

## **‘Goodwill is not enough’**

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### **Abstract**

“Discrimination consists of a pattern of powerful, but unrecognized assumptions and attitudes that work systematically against women faculty even in the light of obvious goodwill.” *MIT A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999

There have been numerous studies (See, for example, *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*, National Academies Press, 2006) to show the effect of the unconscious biases that we all hold on the progress of women and members of BME groups. Studies within the USA have shown that identical CVs are evaluated more favourably if they are presented with a stereotypically masculine name than if they are presented with a stereotypically feminine name. Similar effects are observed with race.

In addition, small subtle disadvantages resulting from gender or race based biases can accumulate to become significant effects. A significant effect would be, for example, snap judgements – which are used extensively within the employment world.

If the effects of this type of subtle, unintentional bias are to be overcome it is essential that people are aware of its effects. Evidence-based workshops are one way of raising awareness of unconscious bias and its effects and increasing uptake of remedies. At the University of Cambridge, we have run a workshop entitled 'Responding to Merit: Performing to Potential' to explore the issue of unconscious bias. Initially these workshops focused on recruitment and selection but recently they have been broadened to consider appraisal.

Are whites carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege? Is this something that requires debate within the context of the unconscious biases?

This paper will discuss the concept of unconscious bias that affects the progress of women and minorities and a strategy to minimize its effects.

## **Introduction**

*"Do we think she is 40% less intelligent, less committed, less hard-working, less qualified? It's not the case. It's entrenched discrimination. It's allowed to persist because it's all swept under the carpet." Ms Harman 2008 BBC Radio 4's Today programme.*

As the world attempts to address the global shift in occupational skills set, there is a need to step back and reflect on what has been happening over the years. The picture that appears to be currently emerging shows that higher education has started to recognise the need for wider participation within their individual university campuses. There is indeed evidence that participation rates for women in higher education have increased between 1999 and 2005 in all regions of the world (Morley 2008), which indicates that there is an abundance of undergraduate women in higher education.

There has also been an increase in the participation rates for minority ethnic students over the last 10 years. -

If this is the real picture and there has been this general increase, surely the question that needs to be raised is – what is actually taking place when the graduates leave higher education to face the world of work? Are our graduates unknowingly stepping into the unconscious bias that appears to be operating across and within organisations? Workplace bias by gender, race and ethnicity is a reality in organisations large and small, in executive suites and in entry level production and service jobs, in both the private and public sectors. Workplace bias can be defined as differences in career outcomes by gender or race/ ethnicity that are not attributable to the differences in skills, qualifications, interests, and preferences that individuals are able to bring to the employment setting.

Racial bias can generally be defined through the concept of intergroup bias. Hewstone, Rubin and Willis (2002), refer to intergroup bias as the systematic tendency to evaluate one's own membership group (the in-group) or its members more favourably than a non-membership group (the out-group) or its members. Dovidio et al. (2004) suggests that intergroup bias appears in different forms, which range from attitudes and beliefs about other groups to emotional reactions and behaviour towards members of a group or towards a whole group as a whole. Understanding this particular concept of Intergroup bias, which, has four key components: prejudice, stereotypes, affective reactions, and discrimination moves us towards working through the variant forms of racial bias that are found today.

However, before we start to launch into a total defence mode, it is important that we acknowledge, that everyone relies on stereotypes and that is 'normal' behaviour. Unconscious biases are the implicit hypotheses about the roles of men and women and the behaviour of minorities. We all need to have hypotheses about how people will behave in various circumstances in order to be able to function in a social world. However, unconscious bias can lead to inappropriate judgements, for example, studies in which the ratings given to a CV associated with a male name are rated more highly than the same CV associated with a female name (Steinpreis et al. 1999).

The effects of unconscious bias may be very serious: a recent study by Green et al. (2007) in the United States showed that unconscious bias affected the treatment given to African American men suffering from chest pain.

Often, however, the effect of an individual misjudgement is not, in itself, particularly significant. Nevertheless, the effect of accumulated misjudgements can have lead to significantly different outcomes.

Research carried out by social psychologists demonstrates conclusively that stereotypes are cognitive schemata that invariably influence how we process information about others (Bodenhausen, Macrae, and Garst 1998). The characteristics that we associate with specific gender and racial groups labels have been learned and embedded into to our unconscious mind and behaviour. Evidence (Devine 1989, Bodenhausen and MacCrae 1996) suggests that people are often unaware of how their own stereotypes shape their own perceptions and behaviour. Similarly, individuals whose personal beliefs are relatively free of prejudice or bias are susceptible to stereotypes in the same ways as people who hold a personal animosity towards a specific group.

There are various social psychological experiments (Nelson, Acker, and Manis 1996) that demonstrate just how difficult it is to get people to attend to information that is only relevant to the overall post. Instead, many appear to acquire and rely on information that has been gained through stereotypes that are linked to group differences. Many of the assignments that are carried out in controlled environments have been criticized for being unrealistic and inapplicable to what one would perceive to 'real world' organisations.

