



W I S E L I

*Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute
University of Wisconsin-Madison*

Unconscious Biases and Assumptions:

The Origins of Discrimination?



Outline

- Examples of subtle discrimination
- What is “unconscious bias” and do I have it?
- What to do?



Applications/CVs/Résumés

- Resumes of differing quality are randomly assigned white-sounding or African American-sounding names
 - Mailed in response to actual job ads in Chicago, Boston. Callbacks are measured.
 - White names are 50% more likely to be called back.
 - White names with high quality resume are 27% more likely to be called back (compared to whites with low quality), but Black names with high quality resume are only 8% more likely to be called back. (Less return to labor market experience for blacks.)
 - Neighborhood, job/employer characteristics not significant

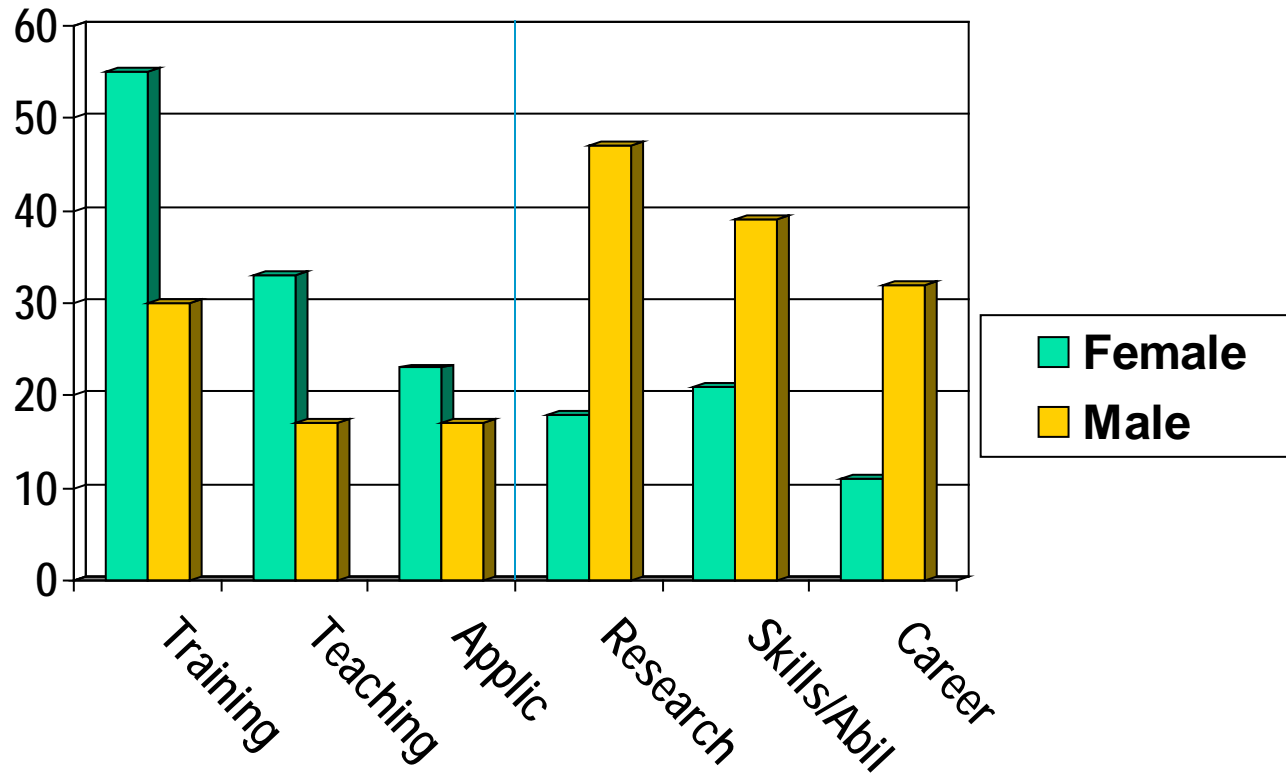


Letters of Reference

- 312 letters of recommendation for medical faculty hired at a large U.S. medical school
- Women's letters compared to men's more often:
 - Were *shorter*
 - Offered *minimal assurance*
 - Used *gender terms*
 - Contained *doubt raisers*
 - Used *stereotypic adjectives*
 - Used *grindstone adjectives*
 - Used fewer *standout adjectives*
 - Contained less *scientific terminology*



