

Recognizing and Overcoming Bias

Ways to Make Your Workplace
More Successful & Welcoming

Sheeri Kritzer Cabral, Mozilla
Leslie Hawthorn, Elasticsearch
USENIX LISA 2013

Introductions - Leslie



- Community Manager, Elasticsearch
- Worked in high tech field for 10+ years
- Interests include helping newbies and humanitarian open source software

Introductions - Sheeri

- Volunteer activist in a previous life
- Fulltime as a sysadmin, DBA since 2001
- Encourages learning cooperatively, not competitively



Reality Check

We'll be standing up here for about an hour talking about bias

We're both also well-educated, well paid white women working in the tech industry.

We have a whole lot to learn about how bias operates in the workplace and our wider world.

The Ground Rules

We'll be discussing some difficult and contentious topics for the next three hours.

- Create a safe environment
 - Listen without judgement
 - Disclose without fear
 - Disagree respectfully
- If we cannot be candid with and amongst ourselves, we cannot improve our situation

Around the Room

Please take a moment to

- Introduce yourself
- Tell us why you chose to come to this workshop
- Let everyone know what you hope to learn by participating

Agenda

9:00 - 9:20 AM: Introductions - all

9:20 - 10:30 AM: Exploring Bias + Ways to Overcome It -
Sheeri and Leslie

10:30 - 10:45 AM: Break

10:45 - 11:30 AM: Small Group Discussions - all

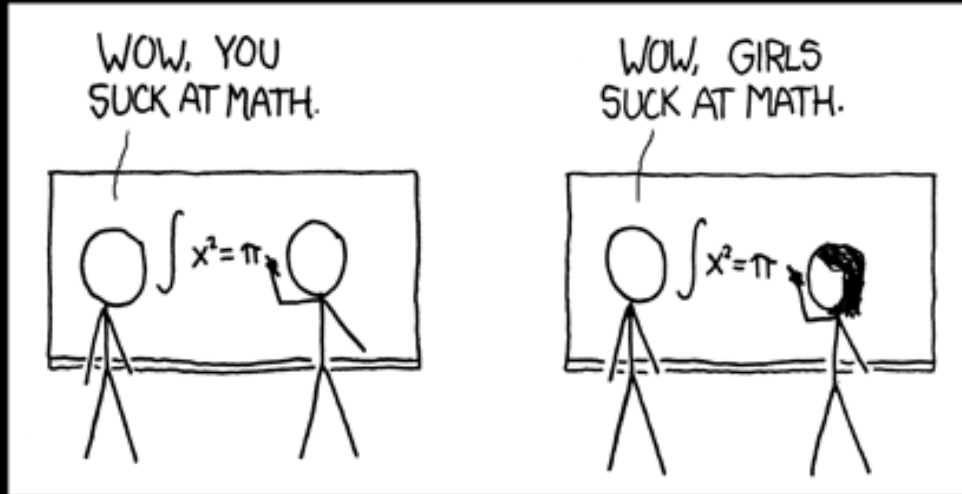
11:30 - 11:45 AM: Report Back from Breakouts - all

11:45 AM - 12 Noon: Break

12 Noon - 12:30 PM: Leveling Up - Sheeri and Leslie

Understanding Bias

Exploring the “-isms”

