Understanding and Reducing Subtle Bias

Eden B. King, Ph.D.

How is this possible?

A father and his son are in a car accident. The father is killed and the son is seriously injured. The son is taken to the hospital where the surgeon says, "I cannot operate, because this boy is my son."
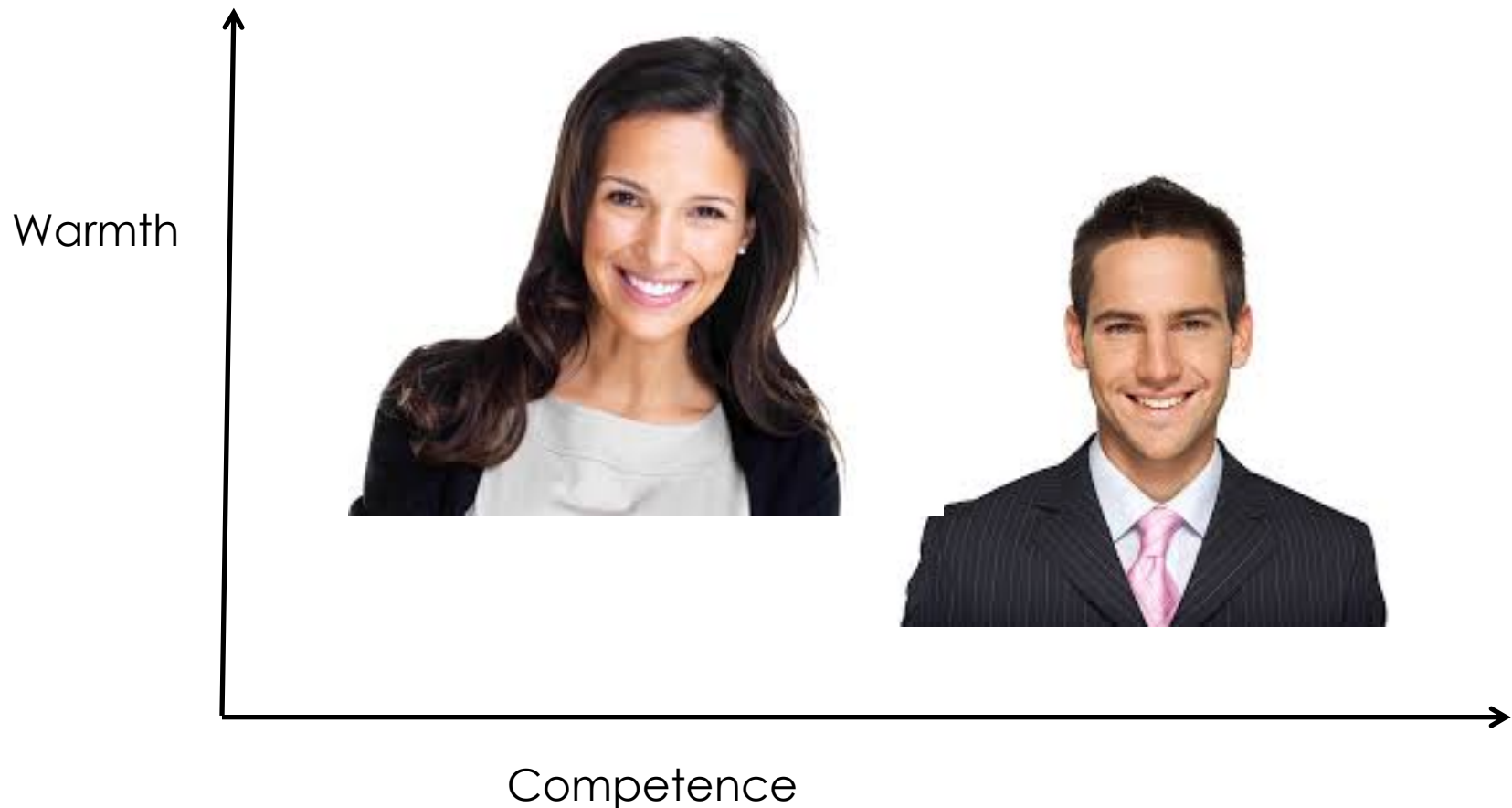
Stereotypes → Biased Behavior

