

# IMPLICIT BIAS: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS, AND WHAT TO DO (AND NOT DO) ABOUT IT

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# HOW I CAME TO KNOW ABOUT IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Philosophy: 17% women in US, 24% in UK
- Implicit bias one of the likely causes
- Directed Leverhulme Implicit Bias and Philosophy research network 2011-2013. Published two volumes with Oxford University Press.s

# SHEFFIELD PHILOSOPHY (MY BELOVED FORMER DEPARTMENT)

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- 1999: hired a woman to a permanent academic post.
- Bringing total to 2.
- 1999-2012: 10 new permanent academic posts filled.
- 0 women.

# SHEFFIELD PHILOSOPHY

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- 1999-2012: Every hiring committee but one contained me— a committed feminist-- and 3 feminist men. Every time we genuinely wanted to hire a woman.
- ~~My (11) 11th~~ chance.

# THIS TALK

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- Implicit bias– mechanism that can bring about results like this from people of genuine good will.
- Methods for combatting implicit bias.
- Discussion of some problems with the ways people think, and talk about, and respond to, implicit bias.

# WOMEN IN SCIENCE

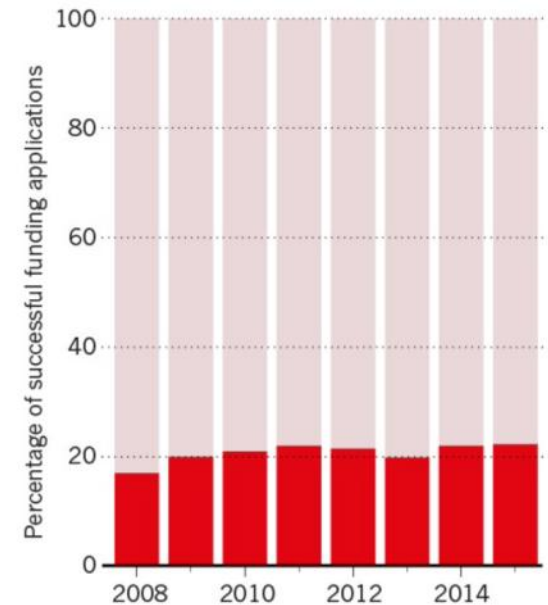
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- Around 30% women worldwide
- Germany:

## GENDER AND FUNDING

Far fewer women than men apply to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for funding, which is reflected in the low number of overall successful applications. Little has changed in the last decade.

■ Male ■ Female



Source: DFG

# POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

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- Innate differences?
- Childrearing?
- Conscious, explicit biases?
- Racist and sexist (and otherwise unjust!) societies and structures?
- Harassment of various sorts?
  
- Focus here: implicit bias
  - Note: This is very importantly connected to the last four above.

# BACKGROUND: IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Broadly speaking:
  - The overwhelming majority of us have implicit biases about the social groups in our society.
  - These are *largely* unconscious, automatic associations which affect our judgments about groups that are stigmatised or valorised.



# IMPLICIT BIAS

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- Arises from our very useful tendency to make fast, often unconscious associations, and to act on them.



# I M P O R T A N T L Y ...

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- These are often contrary to genuinely held commitments.
- They are held even by members of the target group.



# TEST YOUR OWN BIASES

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- Project Implicit
- Be sure to select right country
- Note: this does not tell you an unchanging fact about yourself. What you've just been doing makes a difference to the biases that you manifest.



# WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP



# WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

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# WOMAN IN A MEETING

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- Comment not taken seriously until repeated by a man.



# LETTERS OF REFERENCE

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- Man:
  - “brilliant”
  - “outstanding”;
  - “original”



# LETTERS OF REFERENCE

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- Woman:
  - “works hard”
  - “friendly”
  - “surprisingly successful”
  - “friends with my wife”
  - “very attractive”

# CITATION

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- Several studies showing that women and people of colour are less cited.
  - “the total number of citations received by women in the was in fact slightly higher than the number received by men, but the gap had reversed to 34% in favour of men by the 2000s — despite the proportion of women researchers increasing in this time period. The gap in total citations was partially accounted for by men having longer careers on average, and after correcting for this factor the 34% gap was reduced to 10% but was not eliminated.”

# TEACHING

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- In an identical course, students rate women instructors lower than men instructors. (Study used online class taught by same person, with male and female name.)
- Students are especially likely to question the competence of women and people of colour who are teaching them.

