

# Seeing and Addressing Invisible Actors: Unconscious Bias and Identity Threat

Slides from Training Conducted at the  
Forum on Workplace Inclusion Annual Conference  
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Content and slides developed by [Partners in Equity & Inclusion](#)

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# Agenda

Welcome!

- Invisible Actor 1: Implicit (Unconscious) Attitudes & Biases
- Invisible Actor 2: Identity/Stereotype Threat

Strategies:

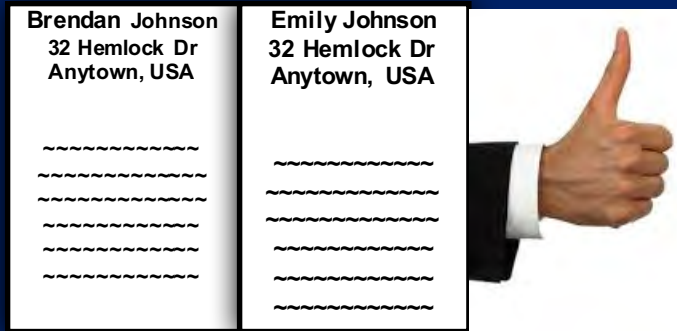
- 1) How to protect yourself from stereotype threat.
    - Small group activity
  - 2) How to Protect Others from Stereotype & Yourself from being Hijacked by Implicit (Unconscious) Biases
    - Small group activity
- Q & A

# INVISIBLE ACTOR 1: IMPLICIT (UNCONSCIOUS) ATTITUDES & BIASES

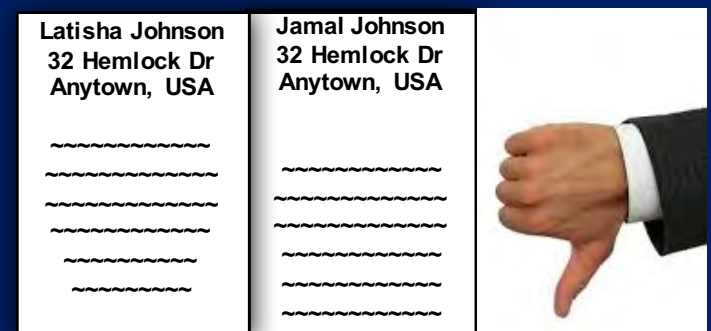
# Why does music sound better when played by a man?

