Avoiding Unintended Biases: Strategies for Providing More Equitable Care

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Community Health and AdvocacyTalks (CHAT)

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Why did music sound better when played by a man in open auditions...

...but when they auditioned from behind curtains, judgments of quality were the same for men and women?

Goldin & Rouse. (2000)

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

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


Hugenberg & Bodenhausin, 2003
APS, 2005

Why did law firm partners find more errors in a legal brief when they were randomly assigned to the group that was told it was written by a black 3rd year associate...
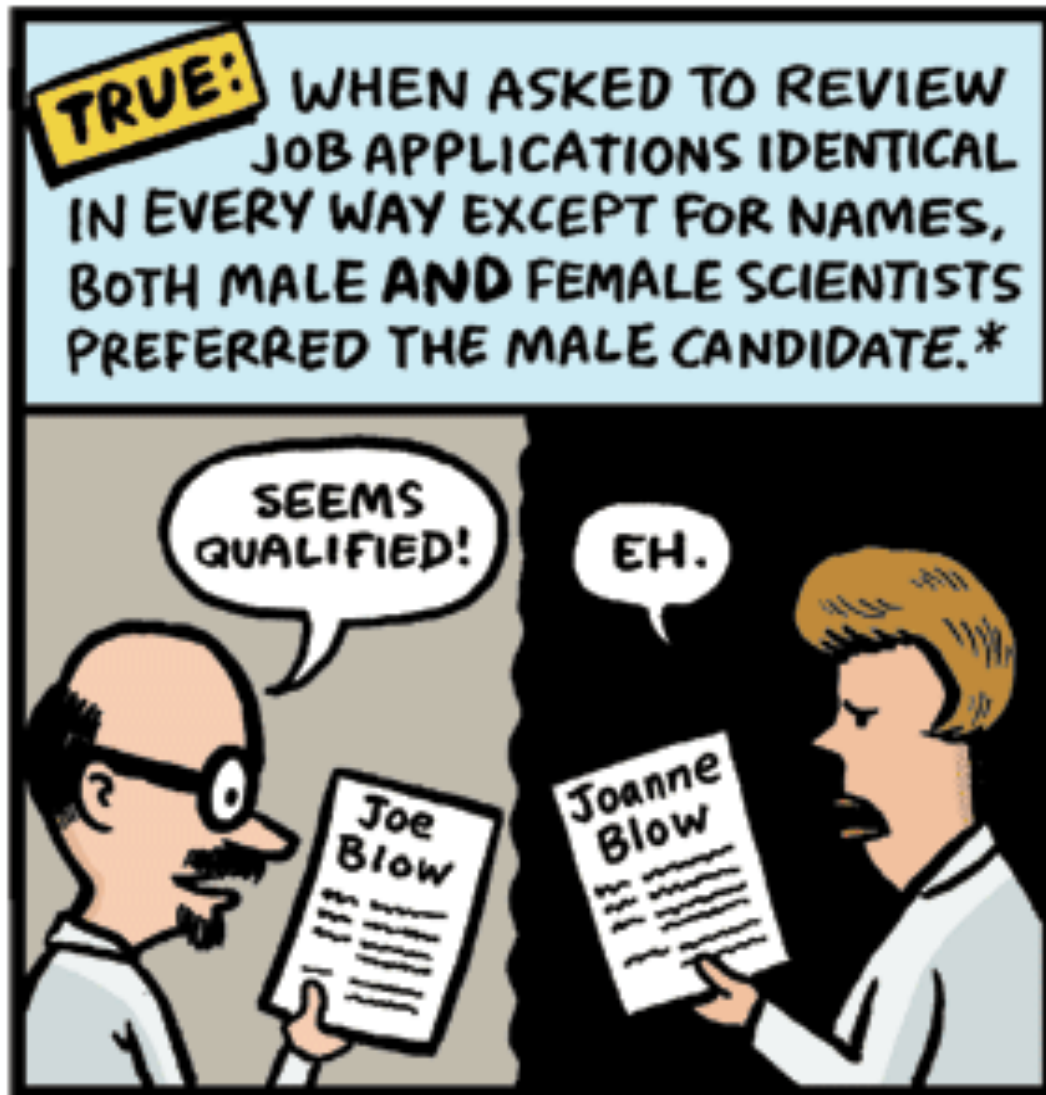

...than they did when they were in the group that was told it was written by a white 3rd year associate?

