

Samuel is smart and Hannah is helpful

Mitigating bias in written evaluations and letters of
recommendation

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Ground Rules & Disclosures

- When making reflections use “I” statements
- Listen carefully to what others say
- Non-judgmental (even with ourselves)
- Commit to having a conversation with each other
- Disclosures:
 - We will focus on the issue of gender bias, though multiple biases, in particular racial bias, exists and influences evaluations as well
 - We’re human beings and we have biases of our own that we are working to mitigate

Workshop agenda

- Background on bias
- Simultaneous break-out small groups:
 - Compiling biased comments (e.g. MSPE, PD letter, etc) *or*
 - Receiving biased comments (e.g. admissions or selection committee)
- Discussion: best practices on how to mitigate bias in evaluations and letters
- Wrap-up and questions

Objectives

- Differentiate explicit and implicit bias
- Identify stereotypical language in written evaluations
- Employ at least two strategies to mitigate bias in written comments

Who are you?



DEFINING BIAS

Definitions

- **Implicit bias:** A positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing, or group that a person holds at an unconscious level (outside of conscious control)
- **Explicit bias:** A positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing, or group that a person is aware of and is under conscious control

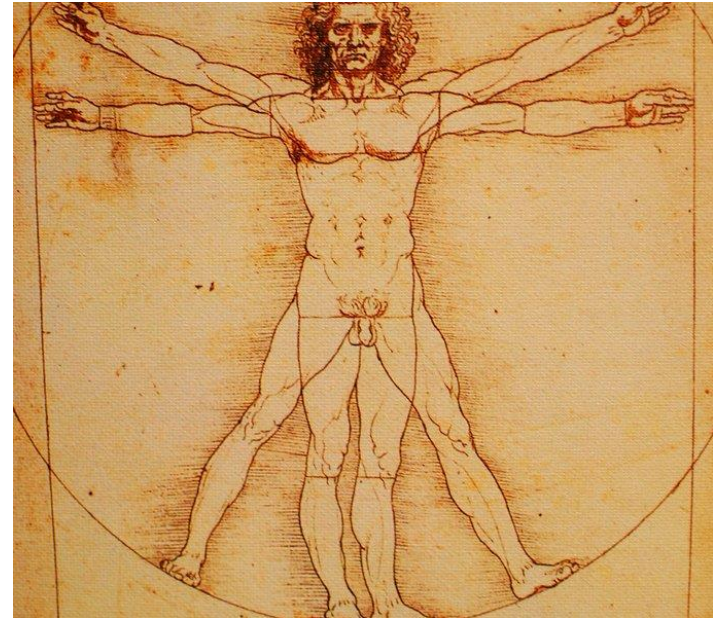
Snap Judgments We All Make

- *“Evaluating people as attractive or not is a basic assessment. You do that automatically whether or not you want to...” – Daniel Kahneman*



How Does Bias Form?

- Homo categoricus
 - Gordon Allport 1954
 - “The human mind must think with the aid of categories.... Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it.”



Unconscious Bias

- Due to the way we categorize people by the way they look, speak, move, we form
 - Opinions/stereotypes
 - Reinforced by what we see & read in our daily lives
 - Reinforced by societal norms & expectations

**IS THERE BIAS IN OUR CURRENT
EVALUATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION
LETTERS?**

Common Biases in Medicine

- Female bias: Nurturing and hard working. Unclear knowledge base and not confident.
- Male bias: Eager and knowledgeable. Resistant to change and over confident.
- Racial biases vary according to group's representation in medicine.

P Babaria, S Abedin MD, M Nunez-Smith MD, The Effect of Gender on the Clinical Clerkship Experience of Female Medical Students..." Acad Med. 2009; 84;859-865

K Woolf, J Cave, T Greenhalgh, J Dacre, Ethnic Stereotypes and the underachievement of medical students..." BMJ 2008;337:a1220

Stereotypical Behaviors

- “Feminine”: assisting others in tasks, nurturing patients, apologizing¹
- “Masculine”: volunteering for activities/procedures, masking/compensating deficits¹
- Racial/ethnic stereotypes (varied)²

1. Bickel J. Gender stereotypes and misconceptions: Unresolved issues in physicians' professional development. *JAMA*. 1997;277:1405, 1407.

