Evidence-based Strategies to Reduce Unconscious Bias

Jennifer Sheridan, PhD
Eve Fine, PhD
May 14, 2013
Strategies That DO NOT Work

• Stereotype Suppression
  – Banish stereotypes from one’s mind
    (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
• Stereotype Suppression


- Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
- Macrae et al (1994, Experiment 2)

• **Stereotype Suppression**


- Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)


**Strategies That DO NOT Work**

- **Stereotype Suppression**
  
  
  - Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  
  - Macrae et al (1994, Experiment 2)
    

Copyright © 2013 by WISELI and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Do not use, copy, distribute, or post without written permission from WISELI (email: wiseli@engr.wisc.edu)
Strategies That DO NOT Work

• Stereotype Suppression
  – Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  – Rebound effects
Strategies That DO NOT Work

• Stereotype Suppression
  - Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  - Rebound effects

• Belief in personal objectivity
  - Leads to biased evaluations of women

© 2013 by WISELI and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Strategies That DO NOT Work

• Stereotype Suppression
  – Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  – Macrae et al. (1994, Experiment 2)
  – Rebound effects

• Belief in personal objectivity
  (Uhlmann & Cohen. Organ Behav Hum Decis Process 2007)
  – Leads to biased evaluations of women
Strategies That DO NOT Work

• Stereotype Suppression
  – Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  – Rebound effects

• Belief in personal objectivity
  – Leads to biased evaluations of women
1. Stereotype Replacement

✓ Recognize when you have stereotypic thoughts, and recognize stereotypic portrayals in society. For example,
  • Women faculty are less interested in leadership opportunities
  • Portrayal of females as poor at math or males as unable to do housework
✓ Label the characterization as stereotypical
  • e.g., Role incongruity, Prescriptive gender norms
✓ Identify precipitating factors
  • e.g., Priming with gender-congruent information
✓ Challenge the fairness of the portrayal and replace it with a non-stereotypic response. For example,
  • I know many successful women leaders
  • I know that training and experience rather than gender are the main determinants of leader competence
  • Research does not support a gender difference in math performance once we control for the number of math courses taken
2. Counter-Stereotype Imaging

✓ Help regulate your response by imagining a counter-stereotype woman in detail
  • *e.g.*, *Imagine an astronaut, engineer, CEO who is also a woman OR specific positive counter-stereotypical individuals you know*
3. Individuating (instead of generalizing)

✓ Avoid making a snap decision based on a stereotype
  • e.g., Make gender less salient than being a scientist, physician, or program developer

✓ Obtain more information on specific qualifications, past experiences, etc. before making a decision
  • e.g., Heilman study reviewed in Module 2.

✓ Practice making situational attributions rather than dispositional attributions
  • e.g., If a woman cries, consider a situational explanation (maybe a loved one died) rather than a dispositional explanation (e.g., she’s emotional)
4. Perspective-Taking

✓ Adopt the perspective (in the first person) of a member of the stigmatized group

• For example, imagine what it would be like to…
  - Have your abilities called into question
  - Be viewed as less committed to your career than colleagues with similar training and effort
  - Not be offered opportunities because of assumptions about family responsibilities
5. Increasing Opportunities for Contact

✓ Seek out opportunities for greater interaction with counter-stereotypic women

  • *e.g.*, *Meet with women in high authority positions to discuss research endeavors, ideas, and visions*
  
  • *e.g.*, *When compiling membership for key committees or speaker lists, ensure that women (from diverse groups) are represented*
Breaking the Prejudice Habit

• Not necessarily easy

• With effort (awareness, motivation, and a sustained commitment), prejudice is a habit that can be broken
  – Can expect that you may slip up
  – Stay committed

• Strategies we provided are powerful tools to combat implicit biases
  – Implicit responses can be brought into line with explicit beliefs
Reducing Bias in Evaluations

What Not to Do:

• Suppress bias and assumptions from one’s mind (or try to)

• Rely solely on a presumably “objective” ranking or rating system to reduce bias

Reducing Bias in Evaluations

Know what factors increase vulnerability to unconscious bias

- Believing oneself to be objective and unbiased
- Believing oneself to be colorblind or gender blind
- Having insufficient or ambiguous information
- Being busy and under time pressure
- Multi-tasking
- Being stressed, tired, and/or hungry
Reducing Bias in Evaluations

What to do:

• Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions

• Diversify the evaluation committee
  - Social tuning/increased motivation to respond w/o bias
  - Counterstereotype imaging

• Hold each member of the evaluation committee responsible for conducting equitable evaluations

• Critical Mass – increase proportion of women and minorities in the pool

Copyright © 2013 by WISELI and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Reducing Bias in Evaluations

What to do (cont.):

• Develop and prioritize criteria prior to evaluating applicants.

• Spend sufficient time and attention on evaluating each application

• Focus on each applicant as an individual and evaluate their entire
  application package – information minimizes bias

• Use inclusion rather than exclusion decision-making processes

• Stop periodically to evaluate your criteria and their application

• Accountability - Be able to defend every decision
  ▪ **Competence**: Biernat and Fuegen,, *Journal of Social Issues*, 2001

Copyright © 2013 by WISELI and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Do not use, copy, distribute, or post without written permission from WISELI (email: wiseli@engr.wisc.edu)
Institutional Solutions

• Leadership: Awareness, commitment, talking about it (*Lean In*)

• New educational practices around unconscious bias (*Why So Slow?*)
  – Hiring, climate, tenure/promotion, awards, more!
  – Examples at UW-Madison:
    
    Searching for Excellence & Diversity workshops for hiring committees; Bias Literacy workshops
Institutional Solutions

• Family-friendly policies and practices (*More Women in Science*)
  – Change of culture around use of these policies required!
  – Examples at UW-Madison:
    Tenure clock extensions, childcare, lactation rooms, dual career hiring, Vilas Life-Cycle Awards

• Attention to workplace “climate” (*More Women in Science*)
  – Examples at UW-Madison:
    Faculty Worklife Study, Department Climate Workshops, Chair chats

• Attention to pipeline (*More Women in Science*)