



Unconscious Bias – Perspectives from the Private Sector

October 5, 2021



AGENDA

- We all have bias - understanding why
- How does bias affect us?
- How can we learn more about our biases?
- What do we do to counteract our biases?
- How do we counteract bias with other people?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th5zZuFvXnA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=v01SxXui9XQ>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/rebroadcast-why-were-all-biased-howard-ross-author/id1127115688?i=1000489822030>

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

<https://www.enactsolutions.com/ub/>

<https://howardjross.com/>

We All Have Bias – Understanding Why

- Bias is simply a tendency or inclination that results in judgement about a question
- Bias is not negative or positive
- Bias is a component of survival, and part of human nature
- Two segments of the brain – fast (emotional) and slow (thinking)
- Fast brain makes quick and effective decisions rather than stick to facts at all times
- Our brains act fast rather than rationally
- Bias derives from fight/flight/freeze impulse in our brain
- Our fast brain processes 200,000 times more information than our slow conscious brain



We All Have Bias – Understanding Why

- Bias is derived from the 'fast' brain - unconscious
- Our fast brain helps us survive - looks for danger
- Bias allows us to live our lives freely rather than be plagued with caution and suspicious of every thing, every situation, and every person
- If the brain misses a reward - nice surprise; if it misses danger = dead
- If we relied on our slow brain all the time, we'd get in a traffic accident every day
- Our fast brain works fast enough to keep us safe – critical to survival



We All Have Bias – Understanding Why

- We think we are rational - we are rationalizing
- Given any human characteristic, Ross can cite a study which shows we can be biased
- Our backgrounds create a filter through which we see the world
- Everyone's filter is different - everyone's biases are different

