

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE ACADEMIC LIFE CYCLE

Overview document compiled by the Office of the Vice Provost, Faculty & Academic Life, building on research by Maydianne Andrade, Vice Dean, Faculty Affairs & Equity, UTSC, and with contributions by TIDE (Toronto Initiative for Diversity & Excellence)

Why we've developed this document

- This document **synthesizes research on unconscious bias** relevant to the academic and U of T context to help faculty engaged in academic HR processes (hiring, tenure/continuing status review, promotion, nominations, etc.) **recognize unconscious bias, and understand the significance of its effects.**
- Other resources designed to enhance the ability of all participants in academic HR processes to (1) *identify* and (2) *mitigate* instances of unconscious bias include:
 - *In person:* The University offers in-person unconscious bias education through the TIDE initiative. Contact unconscious.bias@utoronto.ca for details.
 - *For search committees:* [Strategies for Recruiting an Excellent & Diverse Faculty Complement](#).
- Unconscious bias education for faculty and academic administrators sits alongside **resources made available by the Office of the Provost to support faculty diversity**, including: targeted funding for faculty hires, improved use of institutional data on race and gender, and memberships for all faculty members with the [National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity](#).



DEFINING
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS &
ITS EFFECTS



Defining unconscious bias

- "Unconscious bias" in academic HR refers to the **influence of implicit or unconscious assumptions in the assessment of candidates and faculty.**
- These biases are a by-product of environment and culture, and are held even by people with strong commitments to fairness and diversity.
- People may also hold biases against members of groups to which they belong (e.g. women may hold unconscious biases that affect their assessment of women candidates).

Effects of unconscious bias

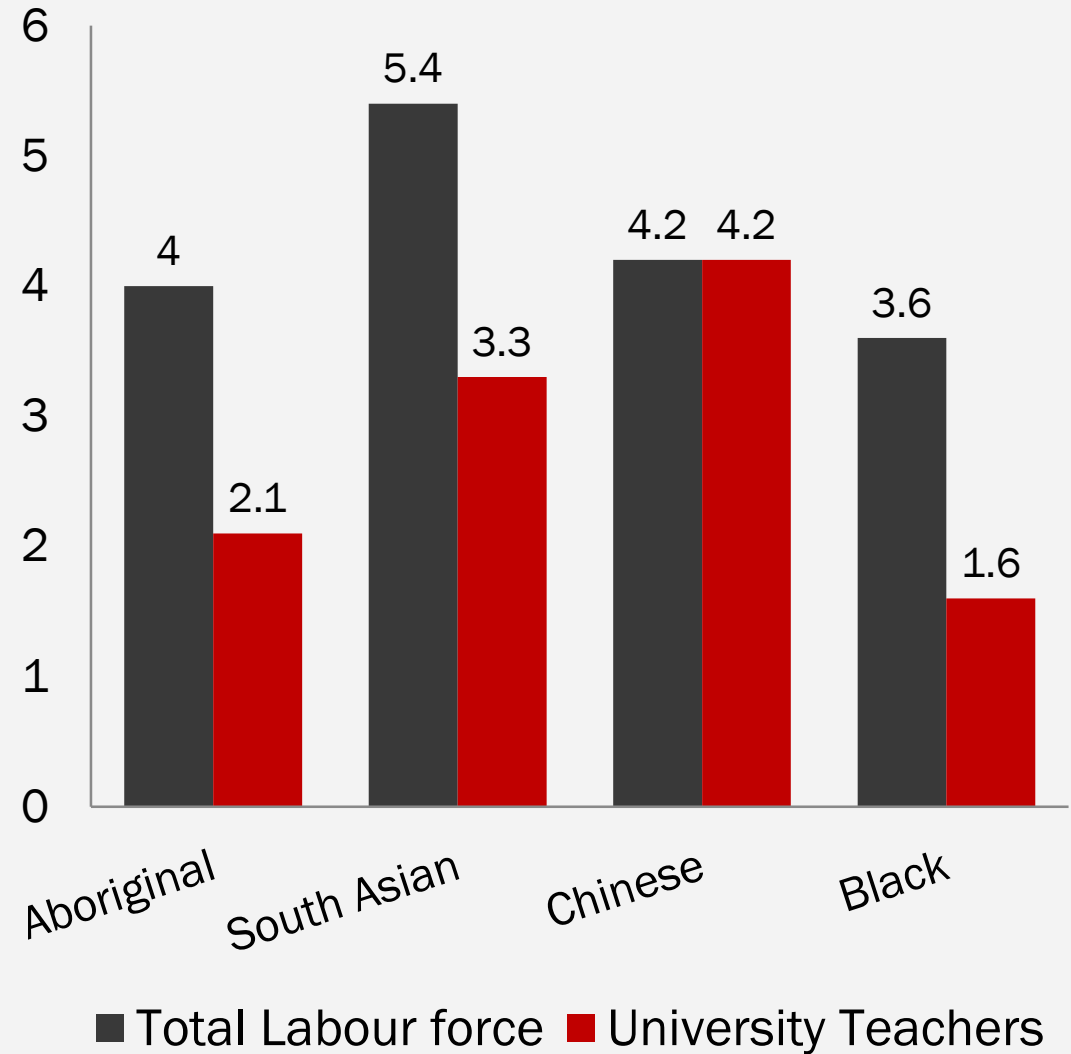
- Everyone can be subject to the unconscious biases of others. For some groups (women, racialized and Indigenous faculty, faculty with disabilities, among others), **patterns of bias contribute to underrepresentation of these populations** across an institution, in particular fields, or in particular stages of the academic life cycle.
- To address underrepresentation, members and chairs of committees or other groups making decisions about academic careers or activities must undertake efforts to identify and mitigate unconscious bias.

