

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

A collection of essays

Joshua Oware FRSA

rare

DIVERSITY
RECRUITMENT
EXCELLENCE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Oware is Rare's Research and Community Affairs Coordinator.

Josh is responsible for Target Oxbridge: a free development programme that works with students in Years 11 to 13 of black, and mixed-race black, African-Caribbean heritage with the aim of ending the underrepresentation of black students at Oxbridge. Through university visits, skills coaching, critical theory discussions, seminars, tutorials and guest speaker events, its various strands focus on intellectual, cultural and social development irrespective of personal or economic barriers. Josh is also responsible for Rare's research and innovation output, including their pioneering work on social mobility, unconscious bias and contextualisation. He was the lead author of Rare's 2013 research project, *Social Mobility in Graduate Recruitment*.



In recent years he has been involved with projects focusing on race, education, space/design, social movements, austerity, mental illness and everyday life. During this time, he has appeared on TV for Sky News and London Live, and spoken at or written for BBC Radio, the Runnymede Trust, the AGR conference and magazine, Teach First, The Gateway, the Oxford Union, the Oxford Education Conference, the University of Bristol and Aston University among others.

For his work, Josh has been awarded the LSBC Higher Education prize (2013), and the Oxford University Vice Chancellor's Civic Award (VCCA) in 2013 for positive contributions to University, local and national civic life. As a consequence he was elected as a Fellow to the Royal Society of Arts. In September 2014, his essay on 'the presence of Siberia' through a reading of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov was declared the 'world's best essay in the social sciences 2013/14' by the Undergraduate Awards (UA).

A geography student, on a scholarship, he gained the highest First in his year at Oxford University, graduating as the 'Gibbs Scholar' in 2013. Beyond Rare, he is an MPhil student at the University of Cambridge, sits on the Amos Bursary Learning and Development Committee and advises the Ubuntu Education Fund.

In his spare time he enjoys procrastination, quoting Othello out-of-context and anything by Zadie Smith.



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

JOSHUA OWARE FRSA

'Hello. The voice I speak with these days, this English voice with its rounded vowels and consonants in more or less the right place – this is not the voice of my childhood. I picked it up in college, along with the unabridged Clarissa and a taste for port.'

Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind*

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FOREWORD

When I started Rare nine years ago, if you'd told me we'd be publishing a book that drew on neuroscience, behavioural economics and big data in order to examine how working-class and minority ethnic people fare in graduate job interviews, I think I would have been rather bemused.



But we are, because over the last nine years, the more we've looked at the issue of why certain people don't get hired – those people who tick all the boxes on paper, but who in person just don't seem to 'have it' – the more we have found ourselves looking at some pretty subtle stuff. We're talking about the minutiae of human interaction – accents, posture, shared experience, the way a word is pronounced, the length of time it takes to get that an interviewer is joking and to understand the reference in her joke – and about the way differences in those things affect the way people are viewed in graduate interview situations. It is, in part, a question of both what we think we're looking for, and what we're expecting to find.

Unconscious bias in general is a familiar field. There is a fair amount of general literature on it, much of it from the United States, but it is frustratingly difficult to translate that into the issues that face us and our clients today. These issues – especially those of race, class and culture – are largely unexplored in the context of top-tier UK graduate recruitment.

These essays do two things. One: they revisit, deepen, revise and make more relevant the science behind unconscious bias; and in doing so partly from the perspective of neuroscience, they shed new light on the way we make decisions. Two: they move beyond the theory and into the actual – what real high potential people from underrepresented backgrounds are like, in the UK, today. This allows us to propose solutions: ways of identifying microinequities, the attendant biases around them and of finding ways to address them.

We have in Clifford Chance a worthy sponsor for this research. Clifford Chance has blazed a trail in issues of diversity, social mobility and unconscious bias, in particular in relation to the firm's CV blind interviewing and Intelligent Aid competition. There is a driving commitment to hiring the best people regardless of background throughout the firm and we are proud to be associated with it.

Our Five Big Ideas, set out on page 75, represent the logical conclusion of our thinking in this area. I am excited about seeing them implemented over the next twelve months, and about the impact that each of them will have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Mokades'.

Raphael Mokades
Managing Director, Rare



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rare's aim

- There are many reports and initiatives on unconscious bias. We wanted a new approach that draws on our unique access to young, high achieving, yet under-represented, students in ways that can actively improve the recruitment process.
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The essay collection

- Part one: covers the emergence of Rare's concern with unconscious bias and the theoretical and empirical background to unconscious decision-making.
 - Part two: examines the idea of background and draws together Rare's thinking on Bourdieusian capital, the series of filmed interviews we conducted during 2014 and our developing understanding of the unconscious.
 - Part three: asks the question of 'what are we looking for?' and analyses the recent, and under-researched, emergence of video interviews.
-

Research summary

- Desk research: extensive interdisciplinary literature review covering over 30 years of academic research, popular scientific non-fiction, lectures, recordings and research-led projects by organisations, in the UK and abroad, such as the Equality Challenge Unit and Project Implicit*.
 - Interviews: over 30 filmed encounters with Rare candidates aged 18 to 24, examined using two to three cameras that captured individual speakers and the space of their interaction.
 - Key research questions: (A) what are unconscious biases? (B) How can we connect unconscious bias to social mobility? (C) How might we develop our three categories of 'capital' (social, cultural and economic) to better understand unconscious interactions during the recruitment process?
-

The social, political and economic context

- Unconscious bias: occurs when a human being performing an action, and/or making a decision, is guided by an association, attitude or illusion of which she is not conscious.
-

- Background: the pioneering work on unconscious bias emerged, most recently, inside the USA. In particular, the work of Kahneman and Tversky (the creation of behavioural economics) and that of Greenwald and Banaji (stereotype biases) in the 70s, 80s and 90s has established unconscious bias as part of the social lexicon.
- UK: much of the work in the UK borrows from the American context. There are relatively few interventions that emerge clearly from a British cultural, social and political context.
- Status quo: with the financial crash, and changing understandings of discrimination, unconscious bias has positioned itself as the next frontier for social justice engagements – from business to everyday life.

What we learned

- The research on the unconscious is clear: we are all susceptible to a multitude of so-called unconscious biases; these biases are hardwired into our neural circuitry and exhibited in all of our everyday actions.
- Capital: a person's economic, social and cultural capital is not only relevant to how they appear on paper (as with last year's research) but how they appear in person – especially, the extra-discursive dimensions of their presence – how often might we produce evaluative phrases such as: 'she was very warm and personable', for example?
- Cultural literacy: there exists a cultural, linguistic and social canon. This canon is, by its very nature, 'the way things get done'. It is a metalanguage that enables social and business interaction. Not having access to, or experience of, this canon may place individuals at unfair, largely unconscious, disadvantages.
- Recruitment process: a blend of blind and contextualised stages will offer the most realistic and egalitarian recruitment process. We must control the information in the system: the best systems are both hyper-contextualised and blind.
- 'It': we questioned what judgements are being made in an interview and how they might betray their conscious aim. When a particular candidate impresses us, when that candidate has 'it', what is 'it' and how might it informed by biases – feelings of warmth, comfort and familiarity, for example? These essays collectively attempt to describe 'it'.

Outcomes / recommendations

- There are two chapters that follow the series of essays: *Rare recommends*, a series of eight recommendations that arise directly from the research; and *Rare's Five Big Ideas* for 2015, five projects, materials and devices being developed to address unconscious bias in 2015 and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Potential not polish, part II

In December 2013 we unveiled the results of our latest research report, *Social Mobility in Graduate Recruitment: potential not polish*. Exploring the past decade of contextual information use in university admissions, it set forth an ambitious plan looking to change the way we see individuals and their achievements. We began to better understand the difference between the person and their appearance on paper – words, grades and a lack of relevant work experience might not faithfully represent their potential to be brilliant.

One year on we are beginning to see the transformational effect of this new way of seeing, through Rare's innovative contextual recruitment system and pan-industry working group.

It is one thing being able to ensure that exceptional, otherwise missed, candidates are fairly evaluated on paper, but what happens on a human level as they, and indeed all candidates, interact with the various stages of an application? How is it that by virtue of background, context, and identity – or at least its perception – applicants might experience (dis) advantage? Indeed, when we look closely, what, or who, is making *our* decisions?

In part two of our research into contextual thinking, we explore the unconscious and its biases. We unpack the decision-making process, and argue that true fairness can only be achieved through attention at the most granular, sometimes infinitesimal, scale.

So, how do we really make decisions?

Unconscious bias and graduate recruitment interviews

When we perform an action, any action, associations and attitudes of the unconscious mind guide us. These might be expressed as cognitive biases, perhaps – as errors in our statistical judgements or our susceptibility to visual illusions, for example. They might also, sociologically speaking, mean that we *associate* particular social categories, and the people who are linked to those categories, with particular traits; and display *attitudes* that dispose us to feel comfortable around, or to act favourably towards, some people, but to feel uncomfortable around, or to act unfavourably towards, others (Coleman, 2010). In this sense, unconscious bias occurs when a person performing an action, and/or making a decision, is guided by an association, attitude or illusion of which she is not conscious. In this way, for human history and for our survival today,

or even by means of keeping the overwhelming incomprehensibility of the world at bay, unconscious biases can be positive, but our concern here, necessarily, is in what can go wrong.

By examining the various methodologies put forward in the disciplines of social psychology, neurology, cultural theory and linguistics, this research builds upon current work that has identified the environmental and unconscious dimensions of human action, by moving into a closer analysis of actions at the individual level. To do so, we have to examine how people process the cues around them to form impressions and give meanings to their experiences, and environments. The empirical work is conscious of adding real world material to the vast array of controlled and laboratory based experiments. With race, for example, there is a qualitative difference between answering questions about 'black people' on a page or screen (e.g. Harvard Implicit Association Test – IAT), and being physically proximate to the body of another (*an 'other'*).

In the context of graduate recruitment, research suggests that various forms of bias might, and often do, occur at all stages of the recruitment process, from the language of the job description all the way through to the interview. Indeed, when deciding between academically excellent individuals, when often all that is evident is similarity, it is quite possible that we begin to rely upon the multitude of distinctions our unconscious biases make salient (*ibid.*). Interviews are often considered to be the 'real' opportunity to gain a handle on the quality of a candidate – a period of direct human encounter – but are they fair and what effect does the unconscious have?

Our departing questions

We are particularly interested in the more-than-linguistic aspects of such encounters, from gesture and disposition to physical proximity, atmosphere and conversational dynamics. These analyses will be informed by interdisciplinary perspectives that seek to connect unconscious traits with various, intersectional, contexts – from upbringing, age, sex and race, to the circumstances of the interview itself. Drawing on an extensive literature base, a longitudinal series of filmed interviews with Rare candidates aged 18 to 24, as well as empirical material from other interviews and conversations, this project asks several questions:

(A) What are unconscious biases?

1. What do we need to be aware of in people's accents, gestures and mannerisms; and what do we need to understand about the societies out of which we all emerge?
2. Engaging unconscious biases: how might we begin to use the research findings to train, engage with and account for forms of unconscious bias? Is it actually possible to 'manage' the unconscious? Failing that, what techniques and tools can we deploy to acknowledge its influence and adjust our actions in light of such acknowledgement?

(B) How might we connect unconscious bias to social mobility?

(C) Within (B), how can we thoroughly, accurately and usefully develop our understandings of the terms 'intersectionality' and 'race/racism'?

(D) Following (B) and (C), how might we develop our three categories of 'capital' (social, cultural

and economic) to better understand unconscious interactions during the recruitment process?
(E) How then do we productively engage with unconscious biases and their potential effects on the fairness of any graduate recruitment process?

Using this book

This short book is a toolbox, a brief textual translation of six months' research. There are six essays of varied length, a series of recommendations (p71) and *Five Big Ideas for 2015* (p75). Each of the essays can be read chronologically, or in an order that suits your need or interest. The aim is to wrestle with what we know and how we claim to know it.

'I've got it! I have an idea!' Do you? This collection of essays is in conversation with new understandings of our neuro-psychology. It uses this conversation to inform and examine how we make decisions. By the time your idea has emerged, your brain has already performed an incalculable amount of work. The inspired thought has been served from behind the scenes, where your neural circuitry has been working away on it for hours, days, months and even years, making complex connections and attempting innumerable experiments. Like a flash of lightning in a hurricane, what you experience is a minute semblance of a vaster, and on-going, tumult. What are these processes, and how might we usefully imagine their relation? More importantly, can we even take credit for them any more?

So, six essays: some expected, others – we hope – less so. They combine critique, six months of empirical research involving real students and interviewers and business analysis. This, we hope, is the first edition of an iterative, exciting and growing engagement with unconscious bias.



BEING BORN: THE UNCONSCIOUS

1. RARE'S RESEARCH - WHY LOOK WITHIN?

'Men make their own history' – Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nova* (1725)

'Everything intercepts us from ourselves' – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Us

We must find stools to replace our thrones. From Galileo to Hutton, Darwin to Crick and Watson, the past 400 years have witnessed the cascading dethronement of human hubris by evolution theory and the development in our knowledge of the Earth. Our world, practices and beliefs have moved from the centre of everything knowable in the universe, to a confusing, infinitesimally small and transient flutter on an unimaginably vast space-time continuum. In the 20th century, a series of discoveries through psychoanalysis, psychology and neuroscience began yet another dethronement of our knowledge; this time, knowledge of our very selves, revealing the dark spaces we all harbour inside. Not only are our most fundamental drives hardwired into the fabric of our neural circuitry, but they are also inaccessible to us. In 2014 we know that: we are not in control, if by control we imagine an 'I' behind the steering wheel of our lives; we do not know much; and we are imperceptibly small. But, in this sobriety – a sombre evolution of self-knowledge that seems lifted from *Le mythe de Sisyphe*¹ – we can still find beauty.

How sheltered and antiquated will our lives look in 100 years, or even in 1,000 years? These dethronements, and particularly the psychological and neurological discoveries of the past century, have unveiled a wondrous depth to our existence, whose architecture was previously unimaginable. Where Galileo decentred the universe and inspired others to discover that our solar system is but one of billions of trillions, our knowledge of the conscious mind's contingencies has enabled previously unthinkable, and unnecessary, questions to be asked – why do I love? Why do we find things beautiful? How can I drive home after work and not remember one moment? We are able to ask fundamental questions about our existence that no longer belong in the corridors of philosophy. They matter in every aspect of our lives and our professions, because what we think of as 'ours' is a now slightly redundant question.

