Unconscious bias in colleges and higher education

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Training objectives

= Explore the brain’s processing short cuts
= Be aware of how that processing impacts on our behaviour and decision making
= Increase our awareness of strategies to manage our brain’s short cuts

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Who are professors?

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Who are professors?

- What do they look like?
- What do they wear?
- What is their background?
- Who are their friends?
- What do they do at the weekend?
- What accent do they have?

On a flip chart draw a 12-year-old’s perception of a professor

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What is the reality?

= 79.5 % male
= 93.7% white (among UK nationals
  – 86.0% white among non-UK nationals)
= 97.6% non-disabled
= 95.8% over 40

*Equality in higher education: statistical report 2013*
Equality Challenge Unit
Gender bias in hiring in science faculties

Possible explanations

Staff in science faculties have been **consciously** biased and deliberately chose the male candidate because they wanted a man

Staff in science faculties have been **biased**, but they were **unaware** they were doing it

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Audio illusion

Amazing AUDIO illusion.mp3

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Psychological explanation

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 judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences.

(ECU: 2013 Unconscious bias in higher education)

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The unconscious bias debate

= Unconscious or implicit
= Implicit Association Tests (IATs) debate
= Harvard Project Implicit:

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/

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Which characteristics might elicit a response?

= Gender
= Ethnicity
= Religion/belief
= Perceived sexual orientation
= Attractiveness
= Age
= Disability
= Clothing
= Piercings/tattoos
= Haircut
= Body language
= Accent
= Personality
= Friends/family

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<th>Fairly intelligent</th>
<th>Neither intelligent nor unintelligent</th>
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Dear obese PhD applicants: if you didn't have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won't have the willpower to do a dissertation #truth
Macro and micro situations: Mary Rowe 1973

Micro:
Small, subtle, seemingly meaningless but collectively significant (for example, being overlooked in a meeting)

Macro:
Bigger, more visible, high-stakes inequalities (for example, equal pay and employment situations)
Where might this have an impact in a college or university?

= Bias in shortlisting CVs based on name (eg Steinpreis et al 1999)

= Bias in shortlisting CVs based on foreign qualifications (Carlsson and Rooth 2000)

= Bias in friendliness of body language (eg McConnell and Leibold 2001)

= Bias in type of drugs prescribed by doctors to different patients (Green et al 2007)
Things which exacerbate our implicit biases

= In-groups and out-groups

= Confirmation bias
In-groups and out-groups

Factors of influence might be:

= **physical characteristics**
  (eg age, gender, race)

= **shared interests and hobbies**
  (eg sport, music, gardening)

= **similar lifestyle**
  (eg having children, caring responsibilities or pets)

= **similar background**
  (eg being from the same place, having a similar family background, having studied at the same institution)

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In-groups and out-groups

= We have natural tendencies to prefer people who are like us

= **In-groups** are people that we feel safer and more comfortable around and who we may treat more favourably

= **Out-groups** are people that we feel less safe and comfortable around and who we might treat dismissively or disdainfully

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Confirmation bias

- Being selective when:
  - searching for information
  - interpreting information
  - remembering/recalling information

- We prefer information which confirms what we know and believe and are more likely to overlook information which challenges or contradicts.
Confirmation bias

= You meet someone and unconsciously judge them

= You notice and remember information in keeping with your original judgement

= You don’t notice or remember information which contradicts your original judgement of them

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10 minute break

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Recap

- Unconscious or implicit biases
- Macro and micro situations
- In groups and out groups
- Confirmation bias

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Racism is 'hardwired' into the human brain - and people can be prejudiced without knowing it

- Same circuits that allow people to judge ethnic groups also drive emotional decisions
- Even 'right thinking' people can have racist attitudes
- Racism operates below the conscious level

By ROB WAUGH
PUBLISHED: 11:33, 26 June 2012 | UPDATED: 15:12, 26 June 2012

Racism is hardwired into the brain, say scientists - and it operates unconsciously.

The same circuits in the brain that allow us to see which ethnic group a person belongs to overlap with others that drive emotional decisions.

The result is that even right-thinking individuals make unconscious decisions based on a person's race.
What can we do about it?

= Accept we are all biased

= Decide what we will do about it individually

1. Break the links in our processing – reduce our levels of bias

2. Ensure policies and processes are designed to mitigate the impact of bias wherever possible

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Reducing our levels of bias: turning theory into practice

= Challenging stereotypes and counter stereotypical information
= Using context to explain a situation
= Changing perception and relationship with out-group members
= Being an active bystander

Look at the strategies which have been used by psychologists and think about how to turn them into real life practice.

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Challenging stereotypes

MPs' expenses: former minister Elliot Morley released from prison
Ex Labour environment minister freed after serving quarter of 16-month sentence for fiddling £30,000 of expenses

Crime victims with mental illness ignored, research suggests
By Dominic Casciani
Home affairs correspondent, BBC News

People with mental illneses are three times more likely to be victims of crime than the general population, new research suggests.

The study found victims saying that their reports to the police were often dismissed or disbelieved.

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Race and attainment

16 JUNE 2013 | BY REBECCA ATTWOOD

Hefce study identifies unexplained achievement gap between white and ethnic-minority students. Rebecca Attwood reports

There are large differences in different ethnic groups’ academic attainment at university, even after factors such as entry qualifications are taken into account, a study has found.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England examined the proportion of first- and upper-second-class degrees awarded to students starting full-time first-degree courses in 2002-03. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/race-and-attainment/412118.article

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Changing perception and relationship with out-group members

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Active bystander

Active Bystander Strategies

Below are some approaches you could consider. This list is by no means exhaustive — you could probably think of others for any given situation.

Use your judgment and common sense. The most effective time to act may be later, not on the spot, and you may want to get advice before taking steps.

Of course, you should not choose a course of action that puts you or anyone else at risk of harm. Know your own limits and "comfort zone", and use your common sense. Familiarize yourself with the Resources on Campus to get guidance for yourself or refer people appropriately.

Click on each strategy to see examples and tips. You can also look at strategies relevant to some typical situations.

STRATEGIES IN THE MOMENT
Name or acknowledge an offense
Point to the "elephant in the room"
Interrupt the behavior
Publicly support an aggrieved person
Use body language to show disapproval
Use humor (with care)
Encourage dialogue
Help calm strong feelings
Call for help

STRATEGIES AFTER THE FACT
Privately support an upset person
Talk privately with the inappropriate actor
Report the incident, with or without names
Improving processes

In groups consider the scenario and prepare a five minute presentation on:
= where unconscious bias could have an impact
= how policies and processes can reduce biases impacting on decisions
= how individuals involved in making decisions can manage their biases throughout the process

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Summary

= We all have unconscious biases and we are all affected by bias

= We can take action to manage the impact on our behaviour and decision making

= It’s up to individuals to decide what action to take

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Reflection

Spend a few minutes thinking about what you can do to recognise and reduce your own biases and mitigate their impact on your behaviour and decision making.

What will you do to move forward following this training?

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