

## Unconscious Bias and Abstract Review

Peer Review is the accepted standard for quality assessment in publications, grants, and abstract review, and most reviewers aspire to minimize their own bias in evaluations. Nevertheless, there is genuine concern that unintended biases may exert undue influence on the integrity of scientific review.

The American Society of Clinical Oncology is committed to high quality scientific review of scholarly works. Biases of reviewers, both implicit and explicit, interfere with the impartiality required to determine the true quality of research. As you volunteer your time with ASCO, please be vigilant against any subtle or unconscious biases that may diminish the exceptional science we hope to promote.

### **Types of Possible Bias in Peer Review\***

- **Bias Against Author Characteristics** – Preconceived attitudes about gender, race, ethnicity, or age may influence perceptions about quality and innovation in the peer review process.
- **Affiliation Bias** – Broad type of bias that may occur when reviewer and applicant share formal or informal relationships such as institution, language, or nationality.
- **Prestige Bias** – A type of affiliation bias, this may occur when there is a preferential evaluation based on a recognized social status.
- **Confirmation Bias** – Reviewers may tend to favor data, interpretations, or approaches that are more consistent with reviewer’s held beliefs.
- **Conservatism** – Innovative or unorthodox research may face a higher burden of proof or be expected to develop more extensive contingency planning.
- **Bias Against Interdisciplinary Research** – Systemic biases may be introduced when the tools used in the evaluation process favor established disciplines and are not adapted to consider the full spectrum of the multidisciplinary proposal.

### **Tips to Combat Unconscious Bias\*\***

- **Understand That We all Have Hidden Biases** – The simple act of realizing that you have hidden biases can enable you to mentally monitor and attempt to ameliorate any hidden attitudes before they are expressed in your decision.
- **Deliberately Slow Down Your Decision-Making** – Slowing down your decision-making process can help you achieve more fairness and improve the quality of your decisions.
- **Reconsider the Reasons for Your Decisions** – Recognize that your reasoning may be a product of post-hoc justifications or “gut” reactions that are coloring your decisions.
- **Question Cultural Stereotypes** – Question cultural stereotypes that seem truthful. Be open to seeing what is new and unfamiliar and increase your knowledge of other groups.

\*Lee, C.J., Sugimoto, C.R., Zhang, G., & Cronin, B. (2013). Bias in Peer Review. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 64(1):2-17.

\*\*Frith, U. (2015). Unconscious bias. [PDF File] The Royal Society. Available at: <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/Publications/2015/unconscious-bias-briefing-2015.pdf> [Accessed 20 Nov. 2019].