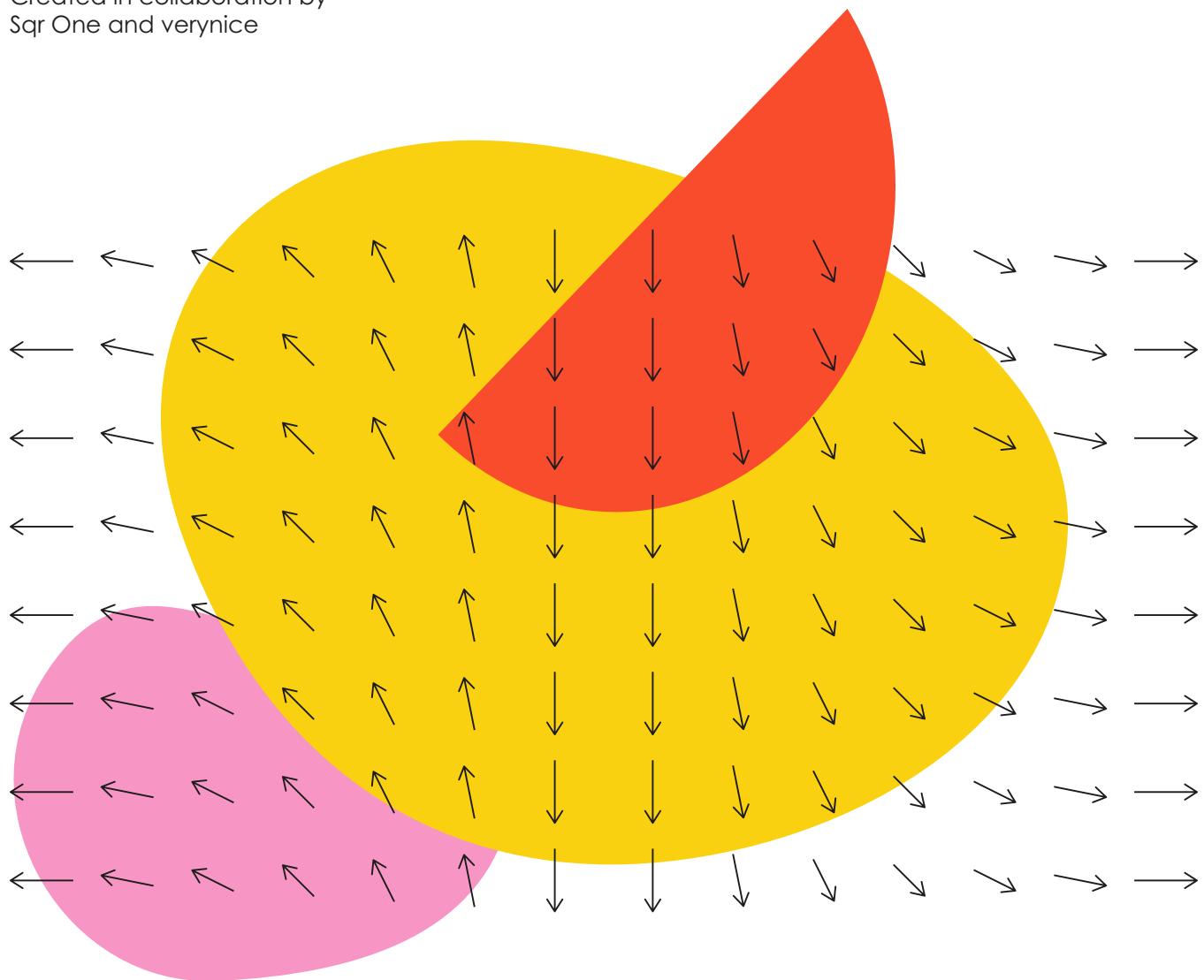


# Understanding & Managing Bias

Created in collaboration by  
Sqr One and verynice



## Welcome to *Understanding & Managing Bias*

So, what is bias? You've heard about it your entire life, and probably now more than ever. It's often painted in a negative light, with undertones of 'privilege' and 'stereotypes' that make you want to look away. Still, you wonder, what exactly is 'bias' and is it so bad after all? Let's take a look...

According to the Dictionary, bias is an "inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair." Bias can be innate or learned, and in the same way, can be unlearned. Most often you'll hear people talk about cognitive bias (with emotional and behavioural biases trailing not too far behind). As you would imagine, cognitive biases deal specifically with our cognition, or perceptions/judgments about certain things.

