UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE:

How hidden biases may be affecting your decisions and what you can do about it.

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What is Unconscious Bias?

An unconscious bias relates to the attitudes, beliefs and opinions about people <u>that operate outside our awareness</u>, yet they have a significant impact in determining our judgement and our behavior towards others. Biases are formed through culture, personality, and individual and work experiences. While a bias is not necessarily a problem, it can become one if it prevents a leader from behaving in an impartial way.[1]

Similar or related terms: implicit bias, hidden bias, cognitive bias, implicit stereotype, microinequities

What's the big deal?

Unconscious biases may affect business decisions including who we bring in for interviews, who we hire, who we promote, who we put on teams, who we do business with, how we treat clients/auditees, how we perceive and rank audit observations, etc.

SO?

Diversity and inclusion are adversely affected.

SO?

Studies show that diversity and inclusion are imperative for companies to be competitive because they lead to innovation, improved productivity and better business decisions.

NY Times (9/24/12): Bias Persists for Women of Science, a Study Finds

- **Yale researchers asked over 400 science professors in six major research universities to evaluate an application from a recent graduate seeking laboratory manager position**

- **Sent one page identical summary of "promising but not stellar" candidate, but half "John", half "Jennifer"**

- **127 professors responded**
  - **Competence Rating: John – 4, Jennifer – 3.3**
  - **Salary: John - $30,328, Jennifer - $26,508**
  - **More favorable response to hiring or mentoring John**

