What We Don’t Know: Exploring Unconscious Bias

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Introduction

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Overview

Exploring Unconscious Bias

- What is unconscious bias?
- What do we know about it?
- Why does it matter at work?
- What can we do to address it?
“Most of us believe that we are ethical and unbiased. But in reality, most of us fall woefully short of our inflated self-perception.”

Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, Harvard University Professor, Co-Founder of Project Implicit
WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?
Implicit vs. Explicit

Main distinction: level of awareness

- Explicit: *consciously* expressed or publicly stated
- Implicit: operates *without* conscious control
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT IT?
Project Implicit

• An online, multi-university collaboration
• Research and education about implicit cognition
  – University of Washington
  – University of Virginia
  – Harvard University
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IAT Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability IAT</td>
<td>Disability ('Disabled - Abled' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize symbols representing abled and disabled individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Science IAT</td>
<td>Gender - Science. This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native IAT</td>
<td>Native American ('Native - White American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Native American faces in either classic or modern dress, and the names of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race IAT</td>
<td>Race ('Black - White' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin. It indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons IAT</td>
<td>Weapons ('Weapons - Harmless Objects' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Career IAT</td>
<td>Gender - Career. This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unconscious bias is:

- Pervasive
- Contrary to Conscious Intention
- Consequential
Unconscious bias is pervasive

- Over 75% of testers show hidden bias
- People favor men, whites, youth, and the physically able
Unconscious bias is contrary to conscious intention.
Unconscious bias is consequential
WHY DOES IT MATTER AT WORK?
Would you admit...

• Tall men make better CEOs than shorter men?
• A man is a more effective director than a woman?
Recommendation Letters
Hiring
Hiring

- Race
- Gender
- Motherhood
Performance Management
Subtle vs. Blatant Bias

• Subtle Bias can be *more* harmful. Why?
  – Rumination
  – Frequency
  – Little or no legal recourse (King et al., 2011)

Source: Jones & King, 2016
WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADDRESS IT?
At the Organization Level

• Design a bias-free organization (Morse, 2016)
  – Prevent hidden biases from leaking out
    • Example: Orchestra
Limit Impact of Biases

- Decide on minimum qualifications
- Carefully construct job postings
- Blind Screening Process
Limit Impact of Biases

- Structured interviews
- Calibrate performance levels
- Design promotion processes around managers’ biases
Limit Impact of Biases

• Create accountability for decision makers
• Develop customized training
• Increase mentoring and coaching
Begin by Collecting Data
Individual Level

• Acknowledge you may have hidden biases
• Take the Implicit Association Tests
• Limit exposure to stereotypes
• Seek counter-stereotypical images, stories, people, experiences
• Seek out regular feedback
AWARENESS MUST PAIR WITH GOALS AND STRATEGIES
Individual Level

• Evidence-based strategies:
  – Practice mindfulness
  – Take a different perspective
  – Visualize positive images that counter stereotypes
Individual Level

• Evidence-based strategies:
  – Identity-conscious perspective
  – Set pro-diversity goals
  – Know the research
Thank you for your time!

• Contact: Aisha Taylor, Ph.D.
  – ataylor@cpshr.us

Resources
• Project Implicit
• Harvard Business Review articles (these will lead to many more)
  – Designing a bias-free organization
  – Why subtle bias is so often worse than blatant discrimination