
What is Implicit Bias?



Presented by the Educate, Elevate and Act Subcommittee of the
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee

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Who We Are

- Senghor Manns – CEO, Harrisburg Housing Authority
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NAHRO Leading

*** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Advisory Committee**

*** Club 21**

*** Creation of a safe space at conferences for difficult conversations among colleagues**

*** Current NAHRO Strategic Plan, created in Jan 2020, added a goal to explore DEI issues across NAHRO and our industry**

*** NAHRO prides itself on upholding our Code of Conduct which insists on ethical behavior that honors diversity and respect of our peers**

**But First - let's take a moment to be
mindful and grounded -let's start by:**

- **Stop what you're doing,**
- **Put down your phone,**
- **Take a deep breath and let it out
slowly,**
- **Notice the sensation of your
breath**
- **Let's begin -**

Introduction

The topics of equity, inclusion, implicit bias, and racism are at the forefront of discussion today. Together they are broad, deep, and with a lot of history behind them. Today's workshop focuses on:

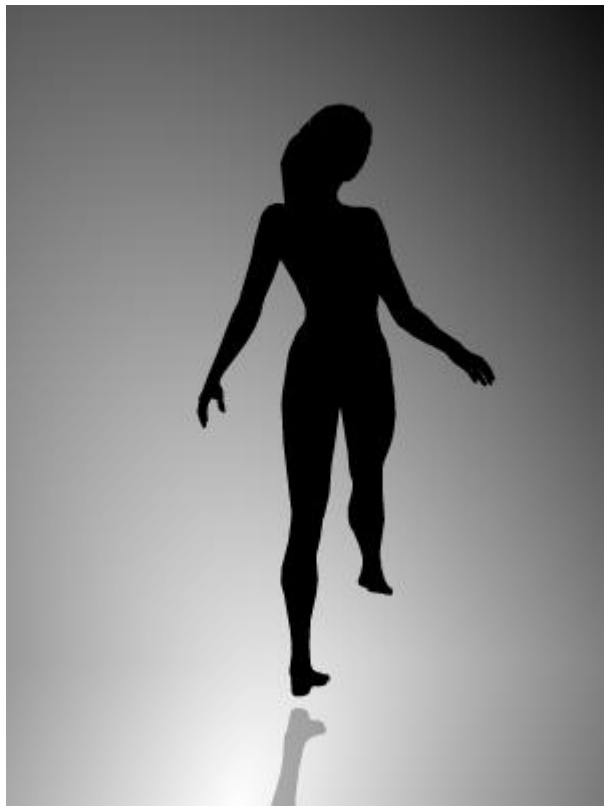
- **Introduction** - NAHRO's work in this area;
- **Overview** - Getting to know your brain;
- **Key Concepts**, Schemas, Stereotypes, Attitudes, InGroup/OutGroup;
- What is **Implicit Bias**? What is the difference between Explicit and Implicit Bias?
- **Types of biases** and their implications for our programs and communities
- Q/A



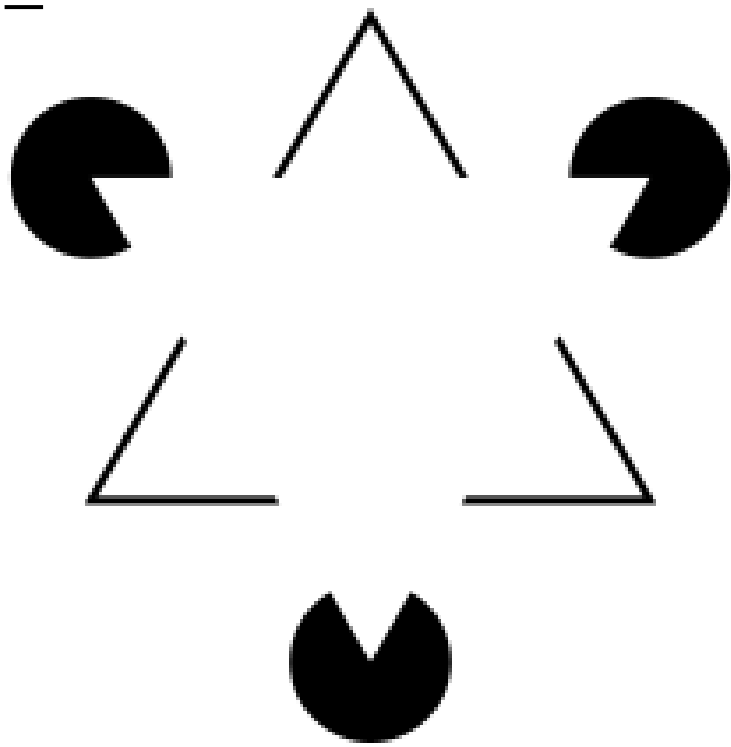
Getting to Know Your Brain

COGNITIVE DEMONSTRATIONS

BLUE	ORANGE	YELLOW	RED	PURPLE
PINK	BLUE	BLACK	PURPLE	GREEN
ORANGE	BLACK	YELLOW	PINK	RED
BLUE	PINK	ORANGE	BLACK	BLUE



Cognitive Tests, cont.