Top 3 semantic realms following the possessive for men and for women

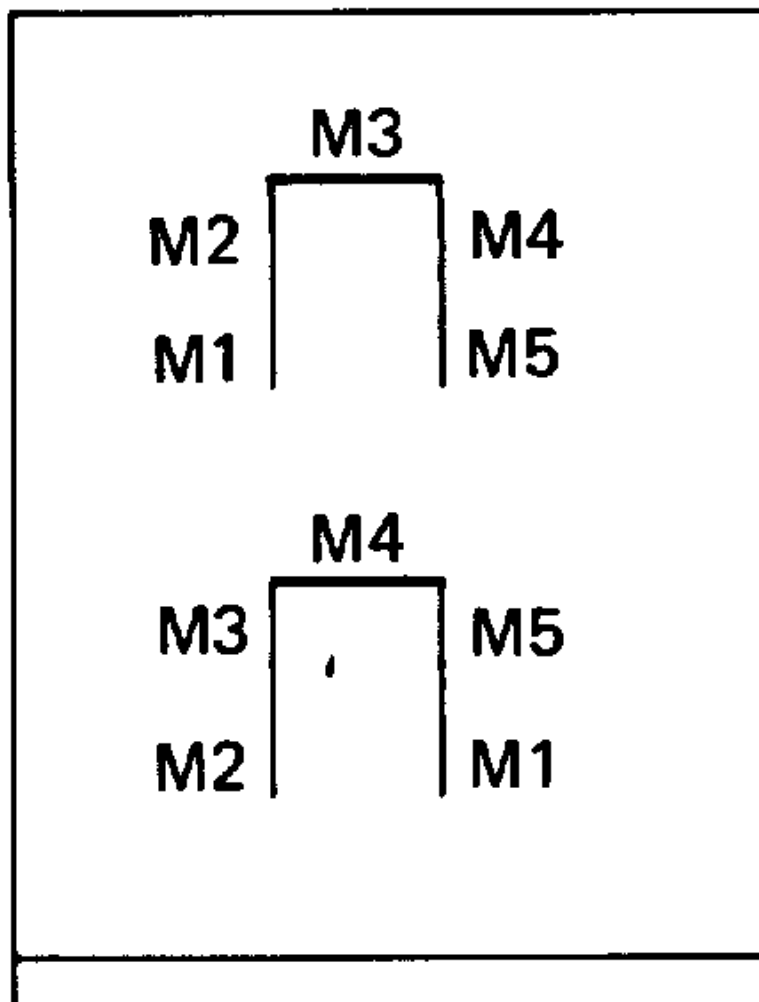




Evaluation of Leadership/Competence

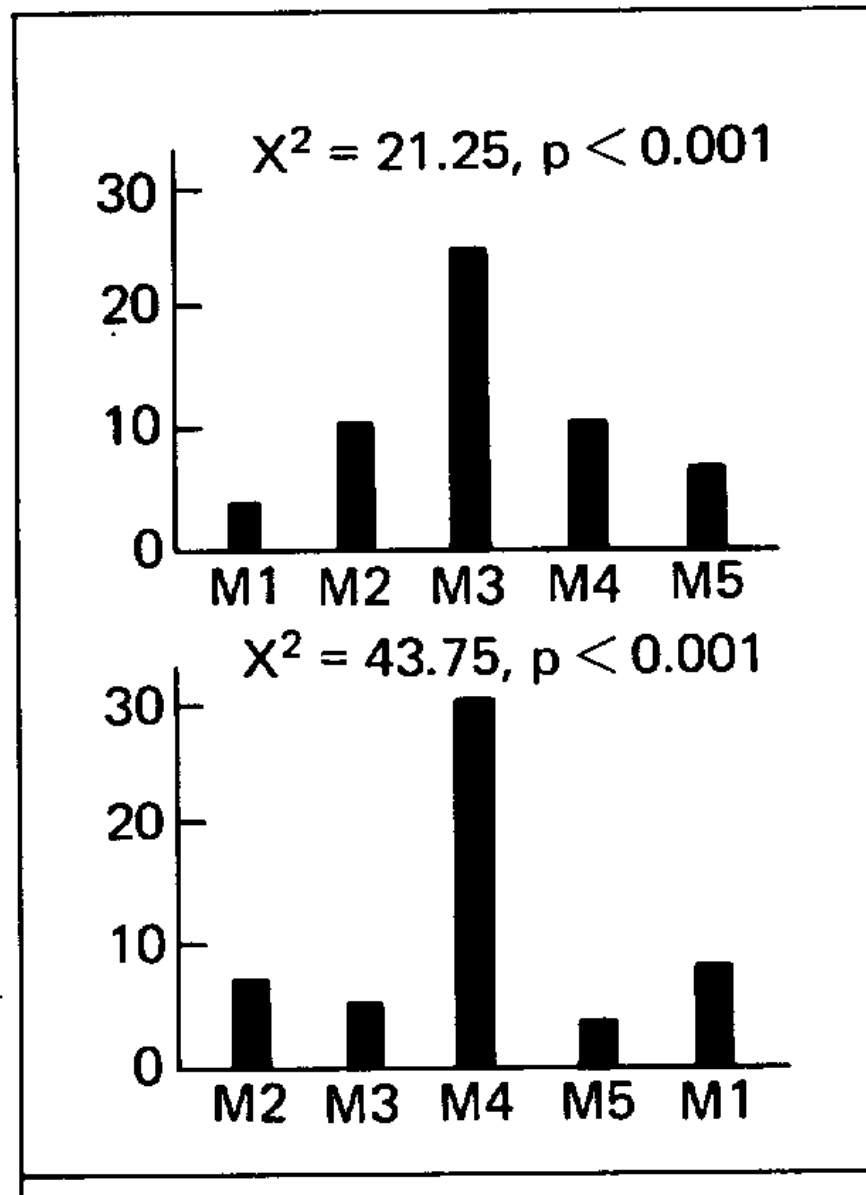
- Students seated around the table—when is the head of the table identified as the “leader?”

MALE

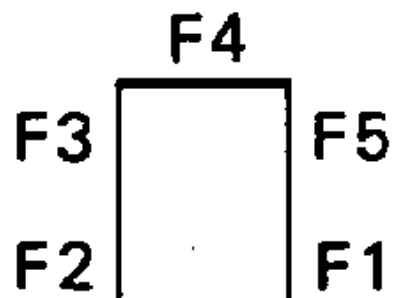
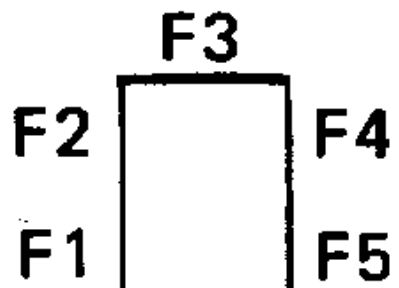