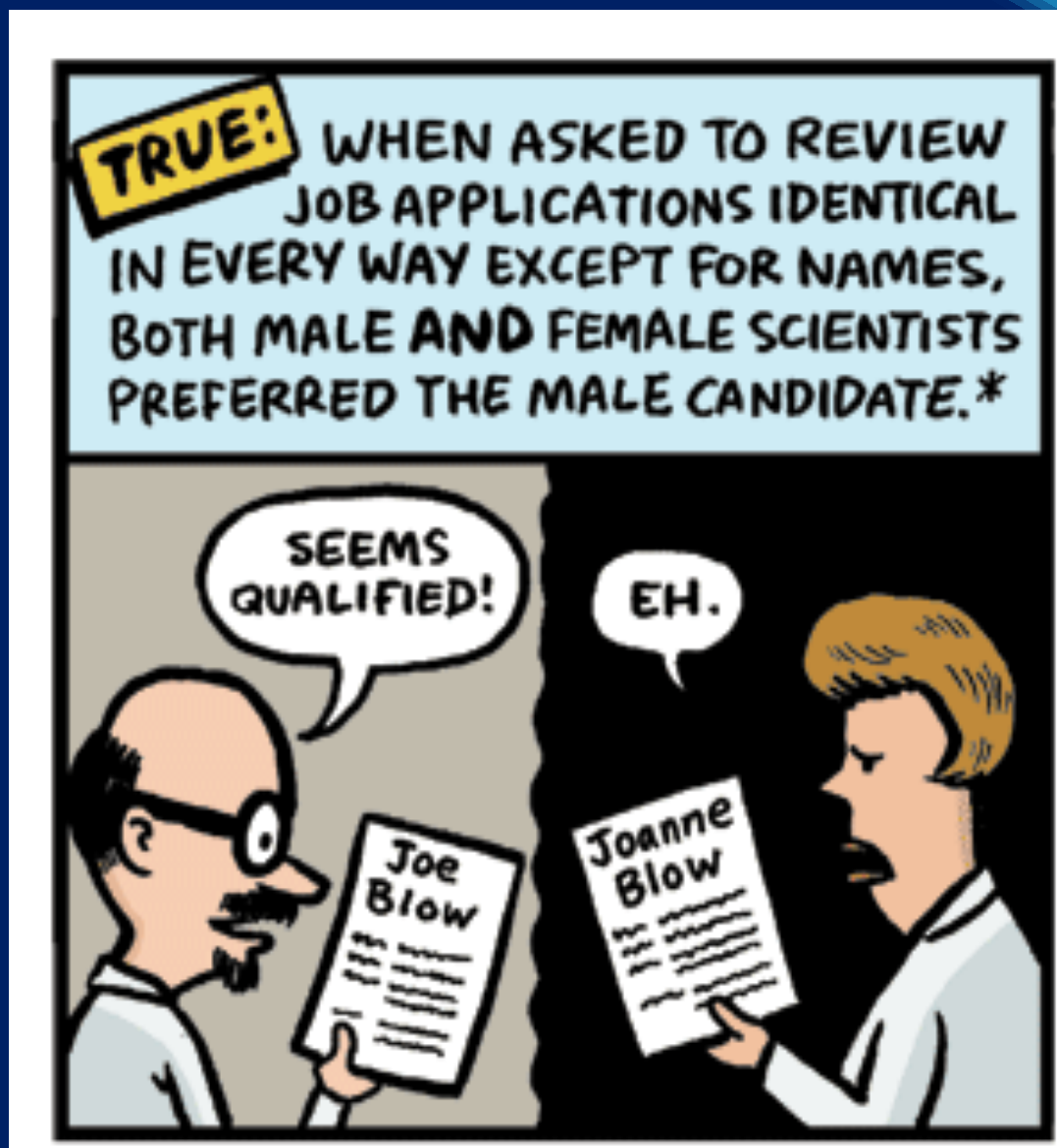


For decades, male musicians were more likely to get hired than female counterparts. However, when symphony orchestras adopted “blind” auditions by using a screen to conceal candidates’ identities, the hiring of women musicians increased. Women musicians are 5% more likely to be hired than are men when symphonies use blind auditions.



Why did the exact same resumes responding to 1300  
want ads get 50% more call-backs when they had a  
white sounding (vs black sounding) names?








Why do white people interpret facial expressions of black individuals as more hostile...

... than the same (computer morphed) facial expressions on white people?



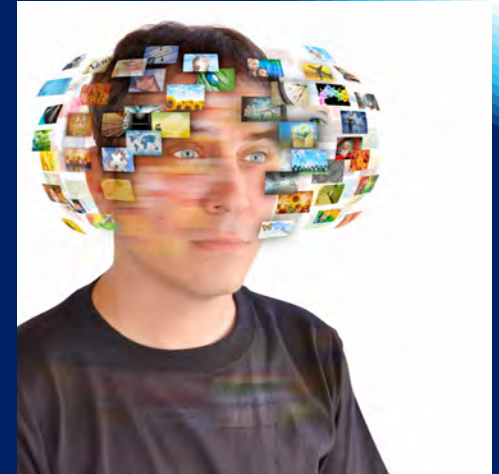
Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003  
APS, 2005





Unconscious,  
implicit,  
effortless,  
automatic  
fast

Unconscious mental processes help  
us deal with the millions of bits of  
information that surround us





We have 2 systems that do different kinds of thinking. They are both important. We usually only aware of one – but the other one runs the show.

A silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. Inside the head, an iceberg is depicted. The tip of the iceberg, which is above the water line, is labeled 'Conscious' in red. The much larger part of the iceberg, which is submerged below the water line, is labeled 'Unconscious' in white. A red arrow points from the 'Conscious' tip to its description on the right. A white arrow points from the 'Unconscious' base to its description on the right.

Conscious

The kind of thinking that we are aware of.  
Conscious, explicit, effortful, deliberative, slow.

Unconscious

The kind of thinking that we are usually not aware of.  
Unconscious, implicit, Effortless, automatic fast

# Implicit Social-Cognitive Processes are Highly Developed and Nuanced

- We automatically assign people to a particular class or group..
- The characteristics assigned to that group are often **unconsciously & automatically activated & applied.**
- Can be as simple as an “affective flash”.
- Can be a complex set of beliefs & expectations



# Where do biases come from?



**AP** Associated Press AP - Tue Aug 30, 11:31 AM ET

A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it

[Email Photo](#) [Print Photo](#)

**RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO** » Recommended Photos  
Recommend It: Average (130 votes)  
☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★★



**AFP** 3:47 AM ET

Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana. (AFP/Getty Images/Chris Grayther)

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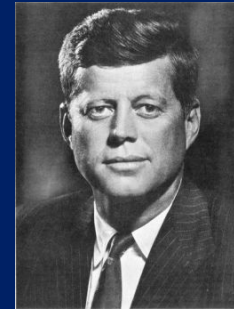
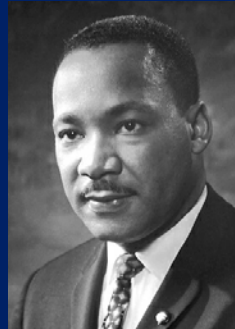
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**RELATED**

- Katrina's Effects, at a Glance AP - Tue Aug 30, 1:26 PM ET

[Hurricanes & Tropical Storms](#)

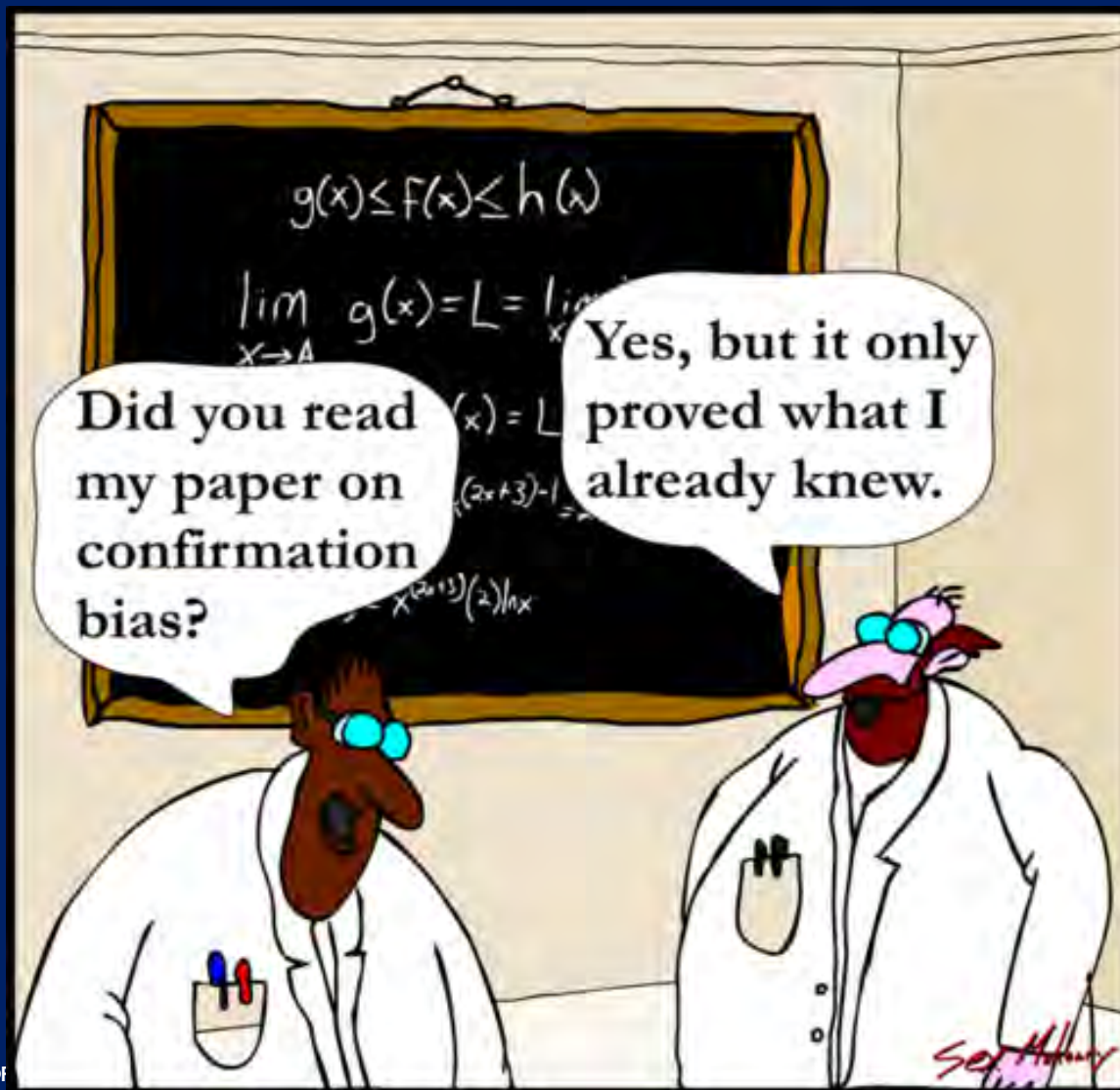
# What was the Google Search Term?



