

Addressing Unconscious Bias

This primer summarizes key information covered in the short course [Addressing Unconscious Bias](#).

Understanding unconscious bias

Unconscious bias (also known as **implicit bias**) occurs without deliberate effort in all of us, as the brain makes automatic judgments about situations and people by relying on stereotypes and often incorrect assumptions. These stereotypes and assumptions are shaped by our background, the culture we grew up in, what we see in the media, and our personal experiences. Unconscious bias can exert a powerful influence on our perceptions, behaviour, and decisions. In the research and publishing ecosystem, it can affect decisions about funding, hiring, promotion, collaboration, credit, recognition, and publication.

Types of unconscious bias

Many different types of unconscious bias have been described. Here we list four types that surface frequently in everyday interactions and impact our professional networks and decisions.

Affinity bias: a tendency for us to gravitate toward people who are like us in some way (for example, appearance, beliefs, values, background). It can lead to professional and personal networks being homogenous and cause us to favour people who are similar to us.

Stereotypes: a fixed, overly simplified, and overly generalized view, usually about a group of people or social identities that are then applied to individuals. Stereotypes can lead to assumptions and decisions with detrimental outcomes for individuals.

Confirmation bias: a tendency to seek out and selectively remember information that confirms our attitudes and beliefs. It can also result in overlooking information that conflicts with an already formed view or hypothesis. Like other types of bias, confirmation bias can result in poor decision-making.

Conformity bias (Groupthink): a tendency toward consensus and agreement with others in a group, even if it goes against one's own view. It occurs when we refrain from disagreeing so as to not disrupt the consensus of the group. Groupthink can especially affect decisions that are made by panels.

How to counter unconscious bias

Each of us has a personal responsibility to confront and seek to counter our biases. Below, we outline a few practical tips for countering our biases.

- Accept that we are biased and reflect on the stereotypes and biases that we may have formed
- Improve consistency and accountability in decision-making processes and structures
- Engage with people who are different from you and seek diverse points of view
- Commit to learning more and spreading awareness about bias (see further reading and resources)

Further reading & resources

[How implicit bias and lack of diversity undermine science](#)

[Can we unlearn implicit biases?](#) Podcast with Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, pioneer in the field of implicit bias

[The double standard](#) Podcast with Dr. Emily Pronin, expert on bias

Understand your own biases through an Implicit Association Test

Resources from the NIH on [Understanding implicit bias](#)

Resources from Harvard University on [Outsmarting implicit bias](#)

Like what you see? See the [full guide](#) from Springer Nature