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**Introduction**

There is now a large body of research, conducted at, amongst others, Harvard, Yale, and MIT, that appears to show us that unconscious, hidden or implicit biases may explain many aspects of our patterns of behaviour in relation to diversity.

Historically there has been an understanding that we make a choice to discriminate because we hold negative feelings toward some groups; or have feelings of superiority about our own group. There is no doubt that this can often be true, however, research carried out on unconscious bias shows that we may make choices that discriminate against a group or show preference for a group without even realising we are doing it. We therefore may make decisions and interact with people believing that we are completely unbiased when that may not be the case.

# Unintentional Preferences

Unconscious biases are our unintentional preferences. They are formed by our socialisation and experiences, such as messages from family and teachers, our overall upbringing and also exposure to images and stories in the media as well as our innate preferences. Having unconscious biases are a normal part of human behaviour. The biases can be based on stereotypes that we consciously may not even subscribe to.

Psychologists Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald (from the University of Harvard and Washington respectively) created the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to test such unconscious biases. Their extensive body of work suggests that it is only in becoming aware of one’s own unconscious biases, that we can begin the work to address them, ensuring they do not affect our decisions or relationships on a daily basis.

As we navigate the world, our unconscious mind makes instinctive, decisions about what is safe and what is dangerous. These unconscious decisions extend to people too. Through the process of social categorisation, our brains are wired to group people quickly rather than to think of them as unique.[[1]](#footnote-1)

On the pages that follow you will find practical steps to tackle unconscious bias.

# Acknowledge and test your biases

Becoming aware of unconscious bias is the first step. The Implicit Association Tests (IAT) have been developed to measure automatic/implicit attitudes and stereotypes towards various groups. It is a computer based test designed to specifically measure differences in associations between two concepts. The current tests are based on visual stimuli and use of a keyboard, so unfortunately are not fully accessible. Unconscious biases sometimes differ substantially from the attitudes we self-report. Some research shows Implicit Association Tests (IAT) are a better predictor of behaviour than explicit self-reports.

**Try the tests and see where your biases may lie.**

What can be done to change our behaviour once we have gained that insight into ourselves?

Our mental schemas and biases can change based on experience or exposure to new information. For example, if your IAT test showed a bias against black people, spending time researching positive black role models can reverse that result, at least temporarily.

**Recommended IAT Tests**

**Project Implicit**

[**https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/**](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/)

You can reset implicit biases – for example: actively learn about achievers from different groups; reflect on biases learned early in life.

# Conscious questioning

Research[[2]](#footnote-2) concludes that what we see and what we hear and how we interpret these things are susceptible to extraneous factors that we are not aware of. To have a more reliable version of what is happening, we need to practice conscious questioning and if possible seek out opinions from those who are different to ourselves.

**You can:**

* Question what you see and hear
* Make notes of what you are hearing and check them
* Get several versions of events from a diverse group of people
* Try to take the ‘other’ perspective

# Check language

The power of language has been acknowledged in equality and diversity training for many decades, and we now know that the language we use affects our experience of the world.

Research[[3]](#footnote-3) shows that the language we speak shapes the way we think, particularly in reference to languages with a grammatical gender system. There are now a set of studies which suggest the grammatical genders assigned to an object, influence our mental representations of those objects.

**You can:**

* Check your language for potential impact on others
* Ask people from different groups their opinion on the language in your workplace or in a film or description
* Consider how you give feedback to different people and the depth of the feedback, including levels of encouragement
* Ask people to give you feedback on your own language and be open to challenge
* Give feedback to others who make jokes, comments or use language that may be difficult for you or others

**Recommended reading**

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| --- | --- |
| Blindspot, Hidden Biases of Good People.  blindspotcover  Banaji, M.R., Greenwald, A.G., (2013). New York: Delacorte Press. | In Blindspot, Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald explore hidden biases that we all carry from a lifetime of experiences with social groups – age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, or nationality.  ‘Blindspot’ is a metaphor to capture that portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. |
| The Loudest Duck  The Loudest Duck: Moving Beyond Diversity While Embracing Differences to Achieve Success at Work  Liswood, L., (2010)., New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. | Through practical stories, cultural anecdotes and personal experiences, Laura Liswood explains how to ensure a fair and level playing field in the workplace. |
| Thinking, Fast and Slow  https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/41jWdXkLySL._SX324_BO1,204,203,200_.jpg  Kahneman, D. (2012), ,guin | Daniel Kahneman, the renowned psychologist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, takes us on a ground breaking tour of the mind and explains the two systems that drive the way we think. System 1 is fast, intuitive, and emotional; System 2 is slower, more deliberative, and more logical. |
| Equality Challenge Unit Unconscious Bias literature review includes:   * Key psychological theories * Review of research * Methods and techniques for reducing unconscious /implicit bias   <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/unconscious-bias-in-higher> | |
| Kirwan Institute  State of the Science, Implicit Bias Review  <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-implicit-bias.pdf> | |

**Further resources**

BFI Diversity Standards:

Overview, criteria and guidance for the standards

https://www.bfi.org.uk/inclusion-film-industry/bfi-diversity-standards

Diversity Standards resources:

List of organisations and resources to help make your work / project more inclusive

https://www.bfi.org.uk/inclusion-film-industry/diversity-standards-resources

Bullying, harassment and racism prevention:

Principles and guidance for tackling and preventing bullying, harassment and racism in the screen industries

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/inclusion-film-industry/bullying-harassment-racism-prevention-screen-industries>

ScreenSkills Online Module: Tackling harassment and bullying at work

<https://www.screenskills.com/online-learning/learning-modules/tackling-harassment-and-bullying-at-work/>

Look Beyond the List: A central hub for various resources (talent lists, trainee schemes, support groups and more) for underrepresented groups working in scripted TV and film, primarily in the UK.

<https://www.lookbeyondthelist.com/>  
Instagram: LookBeyondTheList

Twitter: @BeyondTheList

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)