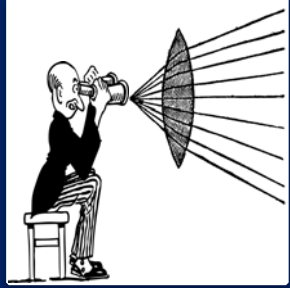




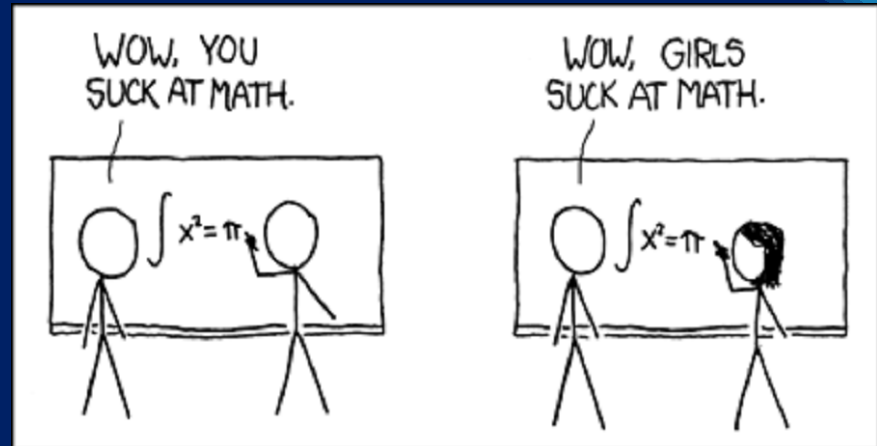
# Automatically activated stereotypes are supported by confirmation biases



We seek confirming evidence to support a belief rather than look for disconfirming evidence to refute it (despite the latter often being more persuasive and definitive).