So, why is understanding cognitive biases important? You see, cognitive biases demonstrate an error in thinking when we process and interpret information in the world around us. They affect the decisions and judgments we make and more often than not, lead us to see the world with a very skewed (read: poor) perspective.

In the *Understanding & Managing Bias* toolkit, we explore bias, where it comes from, how we can recognize our own biases, and how we can begin our journey to unlearn. *Understanding & Managing Bias* was created in a collaboration between [Sqr One](#), an Australian innovation consultancy specializing in life and career innovation, and [verynice](#), a US-based design strategy practice specializing in brand strategy, user experience design, and strategic foresight. The toolkit is designed as a "grab bag" of activities and insights, and is meant to be completed on your own, but you are welcome to share with a friend!

**Materials required:** Scratch paper, pen/pencil, a quiet place.

**Time required:** At your own pace. We recommend 60-90 minutes.

*Understanding & Managing Bias* is published by [Reginald](#), a publisher of toolkits for creative problem solving.

## Seven Massive Trees: A Guided Visualization Exercise

Before we go much further, let's engage in a guided visualization exercise. To begin, take three deep breaths. As you read the following, we invite you to follow along each line of text with your finger.

**Tip:** If you have printed the toolkit, do this with a pen. If you are reading this on your screen, follow along with the tip of your finger.

*"You are standing in a perfect circle, framed by 7 massive trees. Each tree is so tall, that it is nearly impossible for you to determine how high their branches are capable of reaching. In the distance, you see a small bird flying towards you. They're holding a ladder in their beak. As they come closer and closer to you, you can't help but appreciate how soft the ground is, and wiggle your toes a bit to get a better appreciation of the texture. The bird gently rests the ladder up against one of the trees, and you walk toward it. Rung by rung, you begin your climb up the tree. As you ascend, you notice that all of the trees around you are growing more and more frail. With each step you take, the other trees begin to shrink, while yours continues to grow and flourish. By the time you make it to the top of your tree, you see a clean and picturesque apple, grab it, and take a bite. It's the most beautiful and delicious apple you've ever tasted. Meanwhile, the other trees appear to lack produce. The bird flies toward you, picks you up by your shirt collar, and flies with you away from the trees, toward the sunset. As you turn back to look at the trees one more time, you notice that only the one you ascended is left standing."*

## The Elephant And The Rider

NYU psychologist Jonathan Haidt describes the brain as “the elephant and the rider.” The analogy describes the emotional side of the brain as an “elephant,” and the rational side of the brain as a “rider”. Before we can truly identify and work on our own biases, we need to get the elephant and the rider working together, meaning the emotional and rational sides.

This exercise should help you direct your rational side (the rider) whilst motivating your emotional side (the elephant) to stay on task and complete the toolkit.

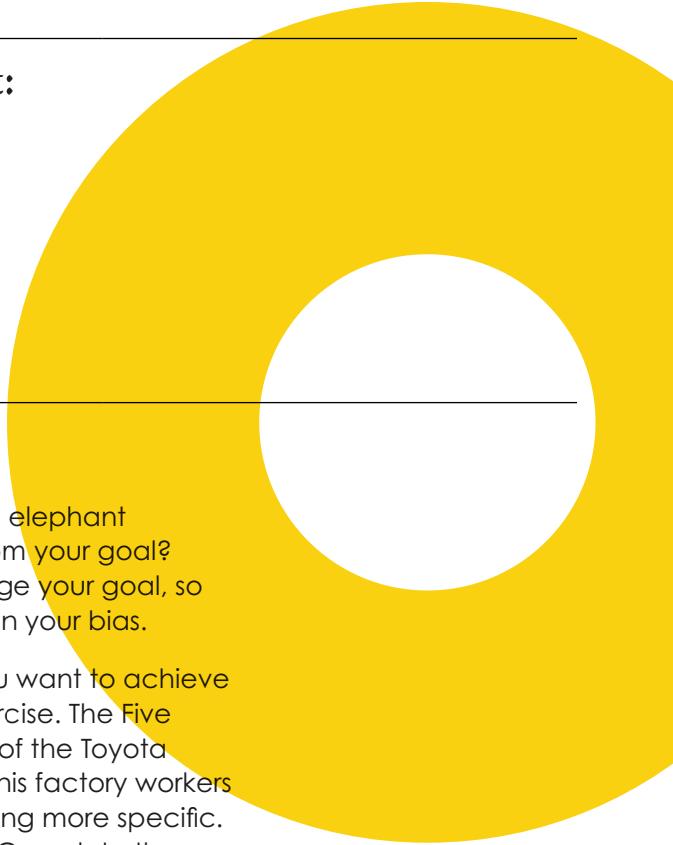
To get you started, write down the conscious goals you want to achieve using this toolkit. List as many as you would like!