Most of what we do, think and feel is not under our conscious control. Our brains are built of cells called neurons and glia – hundreds of billions of them, each as complicated as a city's life and infrastructure. These vast networks, which in their mapping bankrupt human language and demand as yet uninvented mathematics, operate their own programmes. Our conscious selves, in the Cartesian mould, the 'I' that happily and forthrightly commands your life from the moment

¹ *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (The myth of Sisyphus) by Albert Camus, 1942

you wake in the morning, is but the smallest sideshow to what is happening in the three pounds of material behind your dark eyes and dashing complexion.

Two systems

Are these two tabletops the same?

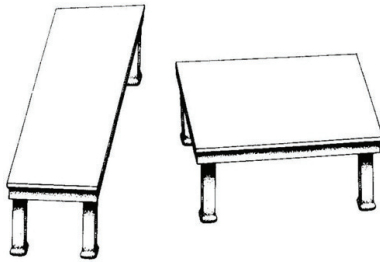


Fig. 1 – Shepard's tabletop illusion

They are². The eye receives, the brain records and the mind interprets. The tabletop example is a so-called *mindbug* – an inbuilt habit of thought that leads to errors in how we perceive, reason and remember.

When we look at the two surfaces our retinas do, actually, receive them as the same. However, when this information is transferred to the brain's visual cortex, where we perceive depth, it becomes distorted. The brain automatically converts the 2-D image of the page into a 3-D interpretation of the tables, as they 'must be' in reality (Banaji and Greenwald, 2013). The automatic processes of the mind impose a third dimension of depth onto the scene, and the conscious, reflective, processes of the mind unquestioningly accept the illusion. 'Any knowledge or understanding of the illusion we may gain at the intellectual level remains virtually powerless to diminish the magnitude of the illusion' (Shepard, 1990: 48). Indeed, the knowledge you have just gained here, in the last 209 words, has no corrective effect: try it; look at the image again.

Our minds do most of their work automatically, and without conscious intention. The proprietorial consciousness can take all the credit it wants, but it is best considered an appendage in most of the work within your brain: playing the piano might become unexpectedly hard if you begin focusing on every individual movement, and micro-motion, of your fingers, feet and eyes.

Generally speaking, we apprehend the world in two different ways, employing two contrasting modes of thought: conscious and unconscious (Wilson, 2002; Strawson, 2011). Many are familiar with the Freudian unconscious, and we must credit Freud, and those such as, Aquinas (1225-1274), Leibniz (1646-1716), Bell (1774-1842), Herbart (1776-1841), Weber (1795-1878), Muller (1801-1858) and Cattell (1860-1944), whose collective work revealed the difference between thought

² Test it: find paper thin enough to trace the outline of one of the tabletops, and then move the outline over the other. If they don't fit identically, then you've muddled the tracing job, and you need to revisit Year 2 Arts and Crafts, with Mrs. Aplin.

thoughts and unthought thoughts, what is now known as the conscious-unconscious divide. The Freudian unconscious, however, was a repressed realm of desire, inhibition and sexual fantasy only accessible from the outside, through interpretation. The Freudian unconscious resembles, in its innermost depths, a dark and treacherous cave, where, with the right torchlight, individuals may be able to illuminate their deepest workings. In contrast, the modern view is that many of the interesting things about the human mind – judgements, feelings and motives – occur outside of awareness, for evolutionary reasons of efficiency, and not because of repression (Eagleman, 2012). In short, modern science affirms an understanding of the unconscious as a set of ‘pervasive, adaptive, [and] sophisticated mental processes that occur largely out of view’ (Wilson, 2002: 5).

While the mind’s processes are almost unquantifiable, these two, admittedly general, modes of thought provide a useful characterisation of its decision-making tendencies. These two modes are commonly thought of as Systems 1 and 2, made famous in the work of Professor Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (see, in particular: 1979, 1984, 2011). For Kahneman, who won a Noble Peace Prize for his insights, and Tversky, System 1 is intuitive, hidden from our rational selves, beyond intentional control and unable to be switched off, while System 2 is logical, slow, rational and deliberative. Indeed,

‘If we think that we have reasons for what we believe, that is often a mistake. Our beliefs and our wishes and our hopes are not always anchored in reasons’
(Kahneman in *Strawson*, 2011: 1).

Unconscious bias

System 1 pays a price for its speed, however. It loves to simplify, to assume WYSIATI (‘what you see is all there is’) even as it fabricates and infers. What is 5×5 ? Okay, fine, what about 234×61 ? System 1 (or unconscious processing) is bad at the kinds of statistical thinking required for good decisions; it jumps to conclusions and is subject to a vast array of irrational biases and interference effects (for an in-depth exploration of these heuristics and biases, see Essay 2). For example,

Imagine a young woman named Amara, who is single, outspoken and very bright, and who, as a student, was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice. Which is more probable: (1) Amara is a corporate lawyer, or (2) Amara is a corporate lawyer and active in the feminist movement?

So, (1) or (2)?

In the experiments conducted by Kahneman and Tversky, a similar situation was posed and the overwhelming response was that (2) would be more probable; in other words, in light of the information, ‘feminist corporate lawyer’ is more likely than ‘corporate lawyer’. This, of course, violates all probability laws: every feminist corporate lawyer is a corporate lawyer; adding a condition only reduces the probability. System 1 jumps to an intuitive conclusion based on a ‘heuristic’ – a mental shortcut – and System 2 endorses this heuristic answer without interrogation. Intuition is a great evolutionary device, but it is a dangerous one too.

The research – picking up where we left off

Last year we introduced the concept of ‘paper vs. person.’ It is the idea, firstly, that the circumstances of an individual’s upbringing are evident in how they appear on paper and in person; and secondly, that there are differences between the paper person and the in-person person. This is particularly important in assessments of someone’s potential to succeed³. Our concern across these two projects is with that which is not necessarily natural, but a symbolic effect of experience. The core idea is that misleading proxies may influence our judgements of quality, competence and potential: how far would my once strong Middlesbrough born accent act as a proxy for my capability? How far do things that are unnecessary to the potential to succeed in a job, or that inadvertently corroborate an unfair view of the world, influence us unconsciously?

As you will see in Essay 5, most research over the past 20 to 30 years has looked at biases by outcome, identifying them by their impact, for example: ‘applicants with typically white British names are more likely to be shortlisted for jobs than those with names associated with minority ethnic backgrounds’ (Wood *et al.*, 2009) or ‘implicit attitudes influence individual preferences in terms of illegal and legal immigration policy’ (Perez, 2010). There seems, however, very little express interest in the question of what happens inside the black box itself (Fig. 2): what is happening during these human to human encounters (interviews), what influences and life stories are shaping the nature of the interaction? It is not a simple case of: one interviewer, one interviewee and an unambiguous, systematic assessment. No, each encounter contains two individuals pregnant with all their pasts, presents and futures. So how do these two histories meet each other?

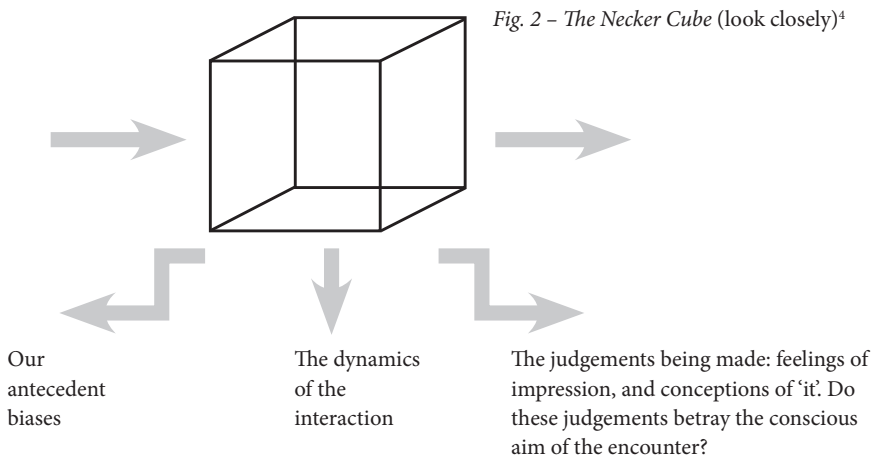


Fig. 2 – *The Necker Cube* (look closely)⁴

³ See Oware, Mokades and Ivanova (2013): particularly chapters 2, 8 and 9 for the empirical background to ‘pre-university’ effects.

⁴ This is another mindbug or, in this case, an example of our multistable perception. The so-called Necker Cube can be interpreted in two different ways: when we look at the picture, it will often appear to lurch back and forth between two valid interpretations of its form. Look closely, and you will see two different, equally possible, cubes.

Events

The application process is a series of events. It is a collection that includes: application forms, psychometric tests, videoed situational judgement tests, interviews and assessment centres. Inside the Necker Cube, inside the interview, there is another series of events, each with a cause, experience and impact. These events can be an unnoticed sweatiness under your arm, or an explicit breakdown under questioning. An event can be dress, accent, eye colour, smell (the pong of au naturel or the CK One that reminds you of that dinner you had at *Locanda Cipriani* in Venice); in fact, these events can be any number of things expressed dispositionally or by association – that tie works well, good job. Most simply, our concern here, and in our work going forward, is the twofold relationship between (a) the event and an association, and (b) the event and an assessment that is influenced by the association (Fig. 3).

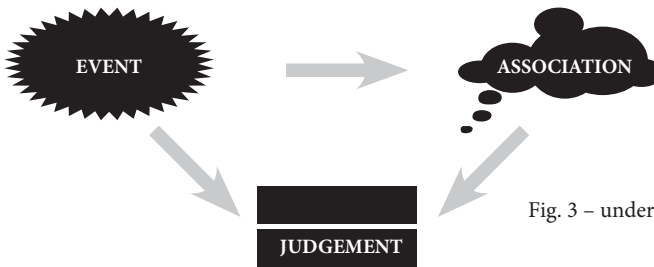


Fig. 3 – understanding judgement

Approaching from this converse angle allows a constant questioning: what is the event? Does the relation *need* to be so direct? Is the event relevant and important to the task at hand? What influence is the event having? Our work is to pause and think about as many of these events as possible.

Let's rewind:

Do you remember Kofi from last year? We used our conversations with Kofi, a trainee lawyer at a Magic Circle law firm, to demonstrate the importance of certain forms of 'contextualisation' at interview. What Kofi revealed in our interview with him, and in the outcome of his actual graduate job interview, is an important rebuttal to those that claim that qualitative techniques of research or assessment are soft and unscientific. In other words, they believe that the absence of data sets and the avoidance of statistical analyses make qualitative techniques of assessment, in comparison to alternatives, *lazy*. Qualitative techniques work to explore the world in its found form. Generally speaking, they seek to answer questions that stress how social experience is given meaning, which is crucial considering how different life experiences can be. Interviews are human interactions, where the interviewer is not a disembodied, neutral and detached observer.

Kofi: But the bit that I found hard is just making it personal to you. So if you're answering something like I like this firm because they've got ...erm... several international offices, why is that personally significant to you? So, for example, I would say that because I was born here but my parents are from Ghana, I've always had a confusion of cultures, so that's always given me a different perspective of life and so it's been one of the more enjoyable aspects of

life and how my work reflects that is quite interesting. So the first bit is generic, but the last bit is personal and that maybe sets it apart. And it certainly helps when you go into your interview to explain why you like something, because I'm just being honest. It's better than I like this because –puts on funny serious voice – ‘The way the market is changing is um moving here and moving there, the firm is perfectly positioned to take advantage of that!’

Interviewer: Yes, And the places where you didn't get in – at which stage was that?

Kofi: Usually the [CV and cover letter] application stage. I tended to struggle with them ... not because my cover letters were bad, but when it was just CV and cover letter then I didn't get anywhere.

Our argument last year was that Kofi's ability at interview, and relative lack of success at CV and cover letter type assessments, might be thought to demonstrate the necessity of contextual attention through paper. This year, this same interaction is important in illustrating something else: Kofi's ability at interview is an example of the subtle forms of influence and 'good' impression that can come across at the stage of personal contact. Kofi, in person, has 'it': he is charming, warm, responsive, funny, intelligent and, well, just excellent. But what exactly, other than a list of evocative endorsements, is this excellence? Seeing the interview situation in this embedded way has many consequences for the way in which we think of it in practice.

Why the interview?

The interview process involves at least two, sometimes more, biographically situated, physically embodied people. Both of these people are shaped in on-going ways by class, race, age, gender, and sexuality. Unlike other aspects of the application process, in interview situations, the interviewer *is* the assessment instrument: they collect information while filtering, feeling and analysing the experience of the encounter. Unlike the tests of rigour and validity familiar to quantitative approaches, because the qualitative interviewer interacts directly and significantly with the people under assessment, the interviewer must be made to evaluate their own presence. This also means attending to the partiality of the encounter itself (DeLyser, 2010): but attention to the fact that the encounter will not be perfect, is not enough, when we introduce an awareness of our cognitive biases. Every event demands an interrogation that begins to explain, or attune to, what is happening. Through training (see *Five Big Ideas for 2015*), self-assessment and active engagements with our habits of thought, we might begin to ensure that these encounters are not only efficient and useful, but also fair.

In systems that profess to pay attention to an applicant's context – the circumstances of their upbringing and achievements – we must be attentive to every form through which such context might be expressed. At interview, the person – or their impression – may embody, in a different way, the very same disadvantages we might see and adjust to on paper. We are not stating that a contextual system should choose either the person or the paper to contextualise, nor necessarily always adjust both as well. We are advocating a shifting mix of the two. For contextual systems to work, this thinking must be in action at all times.

2. OUR OWN STRANGERS

‘Outside consciousness there rolls a vast tide of life which is perhaps more important to us than the little isle of our thoughts which lies within our ken’ – E. S. Dallas (1866)

Though studies of the unconscious have occupied thinkers for hundreds of years, the unconscious, and its biases, has enjoyed widespread popular attention since the turn of the century. For neurologists, the idea that we experience ‘the world as is’ is now firmly understood as an illusion. Though this interpretation of the world has been explored for centuries – you can hear Giambattista Vico, Merleau-Ponty, Habermas, Levinas, Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, among countless others, let out a collective ‘DUH?!’ from beyond their various graves – with recent advances in cognitive neuroscience, those on the positivist side of the social divide have been given the hard data that allows them to finally join the conversation. As psychologist Daniel Simons aptly sums up during his 2011 TedX talk entitled *Seeing The World As It Isn’t*: ultimately ‘our brains use a set of tricks to give us the world as we need it’ and only by testing ‘do we realise [its] interpretability’.