MALE

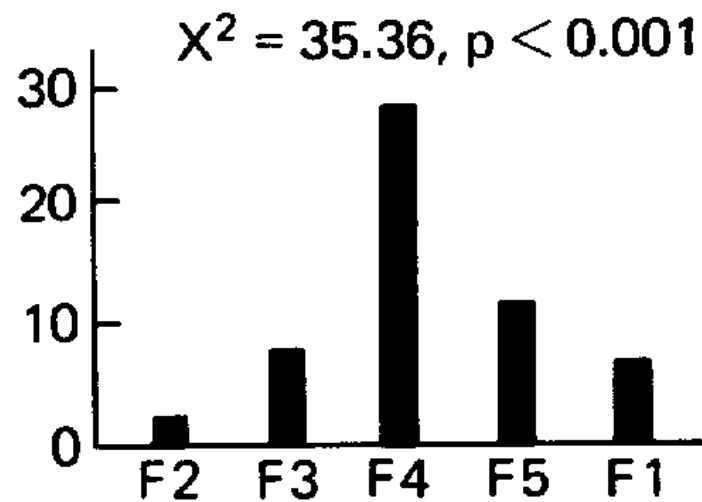
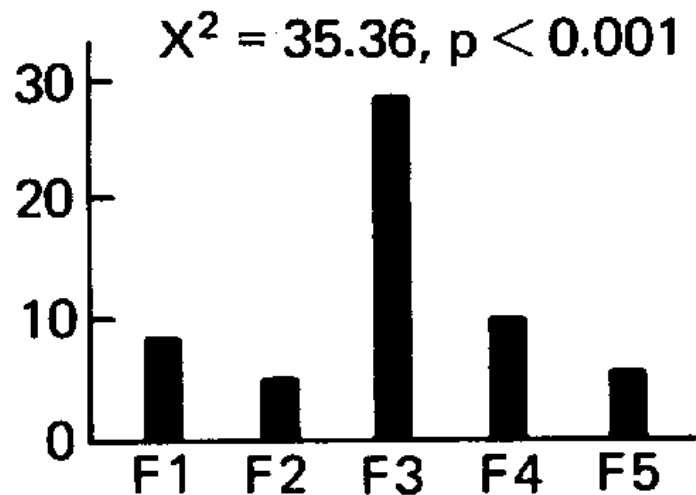
SAME-SEX STIMULUS GROUPS

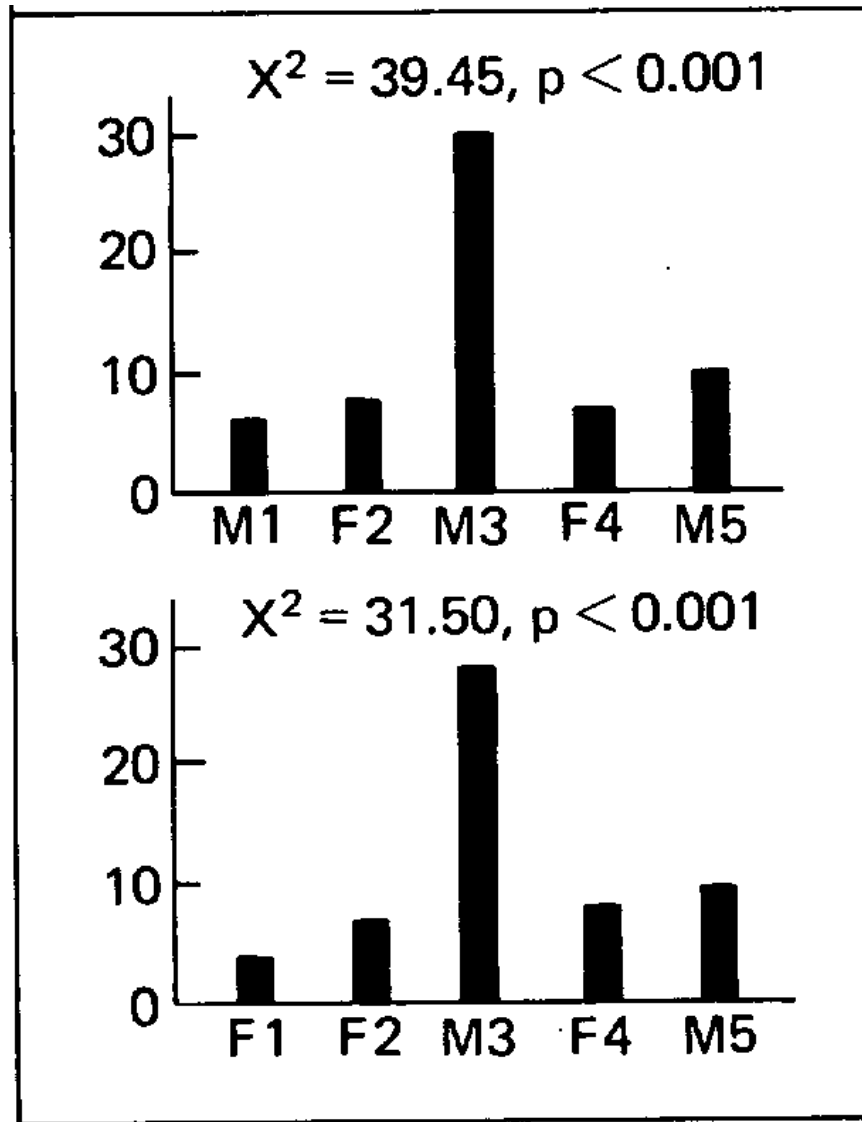
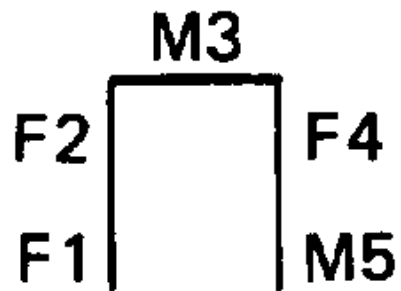
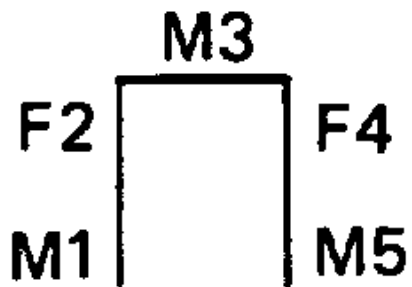