---

### My conscious goals for using this toolkit:

*For example:*

“I hope to understand my biases, and know how to identify when I am being biased.”



Now, what do you think you will need to do to motivate the elephant (the emotional side of your brain) so it doesn't derail you from your goal? Remember the elephant is likely to win. It can easily sabotage your goal, so you really need to understand why you would like to work on your bias.

You can start the process by writing down why you think you want to achieve your goal. You can follow that by using the “Five Whys” exercise. The Five Whys exercise was originally developed by Toyoda Sakichi, of the Toyota Motor Company. He developed the methodology to assist his factory workers in problem solving by breaking down problems into something more specific. In doing so, the root cause of the issue would present itself. Complete the exercise below and write down your insights as you peel the onion layers of your choice.

## *For example:*

**Why do you want to achieve this/these conscious goal(s)?**

I would like to make sure I can be the best person I can be, and treat others fairly at all times, while being conscious of my legacy biases.

**Why?**

Because it's the right thing to do.

**Why?**

Well, because I think it's unfair for people to be treated differently because of the biases we have about them.

**Why?**

Because I shouldn't make assumptions about people based on my unconscious biases.

**Why?**

Because I know first hand what that feels like, and I don't want to do it to other people. Full stop.

## Five Whys Exercise

**Why do you want to achieve this/these conscious goal(s)?**

**Why?**

**Why?**

**Why?**

**Why?**

# Understanding & Managing Bias

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SQR  
ONE

By now, you should have a better sense of awareness of the unconscious (now conscious!) reasons why you were emotionally wanting to achieve your rational goal. Well done! This is brave work.

Now, you need to think of what actions you can take for the rider and elephant to continue on their path.

*For example:*

"I will increase my intellectual knowledge about biases by reading more about it," or,

"I will pause when I think I've said something that implies an unconscious bias and take measures to not do it again."

Think of three actions, and write them down in the space below.

---

**Action 1**

---

**Action 2**

---

**Action 3**

For the purpose of this toolkit, we have geared this activity toward your own intentions for using this guide. However, you can apply this same technique to any project or initiative you take on.

# Understanding & Managing Bias

## Understanding Bias

### Meet Bias

Imagine it's Monday morning, and your alarm just went off.

Instead of having to put on your thinking cap to figure out what comes next, you automatically, instinctively, do exactly whatever you do every Monday morning. In fact, you probably don't think about it at all. It just sort of happens: you wake up to your alarm, get out of bed, hit the snooze button, get back into bed, wake up to your alarm again, get out of bed, and start your day.

Having to think about each and every single decision would take way too much time and mental energy. Human beings are naturally wired to identify patterns and adopt routines that allow us to move from Point A to Point B as seamlessly as possible.

Enter: Bias.

Bias tends to get a bad rep, but the real kicker is our brains are actually wired for bias. It's deeply rooted in our brains, so much so, that even babies can be biased! A piece of [research<sup>1</sup>](#) published in 2017, found that nine-month-old babies associated happy music with faces of their own race, and sad music with faces of people from other races.

[Science<sup>2</sup>](#) tells us that cognitive bias is our brain's attempt to simplify information. It's been part of our survival mechanisms as we've evolved and is linked to our "fight or flight" tendencies, allowing us to make decisions based on when we feel safe or in danger.

Our experiences, upbringing, education, and preferences lead us to interpret and make sense of the world around us. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it quickly becomes problematic when we don't realise the biases we have, to begin with. And that's what scientists call **unconscious** or **implicit bias**.

<sup>1</sup> Xiao, Naiqi G., et al. "Older but Not Younger Infants Associate Own-Race Faces with Happy Music and Other-Race Faces with Sad Music." Wiley Online Library, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 3 Feb. 2017, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/desc.12537. Last accessed September 16, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Haselton, Martie G., et al. "The Evolution of Cognitive Bias." Wiley Online Library, American Cancer Society, 18 Nov. 2015, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781119125563.ebpsych241. Last accessed September 16, 2020.