Reeves, 2014

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?

Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2003

Why?

Moss-Racusin et al, 2012
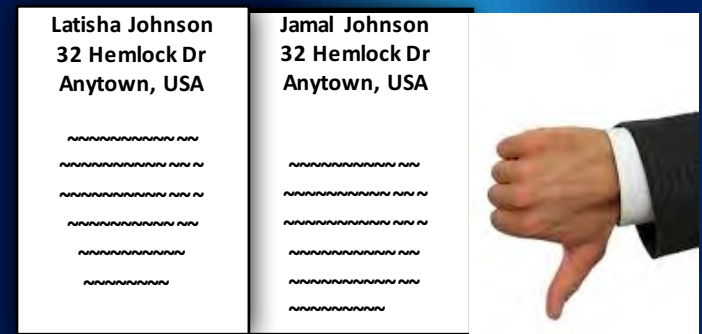
Why were consciously unbiased pediatricians more likely to report they would prescribe a narcotic for pain control following surgery for white children ...

....than black children – in __identical__ clinical case vignettes?

Sabin et al, 2012

# Why do people who have genuinely unprejudiced, respectful attitudes towards people with disabilities:

➢ Show substantial **discomfort** around people with disabilities (electrodermal activity, heart rate, and facial EMG activity)?
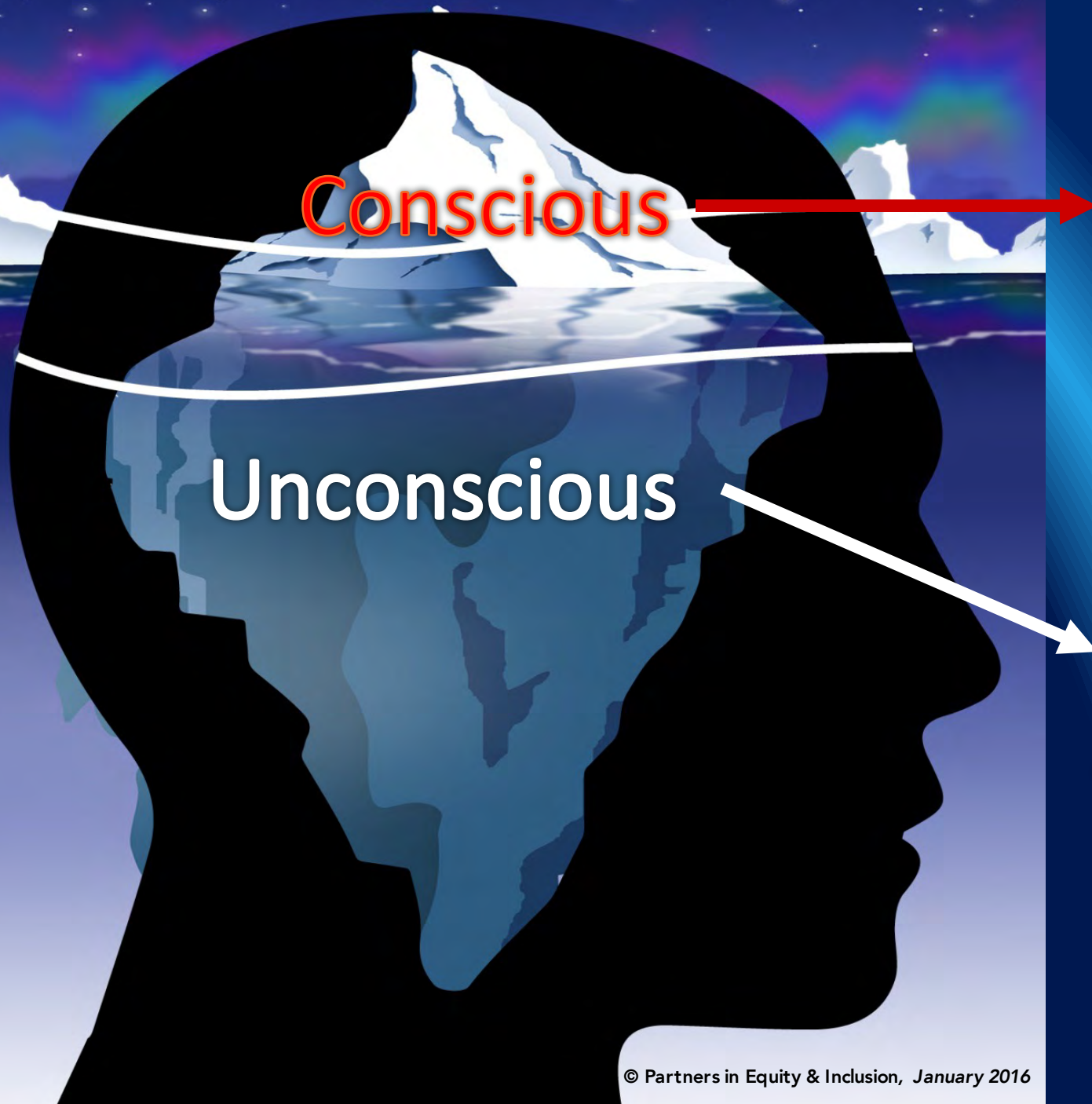
➢ **Avoid** people with disabilities?