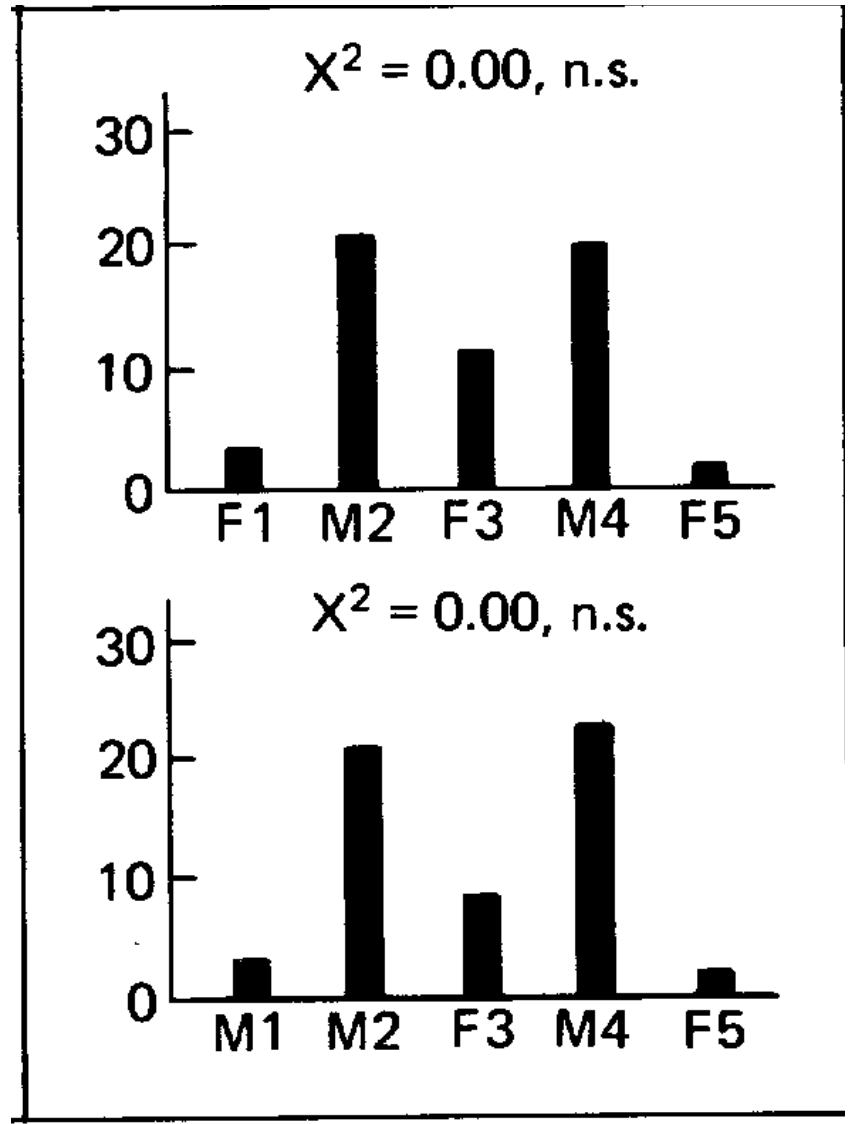
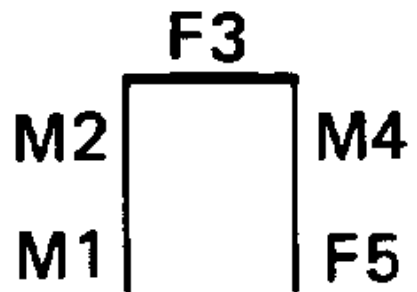
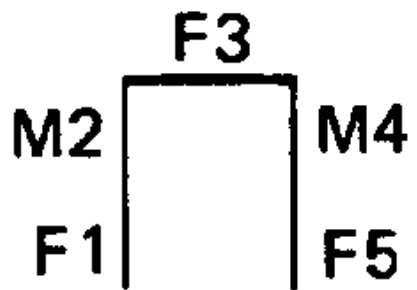
FEMALE