So, how long will it take you to read this essay? What about this book? How much more, or less, time will it take if you are on the train, or if you’re so inclined to take it home and read at bedtime? These three questions will engage your inbuilt planning fallacies – the common, and systematic, underestimation of how long it will take to complete a task. How many episodes of *Grand Designs* must we watch to wait for the third segment of the four, when Kevin McCloud lets us know that the project is now 18 months behind schedule as well as five times over budget? Now the family have had to sell their previous home and move into an on-site caravan, which – no doubt – means that they have to ‘spend Christmas’ freezing to the marrow of their bones; cue sombre music and cut through to the image of the house of their dreams being torn apart by December snow, wind and festive hopelessness. Oh, and the wife gets pregnant. It’s a January 1st birth. Planning fallacies are just one of many cognitive biases we are prone to. It is to the others, and our understanding of the strangers within, that we now turn.

The Unconscious

‘Thousands and, perhaps, millions of little processes must be involved in how we anticipate, imagine, plan, predict and prevent – and yet all this proceeds so automatically that we regard it as ‘ordinary common sense’ – Marvin Minsky, 1986

During the 1880s, as the young Freud examined patients suffering from psychological disorders, he came to suspect that the behaviours he was encountering were not caused by conscious, thought thoughts, but by an entire system of unseen mental processes. In this insight Freud

was right, and this simple idea transformed our understanding of psychiatry and the activities of the mind. Living a century before we had the brain technology capabilities to examine ‘the inside’, Freud turned towards the notion of interpretation (from the ‘outside’), where through subtle behaviours – twitches, slips of tongue, patterns of behaviour – as well as the content of dreams he began constructing a notion of the unconscious. While Freud’s discoveries took him towards imagining a highly sexualised vision of the unconscious as explored in his epic book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, his fundamental realisation that choices and decisions derive from hidden mental processes still stands today.

At any given moment, our five senses are taking in more than 11 million pieces of information; most of this is through our visual cortex. In this same moment, our conscious minds are only able to take on board – at most – 40 pieces of information per second. The gap is sobering. Our minds have evolved to operate predominantly outside of consciousness; the unconscious architecture of our existence is largely inaccessible to us. Even, as you are reading this page your eyes are rapidly flickering over these dark shapes that you come to effortlessly translate into conscious understanding: you do not even know that you are translating shapes into words and meaning, the meaning – I hope – just ‘comes to you’. Why are you attracted to the way certain people look, or even a certain style of car? We have no direct access to the mechanics of our attractions and desires, somehow visual information engages hardwired neural modules that drive our behaviour, which we then might experience through the enjoyable feeling said object or person elicits. Looking inward, in the Freudian sense, cannot offer the level of guidance we need for understanding the complex processes involved in our behaviours, so it is better to *deduce* our unconscious minds by looking outward towards our behaviours.

What we think of the world is our impression of it: we guess, infer, construct and imagine. We each see our own reality, but we are very poor observers. In fact, we actually pay attention to extraordinarily little. Wherever you are at this very moment, try shuffling: move your body, adjust the position of your legs and get comfy again. These movements have just depended upon tens of thousands of nerve fibres registering states of contraction, stretching and then contracting. But, we have no idea of this neural flare. Our brains, obviously, register the entire storm of nerve and muscle activity but what your conscious awareness is given is the unproblematic action itself. As you may have found with the mindbugs in Essay 1, a powerful window into the limitations of our awareness, and the flaws of the brain, can be achieved through visual illusions. Vision is active, not passive: perspective can change with each flicker of our eyes (Fig. 4), and this interpretability is key to understanding how we see what we think we need to see. This can be concerning.



Fig. 4 Faces or a vase?

Our brains make assumptions about the data we are receiving, which are informed by our previous experiences in a phenomenon called ‘unconscious inference’. We should be suspicious of what we see: because we believe something to be true, even if you know it is true, it does not mean that it is actually true.

Repetition can commit certain actions to our implicit memory – knowledge our brain contains that our conscious minds are unable to access. Subtly manipulating our brains in ways that alter our future behaviour elucidates the difference between implicit and explicit memory. Events in the environment, or exposures that we have, can trigger goals and direct our behaviours outside of our awareness. We might experience this as the so-called ‘illusion of truth’ effect, whereby we’re more likely to believe a statement is true if we’ve heard it before. A lighthearted example might be the assumed correlation between going outside without a coat, and catching a cold, despite no empirical evidence in support of this. As you will see, below, in an example borrowed from Kahneman and Tversky, the simple pairing of concepts is sufficient to induce associational dimensions of the unconscious, and an eventual sense of truth and familiarity. It shapes our unconscious prioritisation of information in the process of deciding what is important and what is not. The relative accessibility of an idea gives it priority: if a concept is relevant to us, or if it has been used recently, then we are more likely to bring it to conscious thought. ‘People are creatures of habit, and the more they have used a particular way of judging the world in the past, the more energised that concept will be’ (Wilson, 2002: 37). These processes lead to what is known as automacity – uninterrogated processing of actions and interpretations of the world. It is clear to see how the unconscious tendency to jump to conclusion, assume and rely on implicit memory – even in the face of evidence to the contrary – might be seen as the root to many ingrained prejudices and oppressive behaviours.

Our instincts differ from our automatised behaviours – such as, piano playing, touch typing, driving, and cycling – because we did not have to learn them through action and repetition but instead inherit them. They remain hidden from us because they are vital to our existence: even in the related example of breathing – try thinking about it. You are breathing, I hope, but until these words caused your conscious mind to reroute its focus towards your breathing function, you weren’t ‘thinking about it’. Our deepest instincts are burned into our bodily machinery at the most fundamental level. This is good for us, it allows us to survive, but it also demonstrates what a small function our conscious selves are as part of what we consider, more broadly, ‘our brains’. Ultimately, as the neurologist and author David Eagleman writes in his book, *Incognito* (2011): ‘invisibly small changes inside the brain can cause massive changes to behaviour. Our choices are inseparably married to the tiniest details of our machinery’ (p208).

Kahneman and Tversky, 1974 onwards

Kahneman and Tversky (1974) remains the ‘go-to’ research describing the many heuristics that people use to make statistical judgements (probability and frequency). In the experiments that Kahneman and Tversky pursued, each mental shortcut would be associated with a particular set of so-called cognitive biases: departures from rational decision making that exemplified the influence of an underlying ‘heuristic’. Heuristics, in short, are mental ‘rules of thumb’ employed by all of us, unconsciously, as part of all kinds of judgements; and as the pair frequently summarise them: ‘people rely on heuristic principles to reduce the complex tasks of assessing probabilities to simpler judgmental operations.’ People are irrational. As their work continued, Kahneman and Tversky became aware, as we witnessed in the neurological literature, that we

might think of two ways through which thoughts come to mind: the first is orderly computation, following and applying rules; and the second is intuitive and predictive. The common example used to demonstrate the second is our response to facial expressions. We might contrast the speed of intuiting someone's emotion from a picture versus the relative slowness of long division, for example.

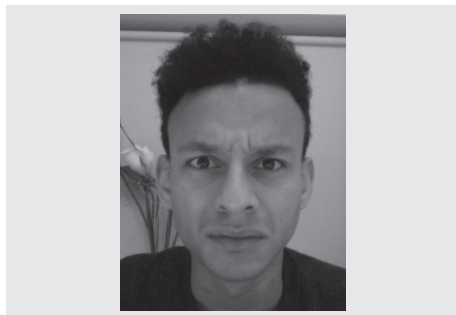


Fig.5 – he's distressed

One is immediate and associative – you see a picture, and you know that the face is distressed, as quickly as you might realise that I have dark eyes and a haircut straight from *Recess*. Kahneman and Tversky would say that you perceive me as distressed, and that perception is predictive, in that you might be able to guess what I will say, or construct a narrative as to why I am expressing such emotion. By examining the connections between intuition and perception they began to construct an understanding of how reliant our judgements are on association and metaphor to produce rapid interpretations of reality. This reality is a fragile one, highly sensitive to environmental context and what we now call priming – the process by which an exposure to one stimulus influences our response to another. Another example that Kahneman and Tversky use is this:

BANANAS

VOMIT

What happened as you looked at those two words? In Kahneman's work, we recoil from the word 'vomit'; quite literally move backwards or away from the page, even if only in an almost imperceptible way. You also make a face of disgust; this might be expressed through a partial frown, or a downturn of the lips for example. Experimentation elsewhere has proven that by altering our facial expression we change the emotion that is felt – if you hold your mouth open while watching comedy, you'll find it funnier, for example – so here, in pulling a face and recoiling from the page, you'll feel worse because of your face. This has all happened within milliseconds, and a then a second unconscious phenomenon takes hold: you have connected the two, independent, words and made a story. This story is one of causation, where the banana has somehow precipitated the vomit. Do you fancy a banana now? Probably not. Your associative structure, your associative memory – the huge repository of causal links and connections that you have in your mind – has changed shape. Now you are primed for similar such banana created pathologies.

Kahneman advocates a 'dual process' model of the brain, where we are generally composed of two competing systems: 1 (automatic, fast and below conscious awareness) and 2 (slow, cognitive and conscious). The first is implicit, heuristic, reactive and impulsive and the second is systematic, explicit, rule-based and reflective. Of course, there are more than two systems, and Kahneman is clear to treat this division as a 'useful fiction' when seeking to understand irrationality in statistical decision-making. The brain is actually composed of several, shifting, subsystems – a number and variety beyond labelling: brains can simulate future states, and reminisce about when they were young and better looking, for example. The divide is useful, as is a similar divide: reason versus emotion. The first analyses the outside the world, the second contemplates internal states, concerned with feelings of good and bad. In the example above, we might say that too often, instead of analysing and questioning assumptive, unconscious, reasoning, 'System 2' accepts the unreliable version of the world as truth. The confabulated story above now makes a phenomenon called 'associated coherence' more likely. Coherence is the idea that everything reinforces everything else, and this becomes knowledge. We have a tendency towards a stable representation of reality; this habit makes the world liveable, it gives Monday a meaning and allows us to place refrains over the world's complexity and our infinitesimal presence within it and its history. To maintain such stability, though, System 1 neglects ambiguity, compartmentalises doubt and exaggerates coherence. It is these shortcuts that we must address in order to be surer of the choices we are making.

What the work of Kahneman and Tversky has done is proved the irrationality of our day-to-day experience, and making, of the world. We are highly sensitive to influences from our environment; and our mind, notwithstanding the fact that the System 1 and 2 division may be too reductive even as a 'useful fiction', operates across many planes of thinking that largely emanate from our unconscious and sometimes absolutely inaccessible mental functions. Evidently, the marvels of our mental capabilities are far more important than the flaws. In such literature, not much attention is paid, at least directly, to the extraordinary things the three pounds of squishy material in our skulls can do. A famous example comes from Gary Klein's work with Cleveland fire station. Speaking with a fire commander who claimed he had extrasensory perception, Klein discovered how expertise becomes intuition – an unconscious ability to predict behaviour and outcomes. His crew had encountered a fire at the rear of a big house. Standing in the living room the team douse the smoke and flames from the kitchen with water, but the fire continues to rage. The persistence was baffling. The flames briefly subside, but then flare up once more with greater intensity. An uneasy feeling starts to overcome the commander; something's wrong. The commander's intuition told him to get out of the house. We might be able to personally recall examples of such urges of half-known feelings. The crew leave. 30 seconds after they reach the pavement, the living room floor collapses into a basement that was engulfed in flames. The fire's behaviour did not match the commander's expectations – the continued burning, the rising heat and a strange quietness that did not match typical 'kitchen fires'.⁵

More interesting, perhaps, is that many times people have intuitions that they feel as confident as the fire commander about, except that they are wrong. This happens through a mechanism that

5 For more interesting examples, see *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell.

Kahneman calls ‘substitution’: ‘you’ve been asked a question, and instead you answer another question but that answer comes by itself with complete confidence [...] subjectively, whether it’s right or wrong, it feels exactly the same [...] the subjective sense of confidence can be the same from intuition that arrives from expertise, and for intuitions that arise from heuristics, that arrives from substitution and asking a different question’. So, as Vilayanur Ramachandran famously declared, our brains can ‘contemplate the vastness of interstellar space, contemplate the meaning of infinity, and think about the meaning of its own existence and the nature of God’; yes, but it is amid all of this awe, however, that we should find time to concern ourselves with our flaws, because we often have no idea that they are even there.

Cognitive heuristics and biases in business

As you will already be beginning to understand, psychologists and behavioural economists have identified a huge amount of biases. The collective works of Kahneman and Tversky still remain the broadest repository of information on the entire suit of biases. The table below gathers some of the most commonly occurring during business decisions. It adapts the work of Lovallo and Sibony (2010), as part of, the management consultancy, McKinsey’s *Case For Behavioural Strategy*, which is profiled below.

Bias	Description	De-biasing strategy
Interest biases		
Inappropriate attachments	So-called irrational attachments to people, products or elements of the business that influence the clarity of your judgement.	These biases might loosely be collected together as ‘interest biases’. Good decision-making will acknowledge that there will always be interest differences (role, preference, reputation, personal agendas). In short, you counter such biases by attempting to make them explicit, for example: a select group of strategists define the precise evaluation criteria, to make it difficult for changes in terms based on personal interests. One additional method, as suggested in the report, is to populate meetings with rival interests.
Misaligned perception of goals	Often left silent, these are disagreements about the hierarchy of objectives pursued by the team or organisation.	
Misaligned individual incentives	Upholding self-serving views, not in a selfish way, but as genuine business concerns.	