Why is it that over 1000 peer-reviewed studies found inequalities in medical care – even with same insurance in same facilities?
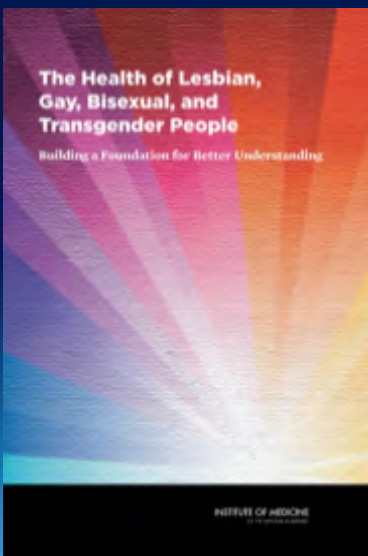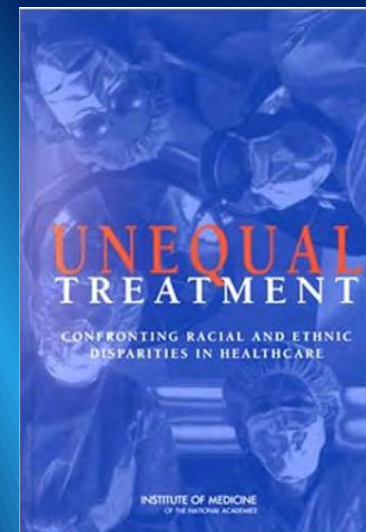
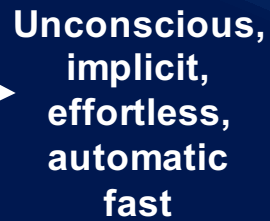# We don't think the way we think we think.