However, Bielby's (2000) work suggests that experimentalists do recognise this and have pointed out that within the workplace, decision makers approach their tasks with considerably more motivation and are often personally identified with long-standing procedures and practices, and may have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Therefore, it is possible that stereotyping and in group bias effects takes place more frequently in the 'real world' than they do in the laboratory (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978, Pratto and Bargh 1991). Kanter (1977) and Izraeli (1983) findings suggest that women who are relatively new to traditionally male-dominated work settings often attract more attention, are evaluated more extremely, are perceived as different, receive less support, and are more likely to be viewed as a disruptive force in the workforce, compared to male co-workers.

The history and characteristics of racial typing of jobs and occupations may differ significantly from those of gender typecasting, the consequences of distorted racial distributions for the social psychology of stereotyping and outgroup bias are very similar to those resulting from gender imbalance, and barriers to career advancement. In addition to the categorization of differing jobs, it is important to remember the way in which people are recruited and selected for positions. Many studies refer to the impact that stereotyping has on the various human resources systems. There is evidence to suggest that some of these systems contribute in the reinforcement of segregated informal networks and personal links in the recruitment process. For example, Braddock and McParland's (1987) findings report that word-of-mouth recruitment more often than not reproduces the existing gender and ethnic composition of a workforce. They criticise the subjective internal selection

systems which are used for promotions, access to training and desirable job assignments which intend to favour those that have personal ties to decision makers and which fail to provide an opportunity for those outside of the informal networks to have their qualifications considered.

#### The Cambridge Unconscious Bias Training Model

The under-representation of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) was recognised in the Government White Paper, *Realising our Potential*, in 1993. More recently, in 2002, the report *SET Fair: A report on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology* gave an overview of the situation and made a number of recommendations. The formation of the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology was part of the Government's response to SET Fair. Not only are women under-represented in SET subjects, but Anderson and Connolly (2006) found that just under a quarter of the 22% gender pay gap in SET in higher education is unexplained.

The Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Initiative (WiSETI) at the University of Cambridge was set up in 1999 in response to continuing concern about the under-representation of women at all levels in SET in the University, as illustrated in Table 1.

	Biological Sciences	Physical Sciences	Technology
1999	17%	7%	7%
2003	24%	11%	9%
2007	27%	11%	10%

Table 1: Women as a percentage of academic staff in SET disciplines at the University of Cambridge.

In 2003 the University of Cambridge appointed two half-time recruitment officers in the Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Initiative to improve the rates of applications by women and appointments of women to lecturer positions in science, engineering and technology subjects at the University of Cambridge. Given the evidence that women's progress in academia is affected by unconscious bias, for example, the CUWAG Report on the Numbers and Status of Women in the University of Cambridge (Forty Years On), (1988 ), Valian. (1998) Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke (1999), the recruitment officers developed a half-day workshop targeted at Heads of Department and those responsible for recruitment and selection to complement the existing training on fair recruitment, which concentrated on compliance with legislation.

Much of the material was adapted from the successful STRIDE programme at the University of Michigan described by LaVaquer-Manty and Stewart (2008)<sup>1</sup>. The workshops were entitled 'Responding to Merit: Performing to Potential' and the publicity material emphasized the importance of enabling all staff to contribute to their full potential regardless of their background. The workshops concentrated on the recruitment, retention of women in the academic SET disciplines but the principles apply to other disciplines as well as other staff groups and to black and minority ethnic staff. Each workshop<sup>2</sup> started with a brief look at the statistics for academic and research staff at the University of Cambridge, including a breakdown for each participant's own Department. Including the statistics for the participants' own departments helped stimulate discussion of the situation of women in the University.

Following that the participants worked in small groups to explore how the wording of advertisements might affect members of different groups and how further particulars could be improved, for example, by alerting potential applicants to the University's family-friendly policies.

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Michigan's presentation is available as PowerPoint and PDF at <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/stride> (accessed 28 August 2008)

<sup>2</sup> An overview of the workshop is available at <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/wiseti/events/workshops.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2008)

To introduce the concept of unconscious bias participants were shown a 'line-up' containing three men and four women and asked to guess which person was a physicist. The point is not whether or not they guess correctly but that most people are happy to do so: they believe that they can pick which person is a physicist just by looking at them. This provides a basis for subsequent discussion of the key ideas summarized in Figure 1.

