

Beyond Borders: Addressing Unconscious Bias in International Student Engagement

NU PLACE

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What is Unconscious Biased

- Unconscious bias is a positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing, or group that a person is unaware of having.
- Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences.
- Unconscious bias is an aspect of implicit social cognition: the phenomenon that perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes can operate before conscious intention or endorsement.

There are types of biases:

1. Conscious bias (also known as explicit bias): It occurs when individuals are aware of their biases and knowingly allow them to influence their thoughts, decisions, and actions
2. Unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias): social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their conscious awareness.

Development

- Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups
- These biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.
- Unconscious biases develop at an early age: biases emerge during childhood and appear to develop across childhood.

Common types of unconscious bias, such as:

1. Affinity bias: Favoring people who are similar to ourselves.

2. Confirmation bias: Seeking out information that confirms our existing beliefs or stereotypes.
 3. Halo effect: Making favorable assumptions about someone based on one positive trait.
 4. Attribution bias: Making assumptions about the reasons behind others' behavior.
- Unconscious bias can manifest in various forms, including race, gender, age, disability, and more.

Examples

- *Affinity Bias: During a team meeting, a manager consistently praises and listens more attentively to ideas proposed by team members who share the same hobby of biking, while disregarding suggestions from those who don't share this interest. The manager is unconsciously favoring individuals based on a shared personal interest rather than objectively evaluating the merit of their contributions.*
- *Confirmation Bias: Sarah strongly believes that eating organic food is healthier. Whenever she reads articles or studies about nutrition, she only focuses on information that supports her belief in organic food's benefits, while dismissing or ignoring any research suggesting otherwise. This selective attention to information that confirms her existing belief is an example of confirmation bias.*
- *Halo Effect: In a job interview, the interviewer is impressed by the candidate's confident demeanor and polished appearance. Because of this positive initial impression, the interviewer automatically assumes that the candidate must also possess other desirable qualities, such as intelligence and competence, without thoroughly evaluating their skills and qualifications.*

- *Attribution Bias: In a group project at school, John's classmates attribute his success in completing his part of the project to his natural talent for the subject, overlooking the fact that he spent extra time studying and preparing. Conversely, when another classmate struggles with their part, they attribute it solely to their lack of ability, failing to consider external factors such as limited access to resources.*

Negative consequences of unconscious bias:

- Biased decision-making in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation.
- Decreased diversity and inclusion. Negative effects on morale, engagement, and productivity.
- Addressing unconscious bias is essential for creating a fair and equitable work environment.

Speaking Impact

- “Bias is not something we exhibit and act on all time. It is conditional, and the battle begins by understanding the conditions under which it is most likely to come alive. Among those conditions, speed, and ambiguity are two of the strongest triggers of bias. When we are forced to make quick decisions using subjective criteria, the potential for bias is great. Yet more often than not, these are the very conditions under which hiring managers make initial decisions about job candidates.” Biased, by Jennifer Eberhardt)

Strategies to Manage Bias

- Question your first impressions
 - Does this person remind me of myself?
 - Does this person remind me of anyone else? Is this positive or negative?
 - Are there things about this person that particularly influence my impression?

- Are they relevant to the job? What assessments have I already made about this person?
- Are these grounded in solid information or my assumptions?
- Justify Decisions
 - What were the key variables in making this decision?
 - Why were these important?
 - What data did you use?
 - If you didn't consider certain data relevant, why not?
 - What input and/or feedback did you collect from others?
 - Why do you ultimately believe this is the decision that will lead to the best outcome?
- Ask for feedback, Ask your peers, leaders, and direct reports for feedback
 - Ask them: What have I missed?
 - Ask them: What am I not seeing?
 - Ask them: Where might bias be influencing my perspective?
 - Ask them: What influences may be in my blind spot?

Minimizing

- Education and Awareness: Learn about unconscious bias and how it manifests in various forms. Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind bias can help individuals recognize and mitigate their own biases.
- Self-Reflection: Regularly reflect on your thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to identify any unconscious biases you may hold. Consider how your upbringing, experiences, and cultural influences may shape your perceptions of others.