Conscious

Unconscious

Explicit
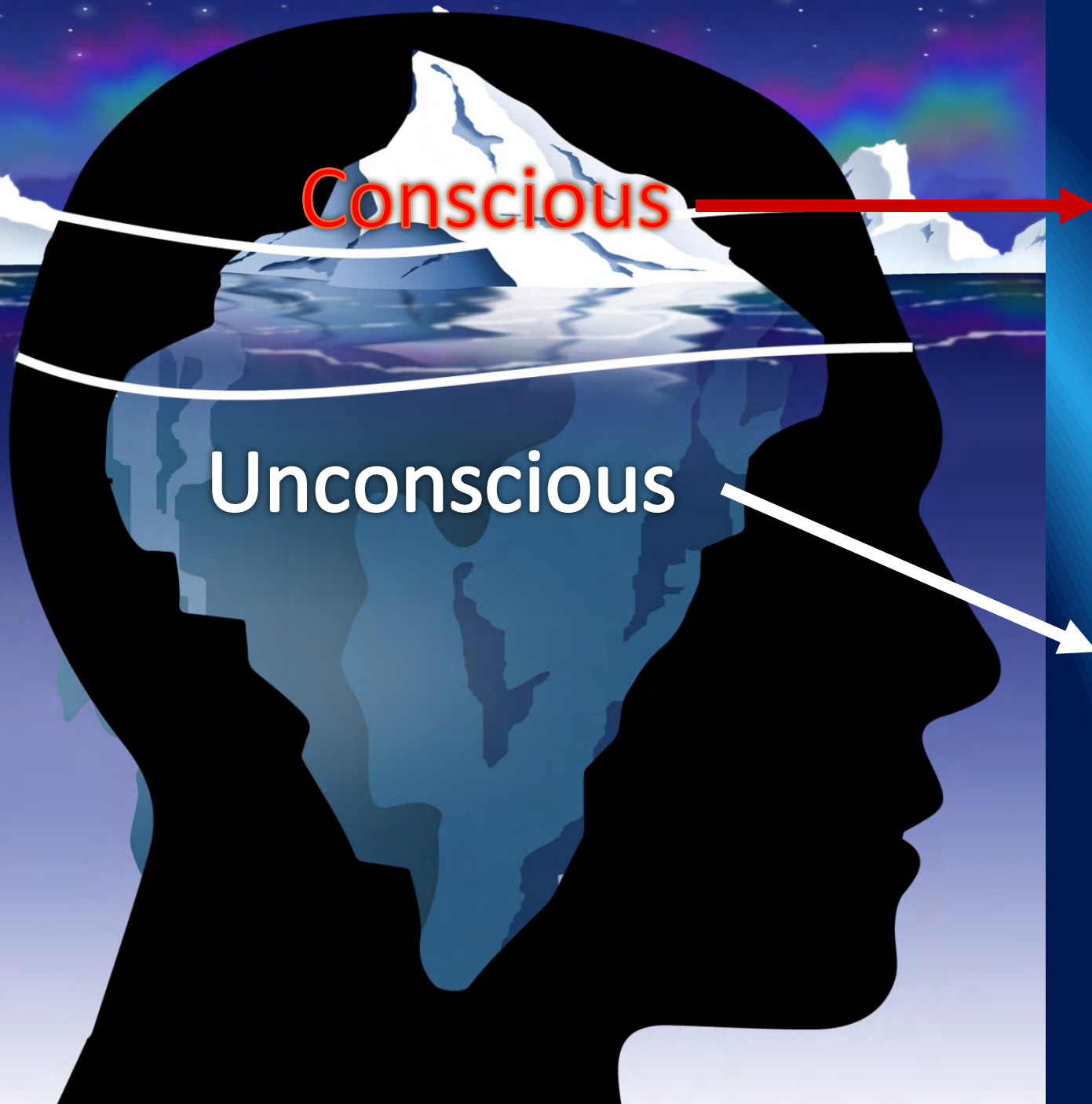Effortful
Slow
Deliberative
Considered
Learning

Implicit
Effortless
Automatic
Fast
Automatic
Associated
Learning

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Unconscious, implicit, effortless, automatic fast

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

Conscious → Energy Intensive

Unconscious → Energy-Saving

Implicit <u>Social</u>-Cognitive Processes are Highly Developed and Nuanced

- When individuals are mentally assigned to a particular class or group, the characteristics assigned to that group are often <u>unconsciously & automatically activated & applied</u> .
- Can be as simple as an "affective flash".
- Can be a complex set of beliefs & expectations.
- Ingroup vs outgroup status.

Conscious

Unconscious

MOTIVES

Unconscious mental processes respond automatically in service of core motives.

Maintain self concept
Access to Resources
(survival & survival of progeny)