2. Peterson NB, Friedman RH, Ash AS, FrancoS, Carr PL. Faculty self-reported experience with racial and ethnic discrimination in academic medicine. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2004; 19:259 –265.

Smart, eager beavers & kind, hard workers

- Bias influences what qualities we choose to highlight
 - Influences the learner's own self-perception of strengths
 - Can effect future career direction and opportunities

Isaac C, Chertoff J, Lee B, Carnes M, "Do students' and authors' genders affect evaluations? A linguistic analysis of Medical Student Performance Evaluations." Acad Med. 2011 January ; 86(1): 59–66.

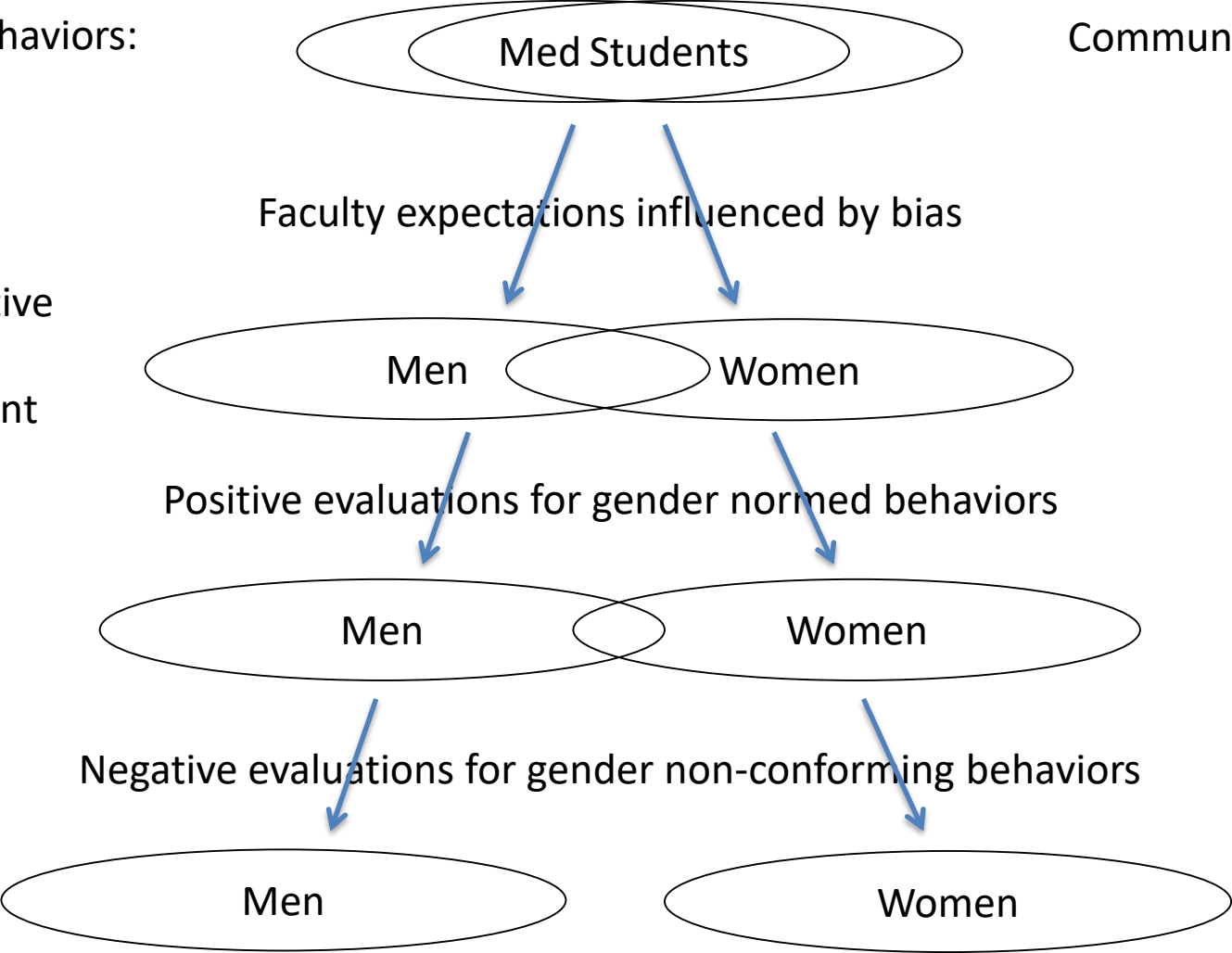
Impact

Agentic behaviors:

- Decisive
- Strong
- Assertive
- Authoritative
- Logical
- Independent

Communal behaviors:

- Nurturing
- Gentle
- Supportive
- Relational
- Emotional
- Dependent



SMALL GROUPS: WHAT TO DO WITH THE DATA YOU HAVE

**DISCUSSION: CONSTRUCTING MORE
INFORMATION AND LESS BIASED
COMMENTS**

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practices: Compilation Letters

She always had a smile on her face

- Include remarks pertinent to competencies
- Create standardized remarks for competency ratings, to be inserted when only numerical scores are available
- Exclude comments regarding personal appearance
- Consider collecting data on evaluators to norm individual rating
- Bias training for evaluators

She created a team culture of joyful scientific curiosity and enthusiasm for medicine.