# Understanding & Managing Bias

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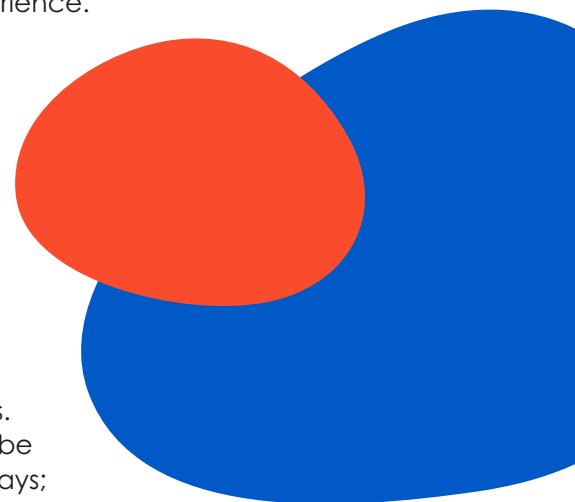
According to Social Psychologist and racial bias expert [Jennifer Eberhard](#),<sup>3</sup> implicit bias is so deeply rooted in our brains that there's actually not a whole lot we can do to change it. What we can change, however, is how bias affects our decision-making. And that is exactly where the work begins.

So, are biases good? Well, yes. And no. They're essential to how we go about our lives and help make things a whole lot easier. When we understand our biases, we can get closer to uncovering the harm they can have on our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Imagine you are an HR hiring manager for an up-and-coming internet-based organisation in Silicon Valley. You must hire someone analytical, well-educated and with good technical skills. You receive dozens of CVs and your job is to pick someone who can do the job with ease. You secure four interviews. One with Michael Gallager, Tamikha Johnson, Patricia Morales and Wang Xiu Ying.

These imaginary four people have the same qualifications, went to the same school, studied at the same college and have the same work experience. Who do you give the role to? Circle one.

**Michael Gallager**  
**Tamikha Johnson**  
**Patricia Morales**  
**Wang Xiu Ying**



Regardless of the decision you made, it was made due to your bias. Unconscious biases like these in the workplace (and beyond!) can be debilitating and unfair for many. Our own bias is shaped in many ways; one of the major ways our bias is shaped is through the influences we have in our life.

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, Molly. "The Science behind Bias: Stanford Researcher Aims to 'Uncover the Hidden Prejudice' with New Book." GeekWire, 25 Mar. 2019, [www.geekwire.com/2019/science-behind-bias-stanford-researcher-aims-uncover-hidden-prejudice-new-book/](http://www.geekwire.com/2019/science-behind-bias-stanford-researcher-aims-uncover-hidden-prejudice-new-book/). Last accessed September 16, 2020.

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SQR  
ONE

**What biases do you have?** This is a challenging question, and is often hard to answer on your own. But spend some time reflecting on this, and use the template below to capture three of your own biases.

---

**Bias 1**

---

**Bias 2**

---

**Bias 3**

**Why do you have these biases?** Again, soul searching is never easy. Think through this at your own pace, and do your best to identify a potential source for each of the three biases you listed above.

---

**Source of Bias 1**

---

**Source of Bias 2**

---

**Source of Bias 3**

# Understanding & Managing Bias

SQR  
ONE

## Mapping Our Influences

Below, you will see a worksheet that includes a space for you to write your name in the center, followed by the name of the biggest influences in your life. These influences can be living or deceased, and may include personal connections, fictional characters from film/literature, celebrities, etc. *This exercise is inspired by mind mapping, a popular approach to visualizing the connections between people and ideas.*

To begin, write your name in the center of the diagram, below. Next, set a timer for three minutes, and fill as many of the circles as you possibly can. Ready? Go!



# Understanding & Managing Bias

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SQR  
ONE

Next, review your influences, and write down a number as a response to each of the following:

**How many of these influences share the same nationality as you?**

**How many of these influences share the same race as you?**

**How many of these influences share the same ethnicity as you?**

**How many of these influences share the same discipline or profession as you?**

**How many of these influences are white?**

**How many of those influences are the same gender identity as you?**

Now, add up your responses to determine your “influence number.” Don’t worry, chances are you did not score a “0” on this one!