FEMALE









Evaluation of Leadership/Competence

- Finding not affected by conscious beliefs
- For female leaders, “warmth” negatively correlated with leadership



Evaluation of Leadership/Competence

- Evaluate fictional Assistant Vice Presidents
 - Male-assumed job—company makes engine products and other AVPs are men
 - Rated under two conditions: performance clear and performance ambiguous
 - Characteristics rated:
 - Competence, personality, likeability, interpersonal hostility



Evaluation of Leadership/Competence

- Competence
 - Performance clear—no gender difference
 - Performance ambiguous—women less competent
- Likeability
 - Performance clear—women less likeable
 - Performance ambiguous—no gender difference

Women were “unlikable” for being competent at their jobs!



What is causing these phenomena?

- Discrimination? Or...
- Unconscious Bias?



Mind-blindness

- Count the basketball passes



What is “unconscious bias”

- Unconscious bias and assumptions
- Schemas
- Stereotyping
- Cognitive shortcuts
- Statistical discrimination
- Implicit associations

The tendency of our minds to judge *individuals* based on characteristics (real or imagined) of *groups*



Unconscious bias

- When shown photographs of people who are the same height, evaluators overestimated the heights of male subjects and underestimated the heights of female subjects.
- When shown photographs of men of similar athletic ability, evaluators rated the athletic ability of African American men higher than that of white men.



Implicit Association Test

- Age bias test

You have completed the Young - Old IAT.

