

Ben Barres, a neuroscientist, gave a talk at his alma mater and overheard a faculty member comment, “Ben Barres gave a great seminar today, but then his work is much better than his sister’s”. Ben Barres has no neuroscientist sister. He is transgendered and the “sister” he was being compared to was himself before his sex change (Barres, 2006). Did Barres become more gifted or start to do better work when he became male? Not according to him. Rather, our shared notion that men are better at math, an implicit attitude or bias, is more likely at play.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

All individuals, no matter how well intentioned, have experiences and memories that affect our attitudes below the conscious level and, hence, are *implicit*. We use these as cognitive shortcuts to deal with the wealth of information that bombards us at any given moment. Most of us have ourselves been affected by the biases of others. If such negative experiences occur on a daily basis and are part of the departmental or university culture, these unconscious or implicit biases can be major barriers to recruiting and retaining the best faculty. In a cyclic manner, these barriers to diversity are often maintained by these unacknowledged biases and may only be overcome by active acknowledgment and institutional transformation.

Such implicit biases have had a profound impact on career choices and career progression in the STEM disciplines that are traditionally viewed as male. For example, copious research demonstrates that both men and women evaluate a man’s CV or resume more favorably than a woman’s (see examples and research in References and Resources below).

IMPLICIT BIAS

Is characterized by:

- Arising quickly beneath our conscious awareness—may be contradictory to explicit attitudes. The individual articulating the bias is generally unaware he/she is doing so.
- May reflect specific stereotypes (e.g., when we think of math, we more quickly think of men than women) or emotions (e.g., we feel more positively toward male scientists compared to female scientists)

- May occur for many different groups distinguished by sex, race/ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation

Has consequences:

- Lose the opportunity to hire superior faculty and to take advantage of the experience of talented individuals within the faculty
- Biased perspective becomes incorporated into institutional practices such as hiring and evaluation
- Limited range of viewpoints can narrow fields of scholarship/research
- Engender microaggressive behaviors such as veiled verbal insults, interruptions in conversation, and underappreciated opinions or work
- Faculty members in the minority may feel excluded or marginalized, or experience limited opportunities to participate in departmental/institutional decision making
- Lack of senior colleagues from the same demographic group may perpetuate the cycle, e.g. new faculty receive little guidance/mentorship
- Lack of faculty from diverse backgrounds will discourage students within diverse or minority groups from pursuing careers in the same field

LIMITING THE IMPACT OF IMPLICIT BIAS

Recognize that implicit bias is universal; examine your own biases

- Visit <http://www.projectimplicit.net/> (*Project Implicit*; Harvard University) to learn about your own biases and to find references about recognizing bias in the workplace
- Use only well-defined criteria when selecting and evaluating faculty and staff; communicate the selection and evaluation criteria to all
- Take adequate time to consider different aspects of a colleague’s professional experience when selecting or evaluating members of committees, assigning teaching

responsibilities, examining promotion and tenure materials, etc.

- Attend search committee training offered by the UNL Office of Equity, Access and Diversity Programs (EDAP)
- Consult the document, *Best Practices, Faculty Recruitment, Development and Retention, A Guide for Colleges and Departments*, by the UNL ADVANCE Faculty Committee

Limit the impact of implicit bias in the department/university

- Govern all interactions among faculty and/or students by mutual respect
- Appreciate that true growth only comes from the acquisition of new knowledge and experiences, *i.e.* diversity
- Department chairs/heads: speak compellingly in support of diversity and advocate for persons from underrepresented groups
- Department/university leadership should include people with diverse perspectives/experience
- Ensure that departmental practices (hiring, evaluation, meetings) are inclusive and that all voices are heard
- Introduce the concept of implicit bias to the search and evaluation committees early in the process.
- Periodically make implicit bias and its consequences a discussion topic in faculty meetings

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