Cognitive tests, cont.

—

“If you can read this paragraph, it’s because our minds are very good at putting together pieces of information in a way that is easy for us to make sense of. Our minds do this automatically, without our conscious control.”

Cognitive test, cont.

Getting to Know Your Brain -

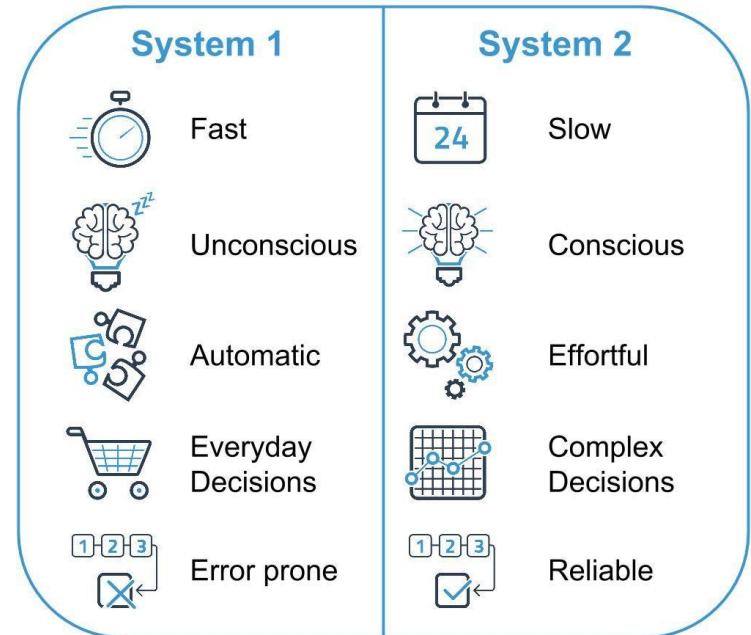
Before we can fix the world, we must see how we view the world

Your brain makes 10 quadrillion calculations every second through about 86 billion neurons. These control autonomic functions, but also how/what we feel, process images, how we think, learn, build and retrieve memory. To do that, your brain takes a *lot* of shortcuts to efficiently handle information flow.

Shortcuts come in 2 forms:

- System thinking
- Unconscious Association

System Thinking - 1. automatic, autonomous 2. Slower, controlled, logical

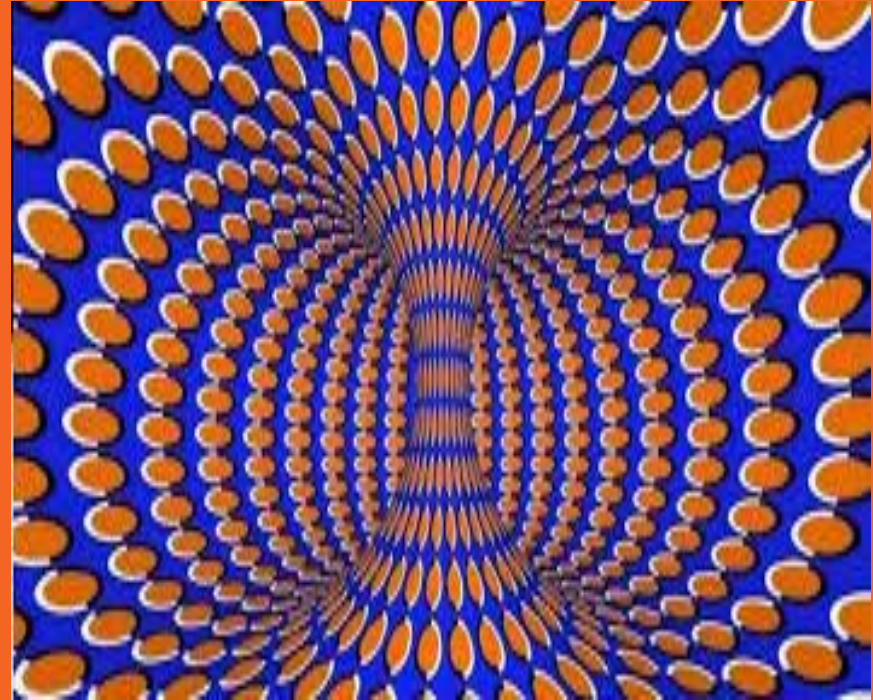


Your Brain, Continued

Unconscious Association - system 1

Pattern Sorting is a major brain function used to build associations and memory. Over time, this sorting leads to implicit judgements and our mind will make choices and decisions without our awareness, control or intent. This can also lead to the illusory effect - the tendency to believe false information to correct if it is repeated often.

Since everyone is doing this - these associations become part of the culture and self-perpetuating.



Key Concepts

Schemas - Mental shortcuts or templates that allow us to quickly assign objects, processes and people into categories.

Stereotypes - Beliefs mentally associated with a given category. Associations can be both positive and negative and become routinized so much that they are automatically processed.

Attitudes - Evaluation feelings, such as having a positive or negative feeling towards someone.