Underrepresentation of racialized faculty in Canadian universities



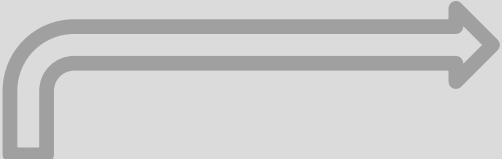
Census data and categories. Data compiled by Maydianne Andrade from the [Canadian Association of University Teachers](#), 2010.

Defining unconscious bias & its effects



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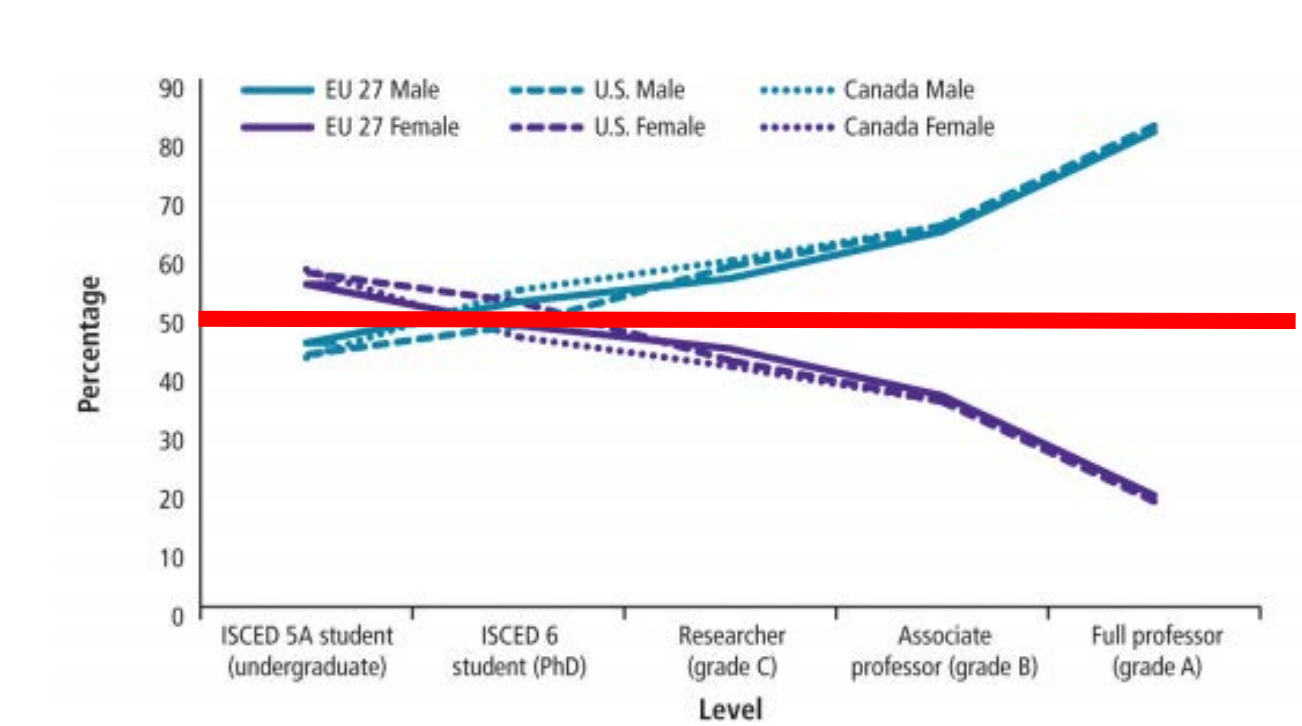
Underrepresentation of women faculty in Canadian universities



From *Strengthening Canada's Research Capacity: The Gender Dimension*. Council of Canadian Academies, 2012.

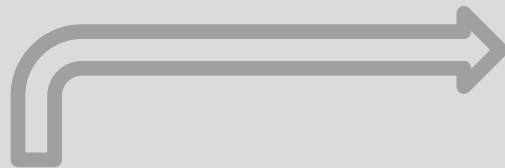
EU, Canada & USA (2007 data)

Male faculty █
Female faculty █



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Underrepresentation of women CRCs



From [*Strengthening Canada's Research Capacity: The Gender Dimension*](#). Council of Canadian Academies, 2012, and current [CRC](#) and [CERC](#) information.

Defining unconscious bias & its effects

CRC 2003 (first year)

17% awarded to women (~30% of faculty were women*)

- Settlement with Canadian Human Rights Commission over charge of discrimination

CRC 2015 (most recent available data)

17% of T1 and 37% of T2 Chairs awarded to women

Canada Excellence Research Chairs

2008 (first year)

0 of 19 awarded to women

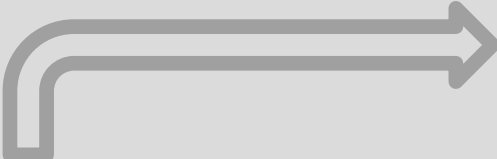
0 of 36 of short-listed proposals from women