Action orientated biases		
Overconfidence	Overestimating our capabilities: this may lead us to overestimate our ability to affect future results by neglecting the role of others and the role of chance in our past achievements.	You can counter this selection of so-called 'action orientated biases' by recognising uncertainty. An interesting technique proposed by the psychologist Gary Klein is the <i>premortem</i> : it is a simple way of encouraging contrarian, devil's advocate, thinking without encountering resistance. For example, if a project goes poorly, there will be a retrospective, lessons-learned, session that looks at what went wrong. Klein's question is: 'why don't we do that up front?' As much emphasis should be put on imagining what could go wrong, as on what could go right.
Over optimism	Overestimating the likelihood of positive events, and by extension, underestimating negative ones.	Checklists: while it does not guarantee against errors when the situation is uncertain, it may help prevent overconfidence biases. As Daniel Kahneman claims: 'to be of any use, they must be turned into standard operating procedure—for example, at the stage of due diligence, when board members go through a checklist before they approve a decision. A checklist like that would be about process, not content'
Competitor neglect	Planning without paying attention to competitor responses and new initiatives.	
Social biases		
Groupthink	Aiming for collective consensus at the expense of realistically interrogating alternative courses of action.	You can counter 'social biases' by attempting to depersonalise debate. Deviation and creativity is limited when people know the views of the lead decision maker.
The boss is right	Agreeing with your boss and their explicit views, as well as those that you might infer.	'Genuine debate requires diversity in the backgrounds and personalities of the decision makers, a climate of trust, and a culture in which discussions are depersonalized' – Lovallo and Sibony (2010)

Stability biases		
Anchoring	Being swayed by an initial value or figure (e.g. last year's numbers), that leads to inappropriate adjustments further on, during calculation.	'Stability biases' make us more prone to accept things as they are, and can lead to sterility. Organisations might, for example, reduce anchoring, and loss aversion by analysing decisions over time. Experimenting with budget allocations (to produce a pressure to change track), and always encouraging curiosity about counter ideas, present ways to reduce tendencies towards fixity.
Loss aversion	The tendency to feel losses more acutely than gains of the same amount.	
Sunk-cost fallacy	Paying attention to historical costs that are not recoverable when considering future courses of action.	
Status quo bias	Preference for the 'as is' in the absence of any pressure to change it.	
Pattern-recognition biases		
Champion bias	The tendency to evaluate a plan based on the track record of the person proposing it, not on its detail in isolation.	'Whenever analogies, comparisons, or salient examples are used to justify a decision, and whenever convincing champions use their powers of persuasion to tell a compelling story, pattern-recognition biases may be at work' – Lovallo and Sibony (2010) You might counter such biases in two ways, for example: encouraging managers to articulate the experiences that are anecdotally influencing them, and trying to change perspective by making it broader, so as to incorporate a large set of similar endeavours for comparative analysis.
Power of storytelling	Tendency to remember facts presented as part of a nice narrative better than those that aren't.	
Management by example	Generalising based on recent or memorable examples.	
False analogies	Relying on false comparisons.	
Confirmation bias	Overweighting of evidence that is consistent with a favoured belief.	

Table 1. Business biases, adapted from Lovallo and Sibony (2010)

It's business, we're just not conscious of it

Daniel Kahneman won his Noble prize not in psychology – for such an award does not exist – but in economics. Kahneman's prospect theory, which explains why humans might make counterintuitive choices when faced by uncertainty, is the fundamental insight behind the field of behavioural economics. Once dismissed, behavioural economics is now a part of mainstream business discourse. In financial and marketing fields, for example, the insights of behavioural economics are widely used; investment managers may, for instance, deploy an understanding of investor behaviours and irrationalities to exploit stock-pricing anomalies, or marketers may use such insights to better appreciate how to influence certain consumers, or to understand why two very similar products perform very differently in a given market be it hair care or toothpaste. Within organisational strategy teams, HR and recruitment, however, the eagerness to engage with unconscious bias has been – by comparison – restrained. The reason may be that the biases that are important here are not necessarily those of the market or the abstract consumer, but instead those that are within.

The 2010 McKinsey *Case For Behavioural Strategy* argued that decision-making can be vastly improved with subtle changes to organisational cultures and the processes of doing business. As with our understanding of bias so far, the prevalence of bias in corporate decision-making is a function of the shifting influence of habit, corporate culture, hierarchies and training (or there lack of). The key message of their research is that biases must be tackled collectively: improving decision making, of course, requires us to confront and limit our own biases (as well as those immediately in contact with us), but it is in designing an entire process that collectively confronts different biases that their impact will be truly minimalised.

The research used examples of large business decisions that participating companies had made during the past five years, from M&A choices to new-product launches and large capital expenditures. In total, over 1,048 decisions were analysed. The research analysed the decision according to three strands: (1) the quality of fact gathering and analysis, (2) the insights and judgements of a number of executives, and (3) the decision-making process itself, the transformation of data and ideas into a choice. They found that great analysis in the hands of managers with great judgement, wouldn't axiomatically lead to great decisions; the third ingredient – the process – is crucial, in fact, six times more crucial than analysis. Indeed, 'this finding does not mean that analysis is unimportant, as a closer look at the data reveals: almost no decisions in our sample made through a very strong process were backed by very poor analysis. Why? Because one of the things an unbiased decision-making process will do is ferret out poor analysis. The reverse is not true; superb analysis is useless unless the decision process gives it a fair hearing.'

On the basis of these findings, the authors then present four steps towards de-biasing such decisions: (a) decide which decisions warrant the effort – from one-off visionary moments to repetitive longer-term strategic choices; (b) identify the biases most like to affect critical decisions; (c) select practices and tools to counter the most relevant biases; and (d) embed practices in formal processes. Clearly thinking of our own strangers, and those which are collective too, are the only ways to forthrightly and effectively engage and limit bias, and its negative affect on decision-making.



The double dark side

Beyond the areas of unconscious action that we have associated with involuntary cognitive biases – the tendency to underestimate or be anchored by priming events, for example – work begun by Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji between in the mid-1980s, set about on a discovery of a second, hidden, dimension of our unconscious processes: social categorisation and stereotyping. In the three decades since, we now know that the same, or similar, unconscious dimensions of experience result in social, associational and attitudinal expressions that are automatically engaged when we encounter new situations, ‘different’ people or social situations that we are unused to. We have *implicit views* of which we are unaware. This is where a second dimension of unconscious bias originates, a dimension that describes our likely preference for people that look the same as us, suspicion or negative feelings towards those that don’t, as well as many other innumerable expectations about the world (the most troubling relate to our views of genders, disabilities and sexualities). These unconscious biases, in part, culturally normalise groups, communities, societies and the world. We expect certain things and, in the event of nonconformity, we are prone to a varying display of negativity biases, or associations that categorise in such a way that our attitudes change and our relationships to other people, or groups, alter.

These biases contain an in-built element of malleability; though, admittedly, neuroscientists and psychologists remain some way from understanding how we specifically change any of these elements. For example, while research struggles to identify significant differences in implicit racial attitudes between 10 year olds and 70 year olds, we know that even thinking about the virtues of winter for a few minutes will defeat an otherwise positive attitude toward summer, or exposing individuals to counter-stereotypical images reduces their racial, gender and other biases in tasks that follow. Sadly though, in questions of duration, and making these adaptations lasting ones, at the moment we remain in another, spurious, dark side.

As explored in Essays 3 and 4, how we each learn the world is important. In growing up, we develop a sense of ‘the way things are’, and it is in the innumerable ways this is reinforced in every aspect of our lives – television, literature, radio, place names, shoe shops, billboards, dress, hair, music and the cultural canon as a whole – that we might begin to realise its intransigence. If you follow this thought through, you also realise that we won’t live to see the degree of change needed for such a population-wide subjective realignment. All we can do is enter its process and do our best to speed up the creeping (r)evolution. The prominent French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his colleague, the French Psychoanalyst and theorist, Felix Guattari, once said that ‘the revolutions of 1968 did not happen’⁶, and this same notion is important in our example too. May ’68 did not take place because the collective subjective redeployment that the impassioned uprising demanded was not allowed to happen; it is not just an unrealised dream but also a set of feelings that persist today. From the passing of new laws, to the first Black president, each event is not an end in itself, because of its place in the wider social consciousness and unconsciousness. If these do not realign, then the event cannot be said to be over. The aim is to keep moving.

6 ‘Egalité! Liberté! Sexualité! Paris, May 1968’ by *The Independent* (2008); and ‘1968: Workers join Paris student protest’, *BBC – On This Day website*.



GROWING UP: OUR CONTEXTS

3. IN SEARCH OF 'IT'

'Ticked all the boxes in terms of the competencies but could not see them being a trainee at the firm'

'Had good examples but lacked enthusiasm for the role'

'Said all the right things but I got the impression that they were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, rather than it being a genuine reflection from them'

'Clearly very intelligent but lacked gravitas - I wouldn't be comfortable sending them to a client'

'Their examples were waffly and long winded – not as polished as other candidates I have seen'

How familiar are you with words and phrases of a similar nature? How far do you understand them? Try conjuring up a vision, or even a memory, of the type of person that might (and has) fit into each of these sentences. In every encounter, there is always an excess, something that necessarily exceeds the definition of the encounter itself: something more than the right answers, the right competencies and the right academic record; there is the right 'right' too. We might actually think of this as 'rightness' itself. This seemingly indefinable extra exerts a force; it hits us and convinces us of a very many things, or dissuades us of others. Sometimes this extra is the French electrical plug trying to fit into a UK socket; we have to be ready to encounter presences outside of our usual, typical or daily experiences – this is hard. It is hard because a great many things we choose to experience – perhaps also, consciously recognise – and a great many more of those that interact with us in unconscious dimensions, confirm a view of the world that is like ours, fits seamlessly into our expectations and gives us anything from a vague to a strong sense of self and world. If something doesn't add up, it's out of place and just 'not right'. If it doesn't fit the conscious and unconscious expectations we have then something's amiss. It's like seeing and buying a vanilla panna cotta in *Pret* and, when eating, tasting barbeque chicken – it does not conform to what we have associatively learned to expect. We should be worried, however, about the content of what we think is 'it'. From the examples above, 'it' is gravitas, awareness, presence, polish and feelings of interest, enthusiasm and fit. But what are these, what component pieces do they have? Might it actually be the case that 'it' is a retrospective proxy for things that are deeply connected to someone's background, and ultimately – if left unacknowledged – a distraction from an assessment of capability and potential? What happens in the gap between the experience of the interview and

its retrospective evaluation? Might we feel something, and then justify it through recognisable logics: 'polish', 'substance' and 'genuine-ness'?

So 'it' is obviously very important to us: having it, seeing it, knowing it and being affected by it. But how does this 'it' accumulate, adapt and change? People grow up differently. It is in this difference that we find multiplicity. Too often, in conversations about recruitment, unconscious bias and social mobility, we forget about this multiplicity as we are made drunk by our fascination with grand and totalising narratives hooked on terms such as 'BME', 'class' and 'equality'. What happens if we shift focus? What happens if we look at everyday life and our habitual expectations, from going to work on the tube to the daily language of our workplaces?

The list of disparate scenes and ideas, below, is not exhaustive. Instead, it signals an attempt to narrow in on what we are judging and being influenced by when we exhibit social biases or preference for common associations. It, and Essay 4, describe an element of 'it', that is not necessarily about someone's job related ability, and potential ability.

Capital

'It' is a by-product of background.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu proposed an understanding of society based on the movement of various sorts of capital through social spaces, as it is accumulated or lost by individuals. For Bourdieu there were three significant types of capital: (1) economic, highly rationalised form solidified as material exchange or financial assets; (2) cultural, which he described as existing in three different states – embodied, durable dispositions of mind and body; objectified, cultural goods such as books and paintings; and institutionalised, such as an academic degree – for example; and (3) social capital, referring to the extent and granularity of an individual's network. These types of capitals are then expressed as a symbolic capital, which is the form they take in society, once they are perceived and confirmed as legitimate. Each can be accumulated, lost, distributed and traded. Their value is tied to the context in which they are found, for example 'something that is greatly valued in an academic field may not be so highly revered in the world of theatre, or art, and may not afford the corresponding power and privilege' (Hook, 2005).

Another key concept is *habitus*. For Bourdieu, this represents deeply ingrained habits of behaviour, feeling and thought. This habitus embodies the inequalities of the social world from which it emerges. However, acting as an unconscious influence synonymous with the social agent, it functions below the level of direct perception. Habitus is a connection between past and present, individual and their environment, that both unconsciously influences an individual's likelihood of success through interaction with other social actors (due to their differential access to and embodiment of social, cultural and economic capital), and simultaneously ensures the survival of the social field by conforming to its unspoken criteria; its doxa. Gender, class and race are deeply ingrained in an individual's everyday actions; it's literally inscribed on their body.

Individuals are predisposed to act in certain ways as a result of the habitus they have acquired during their past experiences. We are always all of our histories.

It also all happens at once. Well, not everything, but almost: we swap our masks as quickly as moving from the corridor to the bathroom, from our partner on the phone while we sit at our desk to our colleague who taps us on the shoulder. I am at once everything I am, but simultaneously more *and* less; sometimes I am silenced, embarrassed, put-down and isolated. In one conversation you are just fulfilling the elements of your role, in another, your very role makes you a 'powerful woman', the 'most senior individual racialised as black' or the 'most Northern person on the board'. We need to be careful not to position sex, gender, sexuality and race as secondary to the embodied effects of social class. They are all happening at once, uniquely combining and interacting at different moments, helping you excel sometimes or categorising and disadvantaging you at others. An intersectional perspective describes hidden acts of multiple discriminations and how they obfuscate damaging power relations (Valentine, 2007). Intersectionality involves various self-identifications such as race, gender and ethnicity, or relative social or political position (class, culture, nationality) as well as other such imaginaries and collectivities. In other words, intersectionality captures the recognition that difference is located 'not in the spaces between identities but in the spaces within' (Fuss 1989). We are intersectional, and we need to think intersectionally: the symbolic effect of our intersectionality is what might come across as 'it' or, more dangerously, be mistaken for a lack of 'it'.

