Understanding and Minimizing Unconscious Bias to Improve Department Climate

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About WISELI

- WISELI – Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute
  - Research Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
  - Mission: Advancing and promoting women in academic Science, Technology, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) – focus on faculty
  - Broader goals – fostering a diverse faculty body
  - Funding: NSF ADVANCE, NIH, Campus support

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WISELI Programs

- Workshops for Search Committees
  Searching for Excellence & Diversity

- Department Climate Workshops
  Enhancing Department Climate: A Chair’s Role

- Bias Literacy Workshops
  Breaking the Bias Habit

- Research & Evaluation
  Faculty Worklife Surveys and more

- Vilas Life Cycle Professorships

- Celebrating Women in Science & Engineering Grant Program
Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

- Diverse working groups are more productive, creative and innovative than homogeneous groups

Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

- Diverse groups engage in a higher level of critical analysis than do homogenous groups


Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

- Diverse scholars and professionals can invigorate and expand disciplines and fields
  - New approaches to teaching
  - New research questions
  - New perspectives and interpretations
  - New concerns
Introduction: Commitment vs. Results

- Despite broad commitment to the goal of diversity, why are results less than satisfactory?
  - Department and campus climate
  - Influence of unconscious bias and assumptions
What is Climate?

- Behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect.

- The atmosphere or ambience of an organization as perceived by its members. An organization's climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions.
Why focus on climate?

- Individuals experience climate in their immediate workplace – the department
- Perceptions about department climate are key determinants for faculty satisfaction and retention
- Improving department climate is critical for the retention and advancement of women faculty and faculty of color
- Numerous campus surveys show that women and faculty of color experience a more negative climate than do male and majority faculty
The climate in my department is positive/very positive

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012.
How often are you treated with respect by ... ... colleagues, students, staff, department chair

% responding often/very often

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues (n=774;398)</td>
<td>91.99%</td>
<td>*83.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (n=774;397)</td>
<td>95.87%</td>
<td>95.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff (n=774;398)</td>
<td>95.22%</td>
<td>*89.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. Chair (n=713;373)</td>
<td>88.22%</td>
<td>*81.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* difference significant at p<0.05

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012
How often are you treated with respect by …
… colleagues, students, staff, department chair

% responding often/very often

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>FOC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues (n=1027; 145)</td>
<td>89.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (n=1026; 145)</td>
<td>88.97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff (n=1026; 146)</td>
<td>96.49%</td>
<td>89.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. Chair (n=948; 138)</td>
<td>93.37%</td>
<td>92.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* difference significant at p<0.05

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012
Perceptions of legitimacy as a scholar

Compared to your colleagues, how much harder to you have to work to be perceived as a legitimate scholar? % responding: not at all, a little, or somewhat

*difference significant at p<0.05

- Men (n=704)
- Women (n=369)
- ALL (n=996)
- Chair (n=78)
- Majority (n=937)
- FOC (n=136)

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012.
The overall climate for women in my department is positive/very positive

* difference significant at p<0.05

- Men (n=678)
- Women (n=391)
- ALL (n=985)
- Chair (n=84)
- Majority (n=936)
- FOC (n=133)

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012.
Climate for Faculty of Color in my department is positive/very positive.

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012.
Very or Somewhat Likely to Leave UW-Madison in Next 3 Years

*difference significant at p<0.05

Results from the 2010 Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison: Tenure and tenure-track faculty. © 2012.
Unconscious Bias & Climate

1. What is “unconscious bias”?
2. How might unconscious biases influence department/campus climate?
3. What can we do to minimize bias and improve climate?
What is unconscious bias?

- A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that most people – men and women – hold unconscious biases about groups of people.
- Depending on the discipline unconscious biases can also be referred to as:
  - Schemas
  - Stereotypes
  - Mental models
  - Cognitive shortcuts
  - Statistical discrimination
  - Implicit associations
  - Spontaneous trait inference

The tendency of our minds to judge **individuals** by the characteristics (real or imagined) of the **groups** to which they belong.
What is unconscious bias?

- Most of us routinely rely on unconscious assumptions even though we intend to be fair and believe that we are fair.

- Human brain works by categorizing people, objects and events around us -- this allows us to quickly and efficiently organize and retrieve information.
What is unconscious bias?

Shift in Conceptual Framework

Old Framework:
Bias/Prejudice is bad so if I think or act with bias, I am a bad person.

New Framework:
Prejudiced thoughts and actions are habits that we all have and breaking these habits requires more than good intentions.
How is the research on bias and prejudice conducted?

- **Blind, randomized trials**
  - Give each group of evaluators pictures, words, or applications with a racial or gender indicator
  - Compare evaluations

- **Real life studies**
  - Evaluate actual resumés/curriculum vitae, job performance, letters of recommendations, call backs for interviews, etc.
Examples of Blind Randomized Trials


Examples of Blind Randomized Trials

- When asked to rate the quality of verbal skills indicated by a short text, evaluators rated the skills lower if they were told an African American wrote the text than if they were told a white person wrote it, and rated verbal skills higher when told that a woman wrote it than when told a man wrote it.

Selected forms of bias

- **Expectancy Bias**
  Expecting people to behave in accordance with stereotypes or assumptions about the social category to which they belong.