- 'Oh no sweetie, put your hand down, we are looking for actual physicians or nurses or some type of medical personnel, we don't have time to talk to you'
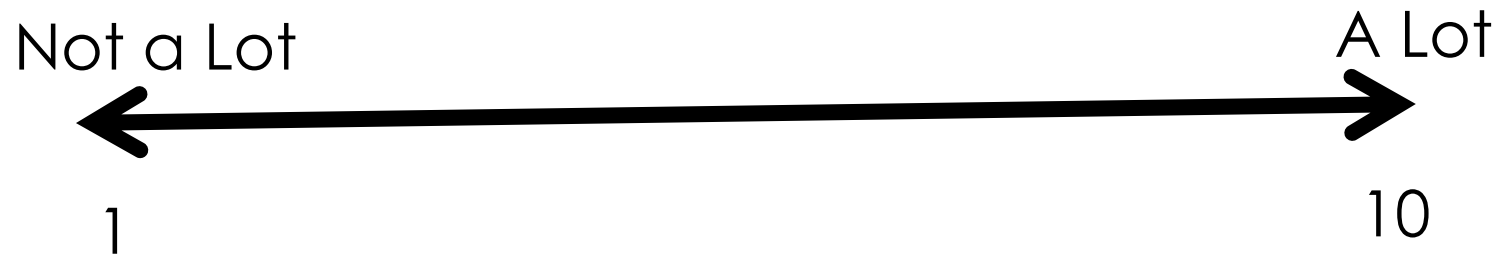
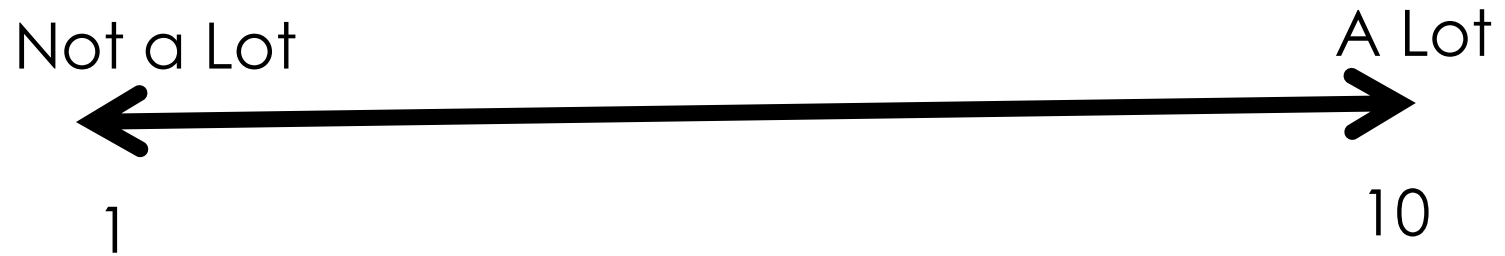**#WhataDoctorLooksLike**
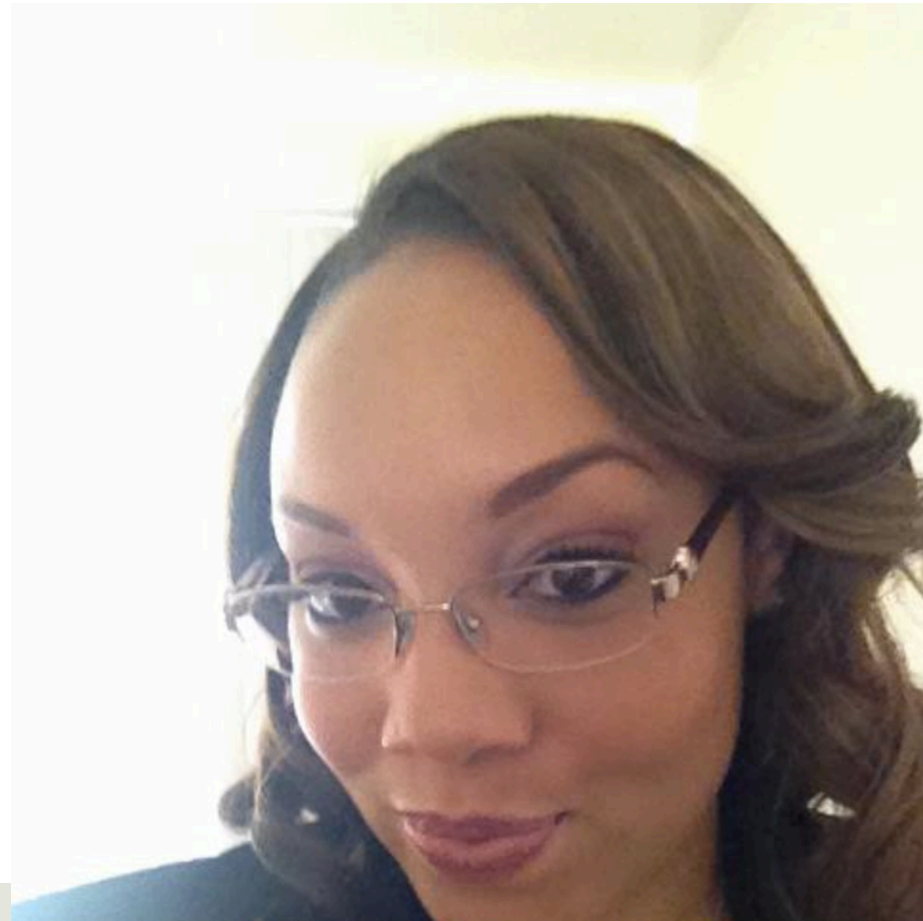
What Stereotypes Look Like