'The flesh itself is sometimes presented as an instrument of masquerade: for some of us our costumes are made of fabric or material, while for others they are made of skin.'
– Judith Halberstam (1994)

Habits

So, we habitualise the world, we have to. Habits are unconscious things that add up – or sometimes, at once conscious things that now add up unconsciously. As explored in earlier essays, these things allow us to expect, forecast and appreciate a sense of time, progress and normality, whatever that might mean to you and in your life. They are moralistic senses of right and wrong, expectations of what happens if you were to punch your boss, or – more sinisterly – what a young man called Paul born in Scarborough to a former shipyard worker and a dinner lady might end up achieving in his GCSEs, or what roles, genders and outlooks parents 'should' have. Habits are repetitive loops that we create, inherit and work to reproduce so as to make the world knowable (to some sort of comfortable degree), our place in the here-and-now manageable and, ultimately, our pocket of time on earth, liveable.

We all want success?

'Incredibly bright but I am not sure I want them as a trainee in my group'

What is success? How material and symbolic is it? How much does success rely on our current understandings of the 'successful'? If this last question contains truth, then what unconscious disadvantage is embodied in such invocations of success? We buy into a shared idea of success. This success is something beyond minor, and mundane, personal achievements – successfully choosing the exact tube carriage exit door that lines up with the platform escalators, for example – and instead speaks to a more transcendent, life-course, notion. We could all tell a story of what a successful life might sound like. When we are younger we are indoctrinated with images of what such success is, or might look like. This point of analysing 'it' is not to disrupt these representations necessarily, though they are important; it is instead to disrupt the idea of the person that can make it – the qualities they 'need' and the achievements at the point of interview that they need to have. In essence, the symbolic capital of a candidate's achievements to date matters a great deal. Rightly so, but how dynamic are your expectations? For those we might consider admitting contextually, their effort might not only have to appear twice that of 'the ordinary' profile, but three, four, five times better. We sometimes expect once in a lifetime extraordinariness as a justification for understanding the unevenness of an upbringing, when in fact we might find a more reasonable, and realistic, extraordinary if we think outside of our hereditary notions of success.

Often contained within our social thinking is the implicit expectation, or demand, of the free individual, heroically setting out into the world – irrespective of their background – to make their own life, and ultimately their own success. They won't be held back, and we like these people and their stories. In and of itself, this is no bad thing: culturally, we like to represent the extremes of such attitudes – the self-made woman or man, the hard-done-by young person that rises to the top echelons of society. But, it is when this zero to hero story becomes the dominant definition of success, that it might pose problems. Indeed, culturally, we also often mock or chastise those that apparently do the opposite – the types of people who we say wallow in their poverty, 'ferality' and laziness. The examples of this are too innumerable to isolate; they are often social normalcy – how common are programmes with the same premises as *Benefits Street*, *Shameless* and *Little Britain*, for example? The normalcy of individually driven success makes thinking critically hard, and moving away almost impossible. In thinking about our practices, however, we must be able to offer a space for reimagining 'success', because the same success as always, effectively means that nothing fundamental changes, and the affirmation of that possible scenario is not why you are reading this book.

The material 'it'

'No evidence of any commercial awareness'

'Clearly well researched – quoted LOTS of stats and facts from the website but struggled to bring these to life and articulate why these facts made them want to be a trainee here'

While our focus has been on the unconscious and habitual elements of 'it' (the sensate dimensions), there are many experiences and knowledges that were once only achievable consciously, but through practice, and know-how they became habit. The relevance of social, economic and cultural capital in enabling someone to apparently shine is an understanding that gets repeated, but still often remains ignored in practice. Of course you do not *need* privilege to be able to build commercial dexterity, and not all those that have it do, but without guidance it is harder, and under some conditions it is an unknown notion in and of itself. Cultural exposures, commercial experiences and leadership opportunities, will undoubtedly offer a candidate a level of something that will make them impressive and perhaps overshadow or occlude the more ill-fitting dimensions of another. These exposures, experiences and opportunities are avidly material, and in this materiality we can, in many cases, identify inequality. In last year's research we recommended that organisations ask not 'just what work experience' but 'how a candidate achieved it'. There are other influential elements that are worth mentioning too: the availability of support and coaching during applications; knowledge of the opportunities in the first place; the ability to undertake unpaid, but 'relevant' work during holidays; and even the ability to take paid roles, if it means a regular holiday job is interrupted and thereby threatened. These opportunities don't just matter on paper if they are structurally built into the process of creating an impression at interview. They do not only have a value in terms of their institutional capital, and the associative inferences that might be made about someone's abilities, but they also matter in terms of a candidate's ability to negotiate, or know how to negotiate, certain – previously alien – spaces: the corporate interview, the drinks reception and the corporate city spaces as a whole, from the obligatory coffee, crumpled (non-Metro) newspaper and effusive iterations of the spotless 'dark suit'. So, if these abilities are part of 'it', which they often are, then we must recognise how they have potentially been assembled.

*

My name is called: it's now time for my interview.

I didn't want to catch the eyes of any of the other interviewees; we all know what an eye catch can do – the window into my soul, I don't need that, I'm at the final round. The room could have been empty; my gaze fell everywhere – up, down and around – but not into their over-preparedness and bubbling anxieties.

So, like the interview before, like the time when I'd meet dad's friends, like my first job at the leisure centre – make sure I stand tall, smile, and reach out my hand intently not forcefully. As I slip into the room, I make sure I hover so as to gesture towards shutting the door out of politeness, knowing full well that my interviewer isn't just waiting so that they can escape or elicit a tip; gestures cannot hurt though, just like holding the door for teachers at school.

Time to sit down: not too quickly, not too slowly – I don't want to look like a forceful Phil Mitchell or a tentative school child in the Headmistress's office – but just right, gently, calmly and assuredly.

Smile

Smile

Well, not too much, no teeth, a lip-sy smile will do for now.

And we begin.

Whatever a person does, whether cooking or moving from one room to another, the order of things in time and space reinforce their basic beliefs about the natural order of the world (Miller, 2009). In 1981, Pierre Bourdieu argued that our orientation to everyday objects was one of the main reasons why we accept as natural and unchallenged the routines and expectations of life: '[...] people do not need to learn how to become a typical Berber or Inuit because everything they touch and do is infused with that underlying order [...giving] them their expectations of the world which are characteristic of a particular society' (ibid. 287). It is clear that everyday concern strikes firmly at what it is to be human, be 'polite', dress a certain way, think particular things, walk in a certain way and believe in certain cosmologies.

The immaterial 'it'

As we have seen, 'it' is also expressively immaterial – it is a feeling and a gut instinct. But again, where do these come from, and what do they mean? If an individual is said to have 'substance', we sometimes might invoke an image of material possession, the idea that there is something 'behind' their words – be it meaning, confidence or a broader zeitgeist waiting to be unveiled. We think we can feel, and then know, substance: try thinking of somebody who exudes this quality, for example. With substance, there persists an association that is quite physical in its nature; to have substance is *to be* present and *have* presence. Presence can happen in many ways, you can be six feet five inches tall, or you can be verbally present through your voice, for instance – from the rhythm and cadence of a demagogue to the forceful confidence that appears with passionately believed argument. So, then, the immaterial 'it' – the idea of substance – is always bound to our feelings of something physical, though, here of course, we cannot hold it; but we know it. Substance is felt immaterially but thought of materially. When we use such terms we must always consider what element of substance we are feeling and thinking, and then with what justification it deserves to be understood as a decision-making factor. The pitch of a voice or the broadness of someone's shoulders are both influential, unconscious, components of our experience of substance, but they would never be listed as evaluation criteria. We must watch out for their subtlety. The same applies for an entire range of such immaterial urges such as 'being genuine'. Genuine-ness relates to an idea of authenticity, sincerity and honesty. But if not from evidenced action, or material witnessing, then where can a feeling of 'honesty' come from in an interview? Think of somebody who is honest. How honest is their personality, what about their body posture when sat down, or the tone of their voice, or their right hand? These are valid, important and influential human experiences of the world, but in isolated situations like interviews we must acknowledge how such feelings are composed, and what may have influenced their composition. If we cannot begin to diagram how they have come to pass, then we cannot

have faith that our decision-making has not been shaped by things that belie our conscious goals and our professional roles.

Conclusion

Our own 'it', and the 'it' we perceive in others is, in part, an outcome of the various aspects of embodied meaning we have described in this essay. The process of changing habits and the unconscious ways we relate to each other and ourselves is a slow, generational process. It is hard to think about and sometimes too great to imagine. It is a process that requires the baseline orthodoxy of social relations in the UK to change, and move beyond our habitual, everyday biases and stereotypes, no matter how subtle.

We make and remake the world, but as we grow older this gets harder to do. Not neurologically, not psycho-pathologically either, but rather it's because the world we've made is a pervasive one. Every advert on the side of a bus, every conversation you overhear, every picture in your client meeting rooms, all serve to stimulate this world vision. In this respect it is simple: we must interrogate what we expect, we must question the content of the stereotypes we all have and then transgress them by performing otherwise. Going forward, there are some crucial questions that need to be thought about, and eventually answered, too: to what extent does 'it' embody an uninterrogated, and traditional, vision of success? What is your feeling of 'it' made up of? To what extent is 'it' learnable and to what extent is 'it' an absolute prerequisite to hiring candidates of exceptional quality?



4. SEEING, HEARING AND FEELING 'IT': A NEW FORM OF CULTURAL LITERACY

'I genuinely thought this was the voice of lettered people, and that if I didn't have the voice of lettered people I would never truly be lettered. A brave person, perhaps, would have stood firm, teaching her peers a useful lesson by example: not all lettered people need to be of the same class, nor speak identically. I went the other way. Partly out of cowardice and a constitutional eagerness to please, but also because I didn't quite see it as a straight swap, of this voice for that.'

– Zadie Smith (2009)

A voice, we are told, is – and can do – many things: it is ability, sound and tone; it can be given, carried, owned or lost; and it can bring disparate objects together, while bringing others to life. A voice is content and expression in context. The content of a voice emerges from its history: cultural exposures, environmental experiences and the families it has been surrounded by – from school to homes of all kinds. Its expression is a closely related by-product of content, but irreducible to it. Expression is the force of the voice itself, and a force that voice energises. It ties together accent, sound, grammar and lexis (its bank of words and phrases), while providing the connective condition for understanding. Without expression you are mute, and to be mute is often to suffer from the impositions of others; the powerless are said to be silent. Content and expression are divisible by context. Every utterance – while providing the conditions of possibility, of something new – is dependent on the time-space in which it is said. From Old Kent Road, to our bedrooms and the conference rooms on the thirtieth floor, voices do not exist outside of context.

A unified voice is a thing of power, or an attempt for the powerless to challenge power: think of the 'one (radical) voice' of Marxist inspired cultural and civil liberties politics in the 60s and 70s, for instance. But a unified voice sometimes belies the multiplicity of an upbringing, particularly as cultures mix and subdivide in geographic communities or on faces and in skins. We are pluralities. To speak of plurality, to embrace and engage it, is not to discredit the singular, whatever you might feel the natural 'you' is, but to instead appreciate the sense in which we move within and between our identities. I was born in Middlesbrough to a black, Ghanaian, father and a white, north-eastern, mother. I spent my childhood shifting between the things I thought I was. We are subtly told, from an early age, to define ourselves, because without definitive objects we are suspicious. To avoid the unfamiliarity, strangeness and – sometimes – emptiness of middle spaces, we must choose: pick a person, a voice and compartmentalised 'us'. But we shift, and through these shifts

we pick up voices – some we keep, others we accidentally lose, the rest we struggle to manage in their richness. Through and between these voices some elements will stick to each other – a twang, a strange saying or peculiar adverb constructions (table 2). These voices, as they are composed variously by language and bodies of gestures, should not be thought as binaries, it is not either one or the other, but instead, their fluidity leads to interesting vernaculars, that are neither wrong nor right, but products of the beautiful plurality of growing up.

So, ‘diversity’ exceeds the boxes of ‘black’, ‘mixed race black’ or ‘Asian’. If diversity is only thought of in terms of the box, uninfluenced by the coming together of various voices and their cultural, personal and environmental points of emergence, then it can never be more than gestural; a tiny shift that only incorporates those already close enough to the status quo. Diversity should mean plurality. Amid this shifting composition an element of ‘it’ is caught up: ‘it’ is part of the relation between our pluralities. Here we use the voice as a segue towards ‘it’. How we understand our own pluralities, and the pluralities of others, is what we are interested in.

Shared experiences and the beginnings of cultural literacy

‘At the moment, [at a particularly intense time at work], people are very concerned about ‘not setting a load of hares running.’ The first time I heard someone say that, it took a long pause before I understood what was going on.’

– Rosie, 25 (Rare alumnus)

‘Kwame? I found him very difficult... he kept interrupting. I found him uncomfortable and ill mannered.’

– Excerpt from a post assessment conversation

Some appearances might not ‘fit in’. The sound of your voice and its content might not align with our expectations of ‘what works’. Who you are might come into conflict with the expected, the lines drawn by the cultural canon; the lived system of meanings and values that creates what we experience as ‘the ways things are’ and ‘the way things get done’ (Raymond Williams, 1977). Part of the canon is a metalanguage; it is an oil that enables social interaction – the knowing of norms, cultural reference points and social faux pas, for example. Certain experiences growing up might distance an individual from this canon. The ‘ways things are’ is then important when it comes to empathy – our ability to share and understand a situation, experience or story.

Empathy has, in recent years, become a powerful political and business tool. The community-organising storytelling technique of ‘the story of self, the story of us and the story of now’, made famous in Barack Obama’s 2004 Democratic Convention speech, and later in his 2008

Presidential election campaign, is a powerful example. We need to recognise, though, that ability to both (a) empathise, and (b) feel a stronger sense of empathy, is predicated on many biases, our own backgrounds, familiarities and our own expectations. There are two important things here: (1) an interviewer's ability to empathise with the candidate; and (2) the candidate's ability to empathise with the interviewer. In this context, empathy is not necessarily about understanding an experience, but it is about understanding a situation and its demands. An interviewer, for example, must acknowledge that this negotiation may be happening, and that it may be an unfamiliar one: know-how is learned consciously and developed intuitively, though intuition itself is an effect of previous exposure. This form of empathy is an unconscious effect of shared experience – corporate space and corporate expectation. Moreover, for an interviewer, empathy is not only about bracing into a specific moment, or event, but it also enables forecasting too – the ability, in short, to recognise potential and predict its (successful) realisation. This, like many such unconscious or intuitional capabilities, is a precarious device if used unintentionally to perpetuate unquestioned expectations (see Essay 3). Not least, they lead us to expect: good-brilliance, bad-danger. Structures of expectation influence how people interpret new information or situations.