# SO... WHAT TO DO?

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- There is an increasingly widespread conviction that we should act to combat implicit bias.
- There is less agreement about what exactly should be done.
- But there is some pretty good empirical evidence which bears on the issue.



# POPULAR BUT (MOSTLY) INEFFECTIVE REMEDY

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- Put a woman on a committee to prevent implicit gender bias.



# THE PROBLEMS

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- Women are equally likely to display implicit gender biases.
- One woman on a committee is likely to have a hard time being heard, due to implicit gender bias.

# WHAT NOT TO DO

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- There are some articles which will say: don't do training.
- The reason: many forms of training actually *increase* the likelihood of implicit bias affecting behaviour.

# FLAWED TRAINING

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- Some training courses do a good job of explaining what implicit bias is, and how widespread it is, but stop there— without giving any remedy.
- If you *just* tell people that implicit bias is widespread, they are *more* likely to be influenced by it.



# FLAWED TRAINING

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- Some training courses explain implicit bias, and tell people simply to “try not to be biased”.
- This instruction also makes people more likely to manifest bias.

# FLAWED TRAINING

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- Some training courses end with the instruction to “be objective”.
- Just *thinking* about objectivity makes people more likely to display implicit bias.

# FLAWED TRAINING

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- Some training courses explain implicit bias, but then train people only in responding to explicit bias.
- This doesn't help with implicit bias.

# SO... GIVE UP?

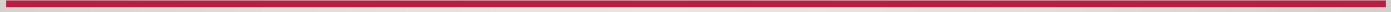
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- No. Instead, examine the evidence and learn what to do.

# KINDS OF REMEDIES

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- Individual: These are things that anyone, as an individual, can carry out.
- Institutional: These are changes that need to be made at an institutional level.
- Often, implicit bias training neglects the institutional side.
- **And institutional remedies are likely to be the most effective.**



# IMPORTANT FACT

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- There are multiple reasons to do most of these, even beyond those concerned with inequities in academia.

# INDIVIDUAL REMEDIES

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- ~~Make your publications~~ **Make your publications** of under-represented groups. (E.g. check your citations!)
- ~~Speak up when someone's~~ **Speak up when someone's** contributions being overlooked or attributed to someone else.
- Check your reference letters to look for gendered patterns.



# INDIVIDUAL REMEDIES

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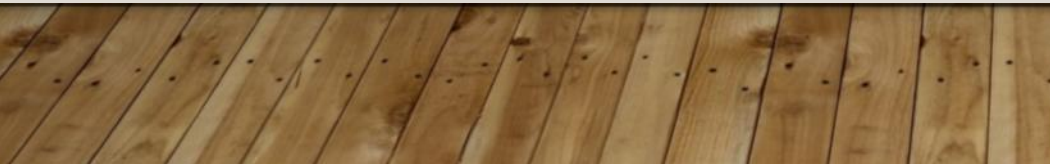
- ~~Don't~~
- Be well-rested.
- Consume glucose (maybe).  
(But also provide alternatives)



# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- Anonymise.
- Anonymising marking is easy. But can also partly anonymise hiring.
- In questions, I can discuss how we did this at Sheffield.



# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- For hiring and promotion, have clear criteria agreed in advance— and agree their weighting.
- In discussion, don't allow overall judgments end. Demand specific, evidence-based discussions of criteria.
- Try to spend roughly the same amount of time considering positives and negatives of each candidate.

# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- Counterstereotypical exemplars: Members of stereotyped group who don't fit stereotype.
- Presence of counterstereotypical exemplars can reduce manifestation of implicit bias.
- So...
  - Think about what's on your walls
  - And who you invite to workshops
  - And who you hire.

# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- Change the demographics– more counterstereotypical exemplars, less support for stereotypical generalisations.
- But does that mean hire based on something other than merit?
- This is what's already happening – CV studies show that.
- (Note: obviously, you have to choose between this and anonymity.)

# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- Think about potential for bias in promotion, hiring criteria.
  - Student evaluation of lecturers shows racial and gender bias.
  - Clear evidence of both racial and gender citation bias.

# INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

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- Mentoring schemes, mentoring workshops– most studies show members of underrepresented groups likely to receive less mentoring.
- However: make sure the mentoring is good! 2002 study showed men benefiting from mentoring but women being held back.

# BU TDONTFOR GETABOUT OTHER FACTORS!

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- Important to remember that other factors play a role too, in perpetuating group-based inequality.



