



PARTNERS IN  
EQUITY &  
INCLUSION



# Unconscious (Implicit) Bias

What is it? What can I do?

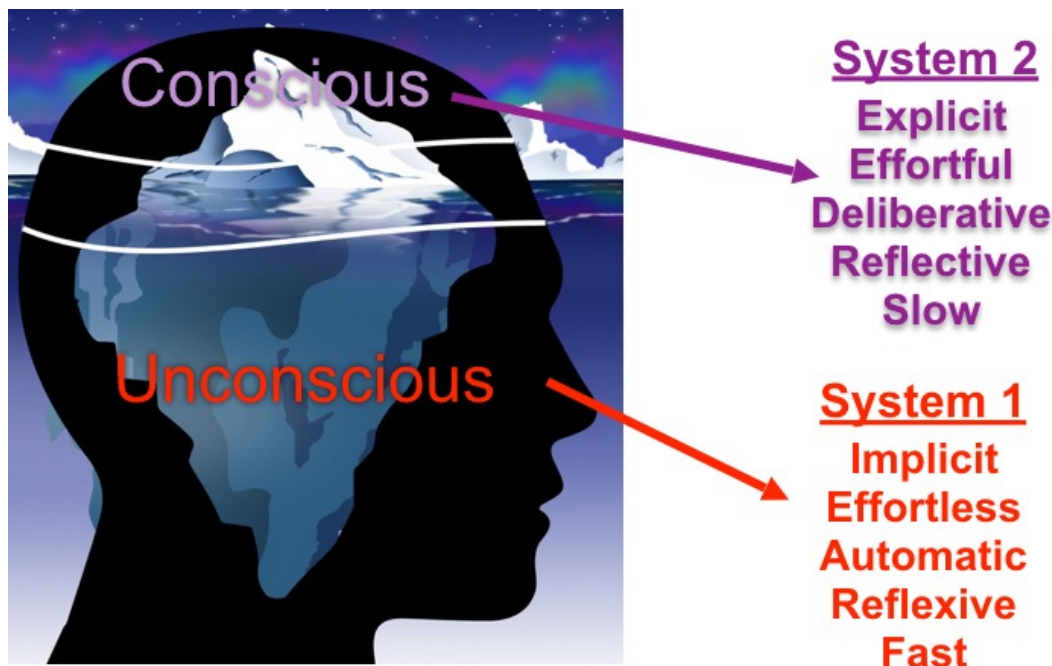


# What do you mean when you say that *everyone* has unconscious biases?

- ➔ We can be truly consciously unbiased and **STILL** have unconscious **negative beliefs and feelings** towards people who are different from us.
- ➔ We can be deeply committed to equality and social justice and still make choices and judge others in ways that affected by unconscious biases.

## How is that **POSSIBLE?!**

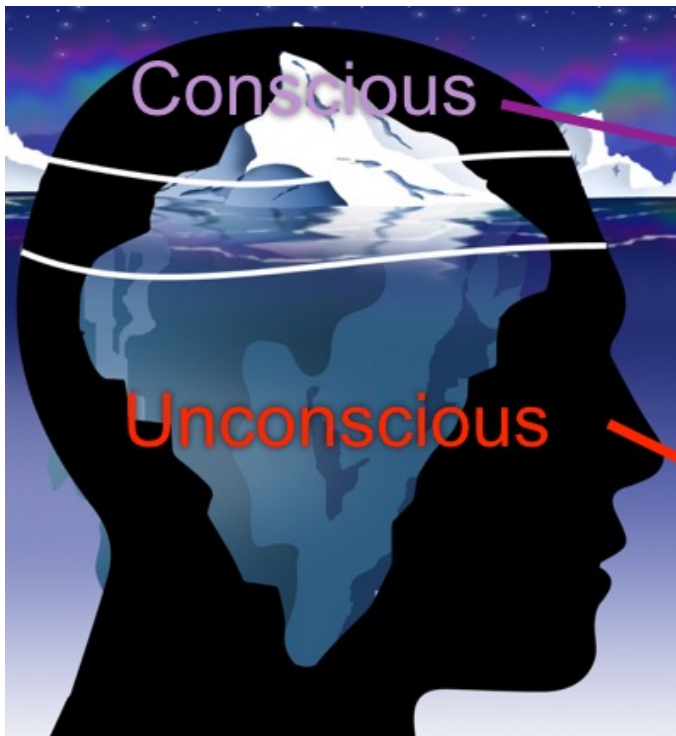
The vast majority of scientists in all the fields that study the mind, brain, cognition, or decision-making agree that we have at least **two systems** operating at the same time.



