

Unconscious Bias Web page

Definitions

“Unconscious bias refers to a bias that we are unaware of and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgements and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences.

Implicit bias refers to the same area, but questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially as we are being made increasingly aware of them. Once we know that biases are not always explicit, we are responsible for them. We all need to recognise and acknowledge our biases and find ways to mitigate their impact on our behaviour and decisions.” *Equality Challenge Unit UK: Unconscious Bias in Higher Education Review 2013.*

Unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups are a product of our life experiences and one of the ways we attempt to organise a complex world, i.e., social categorisation. By definition, we are unaware of unconscious biases. They occur when we make fast judgements, are tired or under pressure. They are automatic, and they may often be incompatible with our conscious values and considered actions.

Examples

- Assuming an older person walking with a young child is the child's grandparent.
- Belief that men will not have care-giving responsibilities
- Expecting lower achievement from UTAS students
- Assuming a female applicant with young children will take more time off work than a male applicant
- Associating good/bad work ethic with particular ethnic groups

Socially dominant groups often have implicit bias against subordinate groups, and individuals usually have a preference for members of a category to which they belong¹. These biases can be a significant factor in decision-making resulting in erroneous and harmful decisions.

Implicit Association Test

In 1995 Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald developed a test, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure the strength of automatic associations, revealing people's hidden biases about gender, race, age, disability, sexuality and 90 other topics. See [Project Implicit](#) for more information on the IAT.

The IAT presents respondents with different stimuli dependent on the category; for example for the Race IAT, white faces, black faces, "good" words, and "bad" words. Respondents complete trials in which they sort white/good pairings from black/bad pairings and white/bad pairings from black/good pairings.

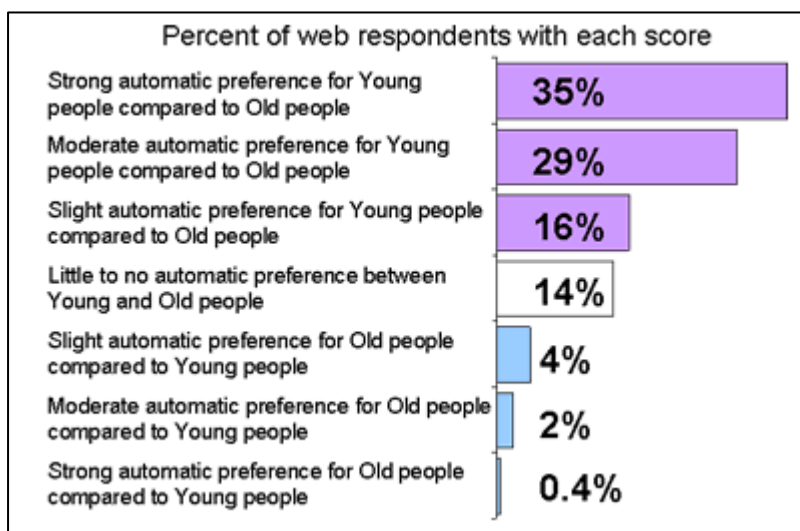
Implicit racial bias is demonstrated by measuring the respondents' "response latency," i.e., the difference in time it takes to complete the different trials.

Race (Black – White IAT)

For the Race IAT most respondents associate positive words with white faces and negative words with black faces. In an additional IAT which measures associations between race and weapons, the majority of respondents associate black faces with weapons and white faces with harmless objects.

Age (Young - Old IAT)

Most respondents, even the elderly, find it easier to associate older people with "Bad" (negative words) and Young people with "Good" (positive words), than the reverse.



Results of everyone who has taken the on-line Old People Young People IAT to date. See [Project Implicit](#)

Disability (Disabled - Abled IAT)

Most respondents show a moderate (27%) to strong preference (33%) for abled people compared to disabled people.

Gender and Leaders and Gender and Career IATs

Investigations of how people associate gender and leadership, using the IAT, found all groups showed a tendency to associate men and leadership more readily than women and leadership². For the Gender–Career IAT most respondents (both male and female) associated career words with men and family words with female.

Unconscious biases and implicit associations are driven by exposure to cultural stereotypes. Because we're all equally exposed to these stereotypes, we're all equally likely to exhibit these biases.

Evidence of bias in employment and education

International research has detailed pervasive evidence of unconscious bias in employment, education, health, justice and many other areas of life. Most common biases are based on a person's gender, race and age but can occur in a positive or negative way for all categories of people.

Studies using identical CVs and job applications have demonstrated name-based discrimination against applicants, disproportionately affecting women and visible minorities.

University faculty selectors (both male and female) rated applicants as being more competent, more hireable, worth higher salaries and offered more career mentoring where the application had a male name compared to an identical application having a female name^{3, 4}.

Again, using identical applications with the only difference being the applicant's name, selectors have demonstrated stark preferences for applicants with distinctly European/Pakeha names to applicants with distinctly Asian⁵, East Asian and Middle Eastern⁶ or African-American names⁷.