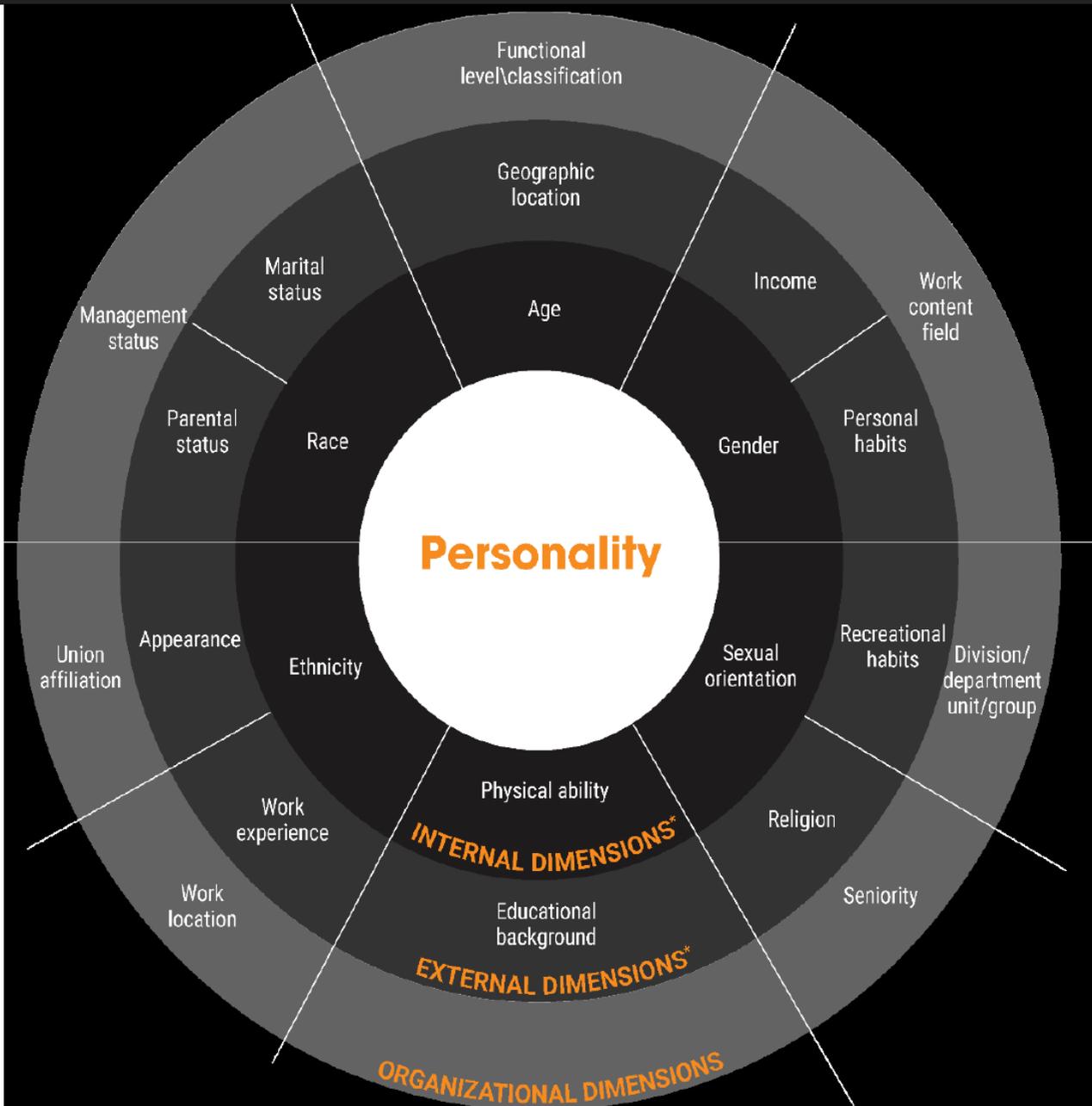


We All Have Bias – Understanding Why

- Bias can affect progression in the workplace
 - Gender, race, age, physical ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation - statistics
- 15% of men in the US are over 6 ft tall
 - 60% of CEOs in the US are men over 6 ft tall !!
- < 4% of men in the US are over 6'2" tall
 - 36% of CEOs in the US are men over 6'2" tall !!



We All Have Bias – Understanding Why



How Does Bias Affect Us?

- We don't see/hear the world the way we think we do
 - Our brain is interpreting and influencing our view of the world
 - We each have a filter through which we see/hear the world
 - Everyone's filter is different due to our background, experience, education, etc.
- Safer for the brain to keep away perceived threats rather than distinguish true threats
- “We don't think the way we think we think”
- Whodunnit [video](#)



How Does Bias Affect Us?

- We are exposed to 11 million pieces of information at any one time, we can absorb about 50
 - Selective attention
 - We pay attention to what we're oriented to pay attention to
 - Two people can go through the same experience and interpret it differently
- Bias is the framework for looking at the world
 - It's our playbook, short cuts for what is good or bad or dangerous
- People interpret things differently based on their filters



How Does Bias Affect Us?



Black Lives Matter

How Does Bias Affect Us?



Only
Black Lives Matter

How Does Bias Affect Us?



Black Lives Matter
Too

How Does Bias Affect Us?



Only
Black Lives Matter
Too

How Does Bias Affect Us?

- Different people's interpretation alter what really happens
 - We don't even realize we're seeing different things
- It takes 20% more brain power to see something positive vs negative because we have to filter out the negative before we can see the positive
- We have the capacity to overcome the fast brain with our conscious part of the brain – the 'slow' brain
- We don't always use our slow/conscious brain
- Our slow brain allows us to be discerning
- Demonstration of [fast brain vs slow brain](#)



How Does Bias Affect Us?



Silk

How Does Bias Affect Us?

- Priming the brain – power of suggestion
- Biases may influence how positive, neutral, or negative you feel about someone
 - Support someone with micro-behaviors
 - Micro-aggressions may hurt someone
- Biases related to every aspect of life and people
 - Gender, Appearance, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Height, Education, Race, Accent, Name, Communication Style, Skin Tone, Personality, Weight
- “We make up things about people all the time”
- The question is *not* “Do We Have Bias?”
- The question is “What Are Our Biases?”



How Can We Learn About Our Biases?

- Implicit Association Test
- Measures the strength of associations, evaluations, or stereotypes
- Purpose is to educate about implicit bias
- Raise awareness and encourage self-reflection
- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Race IAT

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.

Age IAT

Age ('Young - Old' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish old from young faces. This test often indicates that Americans have automatic preference for young over old.

Gender-Career IAT

Gender - Career. This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.

Asian IAT

Asian American ('Asian - European American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Asian-American faces, and images of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.

Disability IAT

Disability ('Disabled - Abled' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize symbols representing abled and disabled individuals.

Gender-Science IAT

Gender - Science. This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.

Weight IAT

Weight ('Fat - Thin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of people who are obese and people who are thin. It often reveals an automatic preference for thin people relative to fat people.