Here’s your challenge. Take your influence number, and spend the next 30 minutes browsing the internet for a total number of influences that correspond to your influence number (for example, if you are looking for more artist influencers, search for “contemporary artists of color” or “contemporary Black illustrators” or “historical Latinx painters”).

Feature each of the discoveries that resonate with you on the next page. Print as many copies as you need. As time goes on, keep track of these influences. What are their circles of influence? Who are some of their contemporaries that you can learn from and be inspired by? This is an ongoing, but exciting, practice.

**Score:**

**For example:** If you have an influence number of 5, that means you need to find 5 new influences and inspiring people that you can learn about.

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SQR  
ONE

## Influence

Name:

Something inspiring about them:

## Managing Bias

### Mindfulness

You may have heard of the many benefits of mindfulness before. Mindfulness has been proven to include a wide range of benefits, including heightened creativity, improved concentration, lower stress, better working memory, and increased compassion.

But did you know that [a study](#) published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* from Central Michigan University discovered that mindfulness can even reduce implicit bias and disrupt the negative behaviors that it causes?

In the study, participants were asked to listen to either a mindfulness meditation or a control audio, and then complete the race and age implicit-association tests (IATs). The group who completed the mindfulness meditation was found to have a lower implicit race and age bias compared to the control group.

The researchers believe that an increased state of mindfulness disrupted participants' automatically-activated associations, leading to a weaker association with implicitly-held beliefs measured by the IAT.

So to help disrupt your own implicit bias, before making an important decision, even a simple "micro-meditation" can be helpful.



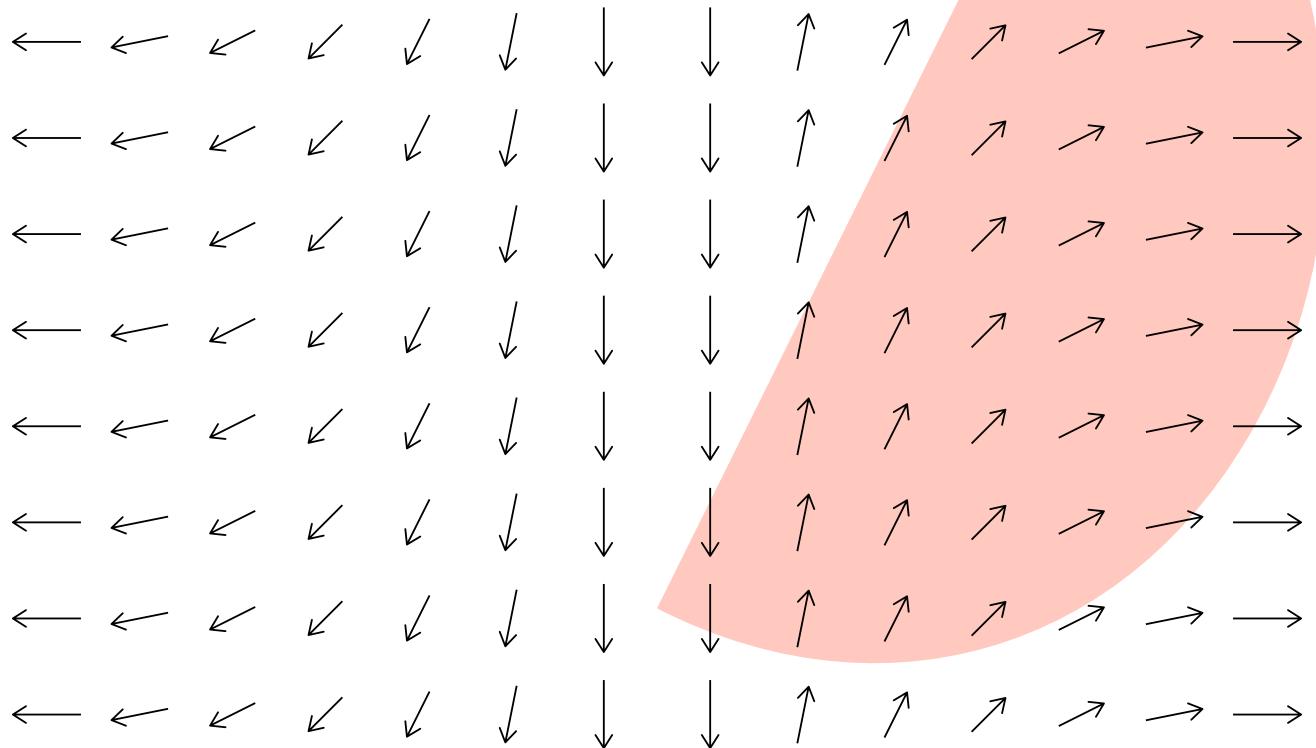
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<sup>1</sup> Gibson, Bryan, and Adam Lueke. "Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias: The Role of Reduced Automaticity of Responding - Adam Lueke, Bryan Gibson, 2015." SAGE Journals, 24 Nov. 2014, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1948550614559651. Last accessed September 16, 2020.