Earlier this year, while I was compiling this research I had a conversation with an 18-year-old man called Peter after a Target Oxbridge event. During this conversation I used the terms 'Catch 22' and 'cannot see the wood for the trees'. Without my realising, he was made confused, having never heard either saying before. He momentarily lost his way and understood little about what I said immediately thereafter, though he did not question me because he said he had 'felt silly, and a little stupid by not knowing'. A moment that for me was unconscious was for Peter, pivotal. While this example is brief, it is important. We can use the term 'cultural literacy', originating in the work of the American educationalist, Ervin Hirsch, to understand this importance. For Hirsch, the term refers to the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. In his model, children need a 'core body of knowledge', a fact-based curriculum, that would then help to make them rounded and informed citizens. The idea was that because some children were not being exposed to this knowledge at home, they needed to be taught it in school. There are clear questions about 'whose knowledge do you teach?' but thought this way, however, the lack of common reference points – at networking events, or during the application process from the interview to the small-talk at the water machine – is not, necessarily, an effect of an uninterested or unmotivated candidate, but rather an effect of exposure. In the same way someone might frequently say 'aye lad', or tie their hair in a certain way, it is wrong to connect the knowledge that an individual is seen to supposedly have, by virtue of their under-exposure to certain forms of reference, to their intellectual ability, warmth and presence. This is a subtle heuristic, but a pervasive one.

We can do more with the term cultural literacy though. Cultural literacy is a tool by which we can grow to understand the content of dominant voices, while also conceptualising two other things: (a) the pre-requisite experiences of certain voices; and (b) methods of transgressing cultural and linguistic margins. Cultural literacy speaks to a vision of the content of language:

its reference points. So, if we move away from the notion that cultural literacy is a finite 'box' of knowledge that we should force-feed young people so that they share the 'same' cultural outlook – as dreadfully monosyllabic as that sounds – cultural literacy has a liberatory or, at least, progressive potential. Firstly, it allows us to identify the dominant language and knowledge within a particular group, community or society; and secondly, with this knowledge, it provides a status quo that might then be challenged, negotiated or, as Rare might be seen to do for some, performed in certain circumstances. On this last point of performance it could be said that, in some respects, we coach individuals not necessarily to 'fulfil their potential', but to fulfil an element of their potential that 'will appeal' to the dominant gaze of that field, be it in law, academia or other professional fields, for example. Within this, there is a tension between a performance that *conforms* to the social hegemony, and the maintenance of a more 'natural' or truthful self that works to *break* – or, more gently, challenge – the hegemony. To give an example, should I maintain elements of 'me', the cultural me, my self-identity, when I go for a job interview, or when I turn up for my first day at work? What is the connection between adapted Creoles in Peckham and 'Queen's English'? Indeed, rather than seeing them as binaries, teaching students not to say certain things in a certain way because it's 'not right', we should think of them in conversation together; their relation on a spectrum, arena or field of social language. So, cultural literacy, in these senses, might provide a gateway for us to reconsider 'right' or 'wrong', accepted and rejected. We can then ask the question of: how does the construction of a 'wrong', of an 'out-of-placeness', justify or inform a decision that we might make about someone's ability, or potential? Are we even talking about the same idea of ability? Perhaps we're not.

Content and expression

In talking with, and of, voices, we are also referring to their content and their expression. Cultural literacy evokes a concept of content that refers to knowledge and shared experience. Another aspect of content includes the literal deployment of lexis, grammar and discursive markers. Content is then the specific words that are used, and the influence of background and experience on their use. Content is not meaning in and of itself: our own linguistic nets, which we use to infer meaning to that which has been spoken, capture content and its simultaneous expression. This is where a value judgement happens. Using the terms dialect and accent we can begin to explore these features of our voices, why we might feel a certain way about them, and why some of our feelings might be misguided.

A dialect is a variety of language where the user's regional and social background appears in her use of vocabulary and grammar: the use of 'happen' as an adverb meaning 'maybe' or 'perhaps' in some Yorkshire dialects would be an example – 'happen it was my experience during university that made me realise this was what I wanted to do'. A related feature is accent, the speech sounds and features of pronunciation that can express particular forms of social and individual identity: 'all deze [these] people are gonna make me late!' A voice is both of these things. There are as many voices (dialects and individual accents) as people, that much is obvious; but specific shared components of one collection of voices often become known and used as 'right', 'proper' or

‘lettered’. In the UK, this is embodied in Standard English, Received Pronunciation or Queen’s English, for example. Standard English was once a regional dialect of Anglo-Norse origin that has developed into something synonymous with, and symbolic of, power – from institutions to individuals and the relations between people. Its notion of ‘Standard’ surely implies that everything sitting outside its walls should suffer from debasement or relegation to inferiority. It is very easy to conjure up such sounds, from our images of the lucid Radio 4 newsreader to our perceptions of the assured Oxford lecturer. Public outbursts, such as those by the Tudor historian David Starkey on the BBC’s *Newsnight* programme in 2011, do little to remove the popular impression of the entrenched ranking of dialects along with their phonological forms, grammatical shifts and lexical peculiarities:

‘The whites have become black. A particular sort of violent destructive, nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion and black and white boys and girls operate in this language together.

‘This language which is wholly false, which is this Jamaican patois that has been intruded in England and that is why so many of us have this sense of literally of a foreign country.’ – David Starkey

Speaking in the immediate aftermath of the London riots of 2011, Starkey exploited the fragility and inner-hegemony of language. He reduced inchoate fears of violence, disorderliness and unintelligence into the figure of the black (male) individual, whose linguistic presence was socially disruptive, and physically manifested itself in the looting and *JJB* smashing. What these constructions ignore is the spectrum of language; its twists, turns and changes through every encounter – between communities, on TV and through various social spaces. In Starkey’s form, this is voice as motion, a dangerous and toxic motion. This is a misapprehension of voices, a worryingly pervasive one: the many-voiced person is untrustworthy, they are said to lack authenticity (think of the John Barrowman figure or the way America, in 2008, was torn by the chameleon voices of Barack Obama); yet we are also distrustful of specific, singular, voices too (the words and sounds that are unfamiliar, caricatured or associated with stereotype).

The writer Lindsay Johns has, for several years, campaigned for the banning of certain forms of language, claiming that many young people, from typically underrepresented backgrounds, commit a ‘spectacular self-sabotage [by becoming] unintelligent to, and unemployable by, the elite’. He describes the inanity of ‘basically’ and the nonsensical use of double negatives or connectives like ‘yeah’. This vision assumes that (a) voices are adopted for their symbolic value among friends and peers over and above any other forms of identity, and (b) there is only one type of voice that is powerful – the well spoken, typically white, voice stretched from Westminster to every other facet of our economic, social and cultural elite. He criticises the use of ‘ar-ks’ instead of ‘as-k’ by young people from British Caribbean households as ‘ghetto grammar’. His vision is unnecessarily dividing, it sees voices as either/or, he offers no room for movement, or the shifting of voices moment to moment. He also, inadvertently, caricatures the black British Caribbean voice, as something we might understand only through figures like Ali G or films like

Kidulthood, for example. This ignores the most fundamental aspect of voices: how they shape, meet others and hybridise.

With 'ar-ks' and 'as-k' (where the 'a' is pronounced 'ar' as in *c-ar* and *b-ar*), as with many other forms of Creolised voices, we must always think of three important factors: (1) Creole is not just a result of cultural and familial immersion in a certain lexicon for second and third generation immigrants, though this is important; (2) it is also a matter of political choice and identity formation for some; but (3) ultimately, voices shift as they move through space and time; we must pick the best voices, and accept that they won't be 'clean' of other influences. Such residue, however, must – and should – not be taken as a proxy for forms unintelligence as Johns suggests. This is diversity, and a plurality worn as, and through, our voices.

Linguistic outcomes of the transition from Pidgin English dialects into creoles persist today in many diasporic UK households. Creole is a language that comes into being during encounters, the contact between two or more languages to be precise. Sharing many elements with Derrida's concept of *bricolage* – the creation of something new out of various parts that existed before – Creoles are new languages that maintain characteristics of the old languages while adding their own. For example, we might think of the Jamaican or Caribbean Creole – known as an 'English-lexicon' – that came about during a period of time where slaves of African heritage used and adapted a reduced form of English as the only common means of communication. The effects of the colonial spread of English to various parts of the world became inflected during the period of the Windrush, as altered forms of English, and various Creoles, returned to England through migration. It is then in the second half of twentieth century that a series of additional language metamorphoses have occurred, as these Creoles interacted with the antecedent local dialects, particularly in urban areas. A telling example of hybridisation might be found in the evolution of Bradford Asian English – in its common mix of speech sounds derived from West Yorkshire and the Indian sub-continent, as well as elements of Received Pronunciation; and an English lexicon infused with cultural neologisms derived from the languages of sub-continental India alongside some 'aye's and by-gum's from traditional Yorkshire dialect. Similarly, heading West, we might think of another famous embodiment of this encounter, as well as the encounters between voices more broadly, through the figure of the Bolton raised, British-Pakistani boxer, Amir Khan: with his distinctive reduction in the definite article 'the' to a 't' sound (or glottalled altogether); and pronunciation of 'old' sounds as 'owd'. With each accent and particular lexical, phonological and grammatical variation there are clear connections to ethnic origin – cultural background, family environment and the types of social expansion a person has been exposed to. This is a crucial point, because voices are not unchanging, though they are subtly expected to be. In challenging this expectation we must consider two additional moments of difference and how they persist through individual practice: the difference between written and spoken forms of dialect, and the difference between the knowledge and use of a dialect. In the same way that we all, in everyday life, use just a tiny proportion of speech sounds that we are capable of performing, we only use a tiny proportion – moment to moment – of all the voices we have.

So, what we can say is this: language exists on a spectrum, one that does not and should not necessarily fit into good-bad, white-black, and wrong-right binaries. Some brief examples that we came across during the course of research are explored in the table below.

Language feature and dialects	Commentary
Sounds / phonology	
Health : Helt /helð/ : [hɛlt]	London Jamaican is one of the most commonly spoken dialects in London. Even if not spoken directly, its infusion – particularly among 2 nd and 3 rd generation immigrants – is pervasive. Speakers are often said to code-switch between various forms of English – including Standard English, London English and London Jamaican. A typical feature is the dropping of the ‘t’ sound at the end of words, or the pronunciation of ‘th’ sounds a hard ‘t’. The former can, and might, be mistaken for the lazy treatment of language.
Best : Bes /best/ : [bes]	
A new dialect	
<p>Particular features of <i>Multiethnolects</i> – a modern, late 20th Century, multicultural mix of various dialects between all ethnicities.</p> <p>Known to be emerging currently in cities across Europe it can be easily seen in many British urban areas: London, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and Leeds for example. Here we are seeing communities that are beginning to transgress, through language, inter-ethnic margins. In England, inputs include local dialects, Creole, ex-colonial Englishes, learner varieties, the media, school variations and the local vernacular.</p>	<p>Grammatical signifiers include: absence of adverb marking (‘I had to revise thorough’); use of ‘ain’t’ for negative auxiliaries (‘isn’t, hasn’t, aren’t’); use of ‘them’ as a demonstrative adjective (‘all of them questions were difficult’); differences in possessive pronouns (‘him grades’ instead of ‘his grades’) and multiple negation (‘it’s okay, I don’t need no help’).</p>
	<p>Multiethnolects often pronounce words without the need for broad diphthong vowels, so the shape and size of the mouth may vary little. The lack of movement, and the emergence of the voice seemingly from the back of the throat may lead to speakers coming across as unenthusiastic and unenergetic, or generally quieter.</p>
	<p>TH fronting in multiethnolects (particularly in London, in the so-called Multicultural London English – MLE) – the pronunciation of ‘th’ as a sound in words such as <i>thing</i> (‘fing’) or brother (‘brov-er’).</p>
<p>In the UK multiethnolect is heavy with Jamaican and African-Caribbean inflections, where words are often clipped (‘race’ becomes ‘rehs’).</p>	

Lexis	
Lexical idiosyncrasies in workplaces	‘There is the difficulty of understanding cultural jargon as well. When I got to the Civil Service [Fast Stream] I had to learn what it meant to submit something by ‘close of play’, what I should and shouldn’t be prepared to ‘die in a ditch over’, and when something ought to be ‘kicked into the long grass.’ Ultimately, one just has to be confident enough to ask people what they mean. Using clichés and jargon all the time is poor practice wherever or whoever you are (as Orwell argued). I guess that is where the opportunity to gently challenge the status quo presents itself.’ – Rosie
Discourse markers and quotives	
You know? / You know what I mean?	In Standard English, these two phrases are used to <i>elicit</i> an agreement, whereas in dialects commonly found in communities of Caribbean heritage – particularly those that speak forms of London or diasporic Jamaican, or Caribbean adapted Creoles – such phrases <i>perform</i> agreement. The first encourages a reificatory response that agrees, the second simulates an agreement, and operates less connectively. These two uses in conversation can lead to misunderstanding. If mistaken, the <i>performance</i> can be thought of as an <i>elicitation</i> – where the elicitation comes across more uncertain. This may, for example, influence the credibility of a point being made (see Sebba and Tate, 1986).

Table 2. The movements of dialects

Accents

‘Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We have a small problem. All four engines have stopped. We are doing our damndest to get them going again. I trust you are not in too much distress.’

– Eric Moody (1982)

We cannot consider content without expression: they bring each other to life. We hear accents and associate certain properties with that accent. We can picture Eric Moody now, in what might be thought a ‘typically British’ handling of a generally disastrous situation. In fact, we actually do more than that – we can begin to describe the sorts of people that might ‘typically’ have that type of accent. This is particularly unique to the UK, especially when it comes to unfair, unconscious and associative decision-making. Accents are caricatured: they are at once an intimate expression

of identity, as well as something that is only one mis-pronounced letter away from comedy. Accents are our voices and so much more, they handle an intimate part of our identity. Within this richness, there is a tension between symbols and their interpretation. In the language of semiotics, an accent can be thought of as a signifier of a sign that might – in such an instance – express an individual’s trustworthiness and therefore the empathy and kindness of my approach. We use the melody of voices to make judgements about aggressiveness, friendliness, class and intelligence. Unlike more interrogated forms of bias, the associative connections between sounds and impression have been afforded comparatively little scholarly and popular attention. It is too easy to think that in encountering Rob Brydon we know Wales; Micky Flanagan, the East End; Billy Connolly, Scotland; Sarah Millican, Newcastle; Michael McIntyre, the ‘middle class’ and in Alistair McGowan a reduced stock of our collective accent consciousness (and, sometimes, bigotry). We *all* have accents, yet the persistence of so-called Accentism is clear, especially in a cultural context that still – in some way – maintains the idea that accents are still only things that ‘northerners and poor people have’⁷.