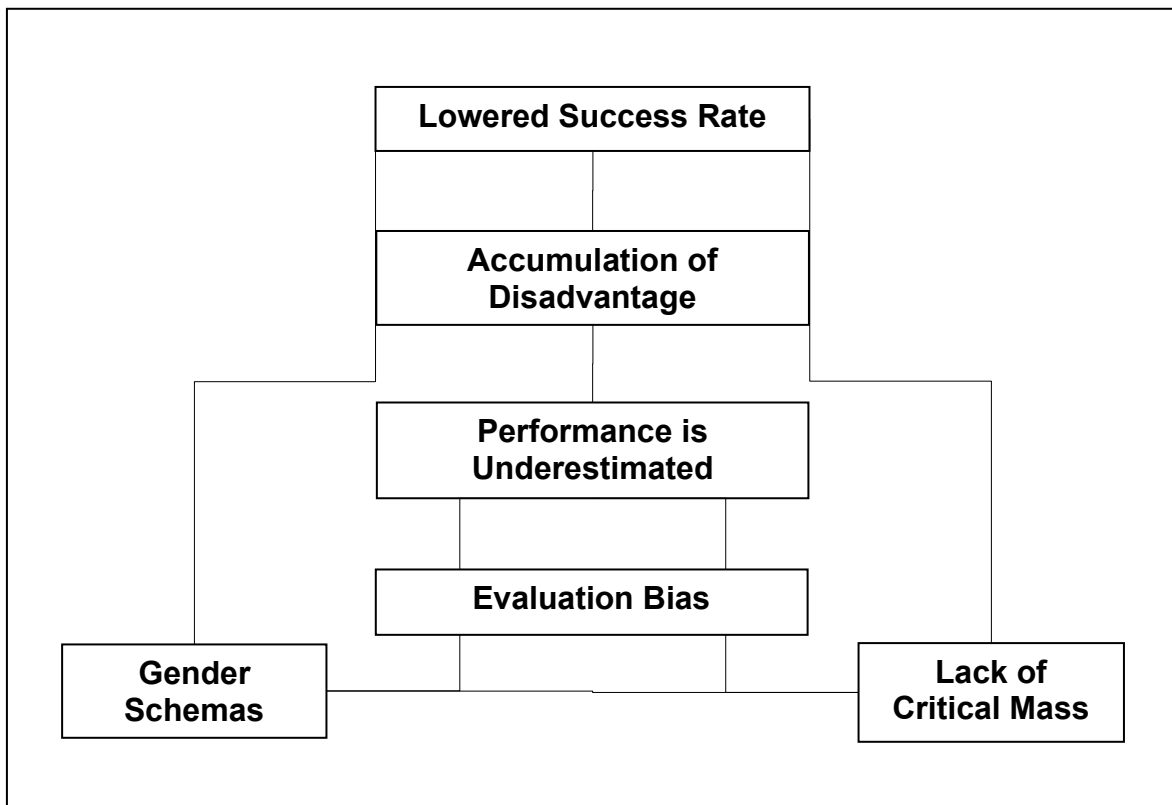


Figure 1. The self-reinforcing cycle of the effects of gender schemas on the evaluation and progress of women in business, the professions and academia. The operation of gender schemas (unconscious bias) together with the scarcity of women (lack of critical mass) leads to a bias in evaluation. This in turn leads to the performance of women being underestimated. The accumulation of many such instances of such underestimation leads to a lowered overall success rate, which both reinforces the gender scheme of women being less competent and contributes to the scarcity of women. After: University of Michigan STRIDE Faculty Recruitment Workshop Presentation available from <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/stride>.



Women are more likely to be evaluated negatively when they are in a minority – the lack of critical mass – and more positively if they are more than 30% of the applicant pool (Valian 1998, Chapter 6 and Heilman, 1980). Coupled with the effects of implicit hypotheses, here, following Valian, called gender schemas, this leads to women being evaluated less favourably than men, hence their performance is underestimated.

Many of the situations in which performance is underestimated are, in themselves, fairly trivial. A classic example is a suggestion being ignored when it is made by a woman but acclaimed when it is made by a man. However, the accumulation of many instances of, often, small underestimations of performance leads to a lowered success rate which in turn leads to fewer women and reinforces gender schemas of women as less competent. This explanation of the effects of unconscious bias leads to a discussion of how to mitigate those effects. Suggestions include: ensuring job advertisements are inclusive, ensuring further particulars of positions promote the University's family-friendly policies, proactively searching for women candidates, flexibility, checking the gender balance of seminar speakers, ensuring staff get appropriate feedback on their career progress and supporting applications for promotion.

Essential features of the workshops are:

- A positive approach emphasising the benefits of ensuring diverse staff can contribute fully.
- Tailoring the data to the participants' own departments so it is directly relevant to them.
- Making sure that statements about the manifestations of unconscious bias are backed up by references.
- A non-accusatory approach emphasising that both men and women have the same gender schemas and that schemas are not inherently a bad thing. We just need to be aware of the potential for poor decision making as a result of non-conscious beliefs.

Participants found the workshops useful and indicated that they would take different approaches to recruitment and appraisal, one reaction was 'Helpful and thought-provoking'.

The principal difficulties are the fairly low take-up and the tendency for those who attend to be those who already have a high awareness of the issues.

### Summary

From birth we all form hypotheses about how men and women behave and, eventually, about how members of other groups, for example, those defined by race or ethnicity, behave. Such hypothesis formation is necessary for us to function in a social world but the resulting hypotheses can lead to faulty evaluations of the performance of men and women or other groups.

Understanding the, often subtle, effects of such implicit hypotheses is essential if women and members of black and minority ethnic groups are to be able to participate fully in the workplace and in society generally. Fact based workshops introducing the concepts of unconscious bias and exploring potential remedies are an important part of creating a workplace where all employees are valued, complementing or stimulating other initiatives such as family friendly working practices and pro-active recruitment.

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