



# UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND ITS IMPACT ON SPORT



**MacEwan**  
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS,  
DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

IRFAN CHAUDHRY – MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

FOR THE GROWTH OF THE GAME:  
ADDRESSING RACISM IN HOCKEY

With support from:

Financé par le  
gouvernement  
du Canada

Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Canada



**MacEwan**  
UNIVERSITY

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Understand what unconscious bias is;
- Understand how unconscious bias can impact the sporting environment
- Recognize the types of unconscious bias and its impact on decision making

## GROUND RULES

We ask that you...

- Listen respectfully
- Assume positive intent
- Speak your truth



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## WHAT IS IT?

When faced with situations or people, we use mental maps and patterns to classify them by making a number of automatic associations.

Not surprisingly, our perceptions and assumptions based on these automatic associations are not always correct.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Part of learning about unconscious bias is realizing that our brains are capable of making assumptions and creating mental shortcuts without us even being aware.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

An unconscious bias is an implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation or assumption that can occur without one's knowledge, control or intention.

Unconscious bias is a result of our life experiences and affects all types of people. Examples of unconscious bias include gender bias, cultural bias, age bias, language and institutional bias.



**Biases are shortcuts our brain forms based on:**

- our own culture;
- experiences;
- things other people tell us;
- institutional influences; and
- other external influences

## WHAT IS IT?

Attitudes, Stereotypes, and beliefs that can affect how we treat others. Unconscious bias, while not intentional, can still impact how we view others based on:

- Race
- Ability
- Gender
- Culture
- Language
- Etc.

## STEREOTYPE

Widely held, preconceived and oversimplified image or idea about a person, group, or thing.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, stereotypes can become unconscious biases.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

An automatic association or attitude about race or gender, for example. Operates beyond our control and awareness. Informs our perception of a person or social group. Can influence our decision-making and behavior toward the target of the bias. Is a powerful predictor of our behavior.<sup>6</sup>

## PRE-JUDGING

An attitude about a person or group of people that is based on a belief or stereotype.

## BEHAVIOR

Based on preconceptions and unchecked assumptions. Can create in-groups and out-groups by favoring one group over another.

## DISCRIMINATION

An ACTION that follows prejudicial attitudes. Denial of opportunity or unequal treatment regarding selection, promotion, etc.<sup>7</sup>

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## FROM STEREOTYPING TO DISCRIMINATION

## HOW UNCONSCIOUS BIAS LEADS TO DISCRIMINATION



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

## COACHING



### How do stereotypes impact being a fair coach?

- With limited exposure, coaches rely on stereotypical information about players that have a very different background.
- Research in the last decade has proven time and again that we tend to favour those that have a lot in common with us (Similarity Bias). Coaches might filter new information and form about players to fit their pre-conceived notions and confirm their initial perception (Confirmation Bias).
- Coaches might overestimate the ability of those players that belong to our group as opposed to outsiders (Ingroup Bias). (Business Insider, 2015)

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

“When we speak of unconscious bias, we are talking about decisions that people make that are happening outside their conscious awareness but nevertheless have a systemic pattern to them.”

— Mahzarin Banaji

\*The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities (2017)

# Unconscious Bias in Action





## In action

### Example – The Stroop Effect

- Our embedded knowledge about our environment impacts how we interact with it.
- We associate certain colors with certain names. Accordingly, our brain fires faster and more confidently when we see the name in the color, compared to when we see the name in an opposing color.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## In action

### Example – The Stroop Effect

First, time yourself while you read the following text, ignoring the colors the words are printed in.

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

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## In action

### Example – The Stroop Effect

Now time yourself while you state the colors of the following words, ignoring the actual text (as best as you can!).

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



## In action

### Example – The Stroop Effect

- Can you read both lists of colors equally comfortably, un-self-consciously, and quickly?
- We see this same effect when we try to get our brains to process other assumed paired words (i.e. men/science; women/nurturing/)
- Our embedded knowledge about our environment impacts how we interact with it.