Warmth

Competence

What Stereotypes Look Like

How biased are YOU?

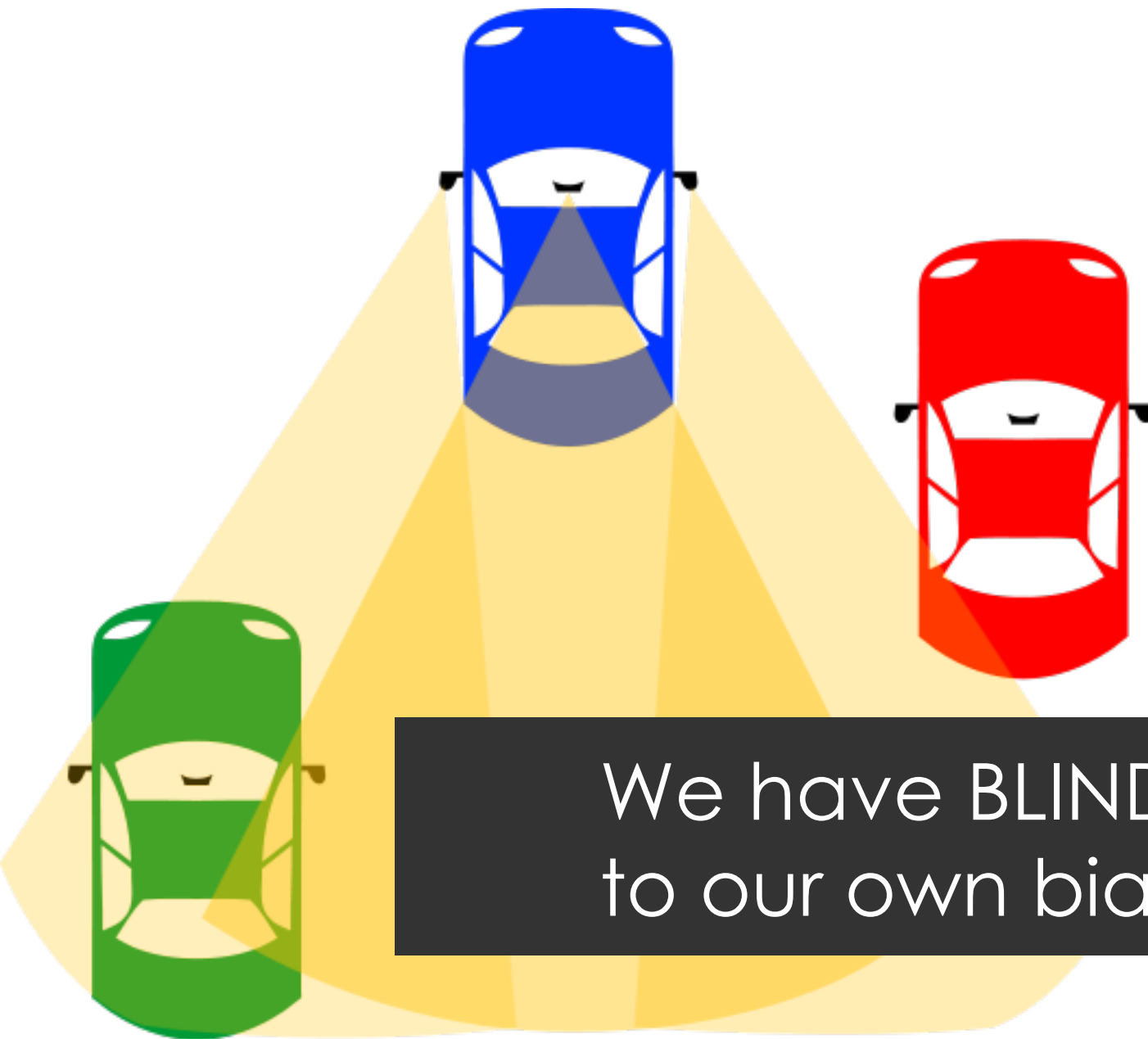Not a Lot   A Lot

1   10

How biased are YOUR COWORKERS?

Not a Lot

A Lot

1

10

Was your answer to "coworkers" higher than your answer to "you"?

We have BLINDSPOTS
to our own biases

Stereotypes → Behavior at Work

Stereotypes → Behavior at Work

Stereotypes → Behavior at Work

So what?

- Change from overt to covert indicative of genuine progress

- However, subtle forms of discrimination may be problematic
  - Difficult to identify, assess, and eradicate
  - Consequences for targets and organizations