CERC 2016

2 of 10 awarded to women

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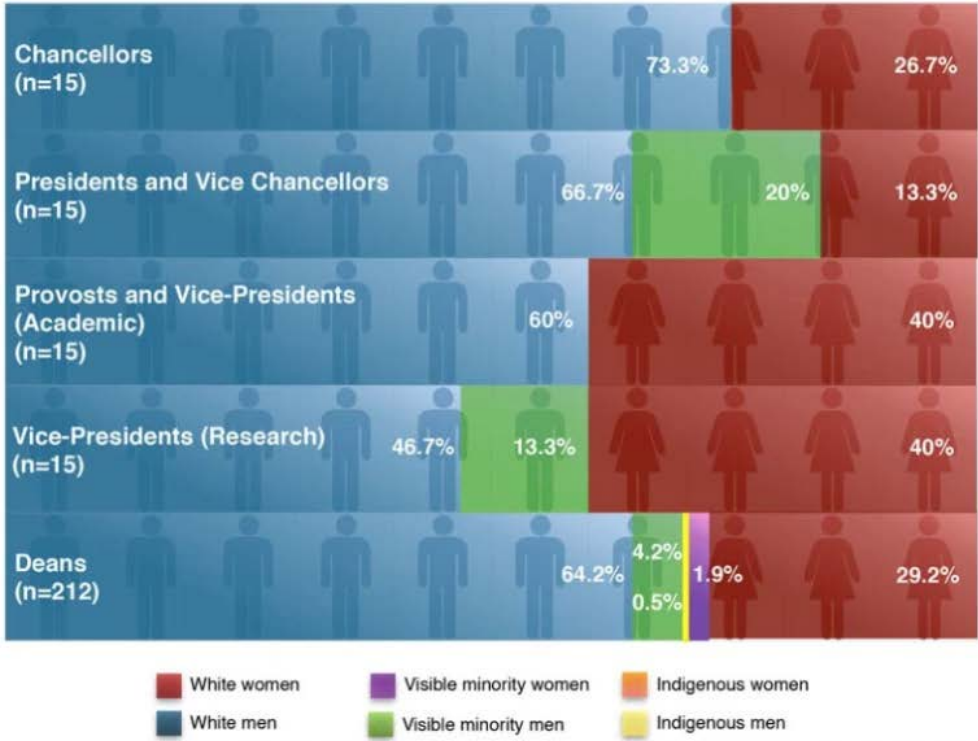
Underrepresentation in senior administration

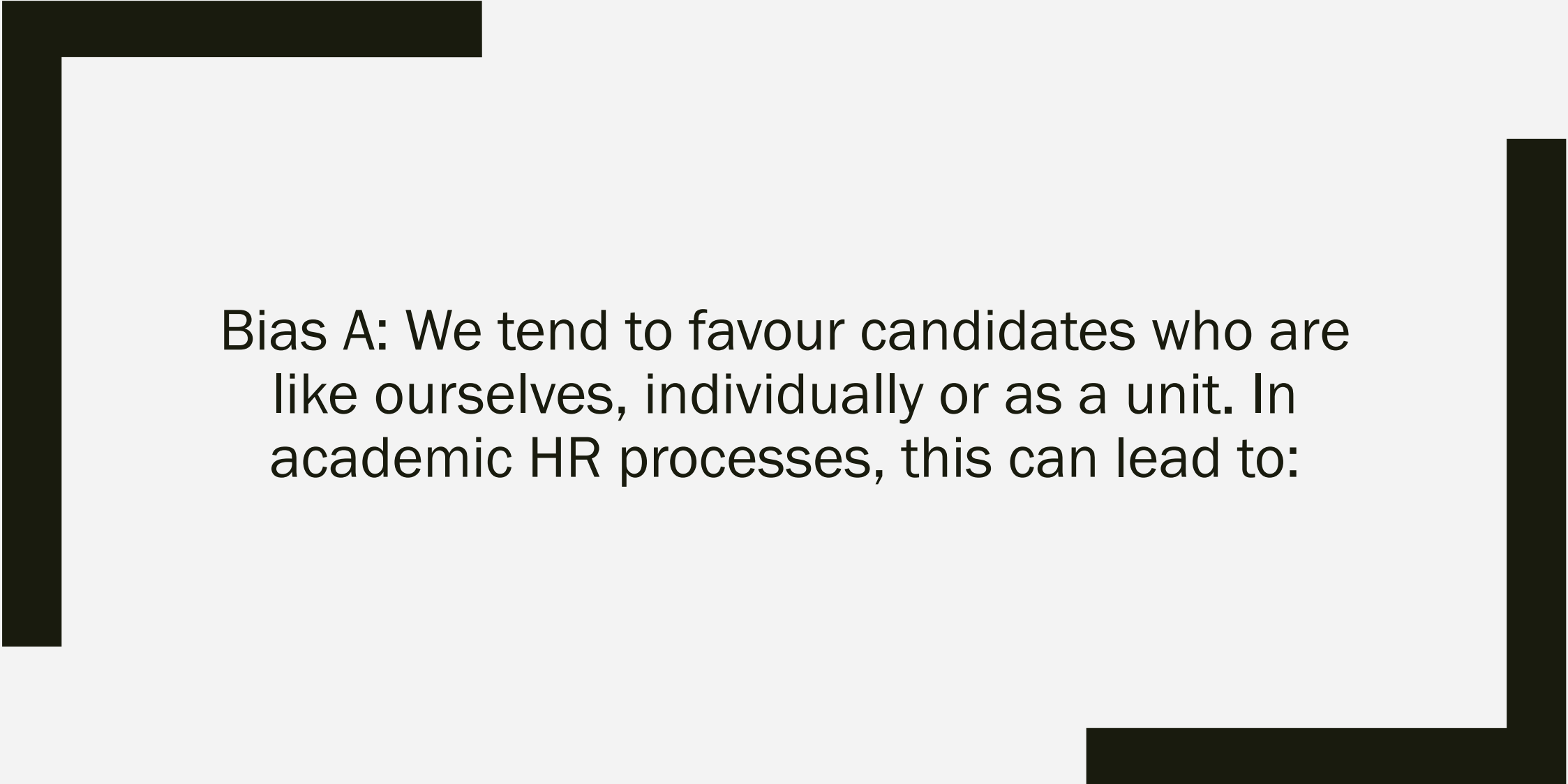


An annual survey of diversity in senior leadership across Canadian universities demonstrates that these roles are primarily filled by white men and overwhelmingly by white candidates ([Academic Women’s Association, University of Alberta, 2017](#)).