*Involve different cortical mechanisms w/associated neurophysiologic and neuroanatomical substrates.*

**Our brains process up to millions bits of information at any one time.**

**Because our conscious mental system (System 2) can only handle around 40 bits of information at one time, our unconscious mental system (System 1) handles most of it.**



*Unconscious mental processes serve our need for cognitive efficiency - so they take a lot of shortcuts.*

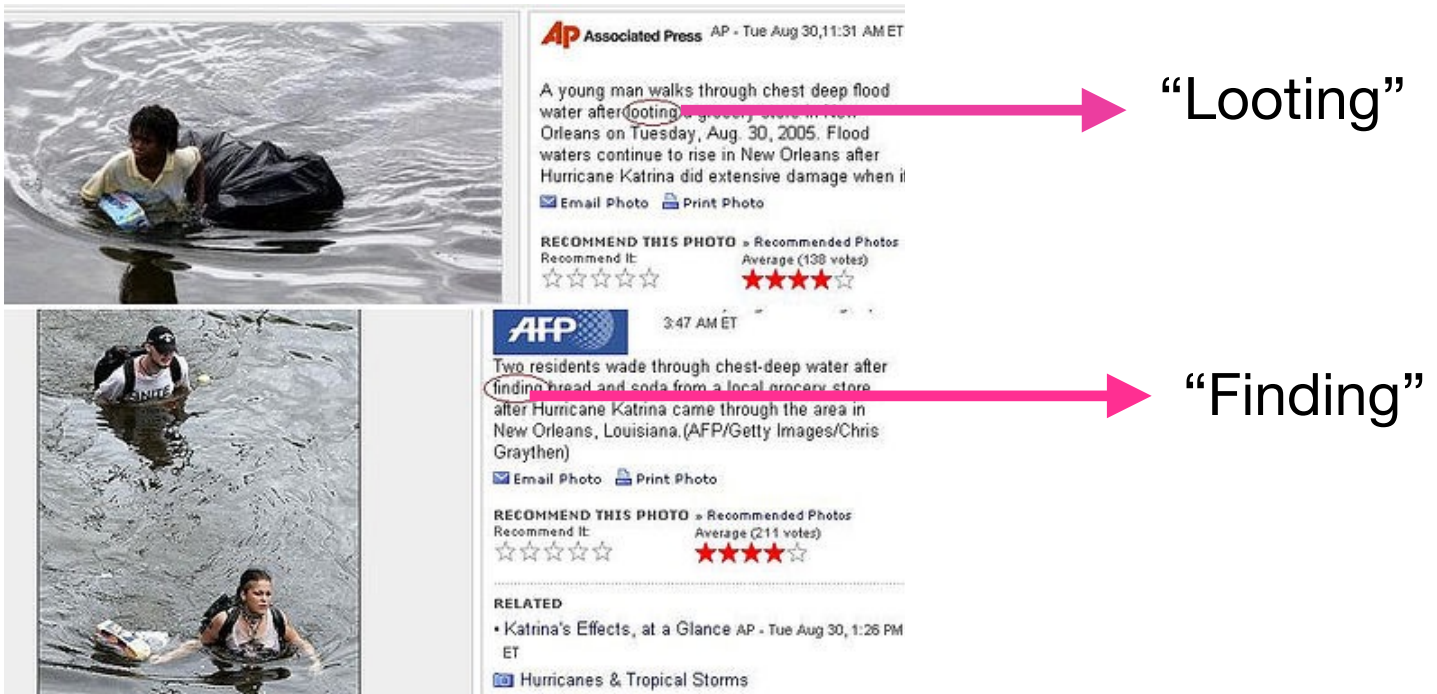
**Most of are only aware of what is going in the conscious system (2) - the system involved in explicit conscious, reasoned and effortful thought. This system is slow and takes a lot of mental energy**