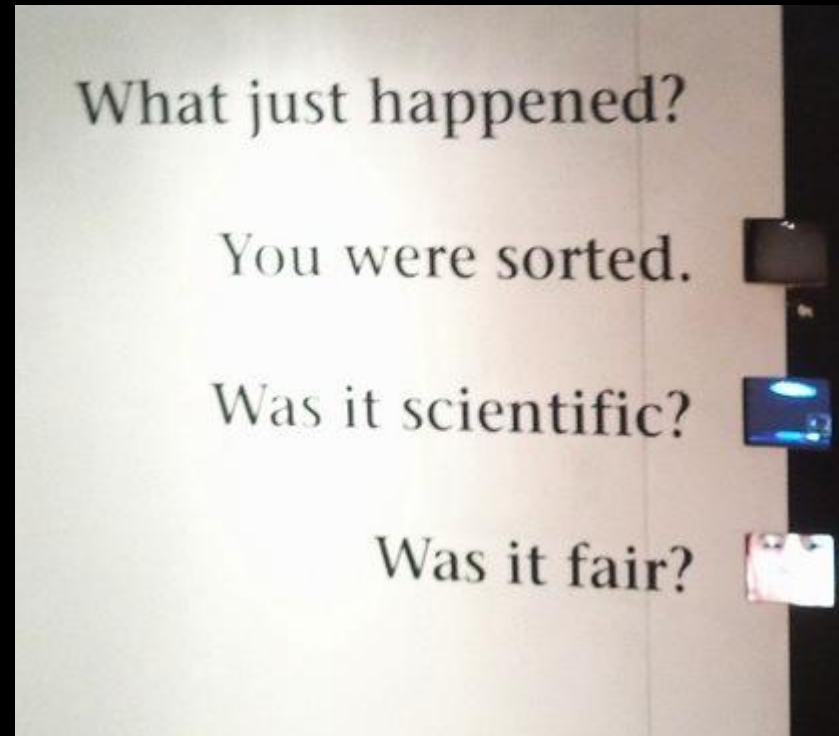


The Myth of the Meritocracy

- our assumed baseline of interaction
- not actually welcoming to newcomers
- obfuscates the operation of inherent bias

Exploring the -isms

- What is intersectionality?
- Why is this topic so difficult?
 - Bias does not affect everyone equally
 - Good 'scientific' explanations for bias
 - Many of us *benefit* from bias
 - We are all good people



Classism

Culturally, we're taught to value those in better economic circumstances *more* than those who are worse off financially.



MULLET

It's always nice to know you're better than someone.

Racism

“Racism is a powerful form of social inertia that unfairly perpetuates social, economic and political advantage for one racial group, while unfairly maintaining a system of social, economic and political barriers against another racial group. advantage for one racial group, while unfairly maintaining a system of social, economic and political barriers against another racial group.”

- *Finding the I in Racism*



Racism “Unpacked”

Six levels of racism:

- societal
- systemic
- institutional
- intergroup
- interpersonal
- personal

-ism

=

Prejudice

+

Power

Racism: I Am Not a Racist

We all participate in racist, sexist, ageist, nationalistic, etc. systems because they are societal and systemic.

The key is to recognize these biases and work to overcome them on the individual level.



Ageism

'Positive' ageism

'Negative' ageism



Physical Ability

We are infrequently called upon to consider questions of equal access.

Extraordinary effort is required by many with different physical abilities to effectively participate in systems that work well for us and that we take for granted.



Nationality and Ethnicity

'Positive' perceptions:

- German trains always run on time
- Asians are great at math

Negative perceptions:

- Unable to understand a 'thick' accent
- French people are lazy and only work 36 hours per week.

Sexual Orientation

Our cultural, by default, assumes heteronormativity.

Consider the many impacts of living outside this normative.



Matters of Faith: Religion and Atheism

- Tech industry is a place where it is largely OK to be overtly atheist
- Tendency to dismiss others' beliefs based on own experience
- Working effectively with those who do not share our belief systems can be difficult

Gender Expression and Transphobia

Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.

Transwomen have:

- Double the rate of unemployment. If you are a transwoman of color, you have five times the rate of unemployment.
- 26% have been fired from a job due to their trans status
- 90% have experienced harassment on the job
- 16% work in the underground economy (drugs/sex work)
- about 1/3 live below poverty level

Sexism in the Workplace: The Dress Code

- Dressing 'sexy'
- Dressing well but not 'provocatively'
- Wearing makeup or heels
- Pink, pink and more pink



Sexism in the Workplace: The Dress Code Reversed

In the technology field,
dressing in this manner
can harm rather than
help your professional
reputation.



Sexism in the Workplace: Working for Female Managers

Women are consistently socialized to fear working for other women while we simultaneously find ourselves lamenting the lack of senior women role models in the tech industry.



