



Unconscious Bias

What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious or implicit bias refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that people may hold towards individuals and groups that they are not consciously aware of.

The human psyche feels comfortable with familiarity, often leading to unconscious bias around unfamiliar ideas, cultures, and ways of living. This want for familiarity contributes to the way individuals stereotype other people and groups, including at a subconscious level. And is why, to some extent, we all harbour unconscious biases.[i]

While unconscious bias may be common to all people, negative racial biases are not. Since Australia's colonisation, white settlers have asserted power over First Nations Peoples. The racism and unequal power that is embedded within our institutions and national history continues to contribute to negative racial biases of marginalised cultures and racial groups. [ii]

What is the impact of unconscious bias?

Reconciliation Australia's 2022 Barometer illustrates that while 42 percent of non-Indigenous Australians believe we live in a racist country, 89 percent feel that relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians are important. Despite this, research indicates that 75 percent of non-Indigenous Australians hold negative unconscious biases towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[iii]

This suggests that while most Australians consciously reject racist attitudes towards First Nations Peoples, we still harbour negative biases and prejudice.



Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias can impact outcomes in justice, equality in life chances, actions, and everyday decision-making. [iv]

Unconscious racial biases:

- Can lead to microaggressions
- Can impact life chances, such as:
 - o Missing out on a job interview due to a non-Anglo name[v]
 - o Access to employment and education
 - o Rental and home-owning processes
- Impacts basic civil liberties and outcomes in justice
- May lead to poor health outcomes due to biased clinical judgements by health care workers

How to address unconscious bias

Avoiding unconscious bias **requires an acknowledgement that everyone harbours it to some extent.** This means that everyone must challenge and work to undo the unconscious biases they hold.

Try the following practices[vi] :

Empathise with the feelings and viewpoints of others

This is a powerful technique for reducing unconscious bias and stereotyping. Understanding someone else's position helps us to empathise with it.

Improve cultural awareness by learning about cultural diversity and differences

Unconscious bias is exaggerated by ignorance. People often avoid what they do not understand and the best way to rectify this is to educate yourself on cultural diversity and be open to diverse ways of living.

Challenge the negative stereotyping that you may have learned

Media and TV tend to highlight the strengths of the dominant culture, which in Australia, is Western culture. Open yourself to diverse forms of media that highlight the strengths of diverse groups.



Next Steps

- 1 Learn more about unconscious bias at our resource page.**
- 2 Read our next factsheet on micro-aggressions.**
- 3 Become familiar with basic terminology**

[i] "Implicit Racial Bias", 2018, Justice Research and Statistics Association.
<https://www.jrsa.org/pubs/factsheets/jrsa-factsheet-implicit-racial-bias.pdf>

[ii] "Implicit Racial Bias", 2018, Justice Research and Statistics Association.

[iii] Quigley, A, Hutton, J, Phillips, G, Dreise, D, Mason, T, Garvey, G & Paradies, 'Review article: Implicit bias towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients within Australian emergency departments', 2021, Emergency medicine Australasia, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 9-18.

[iv] Tyner, A.R. 2019, "Unconscious Bias, Implicit Bias, Microaggressions: What Can We Do about Them?", GPSolo, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 30-33.

[v] Racism it stops with me - ask yourself the hard questions. Australian Human Rights Commission. Published July 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-5ezuQmVm0&ab_channel=AustralianHumanRightsCommission

[vi] "4 ways to reduce unconscious bias", n.d, Hudson.

<https://au.hudson.com/insights/assessment/4-ways-to-reduce-unconscious-bias/>