THE DIVERSITY GAP IN 2017

Canadian Universities - U15 Leadership Diversity Pipeline





Bias A: We tend to favour candidates who are like ourselves, individually or as a unit. In academic HR processes, this can lead to:

Effects of Bias A: Favouring “like” candidates

Favouring candidates...

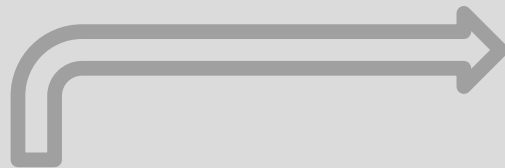
- ...whose research reflects existing unit strengths or whose profile matches that of a retiring faculty member.
- ...who have attended similar institutions as members of the committee, or who otherwise have a similar academic profile.
- ...who match the demographic characteristics of the unit.

Disadvantaging candidates...

- ...who have pursued unconventional research areas or methodologies, including interdisciplinary or community-engaged research.
- ...with unusual pathways to academic jobs (e.g. who worked first in government or industry, and returned to graduate school later in their career).
- ...who are underrepresented in the unit.

I think of an institution as an old garment: it has acquired the shape of those who tend to wear it such that it becomes easier to wear if you have that shape. – [Sara Ahmed](#)

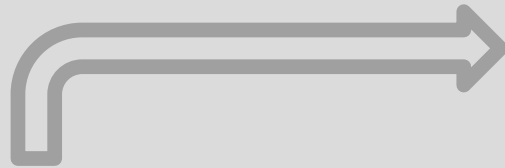
A.1: Research, examples, and illustrations:



See these dynamics in action in a narrative scenario from Skidmore College as part of their 2017 [Video Interventions for Diversity in STEM](#) resource.



A.2: Research, examples, and illustrations:



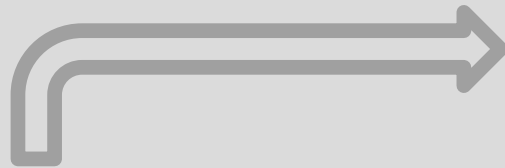
Though in a law firm rather than a university, Hadiya Roderique describes her experiences with affinity bias in a professional environment. From the [Globe & Mail](#), 2017.

ESSAY

Black on Bay Street: Hadiya Roderique had it all. But still could not fit in

My parents moved to Canada to offer me the promise of the North American dream. But on my way to becoming a lawyer, I learned that success isn't necessarily about merit. It's also about fitting in. As a person of colour, that's a roadblock that comes up again and again

A.3: Research, examples, and illustrations:



From the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor’s *STRIDE* (Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence) [Faculty Recruitment Workshop Presentation](#), 2015.



Bias B: we tend to treat candidates who are members of dominant groups in society (e.g., white candidates, male candidates) with greater generosity in terms of interpreting any ambiguity in their record or in assessing their potential. In academic HR processes, this can lead to:

Effects of Bias B: Favouring candidates from dominant groups

Advantaging members of dominant groups by...

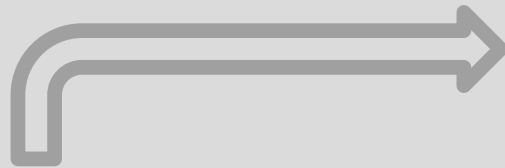
- ...attributing success to individual action and skill.
- ...making positive assumptions about potential and future performance.
- ...making a more positive assessment of a given candidate's work, despite equal performance.
- ...supporting candidates who harbour serious flaws alongside strengths.

Disadvantaging candidates outside dominant groups by...

- ...using fewer superlatives to describe their work, and focusing more on effort than inherent ability.
- ...attributing success to collaborators or graduate supervisors, luck, or external factors.
- ...holding candidates to a much higher standard of success or excellence than candidates from dominant groups.
- ...maintaining a very low tolerance for failure or weaknesses of any kind.

...the culture of academia remains distinctly white, male, heterosexual, and middle- to upper-class. Faculty members whose identities differ from this unspoken and largely uncontested norm find themselves...presumed incompetent as scholars, teachers, and participants in university governance. –[Presumed Incompetent: Continuing the Conversation](#)

B.1: Research, examples, and illustrations:



“[Bias Interrupters](#)” from the Center for Worklife Law, 2016.

Bias B: Favouring candidates from dominant groups

[**BIAS INTERRUPTERS**] *small steps big change*

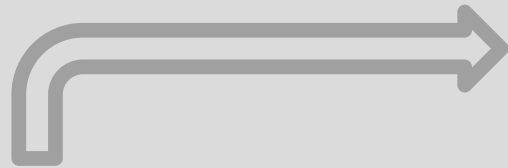
Identifying & Interrupting Bias in Hiring

The four patterns below describe *tendencies not absolutes*. Here’s what to watch out for:

Prove-It-Again! (“PIA”) Groups stereotyped as less competent often have to prove themselves over and over. “PIA groups” include women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, older employees, LGBT+, and class migrants (professionals from blue-collar backgrounds.)

1. **Higher standards.** When evaluating identical resumes “Jamal” needed eight additional years of experience to be judged as qualified as “Greg,” and “Jennifer” was offered \$4,000 less in salary than “John.”
2. **“He’ll go far;” “She’s not ready”** Majority men tend to be judged on their potential, whereas PIA groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.
3. **Casualty: education vs. experience.** When a man had more experience, people tended to choose to hire the man because he had more experience. But when the man had more education, people again chose the man because he had more education. Both education and experience counted less when women had them.
4. **Elite school bias.** Over-reliance on elite educational credentials hurts class migrants and candidates of color. Almost half of Harvard students are from families in the top 4% of household incomes. Top students from lower ranked schools are often as successful as students from elite schools
5. **PIA groups get horns; others a halo.** Horns=one weakness generalized into an overall negative rating. Halo=one strength generalized into a global positive rating.
6. **“We applied the rule—until we didn’t.”** Objective requirements often are applied rigorously to PIA groups—but leniently (or waived entirely) for majority men.
7. **Do only the superstars survive?** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.