InGroup/OutGroup - A process where one is categorized as soon as we see him/her as either “one of us” or different than us, or “one of them.” Us vs Them is an automatic process that happens within seconds of seeing someone. This Us vs Them leads to relative trust and positive feelings for ingroup members.

BIAS

*Ultimately, we believe our decisions are consistent with our conscious beliefs, when in fact, **our unconscious is running the show.***

Howard Ross, 2008

Explicit Bias: The traditional concept of bias. In explicit bias, we are aware of our prejudices and attitudes towards certain groups or things. Positive or negative preferences for a particular group are a conscious decision. Can be hidden by the person.

Implicit Bias: The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is affected. Cannot be hidden by the person as s/he is not aware of the bias.

TYPES OF COGNITIVE BIASES

- **MYTH OF OBJECTIVITY** - No one is objective. We need other perspectives to understand.
- **COGNITIVE DISSONANCE** - When our hidden attitudes/values and associations collide with reality or with our conscious values and thoughts.
- **COGNITIVE MODELING** - Our brain will substitute, reorder, and encode information we receive in order to match our perceived reality with our unconscious beliefs (Confirmation bias).
- **CHANGE BLINDNESS** - Humans have a limited ability to notice change in the environment without making a conscious effort to do so. It is often said we need a catastrophe to stop and reevaluate.
- **TASK DRIVEN UNDERSTANDING/SELECTIVE ATTENTION** - Our minds will often limit our analysis to what is before us and to stop our analysis once we have achieved the task rather than to think holistically about the issue.
- **INATTENTIONAL BIAS** - When we focus intently on the the object of study, we can miss major components of systems and create unintended results.
- **CHAOS INDUCED BLINDNESS** - In a chaotic environment we limit our vision to things that cause threats or demand immediate attention. This, then, limits understanding and options for resolution.
- **ANCHORING BIAS** - Humans tend to overemphasize or rely on the first bit of information received because it triggers a structure for understanding. Once that anchor is set and without conscious intervention, it becomes difficult to change.
- **GROUP THINK** - Over time, a group of people begin to think collectively “with one mind”. The group is more concerned with maintaining harmony than objective evaluation.

Examples of how media can be used to reinforce bias and to debias



TWO RESIDENTS WADGE THROUGH CHEST-DEEP WATER AFTER **REUSING** BREAD AND SOUP FROM A LOCAL GROCERY STORE AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA CAME THROUGH THE AREA IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA. (AP PHOTO/DAVE MARTIN)



A YOUNG MAN WALKS THROUGH CHEST-DEEP FLOOD WATER AFTER **LOOTING** A GROCERY STORE IN NEW ORLEANS ON TUESDAY, AUG. 30, 2005. (AP PHOTO/DAVE MARTIN)

HURRICANE KATRINA, 2005

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS summed up in 60 seconds



Neil deGrasse Tyson
Astrophysicist



Jeremy Lin
Basketball Player

that's the NBA basketball player

An aerial photograph of a large, multi-story apartment complex. The buildings are arranged in a long, rectangular block with a central courtyard area. The courtyard contains a large, dark, rectangular pool or water feature. There are several parking lots with cars and a few trees scattered throughout the complex. The sky is clear and blue.

So, what does this mean for housing and community development professionals?

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**As Housing
Authorities, Bias
Affects us both
Externally and
Internally**

Let's start with something easy -
results of externally biased
representation:

What are some biases or
stereotypes you hear about
housing authorities?

About our clients?

About persons experiencing
homelessness?



Examples of Where Unconscious Bias can affect participants:

- **Eligibility Intake** - who makes it through the gatekeeper system;
- **Criminal checks** - what are we using them for?
- **Program noncompliance** - are our systems fair when it comes to warnings vs termination;
- **Service connections** - who gets the extra help and effort;
- **Where you get to live.**

And now for something harder -

Without understanding and working actively against implicit bias, **we reinforce the dominant culture** through our thoughts, actions, systems. **This has real world impacts** on our clients, on our community, and across our regions and at the national level. **All systems, including affordable housing, implicitly and invisibly maintain the dominant culture.** As practitioners, **we are not immune** to bias and we absorb culture through our interactions - work, family, church, recreation and political life. And then we bring all that to work with us.

**Resources and a Little
Homework for the next
session**

So, how do we make change?

- **All change begins at the personal level**

Until we recognize our own bias, the invisible hand of implicit bias will ensure that we reinforce the system.

- To look at implicit biases you might have, take a test (or 2 or 3!):

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

- **Educate yourself, Take Action, Be Accountable**

Some Additional Resources

Some Resources to Start With:

- Kirwan Institute, Study of Race and Ethnicity. www.Kirwaninstitute.osu.edu
 - Richard Rothstein, The Color of Law (2017) Economic Policy Institute
 - “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth”, www.pruitt-igoe.com
 - Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People, Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald
 - Biased: Uncovering Hidden Prejudice that Shapes what We See, Think and Do, Jennifer Eberhardt
 - Implicit Bias, www.racialequitytools.org/act/communicating/implicit-bias
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Questions and Answers

Thank you!

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2021, Lisa A. Baker, NAHRO