# EXPLICIT BIAS AND HARASSMENT

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- Clear procedures and policies
- Change of culture
- Protection from retaliation

# COMMON STRUCTURAL FACTORS

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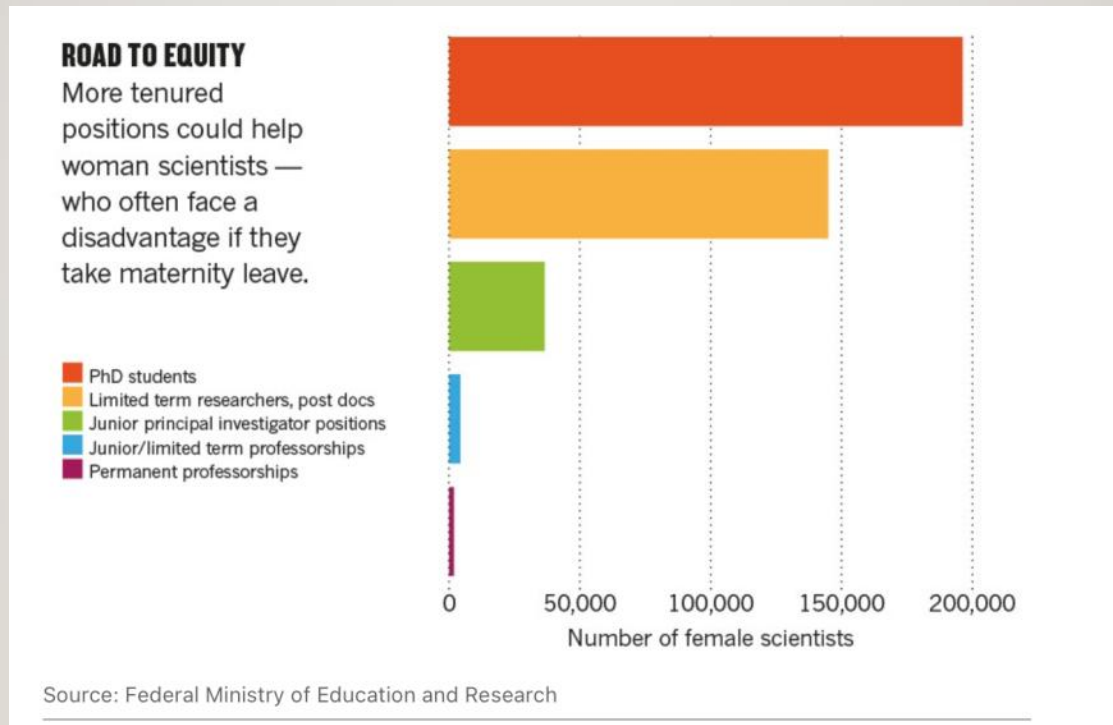
- Women and people of color tending to be in roles that are:
  - Less well-paid
  - Less prestigious
- Women and people of colour take on much more “invisible” labour, that often isn’t well rewarded, or even noticed, and is often very draining.

# STRUCTURAL ISSUES

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- Precarious employment.
- Again, not explicitly about gender, but women and people of colour are, in general, more likely to be precariously employed.
- Pushing for secure employment will help everyone (both academics and students), but will especially benefit women and people of colour.
- Precarious employment makes it riskier for people to speak up about other problems.

# NEED FOR STABLE CAREER PATH (GERMANY 2019)



# COVID 19

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- People with caregiving responsibilities are working at least two full-time jobs right now.
  - Promotion, hiring decisions need to take this into account.
  - Need to be supported in resuming research– in the same way as people returning from parental leave.

# CONNECTION TO IMPLICIT BIAS?

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- All of these non-implicit-bias issues are interconnected with implicit bias.
- They perpetuate group-based inequalities that shore up implicit bias, and they are themselves perpetuated by the group-based inequalities that exist.
- It's important to draw these connections.

# SUGGESTIONS ON PROCEDURAL REFORM?

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- Contact me: [Jennifer.saul@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:Jennifer.saul@uwaterloo.ca)
- Or [j.saul@Sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.saul@Sheffield.ac.uk)

# REASONS TO HOPE ..

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- People are paying SO much more attention to this now.
- Lots of people working to make things better,



# FURTHER RESOURCE

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- Stewart and Valian, *An Inclusive Academy*
  - <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/inclusive-academy>