**System 1 is a rapid, associative, and automatic. It often operates outside our awareness. It is fast and effortless.**



## System 1 learns through association - regardless of our personal values.

Repeatedly seeing Black individuals associated with a negative characteristic (for example, portrayed as criminals on TV) will cause System 1 to store a connection between “Black” and



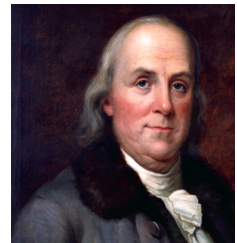
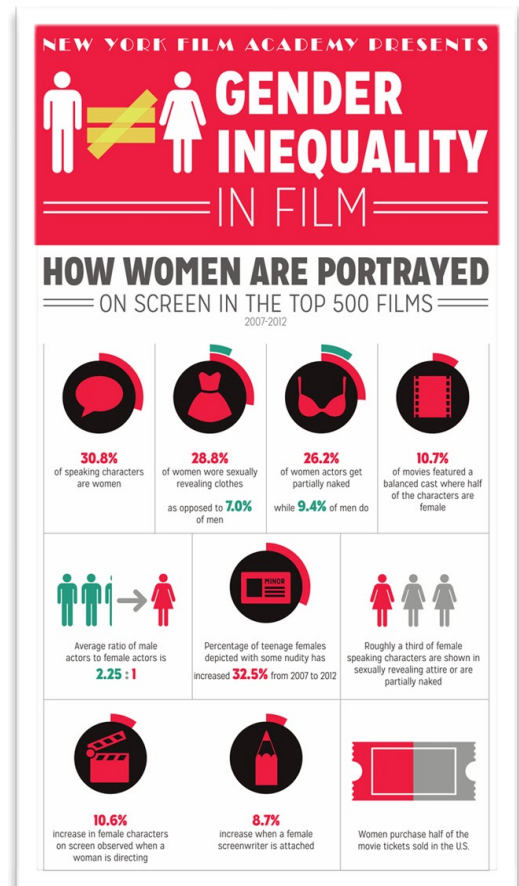
### Analysis of television news:

- **Black crime suspects presented in more threatening contexts than whites**
- **Black suspects disproportionately shown in mug shots and in cases where the victim was a stranger.**
- **Black and Latino suspects were more often left unnamed.**
- **Blacks and Hispanics were also more likely to be treated aggressively by police officers on reality-based TV shows.**



# System 1 learns through association - regardless of our personal values.

Repeatedly seeing men in career roles and as leaders, and women at home or in support roles characteristics, causes our unconscious system to store “man” with “career” and “leader” and woman with “family”.



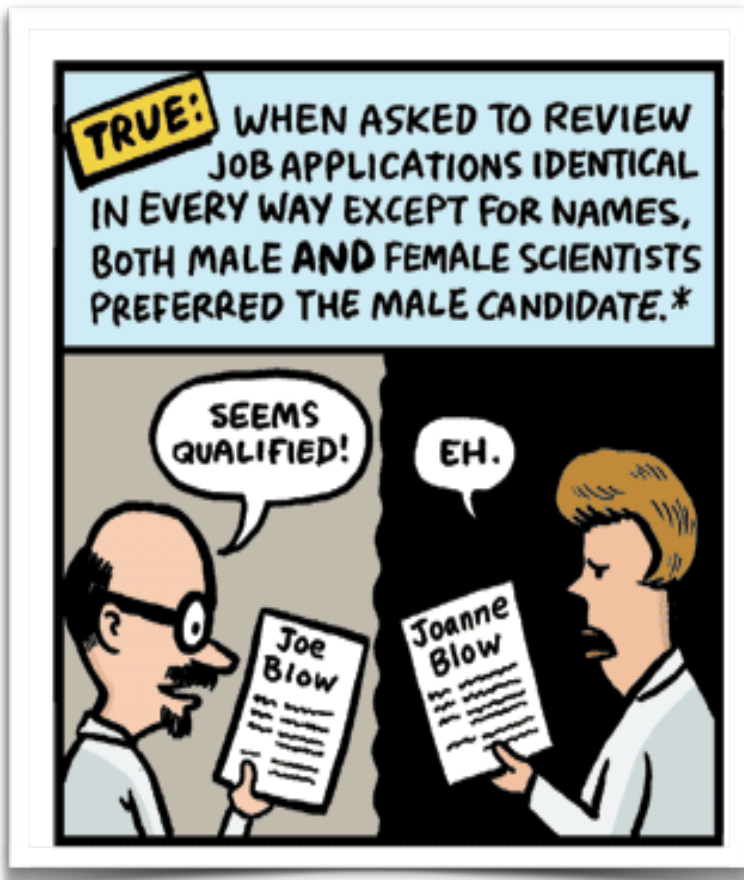
*These images are what appeared for a Google search “Leader”. In seeing this over and over, System 1 automatically connects “Leader” with man.*

