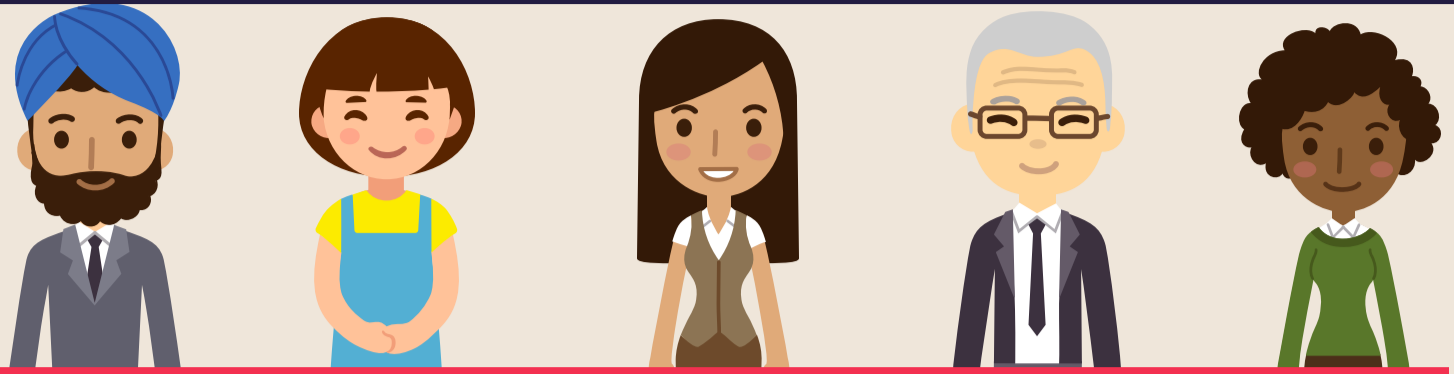


# UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT BIAS



## WHAT IS IMPLICIT BIAS?

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that affect people's understanding and actions. This happens "below the surface", deep in the subconscious, where there is no awareness or intention of bias. Implicit bias is also "activated" involuntarily, it is not something that can easily be turned on or turned off. Additionally, implicit bias can be positive or negative.

## IT ALL STARTS IN THE BRAIN



Implicit bias is a result of the brain trying to categorize all the information that it receives. Because it is just too much work for the brain to process each single piece of information, the brain will sort and categorize based on socialization and memories. While this is a natural cognitive process, in reality it may lead to unfair treatment of one group of people over another.

## OTHER FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE IMPLICIT BIAS

**Entertainment:** what is portrayed on television and movies have an impact on implicit biases. Kang (2012) writes "over-the-top stereotypes have been Hollywood mainstays for decades, and consuming such content influences our attitudes and stereotypes" (p. 135).

**Upbringing:** implicit bias can begin developing at a young age. A 2009 study found a significant connection between mothers' implicit attitudes with their children's (Castelli, Zogmaister and Tomelleri, 2009)



**The Bottom Line:** constant direct and indirect messages about racialized people from sources like the news, movies, peers, family, school, or the workplace can lead to unfair (and false) associations between a group of people and an unfavourable trait or quality.

## SOME NUMBERS ON IMPLICIT BIAS IN HIRING



A 2011 Canadian study looking at discrimination towards resumes with foreign names found that "overall, resumes with English sounding names are **39%** more likely to receive callbacks than resumes with Indian, Pakistani, or Chinese names" (Oreopoulos, 2011, p. 160). Changing a resume from having an English sounding name to a Chinese name lowers the callback rate from **16%** to **11.3%**.

A later study in 2018 using the same data (but amended) found that organizations of different sizes showed different levels of discrimination towards resumes with Asian names (described as Chinese, Indian or Pakistani)

**20%**

In organizations with 500+ employees, resumes with Asian names are 20% less likely to receive a callback.

**40%**

In smaller organizations, Asian names are almost 40% less likely to receive a callback.

Implicit biases may be hard to detect, but it is equally as harmful as direct acts of racism. In the study described above, implicit bias led to unequal hiring practices based simply on a name. Frequent messaging that come from implicit biases are also important to be aware of. These messages from peers, family, education system and media can start shaping public attitude and assumptions (even starting at a young age!) towards certain groups of people - perpetuating racial discrimination at individual and systemic levels.

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