A recent comparative study by Blank, Houkamau and Kingi revealed the implicit biases in education, finding teachers with negative implicit attitudes were more likely to evaluate Māori and African-American students less intelligently and less likely to achieve at school. These low expectations and biases create a downward spiralling self-fulfilling prophecy⁸.

Increasing attention is being given to improving the participation of women in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine). In her 2015 text, Nicola Gaston⁹ details the extent of how our unconscious biases against female scientists works against this aim and she warns of its damaging consequences for science and for society.

Amid concern about bias against, and under-representation of, women and ethnic minority students and staff, universities and private and public sector organisations internationally are attempting to address this issue.

Up until the 1970s, symphony orchestras in America previously had less than 20% female instrumentalists. By introducing a screen between the musician and the audition committee (leaving the applicants audible but not visible to the judges) the proportion of the women hired by major symphony orchestras doubled to 40%.¹⁰

Four universities in the UK; Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool and Winchester will trial anonymised applications for entry to some courses in 2017, to combat the risk of unconscious bias against ethnic minority students¹¹.

In 2016, the Victorian State Government announced plans for an Australia-first trial of anonymous resumes¹². Details such as name, age, gender and address or

location, will be left off all CVs submitted for public service jobs over an 18-month period. This follows a similar programme in the United Kingdom where an anonymised process was adopted for all graduate applicants into the Civil Service and local government¹³. Large employers such as HSBC, Deloitte, KPMG, Virgin money and the BBC also agreed to adopt the practice.

While these measures will remove information that triggers biases and may equalise entry into study and employment, structural processes and cultures in which unconscious biases and implicit associations are recognised and redressed are also needed.

Overcoming unconscious bias and implicit associations

While in many cases unconscious bias awareness training may result in insightful discussions, behaviour change may not occur or may only be short term. Additionally with some people, awareness raising may actually unintentionally encourage more biased thinking and behaviours. Also, by hearing that others are biased and it's 'natural' to hold stereotypes, some people may feel less motivated to change their biases^{14, 15}.

Moving beyond awareness of unconscious bias and implicit associations to long term bias reversal and inclusive behaviours requires changes in organisational practices plus practical interventions to address personal biases and creation of new positive behaviours and pro-active approaches to working with people who are 'different' from the majority group. For example see ^{16, 17, 18, 19, 20}.

Strategies to assist

Teams

- Provide diverse role models and messages in communications and images
- Ensure diverse work and decision making teams
- Emphasise collective goals and cooperative activities
- Provide cross gender/race mentoring and sponsorship programmes
- Consider anonymised screening (removing names and identifying features) of applications for scholarships, disciplinary reports, auditions, etc.
- Develop and/or use evidence based criteria and organisational guidelines and policies
- Use varied decision making tools; Six Thinking Hats, SWAT and PEST Analysis, ethical decision making tools, decision making mind map, etc.
- Provide events which are accessible
- Ensure conferences and panels have appropriate speaker gender balance
- Encourage appropriate team training; e.g., recruitment and selection techniques, inclusive teaching and learning practices etc.

Recruitment and Selection

- Explore how the staffing profile can match the student/community profiles
- Explore auditing the department's staffing profile for; pay equity in starting salaries, representation of Māori and equity groups conference attendance, Māori and equity group representation at each stage of the application/shortlist/interview/appointment process, etc.

- Consider anonymised screening of CV's for shortlisting
- Ensure selection panels use structured processes, objective pre-determined criteria and assessment methods
- Consider short-listing all women in proportion to their application rates in STEMM areas
- Examine language used in communications such as job advertisements to remove exclusive language; consider using a gender decoder

Teaching

- Use inclusive teaching and learning practices accommodating different learning styles
- Use universal design principles in creating and delivering teaching and learning resources and environments
- Provide diverse role models and opportunities for student interaction; e.g., female lecturers in male dominated areas
- Search for and provide to students, research and information from diverse sources including Māori, Pacific and Asian perspectives to avoid curricula being euro-centric
- Consider if Māori and Pacific issues are presented as a deficit model and if so ways this can be addressed

Personal

- Become aware of own possible biases; reflect on personal associations and interactions; analyse decision making practices and outcomes; undertake the IAT; ask others to give feedback
- Be conscious of the words and physical reactions that surface in interactions with others
- Actively seek out and engage with diverse people
- Practice creating more positive behaviours such as micro-affirmations to interrupt bias
- Be an ethical and active bystander; speak out if a colleague's contribution may be ignored or misappropriated unfairly, call out sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, discrimination, harassment, condescension and bias
- Acknowledge and appreciate a team member who takes a risk, offers a new idea, asks a question etc., especially where the team member is different or where other members may not share similar assumptions or experiences
- Be curious of differing opinions and explore differences
- Refer to evidence rather than hear-say
- Look for ways to challenge what you think and see; consider other explanations
- Become informed about minority group workplace issues
- Use thought and change processes and habit breaking interventions to guide decisions towards more objectivity, e.g.:
 - Thinking slow strategies
 - Using decision making tools

- Stereotype replacement and counter stereotypic imaging
- Reframing and perspective taking
- Question first impressions
- Challenge un-reflected exclusion.