Bias had no relation to professors' age, sex, field or tenure

Unconscious Bias @ Work – Google Ventures
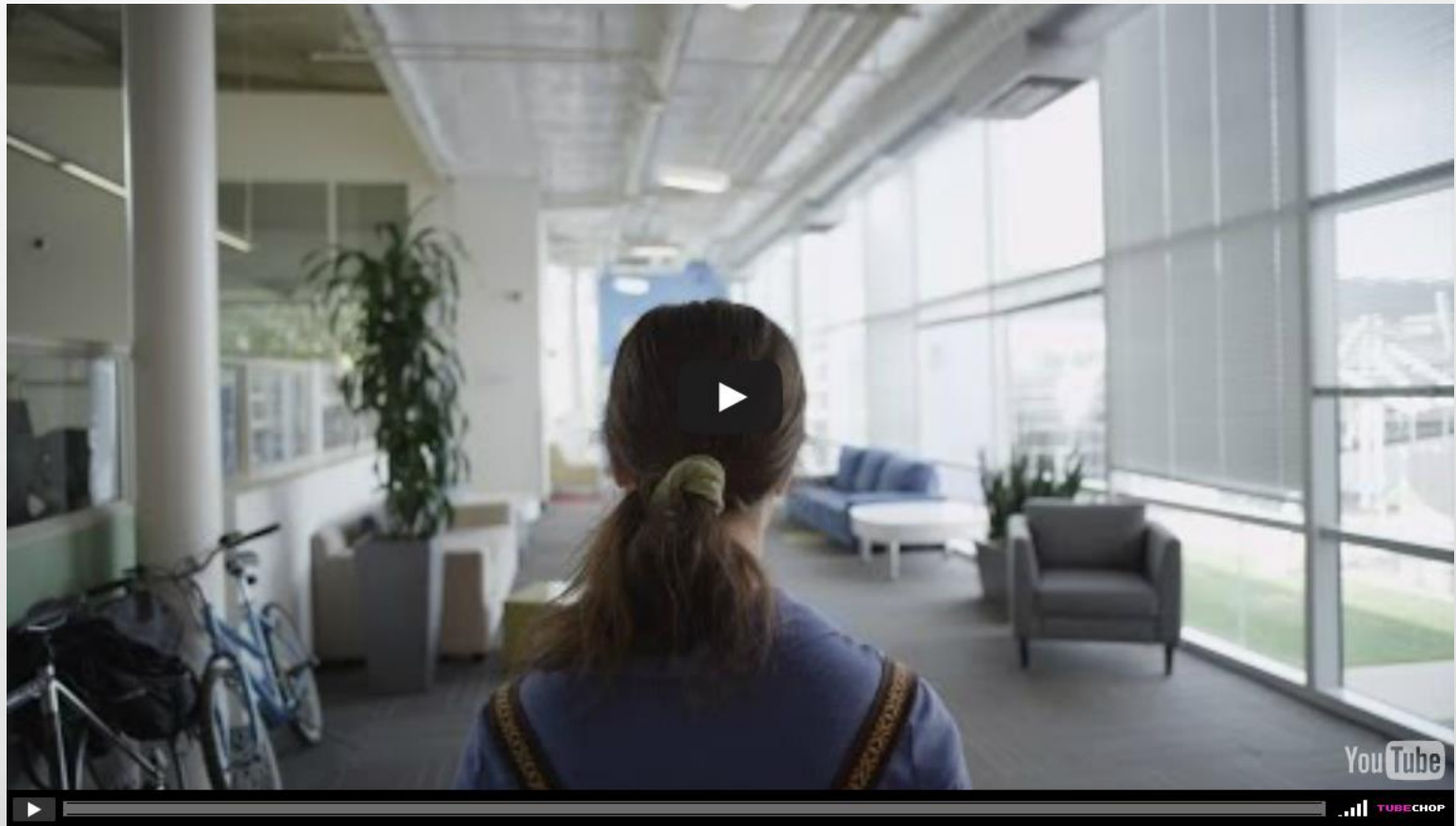
Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW5s_-Nl3JE
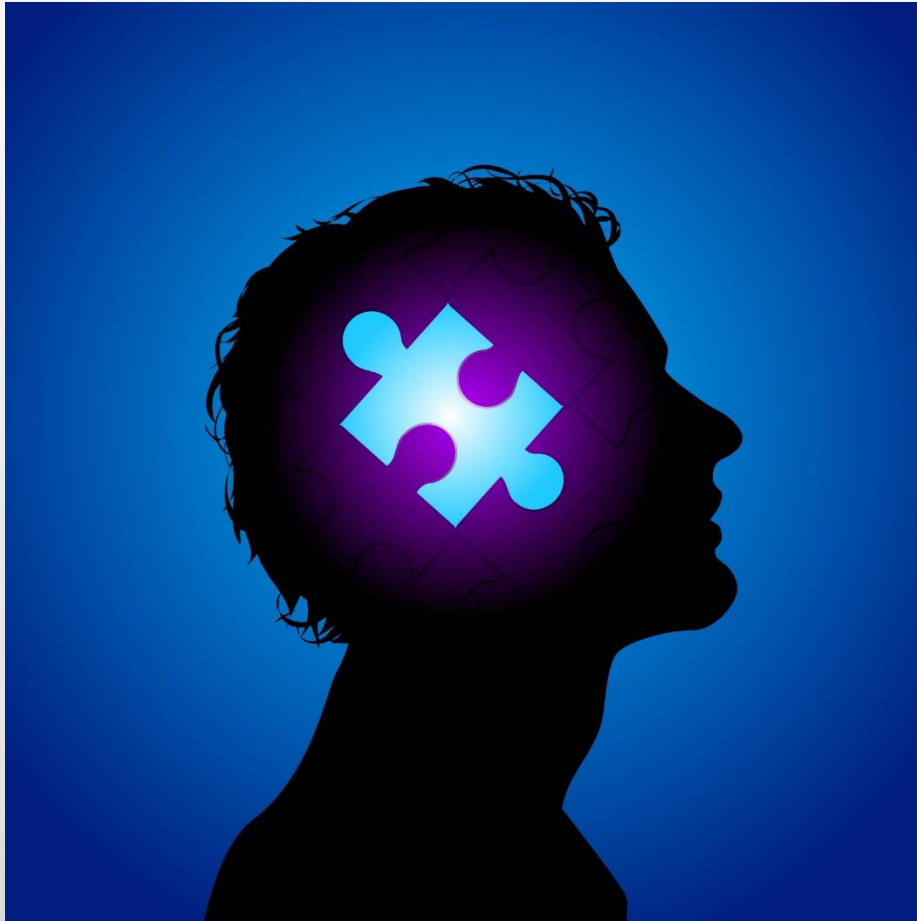
Why do we have unconscious biases?