Consequences for Targets

- Increased stress

- Decreased job and life satisfaction

- Worsened mental and physical health

Consequences for Orgs

- Reduced employee commitment and retention

- Underutilization of human capital

- Litigation

- Potential performance implications

Two Paths to Performance Problems

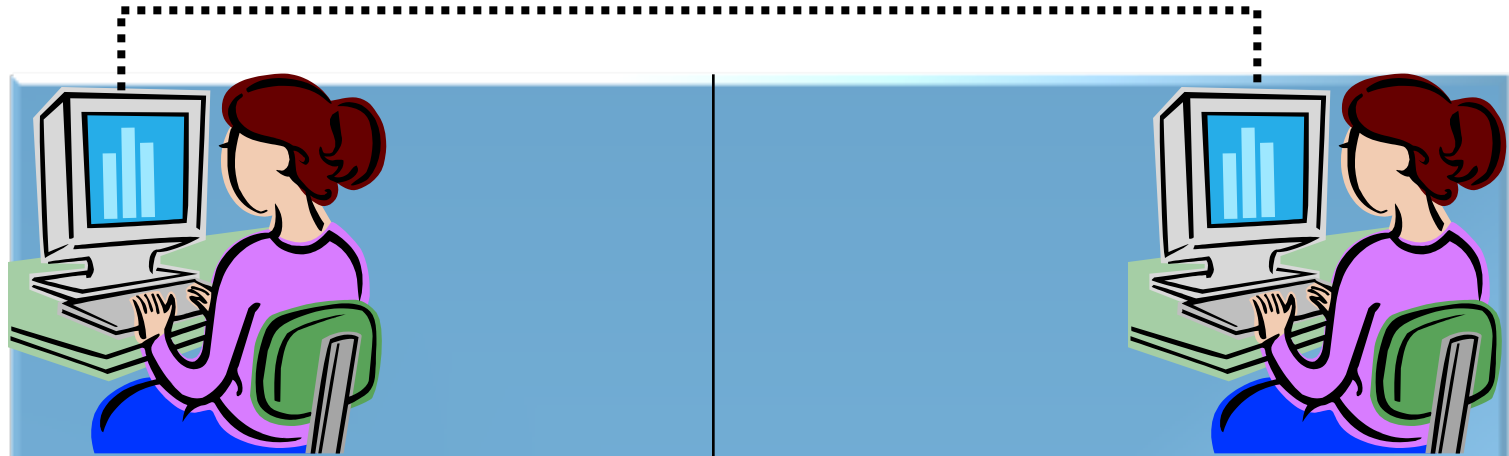## Stereotype Threat

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Instructor