# Creates a lens through which information is interpreted.





# Implicit attitudes can affect non-verbal behavior - creating a negative feedback loop



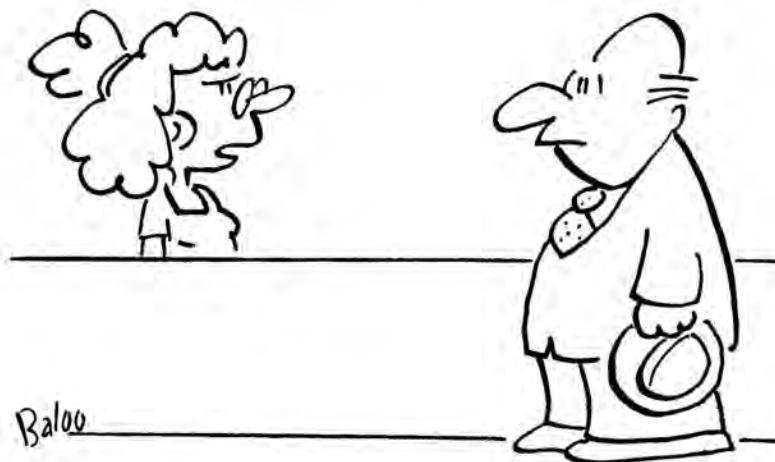
- Unconscious bias been shown to predict **nonverbal friendliness**, higher rates of **blinking** and less **visual contact**.
- Higher levels of visual contact (i.e., time spent looking at another person) reflect greater attraction, intimacy, and respect, and higher rates of blinking reflect more negative arousal and tension.
- People strongly rely on nonverbal behavior when interpreting others.





# Automatically activated expectations affects everyone

Department Of  
Public Assistance



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

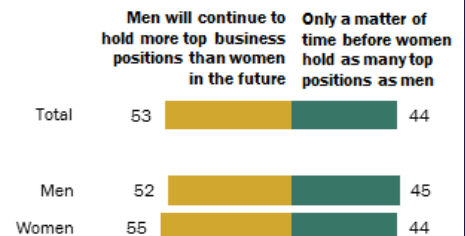
# Implicit vs. Explicit Attitudes

- Although there have been dramatic declines in explicit bias, implicit racial, LGBT, obesity, age, gender, disability bias is still pervasive.
- 75% of White Americans show a significant implicit preference for Whites over Blacks.
- Implicit racial attitudes loosely correlated with explicit attitudes ( $\sim .40$ ).

• Although we do not endorse them we have shared knowledge of them – We know what they are.

## Americans Have Doubts About Women Achieving Equality in Corporate Leadership

% saying as more women move into management ...



Note: Respondents were asked which statement came closer to their view, even if neither was exactly right. "No answer" not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Nov 12-21, 2014 (N=1,835)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q17

# INVISIBLE ACTOR 2: STEREOTYPE/IDENTITY THREAT



**Stereotype threat is a (often unconscious) response to a negative group stereotype.**

When something in a cues one of our group identities  
(e.g. woman, black, elderly, white male)  
and cues awareness of group stereotype  
(e.g. bad at math, unintelligent, feeble, racist)  
we may experience the effects of stereotype threat.

- (e.g performance decrements -“de-skilling”- often in stereotype-consistent ways, psychological and physiologic effects).

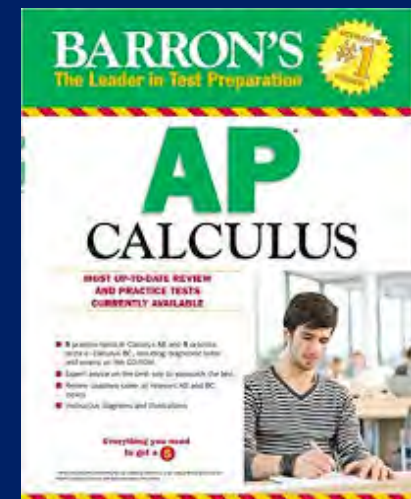
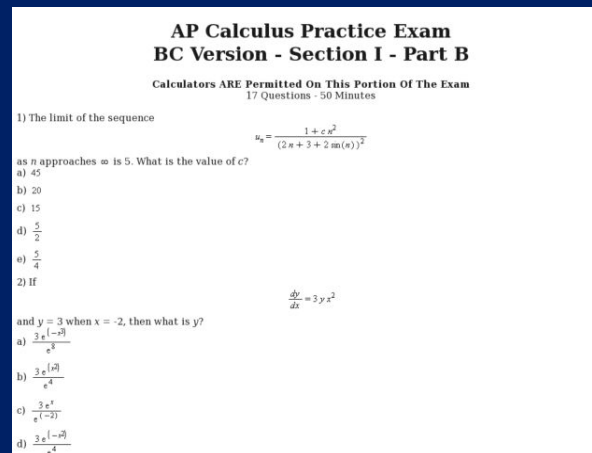
*Hundreds of studies:*  
<http://tinyurl.com/PEI-ST-REF>