We receive **11 million bits of information** every moment.

We can only consciously process **40 bits**.

We all have shortcuts that help us make sense of the world. But our shortcuts sometimes make us misinterpret things. That's unconscious bias.

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The impact is that we are no longer neutral. If we have seen two 'things' occur together, our unconscious mind will often assume we'll see them together again. As a result, we display micro-behaviours and unknowingly discriminate against one group and in favour of another.

Unconscious Bias

We rely on biases we don't consciously believe in!

The "advantage" of this system is that it saves us time and effort processing information about people, allowing us to spend more of our mental resources on other tasks. The clear disadvantage is that it can lead us to make assumptions about them and take action based on those biases. This results in a tendency to rely on stereotypes, <u>even if we don't consciously believe in them</u>.[2]

**The implicit associations we hold <u>do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs</u> or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.[3]

"We usually think of ourselves as sitting the driver's seat, with ultimate control over the decisions we made and the direction our life takes; but, alas, this perception has more to do with our desires—with how we want to view ourselves—than with reality." -Behavioral economist Dan Ariely

Common types of bias

- **Affinity bias:** the tendency to warm up to people like ourselves.

- **Halo effect:** the tendency to think everything about a person is good because you like that person.

- **Perception bias:** the tendency to form stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups that make it impossible to make an objective judgement about members of those groups.

- **Social Comparison Bias:** the tendency, when making hiring decisions, to favor potential candidates who don't compete with one's own particular strengths.

- **Bias Blind Spot:** the tendency to see oneself as less biased than other people, or to be able to identify more cognitive biases in others than in oneself.

Examples of Affinity Bias

Preference towards:

- Those from the same school, university, hometown/state or previous employer
- Those of the same sex, religion, nationality
- Those who look/dress like us
- Those who sound like us
- Those who appear physically fit and well groomed
- Those who have the same hobbies and interests as us

Bias against:

- Those who look or sound different to us
- Those we struggle to relate to as there are no mutual interests or hobbies
- Those with different values or attitudes
- Those who appear weak or unhealthy
- Those who have very different backgrounds than us [6]

Examples of Perception Bias

- Where people live (country, state, neighborhood)
- People who drive certain vehicles – Hummer? Prius? Maserati?
- Political affiliations
- Where people shop– "People of Walmart" versus Nordstrom
- Race: "Asians are smart." "African-Americans are good at sports."
- Gender: "Women are emotional and family-focused."
- Generational: "Millennials are lazy or coddled."
- Appearance: hair color, height, weight, people with tattoos, piercings or other body modifications.

Biases we might see in the audit function

Name	Description
Anchoring	The tendency to rely too heavily, or "anchor", on one trait or piece of information when making decisions (usually the first piece of information that we acquire on that subject).
Framing Effect	Drawing different conclusions from the same information, depending on how that information is presented.
Mere exposure effect	The tendency to express undue liking for things merely because of familiarity with them.
Outcome Bias	The tendency to judge a decision by its eventual outcome instead of based on the quality of the decision at the time it was made.
Confirmation Bias	The tendency for people to seek information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or assumptions.
Status Quo Bias	The tendency to like things to stay relatively the same.
Group Think	When people try too hard to fit into a particular group by mimicking others or holding back thoughts and opinions. This causes them to lose part of their identities and causes organizations to lose out on creativity and innovation (price, n.D). (4)

Gender Bias common patterns

Maternal wall bias – the strongest and most open form of gender bias. It stems from stereotypes that <u>link motherhood with lack of competence and commitment</u>. The leading study on maternal wall stereotypes found that, compared to women with identical resumes but no children, mothers were:

- 79% less likely to be hired
- 100% less likely to be promoted
- Offered $11,000 less in salary for the same position
- Held to higher performance and punctuality standards[9]

➤ "She would not be interested in a promotion…it might require her to work more hours or travel more, and she has small kids at home."

➤ "She's not in her office. She must be home with her baby – *again*."

➤ Asking a job candidate or employee whether she has kids, intends to have/have more kids in consideration for employment or promotion.

