



How to harvest brainpower for a brighter future on Earth – bypassing stereotypes in practice

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Our ability to detect and respond to patterns, the core asset in scientific work, likely has been a strong evolutionary advantage when navigating between need and danger. We therefore argue that our use of stereotypes for the most part is decoupled from malice but instead profoundly rooted, pervasive and often unchallenged in our daily thought process. The fundamental need for patterns also means that we all express biases – regardless of our gender – such as during teaching, mentoring or collaborations. As culprits, our implicit bias both disfavor (e.g. female or immigrant students) and favor (e.g. the-celebrated-worker’s-results-are-probably-stronger-than-they-seem) our fellow workers in unsolicited ways. Additionally, people in our environment adapt to the expectations we express, called the stereotype threat. Ultimately, these two effects likely lead to missed opportunities for new questions and achievements. The omni-present implicit bias also means that some equality efforts, such as quotas, would soon be neutralized unless we train in catching our use of stereotypes in action.

We will share our experiences from gender sensitivity training during teaching and assessment, such as the use of anonymous exams, simple ‘traps’ to demonstrate gender bias, and group work management. We also present views collected in our group on how academic talent management may improve through mentorship, career coaching and general policy decisions. All with the selfish ambition to improve future harvests of brainpower, for science and for sustainable human life on Earth.