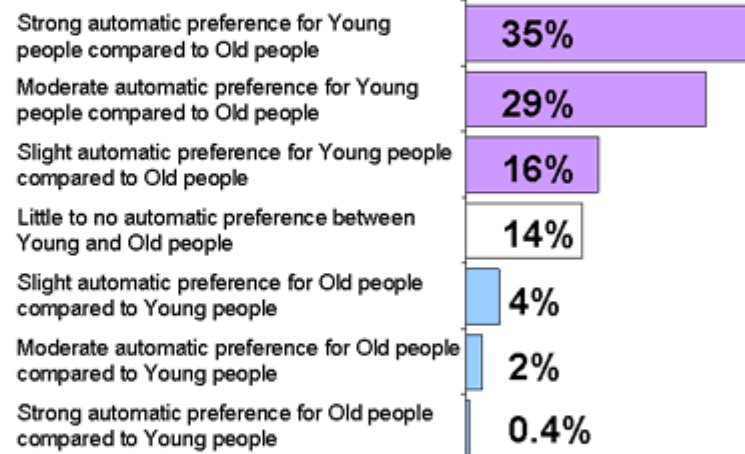
Your Result

Your data suggest a slight automatic preference for Young compared to Old.

Thank you for your participation. Just below is a breakdown of the scores generated by others. Most respondents, even the elderly, find it easier to associate *Old people* with *Bad* and *Young people* with *Good* compared to the reverse.

Many of the questions that you answered on the previous page have been addressed in research over the last 10 years. For example, the order that you performed the response pairing is influential, but procedural corrections largely eliminate that influence (see [FAQ #1](#)). Each visitor to the site completes the task in a randomized order. If you would like to learn more about the IAT, please visit the [FAQs and background information](#) section.

Percent of web respondents with each score



[Click for detailed summary](#)

You are welcome to try [additional demonstration tasks](#), and we encourage you to register (easy) for the [research site](#) where you will gain access to studies about more than 100 topics about social groups, personality, pop culture, and more.

[FAQs](#) || [Research site](#) || [Demo site](#) || [Project Implicit Home](#)



Gender Assumptions and Leadership

Prescriptive Gender Norms

■ Men

- Strong
- Decisive
- Assertive
- Tough
- Authoritative
- Independent



■ Women

- Nurturing
- Communal
- Nice
- Supportive
- Helpful
- Sympathetic



Gender Assumptions and Leadership

Prescriptive Gender Norms

Social

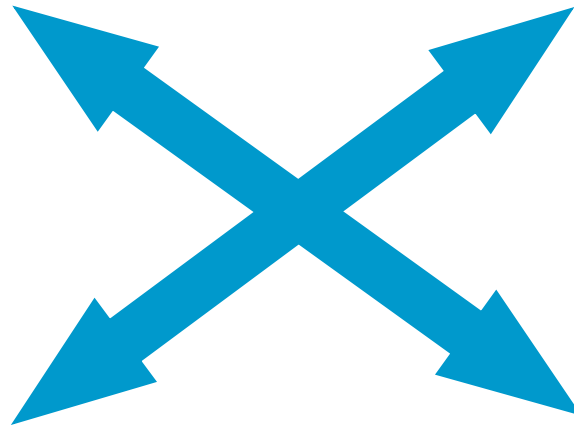
Penalties

■ Men

- Strong
- Decisive
- Assertive
- Tough
- Authoritative
- Independent

■ Women

- Nurturing
- Communal
- Nice
- Supportive
- Helpful
- Sympathetic





What to do?

- Think of unconscious bias as a “bad habit”
 - Explicit attitude change not enough
 - Must be aware, motivated, learn new strategies, and practice
- Beware of strategies that *do not work!*
 - Cannot banish stereotypes from one’s mind—rebound effects!



Overcoming unconscious bias—best practices

- Learn about research on biases and assumptions—consciously strive to minimize influence of unconscious tendencies on your evaluations Kruglanski and Freund 1983
- Spend sufficient time evaluating people Martell 1991
- Reach out to people from under-represented groups individually Wenneras & Wold 1997



Overcoming unconscious bias—best practices

- Do not depend too heavily on any one element of a portfolio Trix and Psenka 2003
- Switch the gender/race “thought experiment” Valian 1998
- Counter-stereotype imaging Blair, Ma & Lenton 2001
- Perspective-taking Galinsky & Sondak 2002



Take an IAT!

- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
 - Select “Demonstration” tests to try them out
 - Black/white, gender/career, fat/thin, young/old, and more!



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