the accuser or accused in sexual misconduct complaints
- Many recent civil lawsuits allege University had racial bias in their Title IX policies/practice
- Men of color, African American and international students expressing racial bias played a key role in their outcomes
- Disproportionality: "It's likely that the same implicit biases that lead to more black high school kids getting suspended could well be affecting the college system," Oka, N. (2017).

 **ACADEMIC**
IMPRESSIONS 6

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW



■ It all starts with the interview



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■ **Case:**

You receive a case where the reporting and responding party are both males. The allegation involves a sex act which occurred between the two males. They are both men of color and you are working at a predominately white institution (PWI).

■ **Before the Interview:
Ways to “check” your bias:**

- Pause.
- Check in with yourself, read the report, understand your own reaction (comfort, discomfort, fear etc.)
- Affinity bias: familiarity (they look like me, are an athlete like me, etc.)
- Do you know any party?
- Names, institutions, departments, affiliations, the alleged behavior etc. Check ALL assumptions.
- We do not only have biases about protected classes (race, sex, etc.) we have biases about EVERYTHING.

■ During the interview:

- Confirmation bias
- Uncomfortable topics
- Assigning meaning to behavior
- Ethnographic interview: Cultural behaviors and worldview
 - Examples: Crying or not crying in the interview, what may crying mean in various cultures?
- Unpalatable behavior v. Policy violation



ACTIVITY

**With your institution group
discuss:**

- How does your body register discomfort?
- Can you identify times you felt uncomfortable during case proceedings?
- Are there times that you have froze, where/when?
- What can we do differently to ensure we are not disrupting the investigative process?

REPORT-WRITING



■ Back to our case example:


The case ends up in a hearing panel. At the hearing, the responding party said he was intoxicated and “ended up” in a sexual situation with the reporting party who was also intoxicated. He said he “isn’t gay” and is “horrified” by what happened. The hearing panel asks a few questions about peripheral parts of the case, no further specification is asked of how the men ended up engaging in sexual contact. It appears this was not fully specified or outlined in the investigation interview either. This information seems to be left out of the investigation.

Can you write a successful report on this investigation and/or hearing?




■ **The rest of the case stems from the Interview:**

- If critical information is not gained, the train is off track.
- One cannot write a successful report without all key information.




■ **Report writing:**

- Alleged behavior: Physical (assault) v. Verbal (harassment), concrete v. subjective (disclaimer)
- Tie to policy
- Concrete argument building, not assigning meaning arbitrarily
- Quotes as often as possible



■ **Report writing:**

- Word-choice, "Shatter," "chased," etc.
- Pounding the keys!
- Subjective language: "Non-compliant," "Disrespectful."
- Include cultural context if relevant (international views on dating, etc.)
- Present ALL sides and theories



 **QUESTIONS**

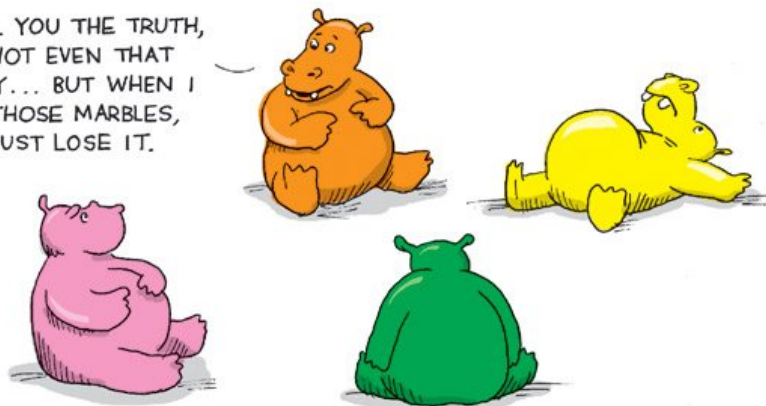


DECISION-MAKING




■ First thing's first...

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH,
I'M NOT EVEN THAT
HUNGRY... BUT WHEN I
SEE THOSE MARBLES,
I JUST LOSE IT.




■ **Decision-Making:**

- We must **HAVE** all the information we can obtain in order to make a fair decision.
- In the case example we have used throughout, can we establish if the sexual misconduct policy was violated? Why or why not? If not, how can we fix this?
- Discuss with others from your institution

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IMPRESSIONS 21

■ **Decision-Making:**

- Pause
- Notice if you are reacting
- Put a “flashlight” on yourself (Cook, Ross Inc., 2011).
- Considered other hypotheses?
- Do not make decisions until all interviews are completed
- Ensure you have all the information you can obtain and have asked all questions, even the uncomfortable ones, even the ones about identity, etc.

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IMPRESSIONS 22

TOOL KIT:



■ Tool Kit:

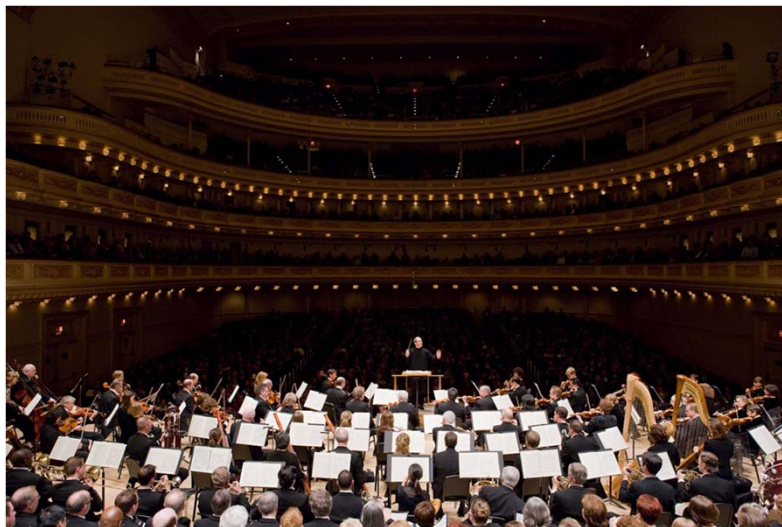
- Self evaluation in the moment, pause, check in
- Seek out D/I trainings
- Accountability partners
- In-house data collection
- Action plan: Individual, departmental, organizational etc.
- Partner with D/I offices
- Trends you notice
- Resources on campus



■ Tool Kit:


- Evaluate your system from entry to case closure
- Gather data (anonymous surveys) from those who are involved (reporting/responding parties, etc.) in your system of care


■ Think outside of the box:



Action Plan:

How can I identify areas of bias?	How can I improve my investigative practices to ensure I'm controlling for bias?	How can I work to ensure my department is controlling for bias?




 **TAKEAWAYS**

Things to consider...

Bias can only be rectified when you increase your willingness to identify it in yourself.

What will you do to acknowledge and mitigate yours?





QUESTIONS

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EVALUATION

Thank you!

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quality of our programs.