## In action

### Example — The Stroop Effect

- Our embedded knowledge about our environment impacts how we interact with it.

What automatic assumptions might be made when we see a headline and image like this one?

- Who is the gym owner?
- Who is the restaurant owner?



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## In action

### Example — The Stroop Effect

- Our embedded knowledge about our environment impacts how we interact with it.

What automatic assumptions might be made when we see a headline and image like this one?



Montana Butler, head of operations and business development for YYC Cycle Spin Studio, left, and Mike Shupenia, owner of Side Street Pub and Grill in Kensington, are both adapting to new regulations announced by the province on Thursday. (Carolyn Dunn/Louise Moquin/CBC)

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

## Media and player characteristics

How does race and media framing influence how athletes are described?

- When you think of the following players, what words would you use to describe them to another?



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

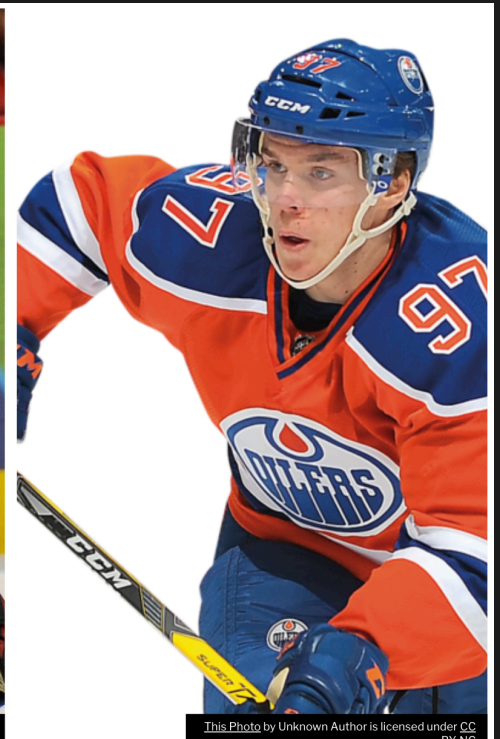
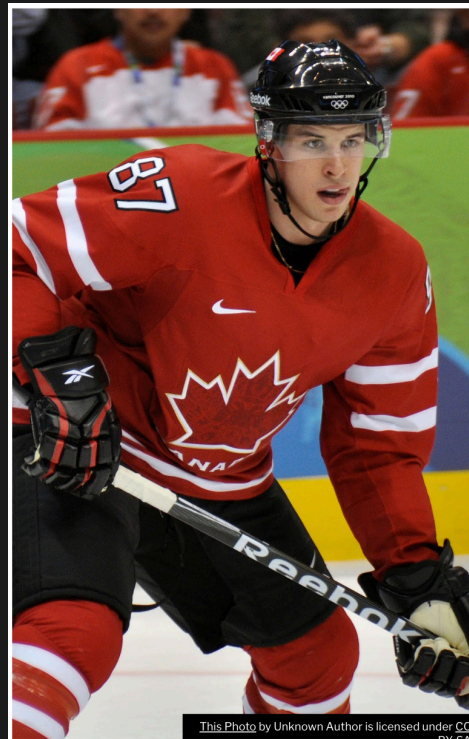
## Media and player characteristics

How does race and media framing influence how athletes are described?

Analysis of media descriptions highlight white athletes' success is attributed to:

- Character
- Personality
- Mental attributes

Example: If a good play is made on the field/ice/court, it is described as a result of decision-making, leadership, "smarts".



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

## Media and player characteristics

How does race and media framing influence how athletes are described?

Common descriptors for white athletes:

- Heady, Smart, Intelligent, dependable,
- Steady, Tough, Hard-working,
- Leader, Crafty, Clever, Determined, Advanced, Durable,
- Slick, Versatile, Relentless, Resourceful, Courageous, Aware,
- Having Character; Competitive.