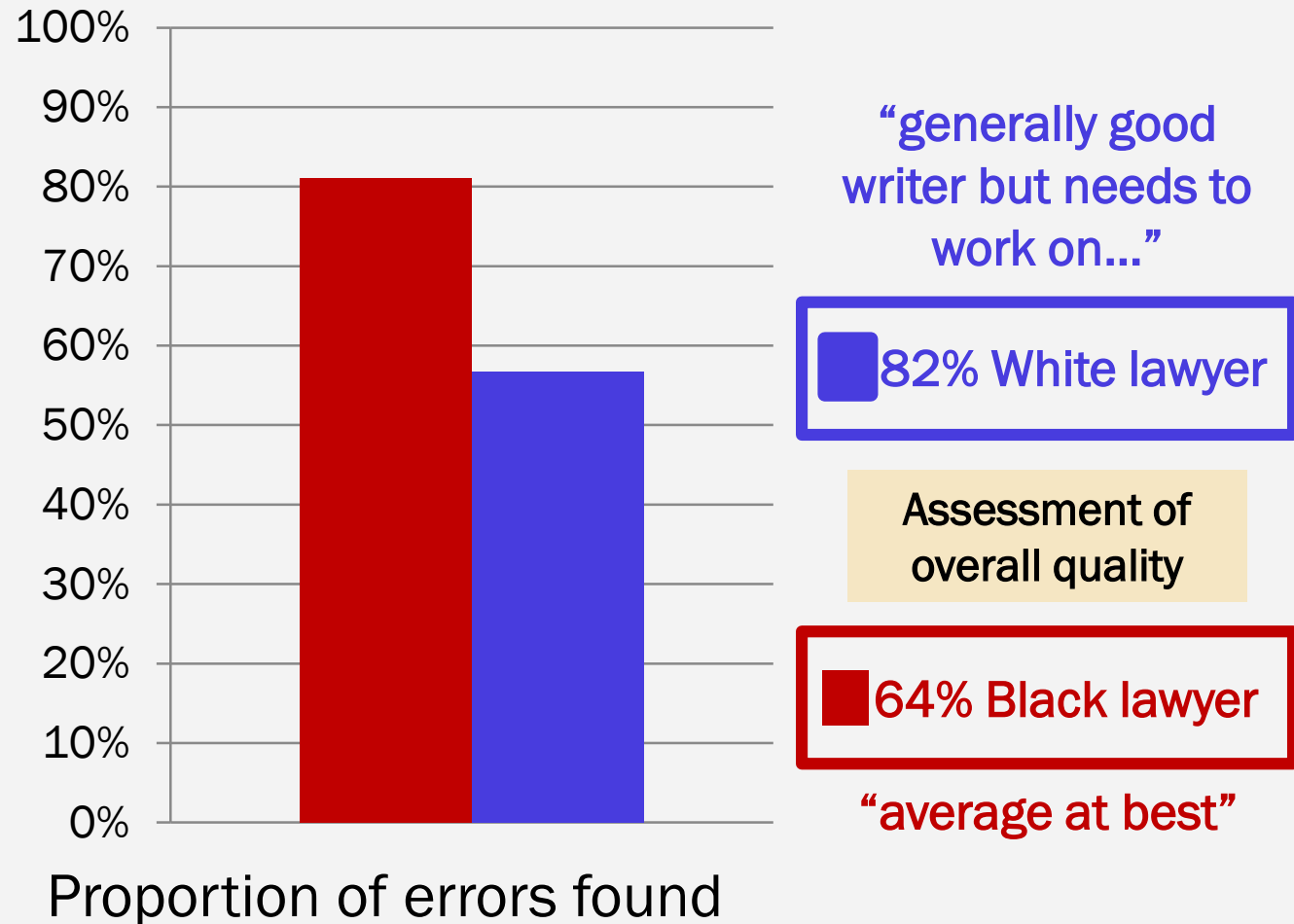
B.2: Research, examples, and illustrations:



A 2014 study asked lawyers to assess a piece of writing: when told it was written by a young white attorney, assessors identified fewer errors and had an overall more positive view of the writing than when they were told it was written by a young Black attorney. ([Reeves, 2014](#))

Bias B: Favouring candidates from dominant groups

Racial Bias in Performance Assessment



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B.3: Research, examples, and illustrations:



Provided with equivalent CVs for male and female candidates, reviewers were asked whether they would consider that candidate for a tenure-track position and/or for tenure. Reviewers were more likely to extend offers to “good” male candidates; “exceptional” women candidates were as likely to be recommended for tenure, but reviewers expressed more doubts or caveats about their files. ([Steinpreis, Anders & Ritzke, 1999](#))

Bias B: Favouring candidates from dominant groups

Gender bias in hiring and tenure decisions

Good record:

| | Male name | Female name |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Offer tenure-track job | ~45% | ~29% |

Exceptional record:

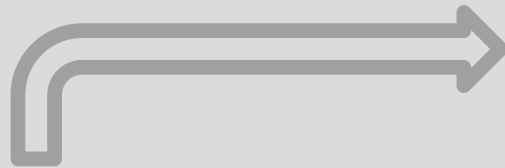
| | Male name | Female name |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Hire & grant tenure | ~35% | ~35% |