- **Expose Yourself to Diversity:** Actively seek out opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. Exposure to diversity can challenge stereotypes and broaden your understanding of others.
- **Challenge Stereotypes:** Question stereotypes and assumptions that you encounter, both within yourself and in society. Challenge stereotypes by seeking out counterexamples and recognizing the individuality of people rather than categorizing them based on group characteristics.
- **Practice Empathy:** Put yourself in others' shoes and try to understand their experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Cultivating empathy can help reduce biases by fostering compassion and understanding towards others.
- **Admit mistakes:** Don't be afraid to acknowledge, and apologize for, mistakes. Everyone makes a misstep on occasion, use mistakes as an opportunity to better yourself and strengthen your relationship with others.
- **Seek Feedback:** Encourage others to provide feedback on your behavior and decisions to help you identify blind spots and unconscious biases. Constructive feedback from peers, mentors, or colleagues can be valuable for personal growth and development.
- **Diversify Media Consumption:** Be conscious of the media you consume and seek out diverse sources of information. Exposing yourself to a variety of perspectives can help challenge preconceived notions and biases.
- **Continuous Learning and Improvement:** Recognize that minimizing unconscious bias is an ongoing process. Stay open to learning, feedback, and new perspectives, and be willing to adapt your attitudes and behaviors accordingly.

What Happens to International Students

- Language barriers and Communication
 - In many cases, English is the second language of international students, and recruiters can quickly judge the candidates' abilities to properly communicate what they want in an interview. Recruiters can blame this on the candidate's lack of English ability, but we must understand that the word pool of candidates who speak more than one language, is very wide, and it is ok if they take their time to properly think about what wording they want to use.
 - Following the point mentioned before, oftentimes, this quick judgment is a bias, as in general, candidates tend to be nervous at the beginning of an interview therefore they might take more time to continue the conversation and answer questions, we must not blame their English communication abilities, thereby they might need a few minutes into the conversation for the candidate to feel confident and perform well.
- Cultural stereotypes
 - As we've learned throughout this workshop, we have our gender, race, and cultural biases. When it comes to cultural biases, we begin to label people from certain countries, cultures, or continents. By doing so, we can generalize candidates or expect something from them that can be erroneous. For example, all East Asians are very smart and shy, all Latin Americans are loud people, Americans only think about work, Europeans tend to be entitled, etc.
 - If we stick to our cultural biases, we can expect certain behaviors from candidates, both negative and positive, pushing us to choose (halo effect) or not a certain candidate because of this bias.

- Bunched into one category
 - It is very common for all international candidates to be considered the same group, but to understand the difference in backgrounds, opportunities, and cultures, they can't just be labeled under one category, because each candidate has something different to offer, a different point of view, a different culture, so we must expose ourselves to the different cultures, become cultured people, and understand the uniqueness each candidate has to offer.
- Being less able to achieve things
 - People might assume that international students lack the networking skills necessary to contact important people in their field.
 - There could be a bias that international students are less likely to secure prestigious internships or work on significant projects due to perceived language barriers or cultural differences
 - These biases can have negative psychological consequences on these candidates and students being underestimated can lead to reduced self-esteem and motivation, affecting the view of the personal value
- Name biases
 - An article published by WBUR states that “Name Discrimination Study Finds Lakisha And Jamal Still Less Likely To Get Hired Than Emily And Greg”
 - <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2021/08/18/name-discrimination-jobs>

Tips

- Limit the use of idioms when communicating with international students
 - Such as “Knock it out of the park”, as they might not understand the meaning.

- Understand that students might not want to ask questions as it can show signs of lack of language ability
- Adopt a growth mindset. If we believe our prejudices and biases are part of who we are and are not changeable, the fixed mindset will keep us from minimizing our unconscious biases.
- Self-Reflect: regularly reflect on your thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to identify any unconscious biases you may hold.
- Promote Exposure to Diversity: Actively seek out opportunities for staff and students to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. Exposure to diversity can challenge stereotypes and broaden understanding.
- Challenge Stereotypes: Encourage individuals to question stereotypes and assumptions they encounter, both within themselves and in society. Emphasize the importance of recognizing individuality rather than categorizing people based on group characteristics.
- Practice Empathy: Foster empathy by encouraging individuals to put themselves in others' shoes and understand their experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Cultivating empathy can help reduce biases and promote understanding.
- Admit Mistakes and Learn from Them: Create a culture where it's acceptable to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Encourage individuals to apologize for errors and use them as opportunities for personal growth and relationship strengthening. Seek
- Feedback: Encourage individuals to actively seek feedback from peers, mentors, or colleagues to help identify blind spots and unconscious biases. Constructive feedback can facilitate personal development and improvement.

- **Diversify Media Consumption:** Encourage individuals to diversify their media consumption by seeking out diverse sources of information. Exposure to a variety of perspectives can help challenge preconceived notions and biases.
- **Continuous Learning and Improvement:** Emphasize that minimizing unconscious bias is an ongoing process. Encourage individuals to stay open to learning, feedback, and new perspectives, and be willing to adapt attitudes and behaviors accordingly.
- **Avoid Name Biases:** Be aware of biases related to names, as research has shown that certain names may be associated with discrimination. Ensure fair treatment regardless of the candidate's name. By implementing these strategies, you can help create a more inclusive and equitable environment for international students and minimize the impact of unconscious bias on decision-making processes.

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