Best Practices: Selection Committees

- Evidence Based Strategies to Mitigate Bias:
 - Common identity formation
 - Perspective taking
 - “Consider the opposite”
 - Counter-stereotypical exemplars
- Avoid multi-tasking while reviewing applications
- Inclusive rather than an exclusive selection strategy

Lai. *J of Exp Psychology: General*. 2014, 143, 1765-1785.

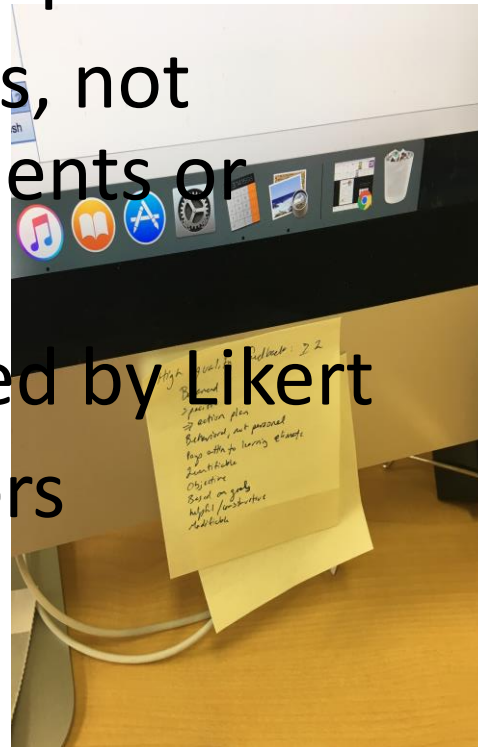
Blatt. *Academic Medicine*. 2010, 85, 1445-1452.


Lord. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 1984 Dec;47(6):1231-43


Isaac. *Acad Med*. 2009: 84:1440-1446

Best practices: writing comments without bias

- Template for what to include
- Know your blind spots
- Specific examples, not summary statements or generalities
- Skills not captured by Likert
- Open career doors



Apples! 

Red, _____ apples! Today we are going to
(adjective)
_____ apples. I am going to _____ the most.
(verb) (verb)
My _____ and I are having an _____ picking
(person) (fruit)
contest this year. Every _____ we go to _____
(season) (person's)
farm to pick a _____ of apples. This year _____
(noun) (person)
wants to make _____, so we need a lot.
(noun)
When we arrive _____, _____ counts out our
(place) (person)
apples. We anxiously await the final count.
My _____ and I _____! Well actually I had one
(person) (verb/ed)
more than him, but it had a _____ slimy worm
(color)
 in it. That night we had _____
(adjective)
applesauce!

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