# Women/Girls & Math

Females do worse than males on math tests when the gender question comes first – but not when asked after the test.

Danaher & Crandall estimated 4700 more girls a year would receive AP calculus credit if the question that asks about the student's gender was moved to the back of the test.





# Men and “Social Sensitivity”

Men did worse on a test that assesses accuracy in interpreting others' non-verbal behavior when told it was a test of "social sensitivity" than when told it tested "information processing".





# Girls & Chess

When female chess players believed their opponent was male they performed worse than male chess players. When they were told (falsely) they were playing against another female they performed as well as male players.



# White vs Minority on Golf & other Athletics

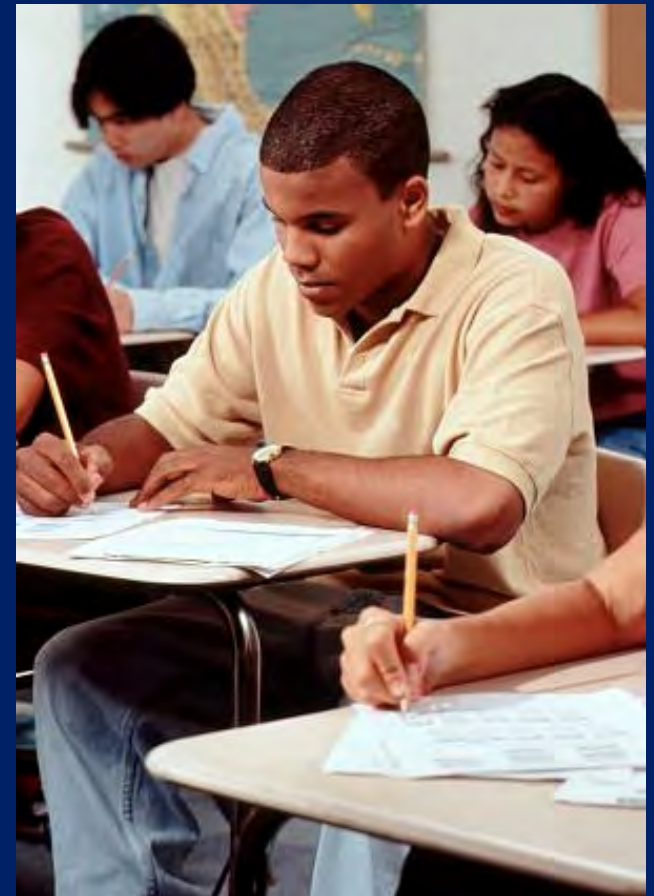
White golfers did worse than black golfers when told they were taking a test of “natural athletic ability”.  
Black golfers did worse than white golfers when told the test required “sport strategic intelligence”.



# African Americans, Latinos & Low SES Students & Intelligence Tests

Black test takers performed worse than white test takers when told it was a test of intelligence.

When told test was a lab task that did not indicate intellectual ability, black and white test takers performed at same level.



# Whites & Racist Stereotype Threat: Why do so many D & I & E efforts fail?

- Stereotype threat: “white racist”
  - The anxiety associated with this threat has negative cognitive and behavioral consequences
    - impairment of working memory caused by self-regulatory behaviors (e.g., monitoring or regulating ones behaviors to avoid appearing prejudiced),
- Fidgeting, avoiding eye contact
- Physically distance themselves from African American conversation partners.
- Increases in implicit (unconscious) pro-white bias.
- Effect diminished when whites are think of the interaction as an opportunity to learn.