Explicit
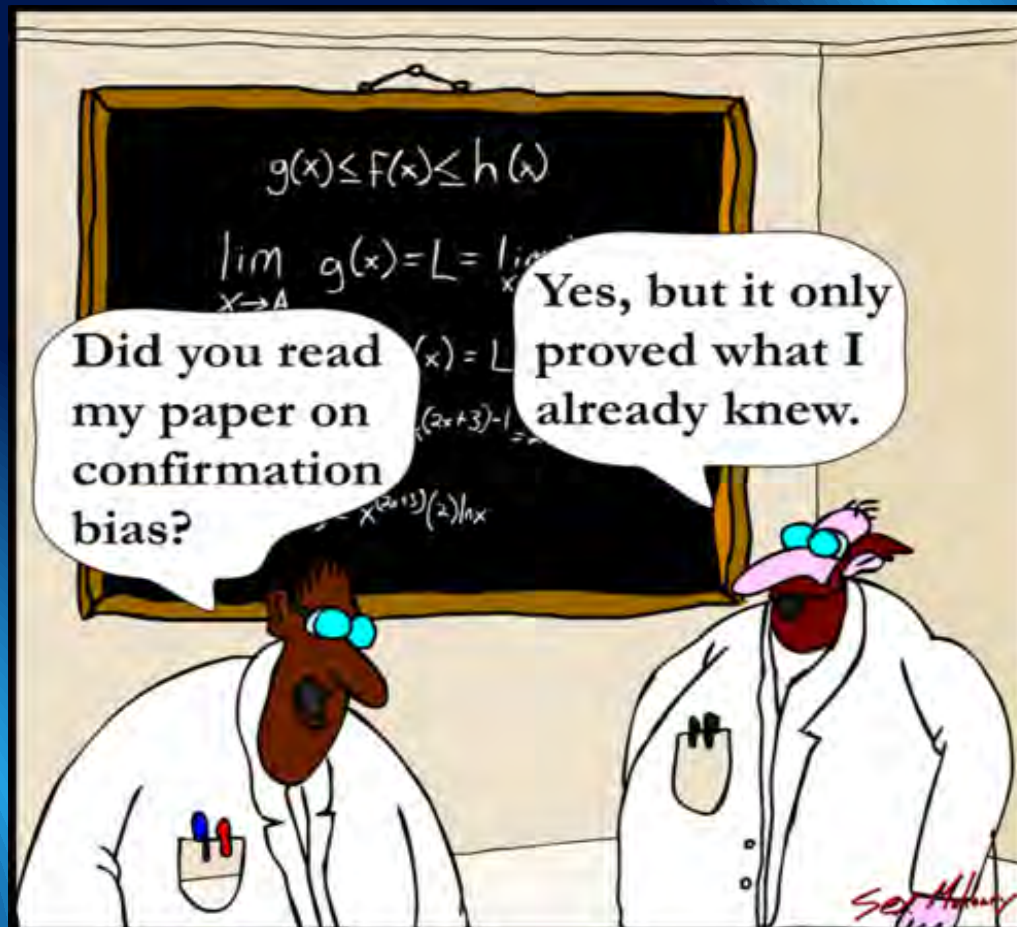Effortful
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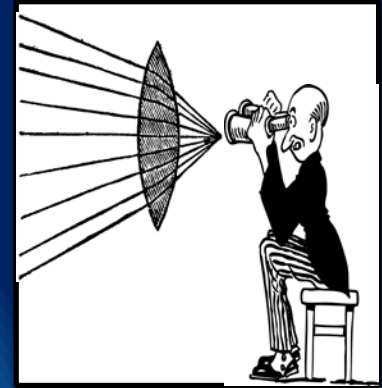Fast
Automatic
Associated
Learning

Automatically guides what we notice and remember

"Selective Attention
Selective Recall Bias"

Creates a lens through which information is interpreted.

Social Cognitive Biases
(Automatic responses to others)

- Outdated criteria.

- Automatically applies whatever it has learned, through repeated exposures, to associate with the group category(s).

- Perceives the other through a framework or lens of automatic beliefs

- Activation can vary by situation.

COGNITIVE HAZARD

The impact of the "Affective flash"

- Dozens of studies showing that we come up with cognitions, beliefs, that are consistent with our first emotional response.

- Influences non-verbal behavior, setting up negative feedback loop.

Our conscious mind seeks justification for our unconscious response

- Often shared response so mutually reinforced (e.g. search committees).

