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11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them (Blog Post)

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When most people think of bias, they think of a negative action taken deliberately. But there are unconscious or implicit biases <<https://catalyst.org/research/infographic-what-is-unconscious-bias/>> that can affect your behavior or decisions without you realizing it. Unconscious biases are often based on mistaken, inaccurate, or incomplete information. These biases can have a significant impact on workplaces, shaping who gets recruited, hired, and promoted. Having an unconscious bias doesn't make you a bad person—it just means you're human.

It's possible, however, to interrupt bias. The first step is awareness. Below are the most common types of unconscious bias, along with tactics you can use to ensure workplace decisions aren't being guided by them.

1. Affinity Bias <<https://catalyst.org/solution/managing-affinity-bias-knowledge-burst/>>

Also called like-likes-like, this bias refers to our tendency to gravitate toward people similar to ourselves. That might mean hiring or promoting someone who shares the same race, gender, age, or educational background.

Opportunity: *Ensure that [candidate slates](https://catalyst.org/research-series/break-the-cycle/) for all open positions include two or more qualified women as well as two people from other underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.*

2. Ageism

Discriminating against someone on the [basis of their age](https://catalyst.org/research/gendered-ageism-trend-brief/). Ageism tends to affect women more than men, and starts at younger ages.

Opportunity: *Remove graduation and work experience dates from resumes. Realize that older workers may bring skills and experiences to the table that younger workers can't.*

3. Attribution Bias <<https://leanin.org/education/what-is-attribution-bias/>>

Because some people see women as less competent than men, they may undervalue their accomplishments and overvalue their mistakes.

Opportunity: *Give honest, detailed feedback to all of your direct reports, and [tie it to concrete](https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-managers-eliminating-gender-bias-in-development-opportunities/) business goals and outcomes. [Research shows](https://hbr.org/2016/04/research-vague-feedback-is-holding-women-back/) that feedback given to women tends to be vague and focused on communication style, while men are given specific feedback that tends to be tied to business goals and technical skills that accelerate advancement.*

4. Beauty Bias

Judging people, especially women, based on how attractive you think they are is called [beauty bias](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/how-to-avoid-beauty-bias-when-hiring.aspx) <<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/how-to-avoid-beauty-bias-when-hiring.aspx>>. People perceived as attractive can be viewed more positively and treated more favorably.

Opportunity: *Try to be aware of those judging thoughts in your head during the hiring process and promotion opportunities. Focus on their work, not their look.*

5. Confirmation Bias <https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/confirmation_bias.htm>

Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to look for or favor information that confirms beliefs we already hold.

Opportunity: *Identify your blind spots. Build your own awareness about unconscious bias.* <<https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-managers-eliminating-gender-bias-in-development-opportunities/>>

6. Conformity Bias <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaagarwaleurope/2018/10/19/how-can-bias-during-interviews-affect-recruitment-in-your-organisation/#457bc511951a>>

Very common in group settings, this type of bias occurs when your views are swayed or influenced by the views of others. This is similar to groupthink.

Opportunity: *Consider using structured interviews and wait to share your thoughts with coworkers until the process is over.*

7. The Contrast Effect <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaagarwaleurope/2018/10/19/how-can-bias-during-interviews-affect-recruitment-in-your-organisation/#457bc511951a>>

This bias refers to evaluating the performance of one person <<https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-hr-experts-eliminating-gender-bias-from-the-recruitment-process/>> in contrast to another because you experienced the individuals either simultaneously or in close succession.

Opportunity: *If you find yourself comparing two people, especially in the hiring process, write down why you are leaning toward one over the other. Be sure your assessment is of each of them individually, not in comparison to one another.*

8. Gender Bias <<https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-managers-eliminating-gender-bias-in-development-opportunities/>>

Preferring one gender over another or assuming that one gender is better for the job.

Opportunity: *Try to use neutral language in job descriptions*

<<https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-hr-experts-eliminating-gender-bias-from-the-recruitment-process/>> *that don't resonate more with one gender over another. When thinking about development opportunities or promotions, try to switch the gender of the person you're thinking about and see if it changes your perception of their readiness.*

9. The Halo/Horns Effect <<https://www.trakstar.com/blog-post/identifying-the-halohorns-effect-with-a-performance-review-system/>>

The tendency to put someone on a pedestal or think more highly of them after learning something impressive about them, or conversely, perceiving someone negatively after learning something unfavorable about them.

Opportunity: *Consider why you have a negative (or positive) perception. Ask yourself if your perception stems from unconscious stereotyping based on race, gender, or ethnicity, for instance.*

10. Name Bias <<https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/unconscious-bias-examples>>

When you judge a person based on their name and perceived background. This is especially important when reviewing resumes.

Opportunity: *Remove candidates' names <<https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-hr-experts-eliminating-gender-bias-from-the-recruitment-process/>> from resumes to ensure you choose people based on their skills and experience, not their perceived background.*

11. Weight Bias <<https://www.obesityaction.org/action-through-advocacy/weight-bias/>>

Judging a person negatively because they are larger or heavier than average.

Opportunity: *When making judgments about a person, consider how you would feel if the person was thinner.*

Now that you are aware of the different kinds of unconscious bias, you can start to put systems in place to prevent bias from interfering in your hiring and workplace decisions. For additional help, check out Catalyst's entire [Break the Cycle Toolkit](https://catalyst.org/research-series/break-the-cycle/) <<https://catalyst.org/research-series/break-the-cycle/>>, which features guides for managers, HR experts, and senior leaders on how to eliminate gender bias in hiring, performance assessments, and more.

Topics: Gender Bias <<https://www.catalyst.org/topics/gender-bias/>>

Implicit Bias <<https://www.catalyst.org/topics/implicit-bias/>>

Inclusion Workshops <<https://www.catalyst.org/solution/leading-workshops/>>

Give your managers the skills they need to succeed in uncertain times.

Understanding Unconscious Bias: Ask Catalyst Express

<<https://www.catalyst.org/research/unconscious-bias-resources/>>

Resources for employees to interrupt their own biases.

<<https://www.catalyst.org>>

Founded in 1962, Catalyst drives change with preeminent thought leadership, actionable solutions and a galvanized community of multinational corporations to accelerate and advance women into leadership—because progress for women is progress for everyone.

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