# Additional Examples

- Women in negotiating ability.
- Whites compared with Asian men in mathematics
- Elderly & Women Safe driving
  - Statistically 65 and older safest drivers – except when reminded of stereotype
  - Women vs men but only in the randomized condition told that study was investigating why men are better drivers than women. Half hit jaywalking pedestrian.
- Elderly in memory tasks
- Women in golf, but only in presence of male skill evaluator



# Physiologic Effects

## Stress response

- Sympathetic nervous system activations
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased cardiac output and total peripheral resistance
- Inflammation processes associated with numerous disease processes.

# Other psychological effects

- Anxiety
- Reduced Motivation
- Disengagement
- Disidentification

# Stereotype Threat Affects Everyone

“It is indiscriminate in cursing any group for which a negative stereotype applies, and it does so across a range of domains from intellectual to. What is also so striking and debilitating about the phenomenon is how seemingly easily stereotype threat can be activated.”

*A naturalistic study of stereotype threat in young female chess players. Rothgerber, H & Wolsiefer, K. Group Processes & Intergroup Relations 2014, Vol 17(1) 79–90, page 79,*

# How To Protect Yourself From Stereotype Threat

- Identify the situations & people that are most likely to trigger stereotype threat for you.
- Think about your unique characteristics, skills, values, or roles - things you value, that are important to you.
  - If possible, jot them down & why they are important.
- Remember that the anxiety and “de-skilling” caused by stereotype threat is not relevant to your actual abilities.
- Activate “alternate identities”. Everyone belongs to multiple groups. Focus on an identity that does not have negative stereotypes relevant to the situation.
- Bring to mind a time you felt competent, powerful, strong (whatever is relevant). Focus on that experience

# Small Group Activity

- In pairs discuss:
  - Can you describe a situation when, in reflecting back, you think you might have been experiencing stereotype or identity threat?
    - If so, what happened? What was the stereotype? What was the trigger/cue?
  - Given what you have learned, are there any strategies you think might have helped – or that you would like to try if it occurs again?

# When are we at greatest risk?

We are lower risk when the task is easy.

We are at higher risk of stereotype threat when:

- ➡ The task or situation is important to us.
- ➡ There are few others who are members of the same group (e.g. few women or minorities)
- ➡ **We interact with people who consciously or unconsciously endorse the negative stereotype.**
  - People tend to be highly sensitive to cues indicating that one of their identities might be devalued - cues can be very subtle and still trigger stereotype threat.**



# Strategies to Reduce Unconscious Bias Overlap with Strategies to Prevent Stereotype Threat

Strategies that prevent us from  
being unintentionally “hijacked” by  
unconscious (implicit) biases also  
serve to protect those around us  
from Stereotype Threat

# Creating Identity-Safety: Reducing Unconscious Bias & Eliminating Stereotype Threat Triggers

- Conduct an environmental audit for stereotype-consistent or reinforcing cues.
  - Images, artwork, educational materials, pamphlets, magazines, TV channels in waiting room.
- Physical space – is anyone excluded? How does the décor reflect the diversity of stakeholders?
- Ask teams of stakeholders representing relevant groups to conduct audit.



# Creating Identity-Safety: Reducing Unconscious Bias & Eliminating Stereotype Threat Triggers





# Promote and Expose Yourself and Others to Counter-Stereotypic Images



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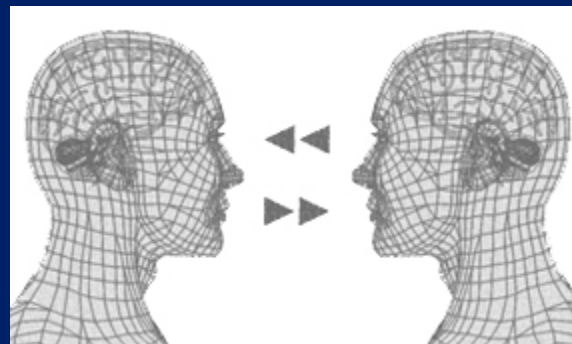
# Perspective Taking Skills

- Perspective-taking is the cognitive component of empathy.
- Perspective-taking and emotional empathy have has been shown inhibit the activation of unconscious stereotypes and prejudices.
- Practicing perspective taking with others will make them less likely to experience stereotype threat due to unintended biases.