Adjusting to context

‘The most important thing is being able to be understood by others. That does not mean you have to think of your original way of speaking as ‘wrong’, you just need to be savvy and flexible enough to know what will make it most likely that people will understand you. The more boundaries that you cross successfully in life, the more voices you pick up. Ultimately it is the content of what you say that is most important and that your authenticity should be judged on. If your style obscures your substance in some settings then you might have to adjust it temporarily, and introduce others to it over time.’ – Rosie

We all adjust our voices depending on context. Small talk is an adjustment event that focuses intently upon cultural literacy, and being culturally literate. It demands a shift in the intentions of our content and expression, as well as a shift in our perception. In small talk events we have to analyse many things: (a) the immediate situation and its context: are we by the water-cooler or at a drinks reception, for example? What information can we feel from the people around us, and the fabric of the environment we’re in? (b) The external situation immediate to that encounter – what’s happening in the news, or how’s the weather been looking, for instance? (c) Finally, the situation of the communication itself – who is the audience, and what is the relation between the speakers (us and them)? With experience, this analysis can happen unconsciously – your experiences of these moments of so-called ‘empty verbiage’ might be intuitively etched onto you. For Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), such moments are where we deploy *phatic* language voices – voices of language containing little hard information but enough, and with such skill, that they perform a social function. Such voices make people feel good, or the lift journey up 16 floors less about staring at the floor or how many passengers the lift can hold. It is a literacy of these subtleties; the tiniest moments that might build into an impression of ‘warmth’, ‘kindness’ or

7 Perry, G. (2014) The rise and fall of the Default Man. *The New Statesman*

personality. It is a surface knowledge of the worlds that *Faulty Towers*, *Blackadder* and *The Office* signify. Small talk requires adjustment, and an etiquette of simulation – pretending, performing and feigning – which, when considered in isolation, can only be thought strange. Adjustments are happening all the time, but the ability to adjust often depends on the antecedent experience of exposure, without it such moments might either be alien, or simply float-by-unrecognised.

As a mediation between two individuals, the adjustment of a voice is an often unconscious form of expressing empathy, a shared identity, or a ‘performance’ of a certain identity. The shifting movement of voices is a process of negotiation, a two-way street. Throughout this essay, the intention has not been to discredit the importance of being understood, quite the opposite. The argument here is more nuanced: we need to dismantle the connection between the cultural sign and a signifier that says ‘that’s wrong,’ ‘that’s unintelligent’ and ‘that doesn’t fit.’ Each of these represents an association that is informed by a maze of heuristics and unfounded inferences. We move away from this coupling by asking the simple question: to what extent is pronunciation or an individual’s voice being used as a proxy for their ability or potential ability? But this is also predicated on a second, crucial, aspect: the journey towards being understood. ‘The responsibility of the listener is to be tolerant, celebratory perhaps, and to adapt when necessary. The requirement on the speaker is to make themselves understood, whatever lilt they choose’⁸. This is not to say that an inherited voice is wrong, but rather to say that the most effective voices are those that are in-flux, supple and responsive. As Rosie elegantly writes, the more new spaces that are moved through, the more voices that can be picked up. On entering a new environment, composed of individuals emerging from vastly different cultural backgrounds, a new process of encounter can take place, this can be an empowering one, one where the status quo begins to change, an opportunity of cultural idiosyncrasies to meet and negotiate, but this can only be done if common ground is first established – and this is what Rare is about.

Conclusion

‘For me, being black has meant working ten times harder than my peers for the same recognition. It means walking into a room and sometimes feeling noticeably different. It means I am always in touch with my Ghanaian roots. It is cultural vibrancy and colour and family and joy and pride. In itself it is neither good nor bad but a hybridisation of values, cultures and social consciousnesses. At least, not until someone makes a negative judgement on you based on it. Or any judgement at all’

– Verity (Rare alumnus and law trainee)

Growing up is picking up: habits, memories, accents, styles and a sense of self – even as it changes and flexes. The environments we are in provide the pallet for our composition. The effects of who we are at any one moment – who we have become until that moment – contain symbols of where we have come from and what he have been through: from the brownness of

⁸ Muir, H. (2014) Do accents matter in modern Britain? *The Guardian*

your eyes, to the scar underneath your left cheekbone; the twang of your 'r's' to your knowledge of TWOC-ing⁹. We are multiplicities, mosaics that sometimes give us away and reveal something of ourselves that is 'not meant to be there' or is there too copiously. Who we appear to be, in our words, gestures, styles and approaches to everyday activities can be abstracted and gathered into an expectation, stereotype or confirmatory signal. By questioning elements of how culturally expressive elements of background might be wrongly mistaken for accurate assessments of quality, this essay deployed the shape-shifting figure of the voice and diagrammed a new notion of cultural literacy. We must acknowledge the contingency of voices. We are all many voiced, but some have more voices than others.

9 A phenomenon called 'Taking Without Consent' that plagued Middlesbrough, the place I grew up for a period of my childhood. During the 1990s, Middlesbrough became known as the car crime capital of Europe, famously covered in Darcus Howe's *White Tribe* series for Channel 4. In my experience, this phrase never had much currency much further beyond Junction 49 of the A1(M).

GETTING HIRED: WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

5. EXPLORING THE UNCONSCIOUS IN RECRUITMENT

‘Decision makers will make better choices when they trust their critics to be sophisticated and fair, and when they expect their decision to be judged by how it was made, not only by how it turned out.’

– Daniel Kahneman

‘If people are so bad at making decisions, how did we make it to the moon?’ ... Individuals didn’t make it to the moon; NASA did.¹⁰

The process

Our work, last year, on context presented a design of a recruitment process where the goal was a praxis informed, at all levels, by information, in the knowledge that to be able to judge a candidate fairly, it is better to know more; more about the background, circumstances and the angle of their trajectory. This demand was only partly true, or rather, it requires a further clarification, admittedly one year down the line. Information is good, needed and important to effective contextualisation, but not everywhere. The information inside the system must be controlled. The best systems – thinking back to last year and the examples in the Higher Education sector, as well as industry leaders like the Civil Service Fast Stream and Clifford Chance – are those that are both hyper-contextualised and simultaneously ‘blind’, or as value neutral as is possible.

In thinking about unconscious bias, we must be careful. It often seems too easy for important notions of fairness, competition and social justice to fall into cliché without the right treatment. Without attention, the harangued coupling of an idea and ‘corporate responsibility’ or do-gooding can happen irreversibly; a HR and business equivalent of pretending to push the *Leaning Tower of Pisa* over while having your photo taken – or hold it up, depending on how adventurous your holiday feels. Interviewers and assessors are the experts, deserve their autonomy and we should not be tempted to offer unconscious bias ‘training’ only as an apparently all-conquering, sometimes academically butchered, solution that necessarily colonises assessment processes. That said, we are biased; every single one of us, in every action we take, and do not realise we are taking. We know that (we think).

¹⁰ See Chip Heath, Richard Larrick, and Joshua Klayman, “Cognitive repairs: How organizational practices can compensate for individual shortcomings,” *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 1998, Volume 20, pp. 1–37.

There are two points, then, that are important to make about assessment processes: (1) when to use context, and when not to use context; and, relatedly, (2) when and how to engage unconscious bias. We will briefly answer the second by focusing on the first: it is the process that needs information, not each isolated moment. This philosophy is based around the idea that over-information causes anchoring and expectation biases, based on everything – gender, race, university, subject, school and accent, for example. The best stage, based on our research over the past two years – borrowing from best practice examples in business and universities, as well as through our own series of interviews – to use extra contextual information (not only as a ‘get bums on seats’ feature) but to account for, and perhaps counteract biases, is at the evaluative stage – when we summarise an interview performance, for example. Critically, this evaluation must not supersede the evaluation that occurs *during* the interview (see below: ‘remembering self and experiencing self’). In short, the remembering self constructs the narrative of ‘how it went’, so the best point of intervention for added information is at the stage of remembering: post hoc contextualisation.

Remembering self and experiencing self

A candidate performs brilliantly at every interview, truly brilliantly. As the final interview begins, you know that the candidate must have ‘something’ to have made it this far. You have your questions, your structure – I mean, this must be the 500th time you’ve done this – your body has begun to learn what works and what does not; a muscle memory almost. It is just before lunch, and that must be one of the hardest times to impress, but nobody ever really addresses this: do you know that judges are more lenient after eating, and harsher before they do?¹¹ This doesn’t matter here, though. During this, the final interview, they rank up there with some of the best candidates you have ever seen: effortlessly lucid, impressively knowledgeable and engaging to the point of demagogue. But, in the very final minutes they get it all wrong; they fall apart, curse and become incommunicably frustrated. They lose their cool and walk out before the interview officially ends. How would you now assess them? Exceptionally well? Probably not. Why can one isolated bad experience outweigh so many good experiences? Because you, like all human beings, are subject to the psychological mindbug known as negativity bias. We unconsciously pay more attention, and give more weight, to negative experiences over positive ones. Our brains instinctively react more powerfully to negative information than they do to positive information. You’re not the first, it has happened before; it has happened, and is happening, to every human being – and, in fact – every living thing to a varied extent, in history. We evolved to focus on the negative as matter of survival, and the legacy persists. That said, the distinctive way in which we examine episodes such as the one described, are functions of our memory.

‘Odd as it may seem, I am my remembering self, and the experiencing self, who does my living, is like a stranger to me’ – Daniel Kahneman

11 Danziger, S. Levav, J. and Anvaim-Pesso, L. (2011) Extraneous factors in judicial decisions, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108(17), 6889-6892.

We experience moment by moment, but our remembering self constructs the overlying narratives, and often these are biased or swayed by unconscious assessments such as negativity bias, duration neglect and peak-end rule. We tend to neglect duration – the passage of time, or duration of an event – when retrospectively evaluating aversive experiences, which cause our memories to contradict our experience of the negative event, be it a bad interview or something more serious – pain, in particular, is a common example in psychology. This omission neglects the fact that memory was not necessarily involved with the experiencing event itself, the interview in this example. The neglect of duration is coupled with the effects of the ‘peak-end rule’, whereby, in recounting an event, we are disproportionately more likely to remember it by its peak and its conclusion, than we are by other, perhaps more mundane – or, in this case, more impressive and admirable – dimensions. Both of these heuristics originate in System 1 and do not necessarily correspond to the values of System 2: we believe that duration is important, but our memory tells us it is not. These biases are important in recruitment because of the information and experiences that interviewers have access to. The introduction of contextual information in select moments also has the effect of mitigating against various biases such as: anchoring biases, the tendency to rely heavily on one piece of information when making a decision; information overload bias, as you confront the brain with excessive information, more than is needed for a rigorous decision, then the quality of the decision, as well as the ability to even make it, declines; confirmation bias, the tendency to interpret or actively search for information in such a way that it confirms our expectations, leading to statistical (and assessment) error; and the framing effect, for example, where equivalent descriptions of a problem may lead to systematically different decisions being made. Ultimately, we must think about when and where we introduce contextual information, and how we reconcile the experiencing and remembering selves during the interview process.

Psychological studies relevant for businesses

The body of research examining unconscious biases is significant. Since the early 70s psychologists around the world have been working on, and expanding, our understandings of the mind and how humans come to make decisions. The goal of this research project was never to enter into this rich pool through our own lab-based experiments. Our goal, instead, was to use this body of work to identify new ways that we might think about graduate recruitment praxis and its contextualisation. That said, it is important to understand the breadth of the antecedent research and, by extension, the basis for many of the assumptions we have made in this research – not least, that unconscious bias exists in the first place.

In the table below, we take you through some of the seminal studies on unconscious bias. On the type of bias we are looking at here – biases that are expressed in terms of our propensity to stereotype, assume and associate – many researchers have introduced the term ‘implicit bias’. Implicit bias differs to unconscious bias – the automatically responsive, beyond conscious control, hair-trigger action – in that it questions the extent to which these biases are unconscious or, at least, beyond conscious intervention. ‘Once we know that biases are not always explicit,

we are responsible for them' (ECU, 2013: 1). In other words, if associational and attitudinal biases remain unconscious during their activation, having been made consciously aware of their existence, we are morally (as well as financially, reputationally and legally) obliged to mitigate their impact and influence on our explicit behaviours.