- Listen for code words that indicate justification for an emotional response.
  - Abrasive
  - Witchy (with/b)
  - Difficult, unpleasant
  - Hard to get along with
  - Non-compliant
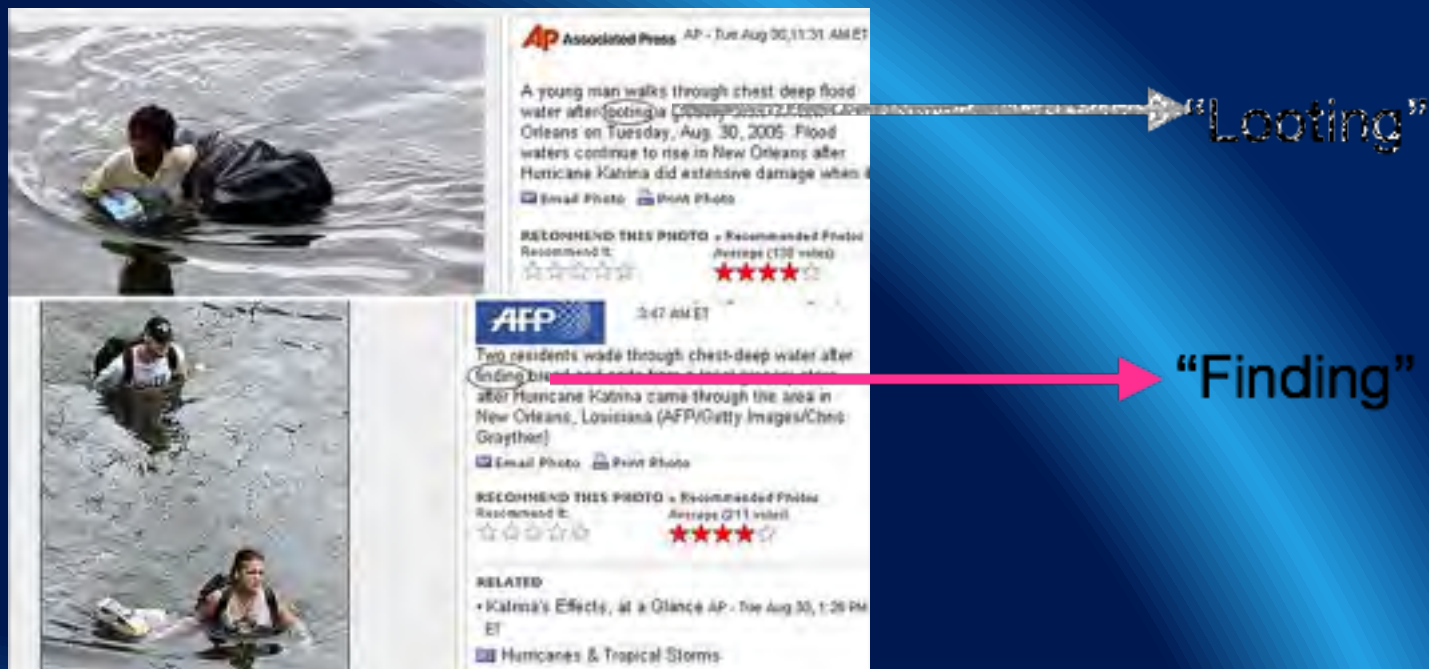 - Hostile
  - Trying too hard

Biases are self-propagating – domino effect

A study of over 300 recommendation letters for medical faculty:

- Women more often described as <u>students</u> and <u>teachers</u> , men as <u>researchers</u> and <u>professionals</u>

- Mentioned personal lives MUCH more for women than men.

- Were shorter, raised more doubts for women.

(Trix & Psenka, 2003)

"Looting"

"Finding"

➢ Unconscious, implicit cognitive system does not reason. It just associates stuff with other stuff.

➢ Repeatedly seeing Black individuals associated with a negative characteristic (e.g. criminals on TV) - store a connection between "Black" and negative characteristics.

Biases are self-propagating - perpetuated & reinforced through communication

Avenanti, A., Sirigu, A., Aglioti, S., 2010. Racial bias reduces empathic sensorimotor resonance with other-race pain. Current Biology 20, 1018–1022.

Challenges to Empathy

Feng Sheng[a,b], Yi Liu[a], Bin Zhou[c], Wen Zhou[c], Shihui Han[a,*]

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[c] Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, PR China

- Responses to pain/ingroup vs outgroup

- Use of neuropeptide (oxytocin) intensifies difference.

- Perhaps part of the explanation for the massive evidence of disparities in pain treatment...