**62% majority of content are Mental Attributes**



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

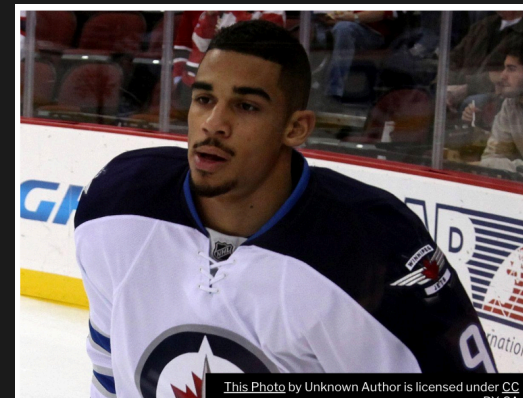
## Media and player characteristics

How does race and media framing influence how athletes are described?

Analysis of media descriptions highlight black athletes' success is attributed to:

- Physical
- “Animalistic”
- Supernatural; “machine-like”

Example: If a good play is made on the field/ice/court, it is described as a result of their natural physical abilities.



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLE

## Media and player characteristics

How does race and media framing influence how athletes are described?

Common descriptors for black athletes:

- An animal, a monster, fast, quick, super-human
- Agile, freak, talented, gifted, a natural, strong, powerful, big
- A missile, a torpedo, a beast, athletic, muscular, wide, speedy,
- Explosive, terrifying, scary, big, massive, and huge, etc.

**78% majority of the content described by physical attributes.**

## STEREOTYPE

Widely held, preconceived and oversimplified image or idea about a person, group, or thing.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, stereotypes can become unconscious biases.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

An automatic association or attitude about race or gender, for example. Operates beyond our control and awareness. Informs our perception of a person or social group. Can influence our decision-making and behavior toward the target of the bias. Is a powerful predictor of our behavior.<sup>6</sup>

## PRE-JUDGING

An attitude about a person or group of people that is based on a belief or stereotype.

## BEHAVIOR

Based on preconceptions and unchecked assumptions. Can create in-groups and out-groups by favoring one group over another.

## DISCRIMINATION

An ACTION that follows prejudicial attitudes. Denial of opportunity or unequal treatment regarding selection, promotion, etc.<sup>7</sup>

## HOW UNCONSCIOUS BIAS LEADS TO DISCRIMINATION

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

## FROM STEREOTYPING TO DISCRIMINATION

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

**WHAT TYPES OF UNCONSCIOUS  
BIAS EXIST?**

Bias	Definition	Example
<b>Anchoring bias</b>	Making a judgement based on a reference point.	When bargaining, the first price proposed will directly influence consecutive offers. So, if the first price proposed is \$100, a rebuttal offer would likely not be \$5 but rather something closer to the original price.
<b>Bias blind spot</b>	Failing to recognize one's own biases.	A manager hiring a candidate who has a similar socioeconomic background to them without recognizing that those qualities are influencing their decision.
<b>Confirmation bias</b>	Looking for information that supports one's existing theories.	A manager who believes women are more passive than men asking female candidates questions about their assertiveness that they do not ask men.
<b>Fundamental attribution error</b>	Placing blame on contextual factors for personal mistakes but attributing others' failures to their individual shortcomings.	Accusing a peer of missing a deadline due to a lack of motivation but excusing their own missed deadline due to external responsibilities like family care.
<b>Halo and horns bias</b>	Weighing one trait, either good or bad, more than other traits.	Assuming a high-performing individual contributor will also make a good people manager.

Bias	Definition	Example
<b>Leniency effect</b>	Treating some individuals or groups in a more lenient way than others.	In the performance management process, some managers assess their direct reports more positively than others despite similar performance.
<b>Like-me bias</b>	Attributing overly positive sentiments to people who we see as similar to ourselves.	Managers preferring to solely mentor employees who are of the same gender.
<b>Optimism/pessimism bias</b>	Overestimating the probability for positive outcomes and underestimating the probability of negative outcomes.	Believing that one's risky financial investments are less likely to fail than others' risky investments who have lost a lot of money.
<b>Overconfidence bias</b>	Believing one's own abilities are greater than what is objectively accurate.	Refusing to ask for directions in an unfamiliar area because you are confident in your directional skills in familiar locations.