- Mastered Task
- Viewed photograph of ostensible trainee

- Provided oral training via "talk" feature of IM

Learner

Instructor

Learner

- Trained via IM
- Performed task

So what can targets, allies, and organizations do?

Targets can individuate!

Targets can individuate!

I'm on a diet and training for a ½ marathon!

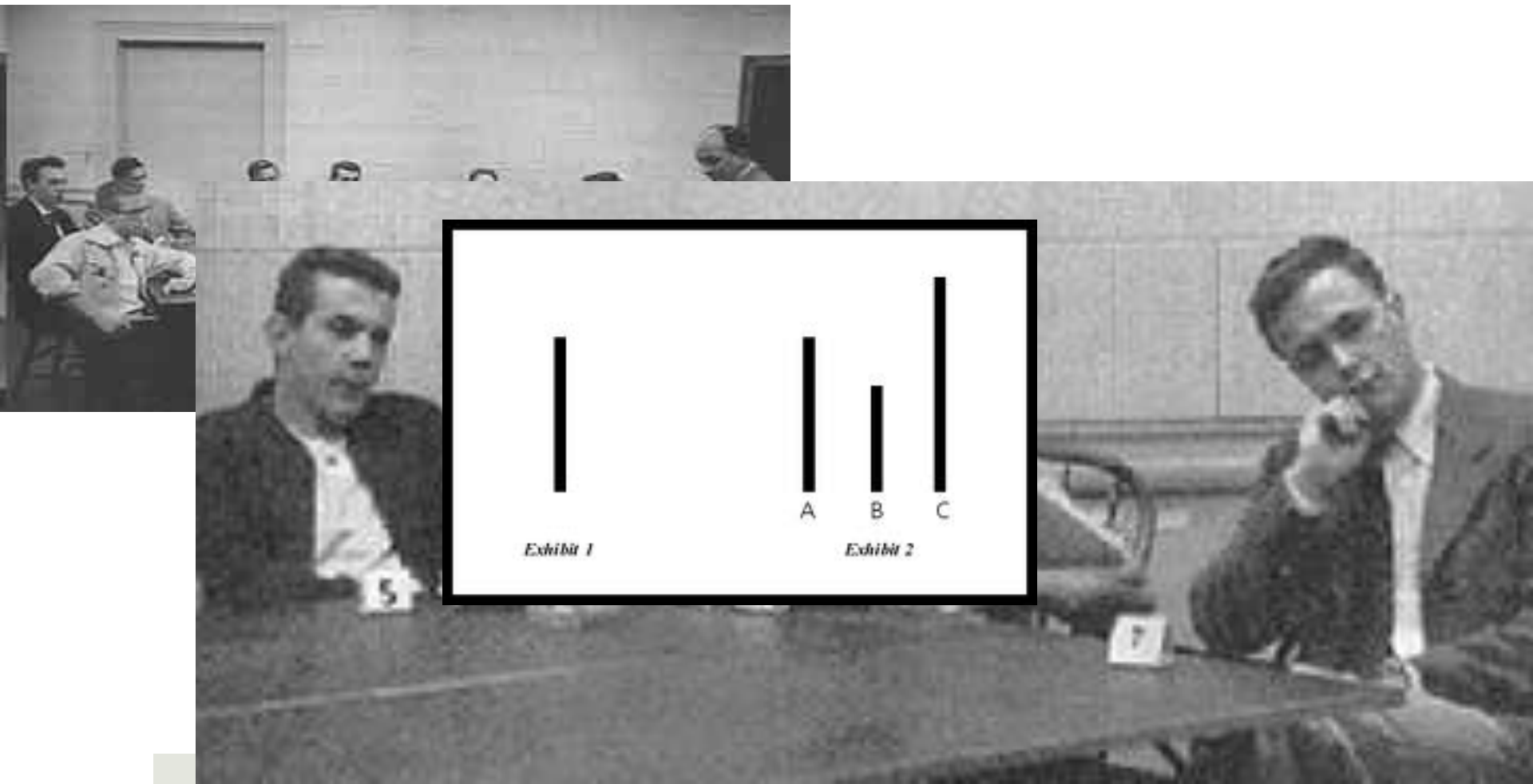# Targets can individuate!