Gender Bias common patterns

Double binds – when women must choose between being liked and respected; he's assertive/she's aggressive[9]
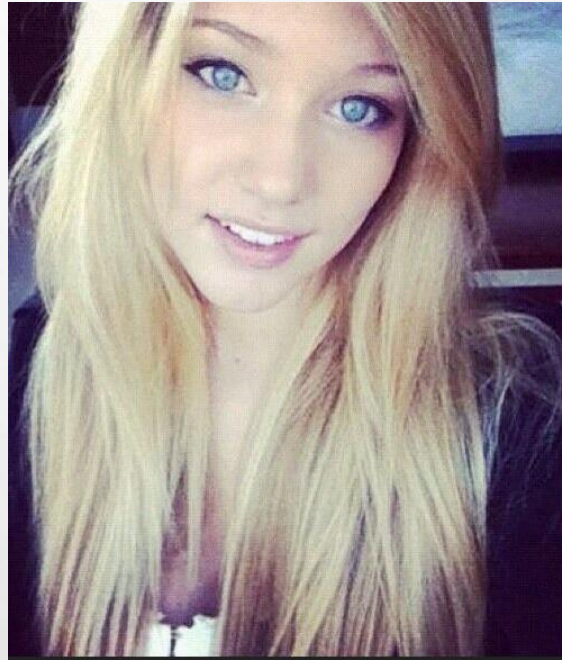
You are biased...and so am I.

The question is not "do we have bias?" But rather "which are ours?"

There is no shame in having biases, only shame in making no effort to improve.

Candidates' LinkedIn Profile Pictures

Imagine that these are LinkedIn profile pictures of candidates with strong and comparable resumes. As you look at these photos, does your impression of either of them change? Does one candidate "feel" stronger than the other? Why? Take note of your potential biases.

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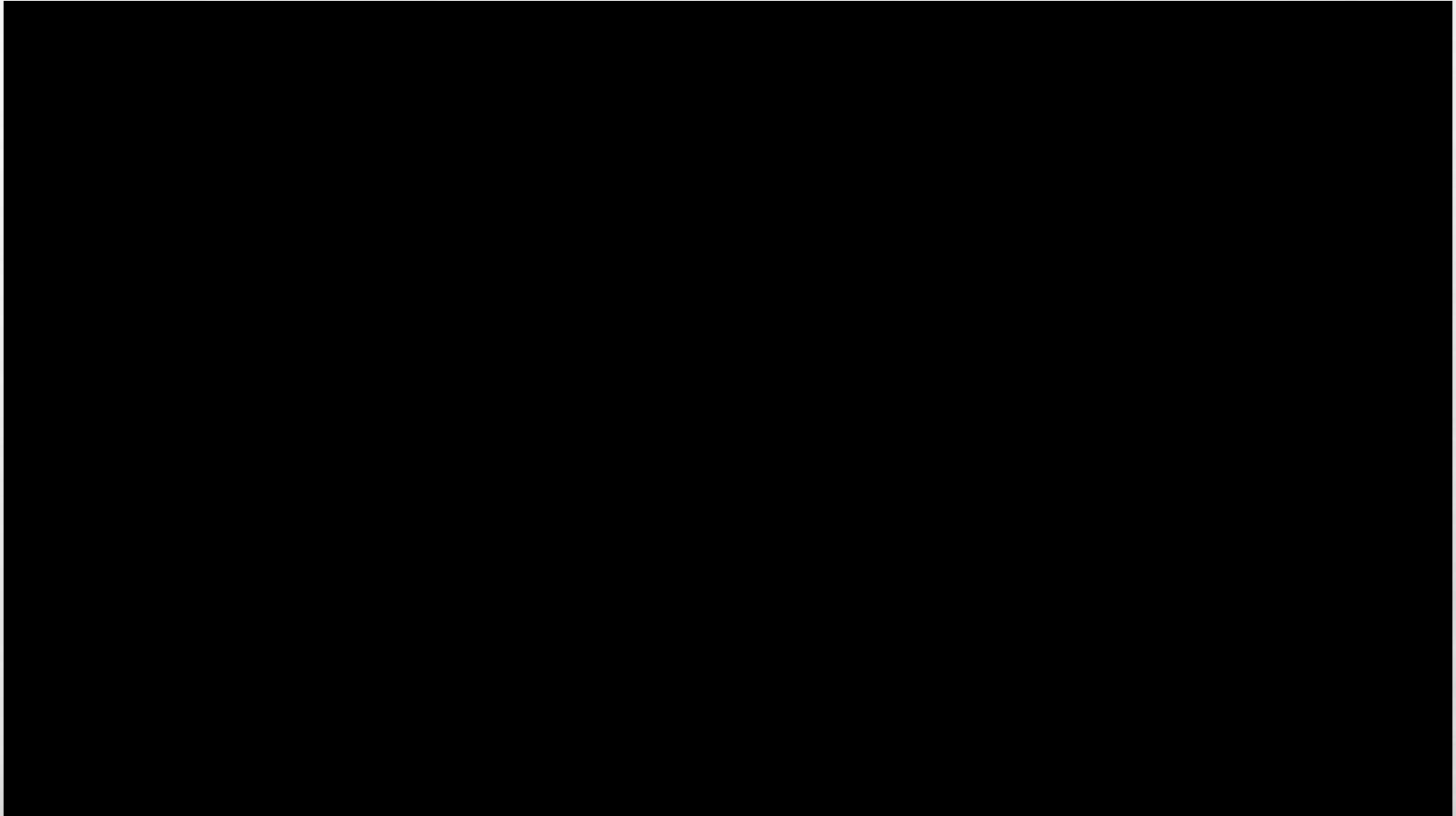
When you hear "Doctor"...