**Activity:** The following is a great breathing technique that you can do for 1-3 minutes throughout the day to help you reset or pause before important decision-making. It's also a great way to train your mindfulness muscle or when you feel yourself becoming stressed or overwhelmed.

*First, become aware of your breath. Notice how you are breathing: are you holding your breath? Where are you breathing from? Your chest? Are your shoulders hunched? Is it shallow or deep?*

*Next, start to bring your breath down to your diaphragm. Breathe right into the bottom of your belly. If your mind wanders, don't worry and don't be too hard on yourself for it. Just let your focus come back to your breath. Do this regularly throughout the day for 1-3 minutes and you'll be surprised how much more calm, focused and present you are.*



## Meet Empathy, Bias' Cousin

Focusing on other's feelings, emotions and needs can help bring a sense of joy and fulfillment into our lives. Understanding empathy can help us tackle our own biases. Empathy can be broken into three categories:

### Cognitive empathy

The ability to understand someone else's point of view and perspective.

### Emotional empathy

Feeling what someone else feels like your own.

### Empathic concern

Unconsciously or consciously figuring out what someone might need from you.

Biases and empathy are intertwined, so it's important to figure out how strong our empathy muscle is. This allows us to, by default, become better at assessing our biases.

It's important to build self-awareness around our own empathy beliefs. When we grow our self-awareness, we can begin to see what thoughts/biases about our own empathy might exist. Using the space below, do your best to write down three of your own empathy beliefs.

*For example:*

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>Empathy Proof 1</i> | I can relate to other people's emotions easily                       |
| <i>Empathy Proof 2</i> | I can be less empathetic to people who are aggressive or rude        |
| <i>Empathy Proof 3</i> | After a long day, I can run out of empathy for my loved ones at home |

## Empathy Proof 1

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## Empathy Proof 2

---

## Empathy Proof 3

*By the way...*

The [Empathy Quotient \(EQ\) test<sup>1</sup>](#), developed by Simon Baron-Cohen at the [Autism Research Centre](#) at the University of Cambridge, can be used to better understand your own empathy.

Now that you have written down your beliefs, complete the test (it takes about 10-15 minutes) and write down below any notes from your assessment.

---

**What surprised you?**

---

**What felt right?**

---

**Something you don't believe to be true?**

This exercise will right away challenge your own biases. Keep track of how what you learned makes you feel, and challenge yourself (in a good way) to think about the lessons you can learn from this and the positive impact you want to leave in your and other peoples' lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Baron-Cohen, S, et al. "Empathy Quotient." Psychology Tools, 1 Jan. 1970, psychology-tools.com/test/empathy-quotient. Last accessed September 16, 2020.

Empathy and biases are intertwined concepts that, once decoded, help us understand our own biases and how empathy can play a role in favour of the notion that it's harder to empathize with people if you've never been in their shoes.

According to the [Harvard Business Review<sup>2</sup>](#), people who have experienced hardship or endured challenges in the past, are less likely to show empathy and compassion towards people who have been, or are experiencing, a similar situation.

So, if we are likely to penalise those who struggle to cope with a similar ordeal, how can we become aware of our own biases in such situations? Here's an activity to explore this further.

To begin, write an experience you have struggled with in the past in the activity below.

**For example:** Losing your job, being bullied, being shamed in public, being marginalised, health-related issues, financial struggles...the list goes on.

---

## What's the situation you would like to review/assess your own bias/empathy?

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<sup>2</sup> Goleman, D., McKee, A. and Waytz, A., 2017. *Empathy (HBR Emotional Intelligence Series)*. Harvard Business Review Press.

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SQR  
ONE

Next, write down who in your circle of family or friends, work colleagues, community, wider social circle or even a stranger that you are aware of who, in your opinion, has experienced or is experiencing a similar situation to what you described on the previous page.