I'm competent!

I'm flexible!

I'm committed!

Allies can fight conformity!

Allies can confront!

- Express dissatisfaction with prejudiced behavior directly toward the perpetrator

- More effective when it comes from a non-target
  - Perceived as less of an "overreaction"
  - Feel less guilty
  - Likely to change immediate behavior

- May be particularly important for those who have "invisible" identities

1) Organizations can can choose a strategic diversity framework

Eden! I'm delicious!!

1) Organizations can can choose a strategic diversity framework

- ▢ Identity Blind versus Identity Conscious Strategies
  - ▢ Don't think about characteristics versus think about them

- ▢ Less bias in **Identity Conscious** condition

2) Organizations can create systems of accountability!

- From top to bottom
  - Chief Diversity Officer
  - Individual accountability with empowerment

3) Organizations can provide training. Empirically based!

- Content
  - Awareness (e.g., Harvard IAT) is insufficient
  - Thoughtful activities
    - Goal setting
    - Perspective-taking

- Context
  - Management participation
  - Opportunities for practice

4) Orgs can create affinity groups, safe spaces, visible signs to reduce "threats in the air"!

THIS BUSINESS IS A
GLBTQ SAFE SPACE
Visit OSGPride.org for more information

DIVERSE INCLUSIVE ACCEPTING WELCOMING SAFE SPACE FOR EVERYONE

NONE project

www.fortytonone.org

Visible signs that diversity matters!

5) Orgs can create supportive policies!

Take Aways

- Remember the surgeon, blindspots, and prostheses
  - We are subject to effects of stereotypes and prejudice
  - Without awareness, we may contribute to the problem
    - But we can all also be part of the solution

- Embrace the chocolate cake and individuate
  - Rather than trying to ignore the things that make us different, value your coworkers as individuals

- Don't be afraid to draw a line
  - Confront your own and others' biases

- Help your organization make the changes it needs

- Support research on diversity science!

Acknowledgements

Thank *you*!   eking6@gmu.edu