

Types of Unconscious Biases and How to Counteract

TYPE OF BIAS	HOW IT WORKS	HOW TO COUNTERACT
Normative Bias	Assumptions about and preference for traditional career paths. Reliance on established understandings of excellence may limit the ability to recognize excellence in different forms.	Become informed about different knowledges, experiences and career paths, and how they can be assessed in terms of equivalencies and transferrable skills. Include diverse faculty and staff on hiring committees/panels. Incorporate diversity of experience and knowledge into selection criteria.
Performance Bias	Performance and abilities are overestimated for individuals from high status groups, e.g. male or white candidates, and underestimated for those from low status groups. For example, a study found that a white sounding name was equivalent to about 8 more years of experience. ¹	Establish selection criteria before recruitment begins. Take time and notes when reviewing applications and when interviewing. Consider how unconscious biases might result in over or under estimating qualifications of candidates. Consider how biases might affect student or peer evaluations or references. Consider using techniques such as removing names from applications to help reduce the impact of biases.
Confirmation Bias	Tied to performance bias, it is the predisposition to “find” or not “find” information in order to confirm expectations and stereotypes	Take care to look at all of the information in an application or from an interview, and not just pick the material that supports an initial impression. It is also important to be careful about relying on confirmation about a candidate’s abilities from assessments by individuals from the same equity group as the applicant. Research has shown that, for example, both men and women have the same gender based assumptions and stereotypes about women. ²
Performance Attribution Bias	Success of those from dominant or high status groups is attributed to abilities, whereas for those from low status groups success is attributed to help from others or through special programs. Qualifications of those from low status groups, such as persons with disabilities or Aboriginal candidates, may be suspect and they may not be credited with ideas being their own.	Don’t make assumptions about people’s choices or how they got to where they are. Recognize that everyone gets ‘help’ to succeed in some form, e.g. wealth, health, family support and connections etc. It is important to recognize that the accomplishments of those who get help to provide them with equitable opportunities are still a result of their abilities. It is also important to understand that performance attribution bias can come from oneself as well as from others, and can affect a candidate’s confidence and the ability to speak about accomplishments. Those assessing candidates should take care to acknowledge achievements in ratings.

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Personal Filters and Competence/ Likeability Trade-off	Factors other than ability and accomplishments can sometimes influence the assessment of candidates for positions. Often this type of bias is constructed in terms of how well someone would “fit” and how much peers think they would like working with someone. For people from historically underrepresented groups this can overshadow assessments of competence.	Do not include vague considerations of “fit” in selection criteria as they open the door to bias being introduced. Incorporate diversity as a key criterion for selection that will enhance team performance. Develop an appreciation of differences, e.g. cultural competencies, and how diversity can contribute to innovation and team problem solving.
Maternal Bias and Debasement Filter	This can take a number of forms. It can involve doubting that someone would be seriously interested in the position because of their family status, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc. It can also result in judgements about professional commitment, e.g. mothers are not committed to, or are less invested in their careers. ³	Don’t make assumptions and if there are concerns, ask the candidate about specific job requirements, e.g. “This job requires travel. Are you able to travel regularly?” It is also important to reconsider traditional expectations of employees in a more diverse society, and to acknowledge that employers have a social responsibility to support employees personally, as well as professionally.

¹Bertrand, M. & Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. *The American Economic Review*, 94 (4):159-190.

² Moss-Racusin, C.A., Dovidio, J.F, Brescoll, V.L, Graham, M.J. & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 109(41): 16474-16479.

³Correll, S.J., Benard, S. & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112: 1297–1339.