Common decision making biases

There are many common biases that affect everyday decision making. These include the affinity or 'similar to me' effect, anchoring or first impressions bias, attribution error or stereotyping, confirmation bias, group-think and the halo/horns bias.

Civility and micro-behaviours

There are also many subtle positive and negative messages in our interactions with people which can have a significant impact on those around us leading them to be feel more included or not.

Responding to everyday "isms"

Sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, ableism, etc., are often expressed in everyday conversations and delivered as 'humour', off-hand comments or story-telling. Be an active bystander when witnessing such behaviour and speak up and support those it's directed to.

How privileged are you?

BuzzFeed Australia has created a video of the privilege walk which is a useful tool to show the effect privilege plays in all of our lives. Also from an Auckland based cartoonist, a descriptive cartoon on privilege.

Watch the ['privilege walk'](#)

Read the [Privilege cartoon](#)

Further information and resources

Contact Cathie Walsh, Staff Equity Manager by phone: +64 9 373 7599 ext 87844 or email: cathie.walsh@auckland.ac.nz

M. Banaji, A. Greenwald. *Blind Spot The hidden biases of good people.* Delacorte 2013.

Daniel Kahneman. *Thinking fast and slow.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2011

Nicola Gaston. *Why Science is Sexist.* BWB Texts NZ 2015

Unconscious bias and higher education **Equality Challenge Unit UK Review** 2013. <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/unconscious-bias-and-higher-education.pdf>

State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review **Kirwan Institute** 2015
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015-kirwan-implicit-bias.pdf>

Professor Jennifer L Martin, Director of the Eskitis Drug Discovery Institute Griffith University, NHMRC Fellow, and former ARC Australian Laureate Fellow, Jenny also writes a blog [cubistcrystal](#) where she advocates for equal opportunity and addressing gender imbalance in academia, particularly science. Including:

- [But what can I do?](#)
- [Ten Simple Rules to Achieve Conference Speaker Gender Balance](#)
- [Five More Rules](#)

Shelley Correll, Professor of Sociology at Stanford University, Director of the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, discusses how stereotypes act as a shortcut in information processing and how to support other women in this 20 minute video [Creating a level playing field](#).

University resources are available to assist managers and academic heads ensure fair and equitable employment processes, including:

[Merit Relative to Opportunity Policy and Procedures](#)

[Guidelines for Equity in Recruitment and Selection process \(PDF\)](#) -

[Flexible Work Policy](#)

[Inclusive Teaching and Learning Guidelines](#)

[Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Guidelines](#)

[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

[Human Resource policy, guidelines and resources](#)

Presentations and workshops on **unconscious and implicit bias** are available through the Equity Office. For further information contact Cathie Walsh, Staff Equity Manager by phone: +64 9 373 7599 ext 87844 or email: cathie.walsh@auckland.ac.nz

References

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⁵ M Gee Wilson, P Gahlout, L Liu and S Mouly. **A rose by any other name: The effect of ethnicity and name on access to employment..** Business Review. University of Auckland 7, 2, 2005

⁶ A. Booth, A Leigh, E. Varganova. **Does Racial and Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence from a Field Experiment.** https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1640989 2010

⁷ Bertrand, M. and Mullainthan, S. (2003). **Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination.** *Working paper series, University of Massachusetts*, 03-22.

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- ⁸ A. Blank, C. Houkamau, H Kingi. **Unconscious Bias and Education: A Comparative Study of Māori and African American Students**. 2016 <http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/unconscious-bias-and-education.pdf>
- ⁹ Gaston, N. **Why Science is Sexist**. BWB Texts NZ 2015
- ¹⁰ M. Banaji, A. Greenwald. *Blind Spot The hidden biases of good people*. Delacorte 2013
- ¹¹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/four-universities-trial-name-blind-applications>
- ¹² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-20/unconscious-bias-victorian-government-jobs-initiative/7432118>
- ¹³ <http://www.civilserviceworld.com/articles/news/civil-service-start-name-blind-recruitment-graduates-latest-diversity-push>
- ¹⁴ T. Nielson, L Kepinski. **Inclusion Nudges Guidebook**. Inclusion Institute. 2016
- ¹⁵ M. Duguid, Thomas-Hunt. **Condoning stereotyping? How awareness of stereotyping prevalence impacts expression of stereotypes**. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol 100(2), Mar 2015, 343-359
- ¹⁶ <https://cel.edu.au/our-research/evaluation-bias-and-backlash-dimensions-predictors-and-implications-for-org>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3603687/>
- ¹⁸ Lynn M. Shore et al. Diversity in organizations: Where are we now and where are we going? , *Human Resource Management Review* 19 (2009) 117–133
- ¹⁹ http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2712520
- ²⁰ Asgari, S., Dasgupta, N, & G Cote, (2010). When does contact with successful ingroup members change self-stereotypes? A longitudinal study comparing the effect of quantity vs. quality of contact with successful individuals. *Social Psychology*, 41, 202-211