UNCONSCIOUS BIAS
INCLUSIVE LEARNING & WORKING ENVIRONMENTS

Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion | Updated March 2015 | inclusion.uwex.uwc.edu

POTENTIAL UNCONSCIOUS ASSUMPTIONS & BIASES

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS ON THE SEARCH PROCESS

Women and minorities may be subject to unduly high expectations in areas such as number and quality of publications, name recognition, or personal acquaintance with a committee member.

Candidates from institutions other than the major research universities that have trained most of our faculty may be undervalued. Qualified candidates from institutions such as historically black universities, four-year colleges, government, or the private sector might offer innovative, diverse, and valuable perspectives on research and teaching.

The work, ideas, and findings of women or minorities may be undervalued or unfairly attributed to a research director or collaborators despite contrary evidence in publications or letters of reference.

The ability of women or minorities to run a research group, raise funds, and supervise students and staff may be underestimated.

DISCOVER YOUR BIASES
THERE ARE INCREDIBLE RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP YOU EXPLORE YOUR UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

For more, check out:
http://inclusion.uwex.uwc.edu/

Harvard Implicit Bias Test
Greater awareness is the first step to address negative group associations.

Invisible Gorilla Video
Video examples of cognitive biases and perception tests.

The Invisible Gorilla by: Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons

Everyday Bias by: Howard Ross

Blindspot by: Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald

WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?
SOCIALIZED INTO A SOCIETY WHERE THERE EXISTS INDIVIDUAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIETAL BIASES

Psychologists tell us that our unconscious biases are simply our tendency to prefer people who are like us, sound like us, and share our interests. Social psychologists call this phenomenon "social categorization" whereby we routinely and rapidly sort people into groups. This preference bypasses our normal, rational, and logical thinking. We use these processes very effectively but the categories we use to sort people are not logical, modern, or perhaps even legal. These neurological "short cuts" can lead to bias and poor decision making.

Unconscious bias is:
- Every day
- Automatic
- Hard-wired
- None of us are immune
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IS HARD-WIRED

Deep within our subconscious, stereotypes are ingrained. Neuropsychologists tell us cognitive bias is built into the very structure of the brain. Our unconscious brain processes and sifts vast amounts of information looking for patterns (200,000 times more than the conscious mind). When the unconscious brain sees two things occurring together it begins to expect them to be seen together and begins to wire them together neurally.

Brain imaging scans have demonstrated that when people are shown images of faces that differ from their own faces, the experience activates an irrational prejudgment in the brain’s alert system for danger, the amygdala. This happens in less than a tenth of a second. Our associations and biases are likely to be activated every time we encounter a member of a particular group, even if we consciously reject a group stereotype.

ASSUMPTIONS THAT INFLUENCE THE EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES

VOCABULARY, SKILL VS. LUCK, WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS AND MORE

- When rating the quality of verbal skills as indicated by vocabulary definitions, evaluators rated the skills lower if they were told an African American provided the definitions than if they were told that a White person provided them (Biernat and Manis 1991).
- When asked to assess the contribution of skill and luck to successful performance of a task, evaluators more frequently attributed success to skill for males and luck for females, even though males and females performed the task equally well (Deaux and Emswiller 1974).
- Evaluators who were busy, distracted by other tasks, and under time pressure, gave women lower ratings than men in written evaluation of equal job performance. Sex bias decreased when they gave ample time and attention to their judgments, which rarely occurs in actual work settings. This study indicates that evaluators are more likely to rely upon underlying assumptions and biases when they cannot/do not give sufficient time and attention to their evaluations (Martell 1991).
- Evidence suggests that perceived incongruities between the female gender role and leadership roles create two types of disadvantages for women: (1) ideas about female gender roles cause women to be perceived as having less leadership ability than men and consequently impede women’s rise to leadership positions, and (2) women in leadership positions receive less favorable evaluations because they are perceived to be violating gender norms (Eagly and Karau 2002; Ridgeway 2001).
- Favorable parole rulings dropped gradually from ~65% to nearly zero within each decision session, and returned abruptly to ~65% following a break (Extraneous factors in judicial decisions (pnas.1018033108). defend every decision for rejecting or retaining a candidate.

WHEN IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS MOST ACTIVE?

STRESS, FRUSTRATION, ANGER AND OTHER EMOTIONAL TIMES

Bias is more likely to influence behavior when someone is cognitively strained, such as when emotionally stressed, under time constraints, or distracted. Bias is also more likely when someone is operating on “auto-pilot,” or acting without being self-reflective and mindful of one’s motivations and thinking.

OVERCOMING UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

SOME TIPS ABOUT HOW TO OVERCOME BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS

- Remind yourself of the need to be fair and objective at key times, either in your head or with written reminders such as posters and cards.
- Spend sufficient time (15-20 minutes) evaluating each applicant. Take breaks during extended or emotional discussions.
- Know where you are in terms of your motivations to change or manage your biases. It can be unrealistic to expect to change deeply held beliefs. It may be all you can do is expect to manage them in key situations (e.g. appraisals, interviews, etc.).
- Learn about research on biases and assumptions.
- Discuss research on biases and assumptions and consciously strive to minimize their influence on your evaluation of candidates.
- Develop criteria for evaluating candidates and apply them consistently to all applicants.
- Evaluate each candidate’s entire application; don’t depend too heavily on only one element such as the letters of recommendation, or the prestige of the degree-granting institution or postdoctoral program.
- Be able to defend every decision for rejecting or retaining a candidate.
- Periodically evaluate your decisions and consider whether qualified women and underrepresented minorities are included. If not, consider whether evaluation biases and assumptions are influencing your decisions.