- **In-group preferences**
  Being more comfortable interacting with people who share your group identity/identities.

- **Role Congruity/Incongruity**
  The fit (or lack of fit) between group stereotypes and occupations or occupational roles.

- **Presumed competence/incompetence**
  Making judgments about the competence or incompetence of individuals on the basis of stereotypes about the group to which they belong.
Selected forms of bias
Presumed competence/incompetence

Source: xkcd.com: http://xkcd.com/385/
Influence of Unconscious Bias on Evaluation

Evaluation of Resumés


- Resumes sent to a variety of employers advertising openings in local newspapers in Chicago and Boston
- Randomly assigned “white-sounding” or “African American-sounding” names to resumes
- Applicants with “white-sounding” names were more 50% more likely to be called back to interview for positions.
- For “white-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were 27% more likely to be called back. For “African American-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were only 8%* more likely to be called back. (*Not statistically significant.*)
Influence of Unconscious Bias on Evaluation – in Academia

Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae


- Curriculum vitae of an actual applicant evaluated by 238 academic psychologists (118 male, 120 female)
  - One cv – at time of job application (jr-level)
  - One cv – at time of early tenure (sr-level)

- Randomly assigned a male or female name to each cv
Examples of Real Life Studies

Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae (Cont.)

- For entry-level cv: Academic psychologists were more likely to hire male applicants and gave men higher ratings for
  - Teaching
  - Research
  - Service Experience

- For tenure-level cv: Academic psychologists were equally likely to tenure men and women candidates, but were four-times more likely to include cautionary comments on cv’s with a female name.
Other Examples

- **Bias in Letters of Recommendation**

- **Bias in publication of journal articles**

- **Bias in grant review**
Other Examples

- **Bias & Leadership**

- **Motherhood Bias**

- **Sexual Orientation**
Unconscious Bias in the Search Process

Case Study Discussion
Selected forms of bias

- **Stereotype Threat**
  Members of negatively stereotyped groups may underperform when reminded of their group membership
  
  Claude Steele and colleagues – many articles

- **Ambient Belonging**
  Subtle cues that cause individuals to feel that they belong or do not belong in a particular environment.
Classroom Environments

Stereotypical room

Cheryan, Plaut, Davies & Steele, Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 2009

Images used with permission of Dr. Sapna Cheryan
Classroom Environments

Non-stereotypical room

Nature poster

Neutral books

Water bottles

Cheryan, Plaut, Davies & Steele, *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 2009*

Images used with permission of Dr. Sapna Cheryan
Selected forms of bias

Microaggressions

“... brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.”

Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

What Not to Do:

- Suppress bias and assumptions from one’s mind (or try to)
  - Studies demonstrating Stereotype Rebound effect
  - Relying solely on a presumably “objective” ranking or rating system to reduce bias
    - Wenneräs and Wold, “Nepotism and Sexism in Peer Review” *Nature*
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

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


**Stereotype Replacement**
- Reflect on your own judgments and interactions and assess whether bias/assumptions played a role
- Recognize stereotypical portrayals in society or your environment
- Challenge the fairness of the judgment or portrayal and replace it with a non-stereotypical response
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

- **Counter-Stereotype Imaging**
  - Regulate your responses/judgments by imagining counter-stereotype examples
  - Recognize or increase the visibility of counter-stereotype examples in your domain.
    - Eg: Photographs on walls in classrooms and hallways – do they reflect the diversity; Examples used in textbooks and classrooms – do they reflect the diverse interests of students.
    - Departmental seminars/conferences – are invited speakers from diverse groups within the field.
    - Leadership positions within the department
    - Awards & recognition
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

- Individuating (instead of generalizing)
  - Avoid making a snap decision based on a stereotype
    - *e.g.*, Make gender, race, ethnicity less salient than being a scientist, physician, or engineer
  - Obtain more information on specific qualifications, record of performance, personality, and other attributes of an individual before making assumptions/judgments.
  - Practice making situational attributions rather than dispositional attributions
    - (He’s late because the bus broke down vs. he’s late because he’s disorganized/lazy/unmotivated.)
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

- Perspective Taking
  - Adopt the perspective (in the first-person) of a member of a stigmatized group

  For example, imagine what it would be like to...
  - Have your abilities repeatedly called into question
  - Not be offered opportunities because of assumptions about what fields you will like
  - Not receive the same rewards and recognitions as similarly deserving peers
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

- Increase opportunities for contact with members of underrepresented groups
  - Greet and engage professionally with members of underrepresented groups presenting at or attending academic conferences
  - Pursue opportunities for collaboration
  - Engage in outreach work with minority communities
  - Mentor and advocate for students and colleagues from underrepresented groups.
Breaking the Bias 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
Creating a Welcoming & Inclusive Department Climate

- Treat all individuals w/ respect consideration & politeness
  - Establish a policy
  - Promote policy by personal example
- Hold department members accountable for violations
- Actively promote an inclusive communities
- Recognize and value the work of department members
- Communicate openly, honestly, and effectively
Creating a Welcoming & Inclusive Department Climate

- Promote professional development
- Encourage Balance between work and family or personal responsibilities
- Recognize and respect perspectives and experiences of others
- Respond to illegal behaviors and complaints about demeaning, sexualizing, or condescending language and behavior