Bias	Definition	Example
<b>Projection bias</b>	Assuming everyone's intentions, priorities, and beliefs are the same as your own.	An employee believing that work-life balance is as important to everyone else in the organization as it is to them.
<b>Recency bias</b>	Allocating more focus on recent behavior than overall behavior.	An employee's fourth quarter results overshadowing annual review content.
<b>Representativeness bias</b>	Assuming the likelihood of an outcome based on its similarities to another situation.	Assuming someone wearing overalls is more likely to be a farmer than an accountant.
<b>Social proof bias</b>	Informing and basing decisions on peers' behaviors.	Using customer reviews to inform purchasing decisions.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

# UNDERSTANDING ITS IMPACTS



# [Un]conscious Bias

- We can do something about this
- Re-educate our minds to acknowledge bias
- Don't try to eliminate it, just avoid it
- Making better decisions leads to better outcomes
- Bias impacts decisions
- Unconscious bias is prevalent in upwards of 80% of decisions

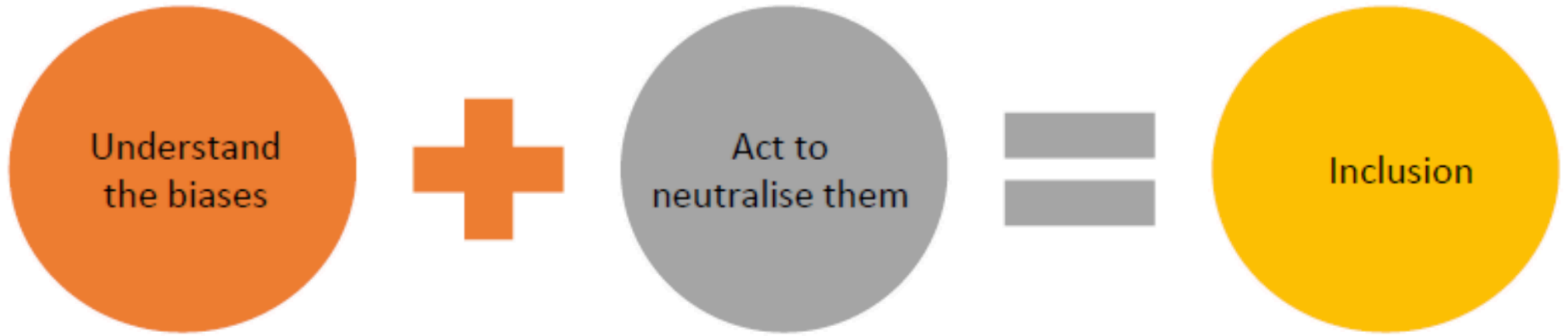
## Unconscious Bias...

Affects diversity and inclusiveness of...

- Teams we create
- Faculty we mentor/support
- Students we guide/encourage
- Community we serve



Source: Acknowledging bias to unlock social change (Dr. Leo Wang)



**Unconscious bias -  
What can we do?**

## Ways to address your bias

### Example - Coaching

- Seek the input from colleagues/staff. By eliminating and minimizing decisions that are based on single, biased opinions, we can ensure that players receive a more objective evaluation of their performance and potential.
- Self-awareness. Provide all staff members and coaches with continuous opportunities to reflect about their own biases, realign as a team, and build the competencies necessary to work with athletes from different backgrounds, nationalities, and walks of life.
- Regular 1-on-1 meetings between the coaches and their players. There is no better answer to softening a stereotype than more exposure to people of the group you don't know very much about. The better coaches get to know their players, the less they will be perceived as different.

FOR THE GROWTH OF THE GAME

FIND ANTI-RACISM RESOURCES FOR HOCKEY AT

**[WWW.GROWTHEGAME.HOCKEY](http://WWW.GROWTHEGAME.HOCKEY)**