What can be done?
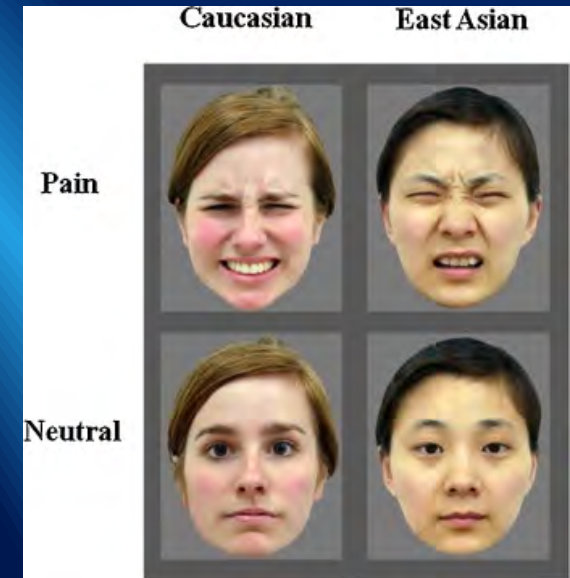
First, Address Organizational Culture
# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Climate

Organizational Strategies

Creating an inclusive, diverse & equitable climate for health care workforce is an essential prerequisite to equity in health care.

Assessment (Diversity Climate)

Face your demons.

- The assessment question should NOT be: "Are there barriers to full inclusion in our organization?"

- The assessment question: **"In what ways do barriers to full inclusion manifest in our organization?"**
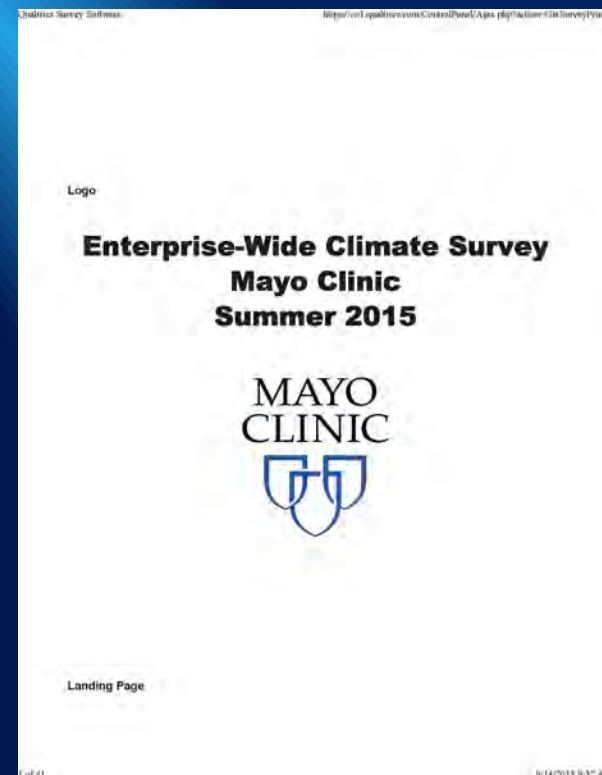
Assessment (Diversity Climate)

Exclusion & Disadvantage (& inclusion & advantage) are "in the air

- "I have to keep proving I am good at my job"
- "I have to change who I am to fit in"

To guide strategy, must also assess employee attitudes that predict or protect from biased behavior

- Implicit attitudes
- Motivation to control prejudice
- Social dominance orientation

Physical Environment Matters.

- Conduct an environmental audit for stereotype-consistent or reinforcing cues.

    – Images, artwork, educational materials, pamphlets, magazines, TV channels in waiting room.

- Physical space – what does it say about who matters? How does the décor reflect the diversity of stakeholders?

- Ask teams of stakeholders representing relevant groups to conduct audit.

Most common magazines in waiting rooms.

Take Every Opportunity To Insert Counter-stereotypic Images

Assess Policies and Procedures for Implicit Bias Vulnerability & Identity Threat Triggers

Examples:

- Write job descriptions and performance standards in a way that does not unintentionally evoke negative stereotypes about a group.

- Examine hiring process for bias leakage

- Send applicants out for blinded review – check on last few hires.

Assess Policies and Procedures for Implicit Bias Vulnerability & Identity Threat Triggers

Examples:

- Develop evaluation procedures that specify measurable outcomes and specific behaviors.

- Reduce evaluation criteria that depend on the feelings of the evaluator(s).

- If possible, conduct evaluations in a way that allows the evaluators to be "blind" to employee group membership (age, race or ethnicity, gender etc).