BUT: **4x more likely** to express **reservations** if the candidate was female

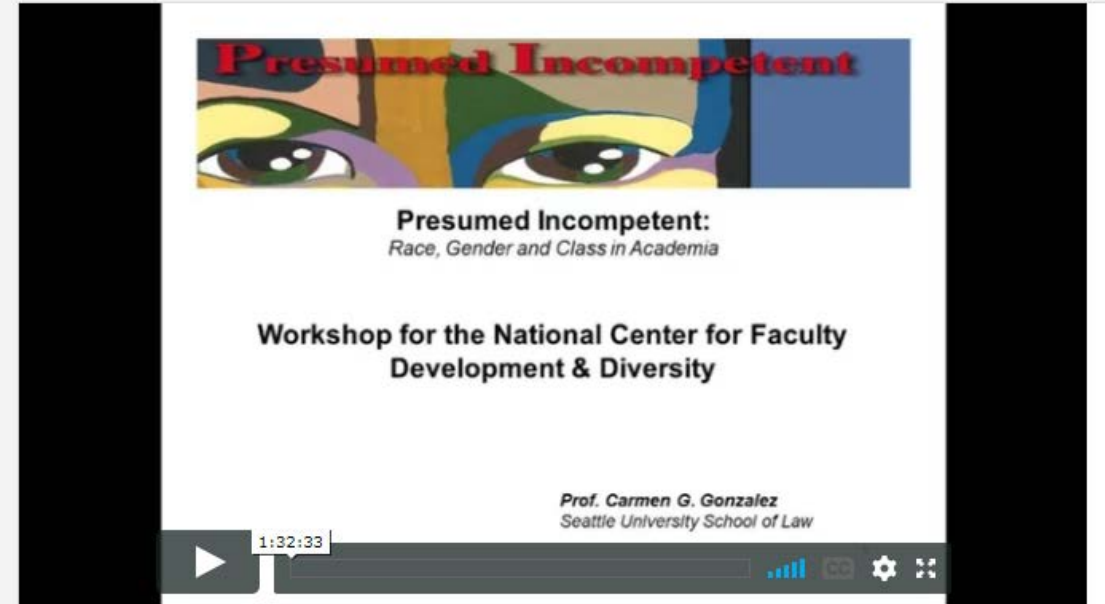
© [MCB Andrade 2017](#)

e.g.,
“I would need to see evidence that she had gotten these grants on her own.”

B.4: Research, examples, and illustrations:



For a detailed discussion of this dynamic in US academic careers, watch this [one-hour webinar](#) from the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity (2013) led by one of the editors of *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*.



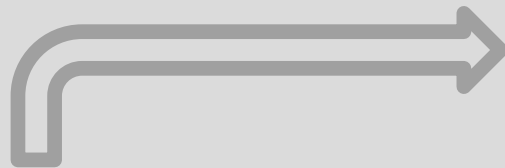
Bias C: Underrepresented faculty are often asked to walk a “tightrope” between the expectations associated with their gender, race, indigeneity, or other aspects of their identity, and the mismatch between those expectations and the stereotypes associated with university faculty and leaders.

The result is that **“a narrower range of workplace behaviour is often accepted”** from these candidates.

- In addition to facing unconscious bias because they do not “match” the expected image of a faculty member in a particular field or role, candidates from underrepresented groups may be:
 - seen disfavouredly if they stray too far from stereotypes about their identity
 - directed into service work that reflects these stereotypes but that carries less status and power in the institution
- As a consequence, this tightrope further limits opportunities extended to underrepresented candidates, especially as they advance in their careers.

Leader or worker bee? [Tightrope] groups face pressure to be “worker bees” who work hard and are undemanding...but if they comply, they lack “leadership potential.” – [Bias Interrupters](#), Centre for Worklife Law, 2016.

C.1: Research, examples, and illustrations:



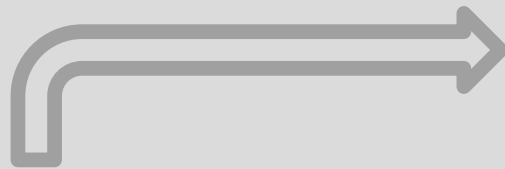
Shared assumptions about men and leaders make it easier to imagine men in leadership roles. Women are assumed not to possess qualities associated with leadership – and are perceived negatively if they do display these traits ([Rojahn & Willemssen, 1994](#), [Eagly & Karau, 2002](#); [Abele, 2003](#); [Rosette & Tost, 2010](#))

Consistent results across studies:

| Beliefs about males: | Beliefs about leaders: | Beliefs about females: |
|--|--|--|
| Dedicated Determined Assertive Competitive | Dedicated Determined Competitive Charismatic | Helpful Caring Sympathetic Kind |
| 'Agentic traits' | | 'Communal traits' |