## What are some examples?



**When musicians competed in open auditions, men were hired at much higher rates than women. In blind auditions (behind a curtain), women were hired at 5% higher rates than men.**

*Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of “Blind” Auditions on Female Musicians. Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse (2000). The American Economic Review, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 715-741*



**Identical resumes, randomly assigned a male or female name, sent to science faculty.**

**The male name made the applicant seem more competent, worth a higher salary, more worth hiring and mentoring than the female with and identical resume.**

*Moss-Racusin, Corinne A., et al. "Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 109.41 (2012): 16474-16479.*

**System 1 guides our attention and provides a framework for interpreting incoming information.**

**For example, when evaluating men's performance, men and women are more likely to notice signs of competence in men and not notice evidence of incompetence - the reverse is true when evaluating women's performance.**



**Partners in law firms recruited into a “writing analysis study”evaluated a research memo from a hypothetical third-year associate.**

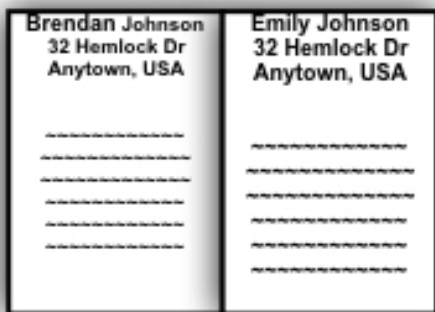
**Race was randomly assigned.**

**The evaluators found more errors, requested more formatting changes, and rated the research memo from the fictitious black 3rd year associate lower than the identical memo from the fictitious white associate.**

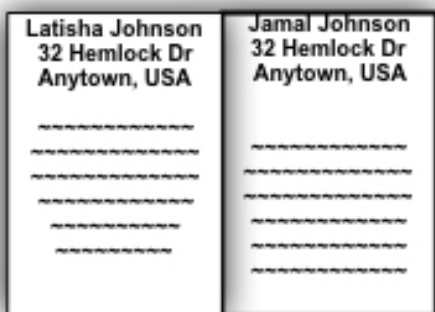


Hayward et al. (1997)

Reeves, A (2015) "Colored by Race: The Evaluation of Candidates of Color By Law Firm Hiring Committees" Nexion



**The exact same resumes responding to 1300 want ads got 50% more call-backs when they had a white sounding (vs black sounding) names.**



Bertrand, M., and S. Mullainathan, (2004): "Are Emily and Brandon more Employable than Latoya and Tyrone? Evidence on Racial Discrimination in the Labor Market from a Large Randomized Experiment," American Economic Review, .



**Consciously unbiased pediatricians were more likely to report they would prescribe a narcotic for pain control following surgery for white children...**



**...than they were for black children - in identical clinical case vignettes.**



Sabin, J. A., & Greenwald, A. G. (2012). The Influence of Implicit Bias on Treatment Recommendations for 4 Common Pediatric Conditions: Pain, Urinary Tract Infection, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Asthma. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(5), 988–995. <http://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300621>

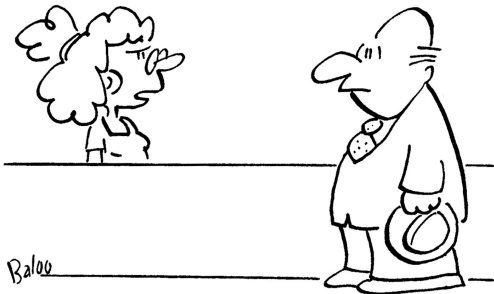
**I am pretty sure that I do not have unconscious biases. I treat all people equally.**

If you are sure you have no unconscious biases, you **might** be **right**.