Explore your biases - Who do you imagine lives here?

Bias Blind Spot

So....what can we do about it?

As individuals:

1. **Identify your own biases**
   - **Implicit association tests**

   Https://implicit.Harvard.Edu/implicit/takeatest.Html

   Http://www.Lookdifferent.Org/what-can-i-do/implicit-association-test

2. **Acknowledge your biases when you notice they appear**

3. **Be intentional about putting biases aside when making decisions**

4. **Call others out on their biases**

So....what can we do about it?

Questions leaders should ask:

• Do I typically hire the same type of person, or personality type?

• When I say a candidate is not the right fit, what do I mean?

• What does my slate of candidates look like? Do I speak up if it is not sufficiently diverse?

• Which of my past hires were successful, and what can I learn from those choices that didn't work out as well?

• Who do I like to assign to work on project teams? Who do I tap for the lead role? Do I have the same go-to people all or most of the time?

• Who do I take to important client or cross-team meetings?

• Who do I encourage to lead or speak out at meetings? Am I creating opportunities for those less extroverted to demonstrate their capabilities equally to clients or other colleagues?

• How do I identify candidates for promotion and succession?

So....what can we do about it?

As an organization:

1. Offer awareness training – allows employees to recognize that everyone possesses biases and identify their own

2. Label the types of biases that are likely to occur – employees will become more aware of how their biases affect decision making, hiring, promotions, compensation & organizational culture

3. Create structures – helps to slow the brain down; allow for more deliberative actions

    Examples: performance evaluation process, standard interview questions, stripping resumes of identifying information

More Studies about Unconscious Bias

- Fictitious resumes with white-sounding names sent to help-wanted ads were more likely to receive callbacks for interviews compared to resumes with African-American sounding names. Resumes with white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks for interviews (bertrand & mullainathan, 2004).[11]

- A study by Queensland university found that blonde women's salaries were 7 percent higher than women who were brunettes or redheads.[4]

- The National Bureau of Economic Research found that for every 1 percent increase in a woman's body mass, there was a .6 percent decrease in family income.[4]

- 90% of CEOs are above average height!
  - Less than 15% of American men are over six foot tall, yet almost 60% of corporate CEOs are over six foot tall. Less than 4% of American men are over six foot, two inches tall, yet more than 36% of corporate CEOs are over six foot, two inches tall.[7] In fact, when corrected for age and gender, an inch of height is worth approximately $789 per year in salary! [8]

QUESTIONS?

Sources

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