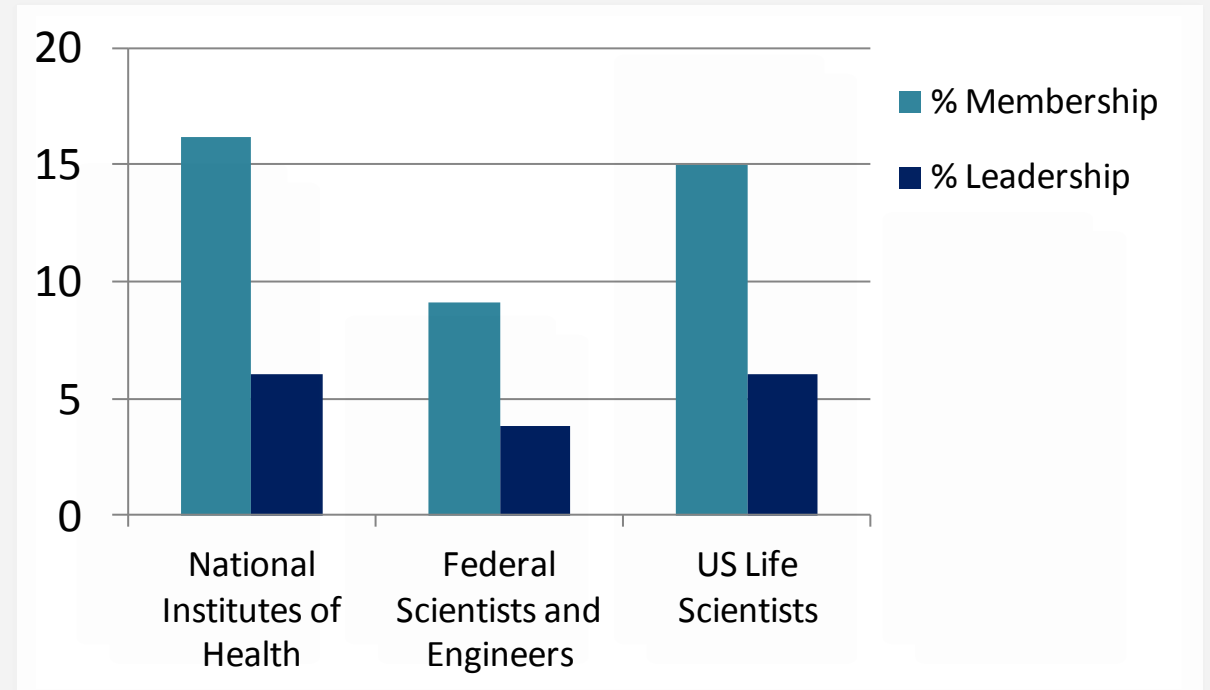
Women penalized in assessment for exhibiting “male” traits
e.g., agentic traits seen as negatives when exhibited by women

C.2: Research, examples, and illustrations:



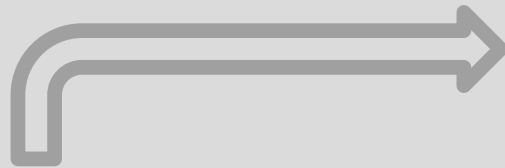
Asian faculty hold a representative share of faculty positions in North American institutions, but are underrepresented in *leadership* positions. (For a discussion of this discrepancy, see [Berdahl & Min, 2012](#); [Rosette, Leonardelli & Phillips, 2008](#); [Sy et al, 2010](#).)

Participation in Science Organizations by Asian/Asian-American Faculty Members



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Compiled with data from the NSF & NIH

C.3: Research, examples, and illustrations:



Articles from [University Affairs](#) (2010) and the [Guardian Higher Education Network](#) series on University Leadership (2017) address the bias faced by underrepresented faculty members as they progress in their careers (note that BAME is a UK acronym for Black, Asian & minority ethnic).

News

Opinion

Features

Career Advice

Multimedia

FEATURES

Racism in the academy

Universities are considered to be among the most liberal institutions in society, yet many non-Caucasian scholars say they still feel excluded or denied opportunities. How does this happen?

By HARRIET EISENKRAFT | OCT 12 2010

Higher Education Network
University leadership

Do universities have a problem with promoting their BAME staff?

There are woefully few people of colour in leadership positions at universities. While steps are being taken, genuine change requires sector-wide commitment

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About this content

Coco Khan

@cocobyname

Thursday 16 November
2017 07.30 GMT





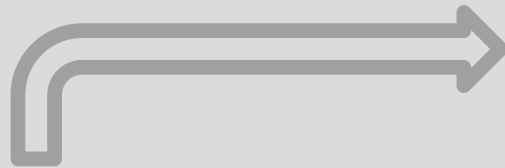
Case study of effective practice in addressing
unconscious bias—University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor



Learning about unconscious bias and taking specific steps to address its effects can **improve representation** of underrepresented faculty groups.

- An initiative at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor incorporating faculty-led education sessions and recommended changes to search and recruitment practices led Michigan to hire more women in STEM fields and to surpass its peers in hiring racialized faculty.
- Slides and details drawn from the EAB's [*Breakthrough Advances in Faculty Diversity: Lessons and Innovative Practice from the Frontier*](#) (2008).

STRIDE: Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence



At the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, a committee of faculty formed STRIDE: Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence. Faculty members developed research-driven materials and presentations to groups of peers sitting on search committees.

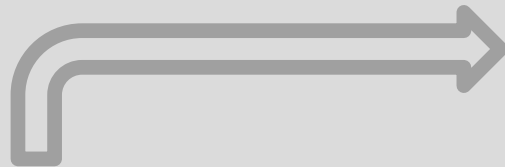
Case in Brief



University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

- Senior faculty from 11 departments and 3 colleges serve on Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence (STRIDE) Committee
- Membership is a deeply intellectual experience as well as a substantial time commitment
- Committee designs and delivers search committee workshops on recruiting diverse faculty
- Per ADVANCE grant conditions, committee initially focused on female faculty in sciences and engineering
- With institutional support, focus expanded to race as well as gender in all disciplines

Search committee workshops

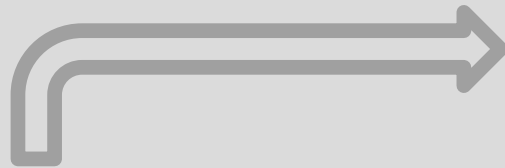


The workshop that STRIDE developed focuses on four areas. Each area is delivered by a different faculty member who has built expertise on that topic.