Review Performance Reviews, Letters of Recommendation

Jane is delightful

John is brilliant

Jeff is a leader

Jamal is hardworking

Juliet is a team player

Jim's work will change the field

Jen's work will make a contribution to the field

Fearless Self-awareness

Believe what you are told about exclusion and discriminatory experiences until proven wrong.

Catch yourself seeking alternate explanations. This is motivated bias. It is also insulting and marginalizing

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.**

Change norms, set an example

- Ask more questions. Make fewer assumptions.

- Notice others assumptions and connections and point them out.

- Bring the conversation back around to individuals who were interrupted or ignored

Fearless Self-Examination
Who's In Your "In-Group"?

- Who are your confidantes and trusted advisors when you make decisions?

- Whose opinions do you value most?

  - **Other than your family, who are the 5 people you trust most?**

  - **Experiment:** Practice deep listening to the people you are most likely to discount.

Train all Supervisors in a Feedback Style Shown to Reduce Stereotype Threat

There are 4 key things that supervisor must communicate:

• High standards for the employee's performance

• Belief that the employee can live up to those standards.

• Mistakes or failures are learning opportunities and necessary for growth.

• Mistakes are failures are not due to some fixed characteristics of the individual (e.g their core abilities, "having what it takes", their personality).

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 white employees understand why the organization is moving away from a color-blind philosophy.

Take advantage of the known strategies to build Team/Group Cohesion & Improve Intergroup Relations

- Teams (In-Group Identity):
  - Emphasize shared values/goals, highlight similarities, affiliations, to build reciprocal trust and obligation to the team/each other.
  - This does NOT mean "everyone act like the white folks".
  - Trust, trust, trust

Universal Employee Training

- Start with identity threat.
  - Everyone can relate & benefit
  - Pulls on altruism
- Promote "growth mindset"- learn from mistakes
- No shaming

Skills & strategies for preventing identity threat in others overlap with skills & strategies for preventing automatic bias hijack.

Mindfulness

- Told study was about "the relationship between listening to an audiotape and reaction time."
- Randomly assigned: 10-minute introduction to mindfulness vs 10-minute discussion about natural history.
- The mindfulness talk, "instructed participants to become aware of bodily sensations (heartbeat and breath) and fully accept these sensations, and any thoughts, without restriction, resistance, or judgment."

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness group had lower implicit bias on black/white & age Implicit Associations Test.

- Mindfulness also lowered discriminatory behavior associated with trust/investment of money (Trust" Game)

Mindfulness

- Mindful people show less automatic biases and are less likely to have automatic strong negative emotional reactions.

- Why? Increase awareness and view of thoughts and feelings as transient mental events separate from the self – inhibits natural tendency towards automatic reaction and evaluation.

- Weakens automatic associations between a group category and a negative characteristics.

- Interrupt automatic threat response?

(Fledderus, et al 2010; Lueke & Gibson, 2015; Ostafin & Kassman, 2012)

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 Identity Threat due to unintended biases.
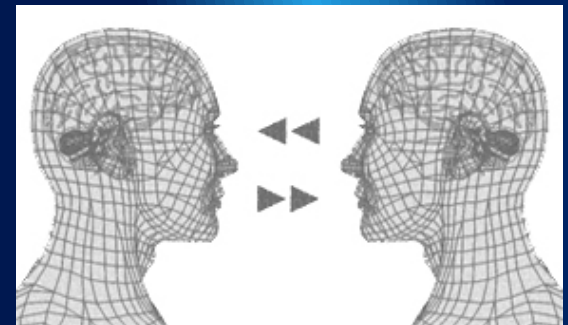
How to Practice Perspective-Taking

– *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?"

Learn Partnership-Building Skills to Promote a Common In-group Identity

- Potentially most powerful approach to reducing bias

- Facilitates empathy

- Reduces implicit bias

- Increases trust

  - Does NOT mean everyone acts like the white men.

Partnerships 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.

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 ourslelves as being part of a larger group…. which can facilitate empathy and increase the capacity to see others as members of a common "ingroup".

Mindfulness

Protect and conserve your mental resources

Recall: Automatic processes serve need for efficiency. Kick in when we do not have the resources to override them.

Resource: Leaflet on How To Protect Yourself From Identity Threat

www.p-e-i.org or
www.equityandinclusion.com

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