Religion IAT

Religion ('Religions' IAT). This IAT requires some familiarity with religious terms from various world religions.

Arab-Muslim IAT

Arab-Muslim ('Arab Muslim - Other People' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish names that are likely to belong to Arab-Muslims versus people of other nationalities or religions.

Skin-tone IAT

Skin-tone ('Light Skin - Dark Skin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize light and dark-skinned faces. It often reveals an automatic preference for light-skin relative to dark-skin.

Weapons IAT

Weapons ('Weapons - Harmless Objects' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.

Sexuality IAT

Sexuality ('Gay - Straight' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish words and symbols representing gay and straight people. It often reveals an automatic preference for straight relative to gay people.

Transgender IAT

Transgender ('Transgender People - Cisgender People' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish photos of transgender celebrity faces from photos of cisgender celebrity faces.

Presidents IAT

Presidents ('Presidential Popularity' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize photos of Joseph Biden and one or more previous presidents.

How Can We Learn About Our Biases?

- Halo and Horns – Shorthand for positive or negative first impressions
- Affinity – Favoring people who share the same social background
- Social Comparison – Having feelings of dislike and competitiveness with someone, or groups of people, that are seen as physically, or mentally, better than you
- Stereotype Threat – Fearing being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype and of doing something that would confirm it
- Confirmation – Noticing or looking only for evidence which confirms our ideas, good or bad
- Outcome – Tendency to evaluate a decision on the basis of its outcome rather than on what factors led to the decision



What Do We Do To Counteract Our Biases?

- Take responsibility for ourselves and how we act
 - Let go of the guilt
- Become an observer of how fear impacts you
 - What are you afraid of, what are your fears?
- Acknowledge a bias and let the slow brain engage
 - We can't change anything until we accept it
- Meditation develops the capacity of the slow brain
- Breathing exercises engage the slow brain
- Embrace and explore fear
- Freedom is the pause between stimulus and response
 - Count to 10 before reacting/responding, let the slow brain engage



What Do We Do To Counteract Our Biases?

- Engage and learn from “others”
- Surround yourself with “others”
- Don’t try to change the reality of “others”, rather understand them
- Be an ally
- Explore awkwardness and discomfort
- Understand everyone needs to belong
- Learn to question/distrust your first impression
- Be curious and embrace differences – in thought and appearance
- Challenge negative assumptions and stereotypes
- Don’t try to suppress bias – understand it



What Do We Do To Counteract Our Biases?

- Be careful about our “echo chamber” – reduce the confirmation
- Develop greater consciousness about yourself, turn inward
 - Why do I make these decisions, why do I feel the way I do, what is triggered
 - If you are hysterical, it is often historical
- Take the “other” to lunch
 - Agree on ground rules
 - Don’t persuade, defend, or interrupt
 - Be curious, authentic, and listen
 - Ask 4 questions
 - What are some of your life experiences that have led you to feel the way you do?
 - What issues deeply concern you?
 - What have you always wanted to ask someone from “the other side”?
 - Is there anything you would like to say to “clean up” the past?



What Do We Do To Counteract Our Biases?

- Ask a colleague to evaluate your decision
- Is my opinion factually true, is it always true, what evidence do I have?



How Do We Counteract Biases with Other People?

- Be authentic about your own biases
 - Share your own biases and be truthful
- Acknowledge the feelings of “others”
 - I understand you believe a single mother will not fit this role
- Clarify – avoid assumptions
 - Am I missing something, because I’m still not clear as to how this happened?
- Explore – evidence
 - Help me understand what you meant
- Solve – moving forward
 - What would a better situation look like for you?
- Take action – from micro-behaviors and beyond



How Do We Counteract Biases with Other People?



- Create inclusive meetings
 - Set time to accommodate caregivers, different time zones, standard religious obligations, varying international holidays
 - Greet everyone warmly
 - Value others' time as much as you value your own
 - Don't always sit next to the same person
 - Limit interruptions
 - Be present, pay attention
 - Rotate responsibilities: note taking, preparation, clean-up, bringing supplies
 - Respond constructively to something you disagree with
 - Solicit the opinion of everyone in the room, even the quiet ones
 - Be open to challenges/opinions from everyone
 - Ideas are attributed to the originator



Questions/Comments/Discussion