Components of Search Committee Workshop

1. Importance of Faculty Diversity
2. Effects of Unconscious Bias
3. Institutional Performance and Benchmarks
4. Best Practices in Recruiting

Increase in women faculty in science & engineering

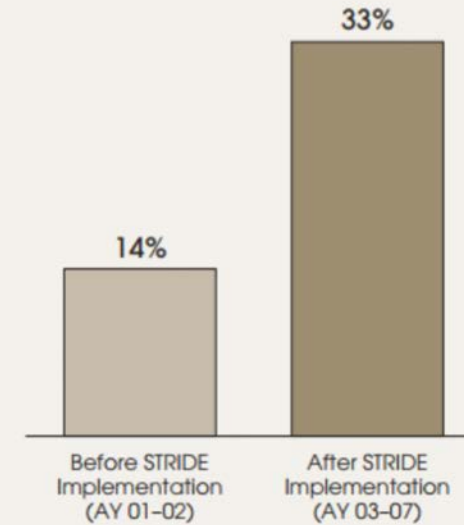


The implementation of STRIDE, which initially focused on increasing the representation of women faculty in STEM fields but has since expanded to address other areas of underrepresentation, has resulted in increased hiring of women faculty in Science and Engineering.

A Substantial Impact on Hiring Outcomes

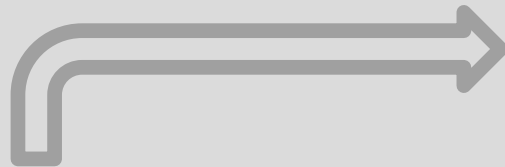
Female Representation Among Tenure-Track Hires in Science and Engineering

University of Michigan



Source: ADVANCE Program. *ADVANCE Program Overview*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2007. <http://www.umich.edu/~advproj/overview.pdf>.

Peer leader in representation of racialized faculty

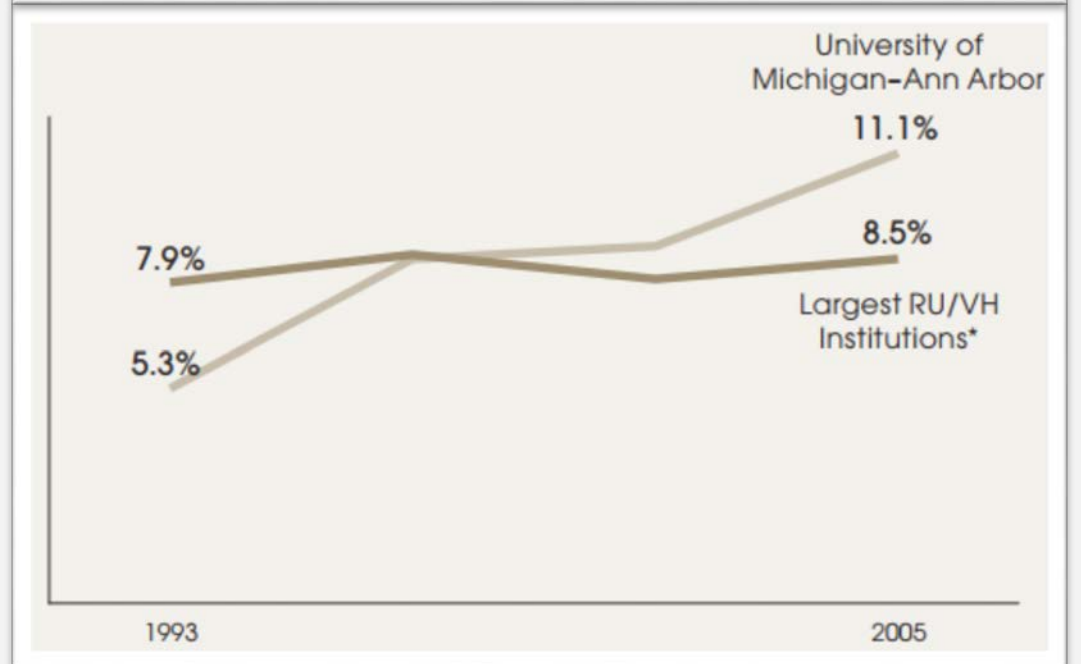


Across the board, Michigan has surpassed its large research university peers in representation of what it calls Underrepresented Minority Faculty.

Some Institutions Surpassing Peers

Fig. 1.26

Percentage of URM's Among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty





ADDITIONAL U OF T RESOURCES

Additional U of T resources:

- For **search committee** chairs and members: [Strategies for Recruiting an Excellent & Diverse Faculty Complement](#)

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FURTHER READING

Unconscious bias and underrepresentation in academic HR and the academic community

- *Instilling Equity and Inclusion in Departmental Practices: Guiding Faculty Recruitment and Retention* (2017) and *Breakthrough Advances in Faculty Diversity: Lessons and Innovative Practice from the Frontier* (2008). From the Education Advisory Board (please contact vpfal.prof.dev@utoronto.ca for a copy of these reports).
- *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities* (2017). By Frances Henry, Enakshi Dua, Carl E. James, Audrey Kobayashi, Peter Li, Howard Ramos and Malinda S. Smith. Or review a [shorter article](#) summarizing some of the findings captured in the book.
- A comprehensive 2017 [annotated bibliography](#) of unconscious bias studies and resources from UBC.
- Excellent research and resources from the [University of California, Berkeley](#) and the [University of Michigan, Ann Arbor](#) (2017).
- [Gender Bias Bingo](#) from the Centre for Worklife Law, addressing four patterns of gender bias in academia (2017).
- [On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life](#). (2012). By Sara Ahmed.
- A 2016 opinion piece from a University of Pennsylvania faculty member: [The five things no one will tell you about why colleges don't hire more faculty of color](#).

Unconscious bias in **other contexts**

- Test your own unconscious bias at Harvard's [Project implicit](#) (2011).
- [Bias Interrupters](#) from the Centre for WorkLife Law (2016).
- [Managing Unconscious Bias](#) at Facebook (2017).
- [Why Diversity Programs Fail](#) in the Harvard Business Review (2016). Title aside, this article also discusses which diversity programs and initiatives are most effective.