Sexism in the Workplace: Slut Shaming

- Acceptable in the workplace for men to express desire, but not for women
- Success means you've "slept your way to the top"



Fat Shaming + Other Body Type Matters

Overweight people are perceived as:

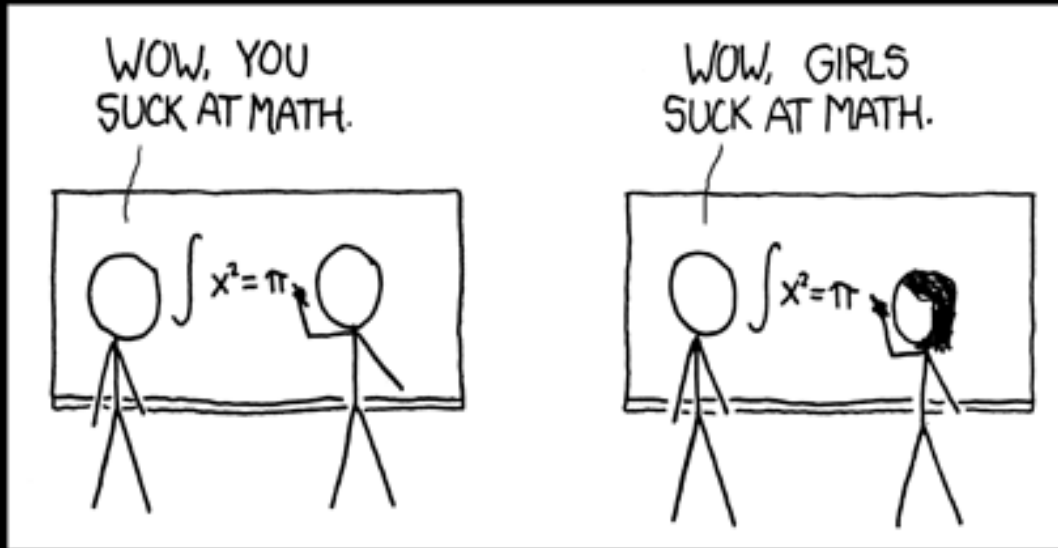
- Lacking self-control
- Less competent
- Less attractive

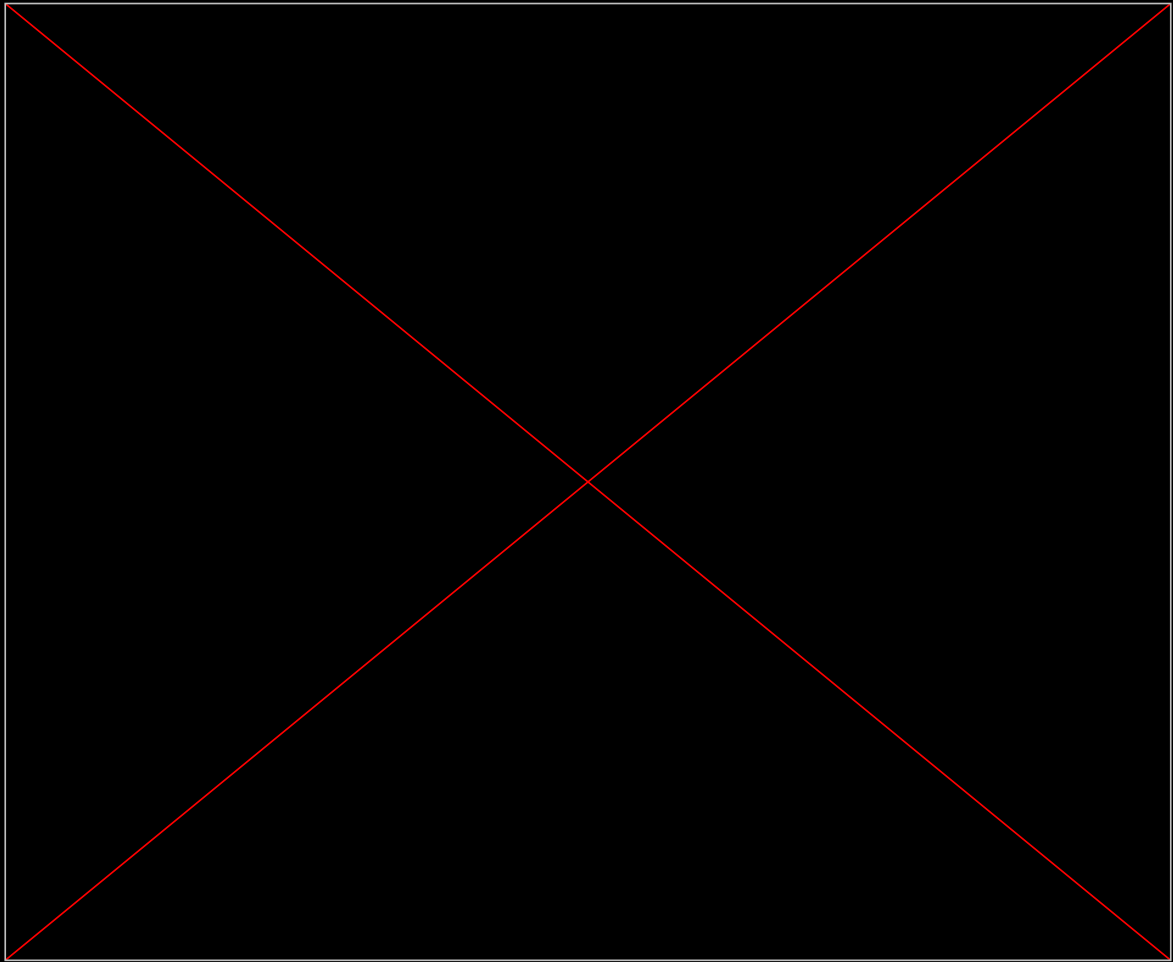
Contrast with tall people:

- Confident
- Trustworthy
- Capable



How Bias Works





<http://i.imgur.com/jrKmgIA.jpg>

Creating the Other

Cognitive bias is part of being a human being:

“A cognitive bias is the human tendency to make systematic decisions in certain circumstances based on cognitive factors rather than evidence.”

How We Subconsciously Reinforce Our Own Biases

It is natural for us to spend most of our time with people who:

- Look like us
- Think like us
- Act like us
- Come from the same economic class we do
- Etc.



Ways We Group Ourselves

- Republican vs. Democrat
- vi vs. emacs
- Techie vs. Non-Techie, e.g. Jocks vs. Nerds
- East Coast vs. West Coast
- Academic vs. Self-Taught
- Vegan vs. Vegetarian vs. Omnivore
- LISA attendees vs. non

This list is endless

Why Do We Group Ourselves?

- Sense of tribalism / belonging is essential for our well-being as humans
- Natural desire to see ourselves as “special” or part of an “elite” group
- Mixing with others like us is inherently easier precisely because it is less challenging

Mitigating Bias is *Not* Easy

1. You are uncomfortable you have the bias
2. Bias is a part of your identity, so giving it up is giving up a part of who you are
3. Your bias revolves around something you value/want to keep

Recognizing the Difference: Being Special and Being Awesome

We all very much want to feel good about ourselves ...

What is not required, however, is for someone else to **not** be special in order for us to be an awesome human being.

So What Can We Do About It?

The first step is recognizing our own biases

We'll talk about these together soon.