# Practice

## Perspective-Taking

- *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?”



# Build a sense of partnership

- Create common “in-group identity”, develop a sense that their partner is on the same “team”, working together towards a common goal.
- Reduce the likelihood that implicit bias will affect behavior and decision-making;
- Perceptions of common in-group identity facilitates perspective taking and affective empathy
- Feeling like a partner, part of a common “in group” lowers the likelihood of stereotype threat.



## Partnership can create an unconscious sense of the other as a part of your in-group

- Similar to some team building exercises.
- Mindhack, cognitive shortcut: use words like "we" and "us" and "our" instead of "I" "yours" and "mine".
- Find the common goal.

# Protect and conserve your mental resources

- Emotional Regulation Skills
- Emotion Shifting- Positive emotional states
- All the usual advice: sleep well, exercise, eat well, if possible reduce stressors

## Practice Emotional Regulation skills

- Experiencing positive emotions makes us less likely to put others in an “out-group” category.
- We use of more inclusive social categories,
- View are more likely to view ourselves as being part of a larger group.... which can facilitate empathy and increase the capacity to see others as members of a common “ingroup”.

# Change norms, set an example

## Role-model learning and growth approach

- Welcome requests to reexamine your decisions for possible unintended biases.
- Ask more questions. Make fewer assumptions.
- Notice others assumptions and connections and point them out.

# Assess Group Processes

- **Time:** Who has floor and for how long?
- **Interruptions:** How many? Who is interrupted? Who interrupts?
- **Traction:** Whose ideas, opinions, or thoughts get no response or follow-up? How often?
- **Bring the conversation back around to those who were interrupted or ignored.**



# Targeted Strategies to Protect Others from Stereotype Threat

- Growth mindset: Focus on mistakes as necessary for growth, not signs of a personal deficit. Help others see low performance as situational, malleable or temporary.
- Encourage self-affirmation
- Ask about successes, accomplishments, things they are proud of.
- Ask them about what they value most.
- State that no one group is better at task than another (telling girls that girls and boys do equally well on a test eliminated stereotype threat.)
- Teach about stereotype threat .

# Small Group Activity

## Protecting Others from Stereotype Threat

- Think of a time you were with someone who you now believe might have been experiencing stereotype threat.
- Given what you learned in this workshop, is there anything you would do differently in the same situation?



# Additional Strategies



# Assess HR Policies and Procedures for Stereotype Threat Triggers

- Write job descriptions and performance standards in a way that does not unintentionally evoke negative stereotypes about a group.
- Develop evaluation procedures that specify measurable outcomes and specific behaviors.
- Reduce evaluation criteria that depend on the feelings of the evaluator(s). This may reassure employees that they are less likely to be judged in terms of specific stereotypes.
- If possible, conduct evaluations in a way that allows the evaluators to be “blind” to employee group membership (age, race or ethnicity, gender etc).

# Develop and Disseminate an All-Inclusive Multicultural Diversity Philosophy

- Develop and widely disseminate a diversity philosophy that explicitly recognizes and values contributions from all groups, majority and minority.
- Ensure all employees (minority and majority group members) report feeling included when they read/hear the philosophy.
- In many cases, organizations will have to help employees understand why the organization is moving away from a color-blind philosophy.
- Many have been taught that a color-blind philosophy is needed to promote group equality and may be initially confused by the an all-inclusive multicultural philosophy.

# Learn more at

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

## References:

<http://tinyurl.com/PEI-ST-REF>

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