*But you're probably not.*



Department Of  
Public Assistance



"A white heterosexual male? —  
what assistance could *you*  
possibly need?"

**You have the same cognitive and information processing systems as everyone else.**

**Unconscious bias is an “equal opportunity virus” that gets in the mind of everybody regardless of their own group membership. Every group has stereotype associated with it.**

## What can I do?

Unconscious associations and biases can affect behavior and, if unchecked, often DO affect behavior.

BUT they do not always and they do not have to. System 2 can override System 1.

Fortunately there are things we can do to protect ourselves from being hijacked by our implicit biases.

❖ **Protect your mental energy.** When we have sufficient cognitive resources (mental energy), time, information, awareness and the motivation to be unbiased, our expectations of others and decision-making are much less likely to be undermined by implicit biases.

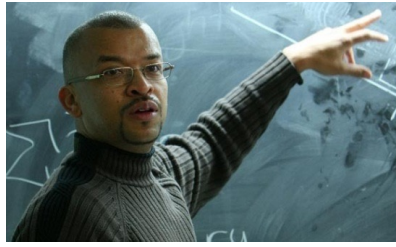
Physically  
Mentally  
Emotionally  
**T i r e d .**



Unconscious biases are most likely to hijack perceptions, expectations of and evaluations of others when mental (cognitive) processing capacity is low due to fatigue, illness, anxiety, multiple demands or anything else that drains mental resources.

❖ **Surround yourself with counter-stereotypic images.**

Examples include pictures, books, movies, TV shows involving admired LGBT and/or African Americans, veterans, elderly, people with obesity or a disability, and competent or powerful likable women. This has been shown to lower unconscious biases in the short term. This is not a one-time strategy but rather requires ongoing effort



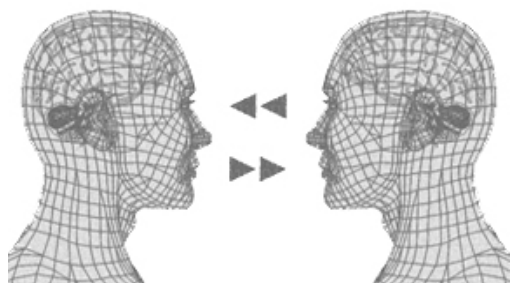
❖ **Learn and regularly use emotional regulation skills.**

- They protect from unintentionally biased behavior by reducing anxiety, negative emotions, and the deleterious effects of stress reactions on cognitive load.
- Positive emotions make us less likely to categorize others in terms of their racial, ethnic or cultural group and more likely to see them as individual with their own unique attributes.

❖ **Practice self-compassion and treat others well.** When we feel bad about ourselves - or poorly treated - we are more likely to unconsciously activate and apply negative biases towards others.



❖ **Practice perspective taking.** Perspective-taking has been shown to reduce bias and inhibit the activation of unconscious bias and stereotypes.



- **Imagine yourself in their shoes.**
- **If possible, check your perceptions.**
- **“I am wondering how I might see it if I were looking through your eyes...”**
- **“I was imagining being in your shoes here and it occurred to me that I would (feel/think/be).... Am I close?”**

❖ **Notice: Who are your confidantes and trusted advisors? Whose opinions do you value?**

- **Examine:** Conduct fearless exploration of WHY these individuals are influential.
- **Experiment:** Practice deep listening to the people you are most likely to discount.

❖ **Be a role model.** Make it safe to discuss a challenge that we all have. Make it safe to gently point out when unconscious bias might be affecting things.

❖ **When you are with someone who is different from you, do not worry about unconscious bias.** Focus on the other person (people). Find common goals and connections. When you experience someone as an individual, separate from any group they may belong to, you are less likely to be derailed by unconscious bias.

For more information: [www.p-e-i.org](http://www.p-e-i.org)