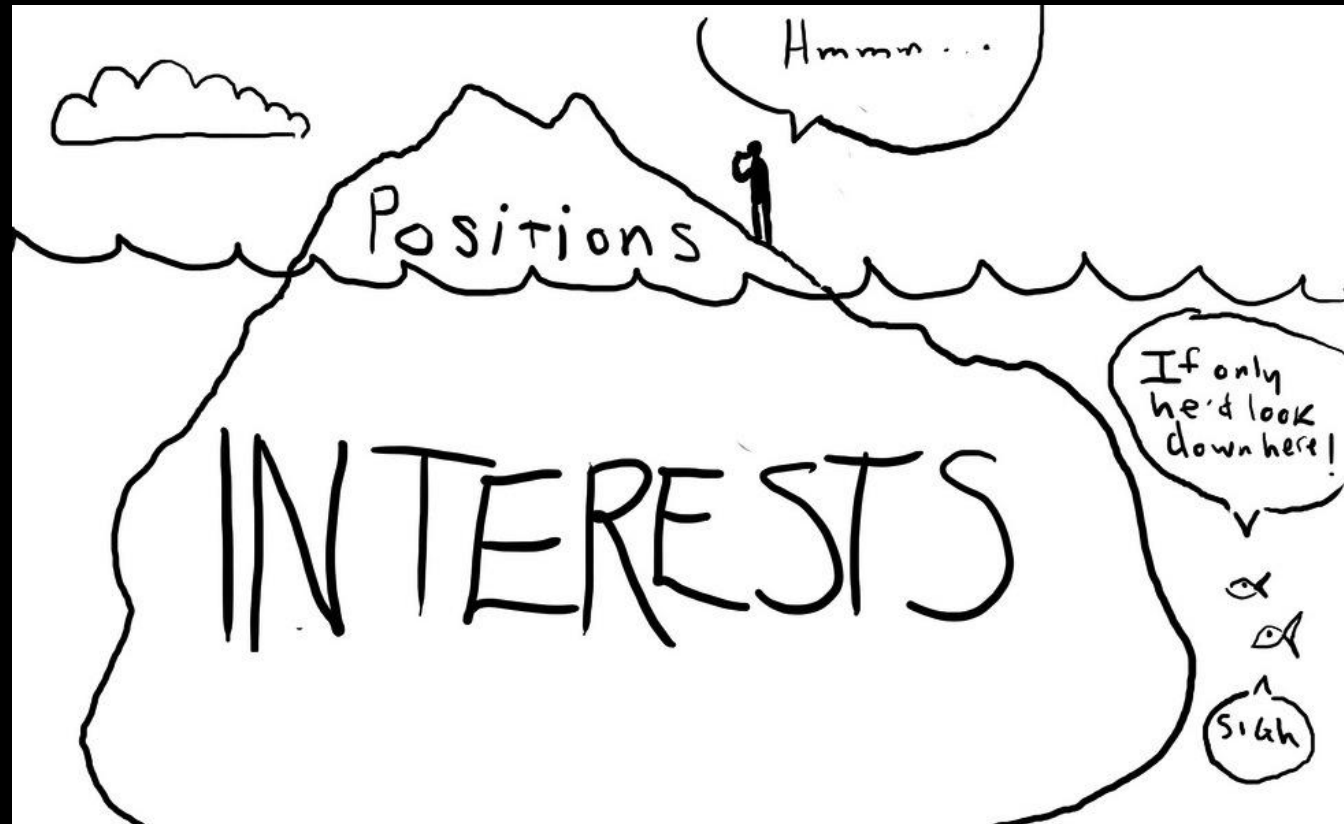


Breaking Down Bias - Empathy

- Spend time with people who are not like you
- Listen and learn
- Ask for more information to challenge your assumptions



Focus Your Thinking on Interests vs. Positions



Challenging Systemic Bias

There are many ways to act as an ally in the work place:

- Politely call out sexist/racist/ageist/etc behavior
 - In yourself and others
- Advocate for inclusiveness even when it does not benefit you
 - Domestic partner benefits when employer chooses health plan
 - Volunteering to mentor minority youth as company project
 - Who are you hiring? Who have they worked with?

When Faced with Bias

- Biases hurt, whether we are feeling them, displaying them or facing them in someone else
- Take a moment to feel defensive as needed, but answer in a positive way
- Challenge the inherent assumptions in a biased remark

Reality Check

We've been standing up here for about an hour talking about bias

We're both also well-educated, well paid white women working in the tech industry.

We have a whole lot to learn about how bias operates in the workplace and our wider world.

Let's Learn More Together

Thank you!

Sheeri K. Cabral
@sheeri
awfief@gmail.com
<http://www.sheeri.com>

Leslie Hawthorn
@lhawthorn
mebelh@gmail.com
<http://hawthornlandings.org>

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Works from The Harvard Negotiation Project, http://www.pon.harvard.edu/category/research_projects/harvard-negotiation-project/
- Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, <http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>
- How to Overcome Unconscious and Hidden Bias, <http://www.wikihow.com/Overcome-Unconscious-and-Hidden-Biases>
- Overcomingbias.com, especially http://www.overcomingbias.com/2006/11/to_the_barricad.html
- Microaggression and Management, <https://medium.com/about-work/65d4740f7a2f>
- National Association of White Men and Black Men Together, <http://nabwmt.org/>
- Project Implicit, <https://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html>

There are many works that should be here that are not.
Please let us know how we can improve this list!

The legal bits

The images contained in this presentation are copyright their respective owners and are used with permission, typically under a Creative Commons license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

The legal bits, continued

This presentation is licensed CC-BY-3.0

You can read the full text of the license here:

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en_US

Please use, remix and share widely!