---

## Who else in your life has experienced/is experiencing this situation?

Now, reflect on the moment you heard that person in your life had experienced the same situation as you. What did you do? What did you say or didn't say? How did you feel?

---

## Reflection: What did you do? What did you say or didn't say? How did you feel?

## Additional Reading & Activities

Truly understanding your biases and growing your capacity for empathy is an incredibly difficult practice. We're not going to undermine that. In addition to the activities we've taken you through, we've curated a list of six additional resources for you to explore.

### The Privilege Walk

The Privilege Walk, via the Dolores Huerta Foundation for Community Organizing, is an excellent one for group settings. It is designed to reveal to each participant the relative privilege they have benefited from, in comparison to those around them.

<http://doloreshuerta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/privilege-walk.pdf>

### 10 Examples That Prove White Privilege Exists In Every Aspect Imaginable

A powerful breakdown by Jon Greenberg in *Everyday Feminism* that shines a light on the “vast array of benefits and advantages not shared by many people of Color (POC).”

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2017/07/24/10-examples-that-prove-white-privilege-exists-in-every-aspect-imaginable/>

### The Origins of Privilege

By Joshua Rothman in the *New York Times*: an interview with Peggy McIntosh, author of the seminal work, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies.”

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-origins-of-privilege>

## The “Flip it to Check” Approach

Presented in an excellent TEDx talk by Roche's Global Head of Human Resources Kristen Pressner, the “flip it to check” approach is a very simple but profound exercise. Before you make a statement with a value judgment—one that's based on gender, race, age etc—swap the term with a different gender, race or age. If the sentence now contains an assumption that “sounds off,” then it's likely a biased statement.

For example, imagine you're considering promoting a woman on your team. Yet, because the new role comes with a lot of travel and she has young kids at home, you decide against offering her the role. Now flip the scenario to test it: would you make that same decision if that employee were a man? The next time you make a value-based statement, change out the gender/race and see if the statement or question sounds off.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq\\_xYSOZrgU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq_xYSOZrgU&feature=youtu.be)

## The SPACE2 Model of Inclusion

To truly train or manage your implicit bias, it's important to bring those unconscious thoughts into your consciousness, and continue to critically examine them regularly. The SPACE2 Model includes six evidence-based strategies that “activate controlled processing and enable individuals to detect and override their automatic reflexes”.

<https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2018/10/17/six-proven-strategies-for-managing-unconscious-bias/>

## Implicit Association Test (IAT) <exercise> MH

To help uncover implicit biases and stereotypes, Harvard University devised a set of tests called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). This test measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., Asian people, fat people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., smart, lazy). Each concept is paired with a positive or negative association and assigned a letter on the keyboard. Participants are then presented a stimuli (a photo or word) and asked to respond with either key. The premise is that it is easier to make a response when the closely-related items are on the same key. The results of the IAT are classified into three groups: a slight association, a moderate association, or a strong association. For example, we would say

that a participant has a strong implicit preference for straight people relative to gay people if they are significantly faster to complete the task when Straight People + Good / Gay People + Bad are paired together compared to when Gay People + Good / Straight People + Bad are paired together.

The IAT is a well-validated measure, independent of variables such as handedness, hand-eye-coordination, in-group bias or even familiarity. As the test measures implicit bias, the results can surprise you. It is important though to remember that showing a moderate or even strong result should not be seen as a negative or immediately label you as prejudiced; the IAT is a great tool to help you discover your unconscious biases, and it's what you do with the knowledge of your unconscious that makes it powerful.

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



## **Commitments to Action**

Now it's time to reflect on your journey, and make commitments to action. While reflecting upon the activities you completed throughout the toolkit, do your best to complete the statement below.

**"I recognize these biases exist in my life: \_\_\_\_\_ . These biases stem from \_\_\_\_\_ . I will do all in my power to challenge these assumptions by \_\_\_\_\_ . The first step I will take to do that is \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**I have struggled with \_\_\_\_\_ in my own life. I will support and make space for others who have struggled with the same challenges by \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**My empathy proofs are \_\_\_\_\_ . I have a more difficult time empathizing with \_\_\_\_\_ . I will work toward building empathy for this by \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**I commit to checking in with myself on my progress in \_\_\_\_ (days) (weeks) (months)."**

Congratulations! You've made it through the Understanding and Managing Bias toolkit. Keep in mind that it is okay to revisit this (in fact, we encourage you to!).