The specific interest in the studies here is less the existence of various cognitive heuristics, as introduced in the essay *Our Own Strangers*, but rather specific inferential biases that have been proven influential in various psychological studies over the past two decades in particular. Summarising research by the Equality Challenge Unit in 2013, some telling examples, and their findings, are briefly explained:

Study	Key findings
<p><i>A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities: research report no 607.</i> Department for Work and Pensions (Wood <i>et al.</i>, 2009: p11)</p>	<p>Commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the research found that applicants with typically white British names are more likely to be shortlisted for jobs than those with names associated with minority ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>Of the 987 applications with a white name, 10.7 per cent received a positive response. This compared with 6.2 per cent of the 1974 applications with an ethnic minority name – a net difference of 4.6 percentage points. [...] 74 per cent more applications from ethnic minority candidates needed to be sent for the same level of success.’(9)</p>
<p><i>Preferring the upper class: Implicit class prejudice ubiquitous in British Society</i> (Vlietstra <i>et al.</i>, 2014)</p>	<p>First UK focused, class-based Implicit Association Test (IAT).</p> <p>Class, in the UK context, was found to be a more influential bias than race, gender or sexual orientation.</p>
<p><i>Relations among the implicit association test, discriminator behaviour, and explicit measures of racial attitudes</i> (McConnell and Leibold, 2001)</p>	<p>Explored differences in the way research participants behaved and responded to a white versus black researcher and how this correlated to their implicit and explicit bias scores. While the extent to which the conclusions are generalisable continues to be debated, psychologists found that participants behaved differently towards each of the two researchers.</p>

<p><i>Reducing automatically activated racial prejudice through implicit evaluative conditioning</i> (Olson and Fazio, 2006)</p>	<p>Participants watched a random sequence of images without knowing the purpose of the study. Throughout, images representing black people with good and white people with bad characteristics were interspersed and reduced their implicit bias.</p>
<p><i>On the malleability of automatic attitudes: combating automatic prejudice with images of admired and disliked individuals</i> (Dasgupta and Greenwald, 2001)</p>	<p>Explored the impact of positive exemplars of black people and negative exemplars of white people on individuals' level of implicit bias. Pro-white bias was significantly reduced.</p>
<p><i>Disconfirming intergroup evaluations: asymmetric effects for in-groups and out-groups</i> (Crisp and Nicel, 2004)</p>	<p>Participants responded with the word 'yes' whenever they saw counter-stereotypical stimuli of an out-group member in an attempt to reduce bias. While the effectiveness of this strategy remains hazy, a general reduction in implicit bias was discernable in the examples used.</p>
<p><i>Consider the situation: reducing automatic stereotyping through situational attribution training</i> (Stewart et al., 2010)</p>	<p>Participants trained to use situational rather than dispositional explanations for stereotypical behaviour showed reduced levels of negative stereotyping and automatic bias.</p>
<p><i>Contextual moderation of racial bias: the impact of social roles on controlled and automatically activated attitudes</i> (Barden et al., 2004)</p>	<p>Explored the impact of social role and context on implicit bias, for example different reactions to a black face in a ghetto background than a black face outside a church.</p>

<p><i>Reducing implicit prejudice by blurring intergroup boundaries</i> (Hall <i>et al.</i>, 2009)</p>	<p>Aimed to highlight the similarities people had with their out-groups, rather than their differences.</p>
<p><i>Awareness of implicit bias: what motivates behaviour change?</i> (Henry-Darwish and Sanford, 2012)</p>	<p>Found that taking an IAT in a supportive setting with feedback had a positive effect.</p>

Table 3. Theories, impacts, and techniques of reduction for implicit biases
(See: ECU 2013, for broader exploration)

What's wrong?

In 2014, the context is clear: over their lifetime, the average female executive will earn £432,390 less than a male counterpart following an identical career path (National Salary Survey, 2013); on average, women earn 18.6% an hour less than men (Fawcett Society, 2013); a study by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2009 found that when sending fake CVs with identical qualifications and experiences the candidate with the Anglo-Saxon name had to send nine CVs before receiving a positive response, whereas candidates whose names were of typically black or ethnic minority heritage, had to send 16 CVs for the same response (Table 2); and, most recently, the annual Robert Half FTSE 100 CEO tracker found that the normative leader of Britain's biggest businesses is a 54 year old man with a background in finance.

Those who are part of the so-called 'Generation Y' (or *Generation Why?*¹²) are estimated to hold, on average, at least seven jobs in their lifetime, sometimes even before their 30th birthday¹³! Now, more than ever, it is imperative that organisations hire right, hire fairly and hire potential.

From application to interview

It is wrong to talk of 'the application process' as has been done so far in this essay. Of course such processes are plural, and vary even within a single organisation each year and sometimes within the same year. Speaking, even in the most general terms, it is clear, though that if we accept

12 *Generation Why?* By Zadie Smith, in the New York Review of Books (November 25, 2010) – provides an interesting observation that sits well alongside our consideration, throughout, of face-to-face encounters, and the skill of social dexterity.

13 Time Magazine: *Note to Gen Y Workers: Performance on the Job Actually Matters.*

that the social playing field is an uneven one, where everybody is unequally capacitated (see Essay 3 for a greater exploration), then each of stage of an application, even – more worryingly – being in a position to either apply or know about the application itself, may be subject to bias and disadvantage (see Rare's *Class, Race and Graduate Recruitment*, 2012). With application forms, we must think about its wording, readability and the opportunity to disclose – in a safe space – any contextual information that might be relevant to a candidate's assessment (disability, personal circumstances, or health complications for example). Some biases can be, quite literally, structurally in-built into application procedures particularly, for example, with non-verbal reasoning tests – where dyslexia sufferers might only be given 'extra time' rather than an appropriate adjustment. During the course of research, a colleague described such adjustments in this way, and it still resonates: 'I have a disability, but you can see this disability; I'm in a wheelchair. My interview is on the third floor, and there is no lift. It's okay, apparently, though, they've given me an extra twenty minutes to get there.'

Moving away from the candidate's interaction with the process, we should also pay attention to the decision-making that occurs on the side of the recruiter. We might think about our judgements when considering universities, and the internal hierarchies we frequently, unquestionably deploy: 'of course UCL Law is harder than at Leeds' – but why? And where are our associations coming from? Such assumptions are damaging if they are under-informed. This misinformation can lead to correlative errors, and overconfidence illusions. Similarly, while the same cognitive biases might not be stretching their muscles, how important is the warmth of a voice, or the conviction of someone's tone, during a phone interview, to their core ability to perform a certain task or duty? The advice, in some organisations, to not make an effort to build rapport with an interviewee and instead remain rigidly focused on the accomplishment of competency based questions, may actually present the fairest form of assessment. After all, in this discrete moment, what is rapport? It is warmth and an admittedly desirable characteristic, but in this desirability might our assessment be swayed by optimism biases or illusory correlations? Flipping our perspective, might a desire to build and enjoy rapport – it is an enjoyment, for most – be a disadvantaging demand, in both its cultural latency and social specificity? As with other aspects of assessment, especially that which is remote, we must think about our own, situated, contexts at the time of interview: where are we, how tired are we, how have we framed our expectations of this encounter – what do we know already? Nothing? – Then good, as long as we're not looking for a new friend just yet.

It is in thinking about the sensory isolation that comes with phone interviews, that the complicatedness and sensory overload of in-person interviews becomes more apparent. What are the effects of sight and embodied co-presence? From the swelling of literature on communication – drawing together the pioneering work of Erving Goffman (1990 [1954]) in the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, all the way through to more recent explorations of drama in business (e.g. RADA), so-called neuro-linguistic programming and executive coaching on non-verbal communication skills – concern with not what is said, but how it is said, is intense, and has been for some time. As with psychological studies of bias, the research and the examples are innumerable, so for our purposes here we will propose a series of ranging questions, rather than

repeating that which is already widely understood and thoroughly covered¹⁴. Beyond words, and beyond gestures – as, again, this is something well covered in recent years (e.g. O'Connor and Seymour, 2002) – what other forms of communication are given off by the perception of gender, sexuality, race, smell and even physical 'presence'? Name an individual who 'fills a room' with her energy. Remember a time when you were with someone, in a professional situation, with a distinctive smell. No matter at what level we did or didn't recognise these dimensions as part of our experience of that moment, they exist and they are important when we consider the influences on our decision-making. How do different ways of saying – call them cultural idiosyncrasies, not to mention the insufficiency even of this term – lead to feelings of abruptness, by the very fact that some level of translation may need to occur, for example? This translation, of course, is not of one entire dialect into another, but it can be something subtler: social cues left unreciprocated, or the lack of common reference points, from *Heartbeat* through to Srinivasa Ramanujan (see Essay 4).

There are no definitive answers to these questions, necessarily, but there is plenty of potential energy in their asking. Drawing awareness to the minutiae of each encounter, the unknown, unanticipated or under-acknowledged aspects of a meeting between two human beings, opens out the possibility of self-regulation and self-analysis, a proven method of enacting forms of bias avoidance, or reduction. Assessment procedures with various points of information, test and examination are the most effective – providing this information is put together coherently, and not all at once, as described above – in that pluralism reduces the influence of what Daniel Kahneman calls WYSIATI, 'what you see is all there is'. The question, then, for the rest of this essay is, in one-way or another, the question of: what are we looking for?

So, what are we looking for?

Is diversity just what you can see and record – the wearing of multiplicity on faces, skins and bodies – or is it about something more intransigent? Last year we pursued an understanding of candidates as products of their upbringing – their family, school and local area circumstances – yet how far do we attend to both an individual's personality and their ethnicity when we measure statistics only on race, gender, disability and social mobility? As we have seen in this book, unconscious bias is hard wired into every action and decision we make. In addressing diversity of the 'seen' there may be a risk that we are simply accepting the status quo in the more subtle dimensions of multiplicity. Let's, for a moment, move beyond our interrogation of associational biases and look at the perhaps more intangible dimensions of warmth, feeling and impression. How influenced, perhaps without even recognising, are you by accents, shared experiences and thereby someone's *fit*? – Does this 'non-verbal' communication per se matter to the extent that your assessment is informed by it at almost every level; because, it is?

¹⁴ E.g. Cialdini, R. B. (2007) *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Collins Business Essentials; Johnstone, K. (1979 [2007]) *Impro – improvisation and the theatre*, Methuen | Drama; and Steel, J. (2006) *Pitch perfect: the art of selling ideas and winning new business*, John Wiley & Sons.

We are used to formal classifications of good and bad non-verbal communication habits. Many of the examples in the table below should be familiar. They are largely commonsensical, though the idea of common sense is a contentious one; we should ask of whose common sense are we talking, and to what extent might this enforce a specific socio-cultural hegemony (e.g. Essay 4)? Perhaps it is that simple, but one thing our work on the unconscious is demonstrating is that sometimes the simplest, uninterrogated, things are the most worrying.

Non-verbal indicator	Positive	Negative
Legs and lower body posture	<p>When sitting: legs either together or one slightly in front of the other</p> <p>Even distribution of weight when standing free from support</p> <p>Both: directing body movements towards the person you are in conversation with</p>	Sitting and standing: legs and feet turned to point towards the exit or away from the speaker
Face – poise, expression and eyes	Facially expressing interest by nodding, smiling and holding ‘just the right amount’ of eye contact (not too much that it becomes staring)	Looking away, closing eyes, turning away, pursed lips, frowns, clenched jaws and twitching
Upper limbs and upper body – hands and arms	Openness: open hands or gently rested on the table; hands relaxed in lap or on the arms of the chair; and if in relaxed conversation, hands that are touching the face display intrigue, interest and sometimes affection	Closed posture: crossed arms, hunched shoulders, clenched fists, hands over mouth (worse, with clenched fist!), rubbing the back of the neck

Table 4. Non-verbal communication indicators

Underlying these observations is an ignored question of ‘what do they produce?’ Yes, ‘positive indicators’ such as good eye contact, frequent smiles, open posture and a gentle lean towards those with whom you are in conversation make you, in this moment, a good communicator; but what

output does each action have? Where does it resonate, and what does it resonate as? We suggest that these ‘things’ compose ‘it’, and these things are ‘affects.’ Affect is the pause between the pre-codified force of something, and the gathering of this *ex post facto* into describable feelings or impressions. Imagine, amid the ambulatory turnover of everyday life – going to work, working (ideally), lunching and many other *-ings* – an unexpected thing happens: a cyclist knocked over, a baby dropped, a shop robbed. Whatever the perturbation, it exerts a force upon you. Its impact, the moment it hits you, resonates as something – be it a rush of blood, butterflies, or that hollow enclave that can appear in the middle of our chest when we hear bad news – before it becomes a recognisable emotion such as anger, terror, sadness, or happiness. These are pre-cognitive dimensions of experience, and they are constantly in motion. An individual who clenches their fists when talking to you, or another who sits with crossed legs that are pointed away from you, exert affects through their body language – not to say the innumerable other influences in that moment: what you read in the news that morning, the temperature of the room, what they’re wearing, the fact that they remind you of your first boyfriend at university (you then wonder what he’s up to... poor them). This dimension of affect is proprioceptive – it is a bubbling pre-conscious flow of information and movements. It conditions how we negotiate every situation. The next time you are on the tube, think about the ways you are subtly, almost unconsciously, loaded, and made ready to act against a vague, but constantly looming, potential threat, coded in the language of ‘for your safety and security’ and imploring you to ‘keep your luggage with you at all times, any unattended luggage may be removed or destroyed by the security services.’ The point is that we are affected, and primed, with such constancy that thinking each influence individually becomes impossible. In an interview, what are the criteria, what do you think you’re assessing, and what influence does the apparently irrelevant – or certainly, unmentioned – have?

The case of three students

Eleanor, Jere and Jonathan are three eighteen-year-old students from black and mixed-race black backgrounds, that participated in Rare’s research. They sit at various points on a spectrum of ‘soft skills’, when soft skills are understood as a familiarity with the techniques described above as well as the ability to float between many socio-linguistic cloisters, different people, groups or social situations, and hold your own. Eleanor is the Obama figure. Obama is said to effortlessly be able to -

[...] Do young Jewish male, black old lady from the South Side, white woman from Kansas, Kenyan elders, white Harvard nerds, black Columbia nerds, activist women, churchmen, security guards, bank tellers, and even a British man called Mr Wilkerson, who on a starry night on safari says credibly British things like: ‘I believe that’s the Milky Way’ – Zadie Smith

It is a skill that might be referred to as chameleon quality, the ability to metamorphose and adapt to the linguistic and generally performative dimensions of contingent situations. Eleanor, born and raised in Croydon, can shift imperceptibly between various identities: she is able to engage her

family, friends and Oxford dons in the metalanguage demanded by each encounter. Jere is from a similar background, but she is less skilled in such negotiations. She has fewer such experiences, but makes a conscious effort to navigate new and unfamiliar spaces empathetically and sensitively. Jonathan does not have Jere's urge towards adaptability, nor does he share, to any noticeable degree, Eleanor's multiplicity. He has not been put in situations where he has to 'become' somebody else, nor does he know what that means necessarily. For Rare, he appears rude, abrupt, rough and self-entitled. There are other influential factors, but for the purpose of this analysis, this is his appearance. All three have similarly impressive academic records. Even with these brief descriptions if I were to ask the question of who you think expressed an impressive engagement in conversation, performed well when asked to infer and move beyond what they knew they knew, and toward known unknowns, you would have a pretty clear hierarchy in your mind I imagine; and in this situation you would be right. Obviously, the way I introduced the three students, their ordering, and the reference to Obama left little room for alternative narratives, my priming worked, but in this instance it's unimportant. The question we're concerned with here is whether my assessment, modelled on an Oxford and Cambridge interview, was concerned with the wrong things. Moreover, in thinking about students like Eleanor, Jere and Jonathon, are we attributing their difference to some notion of 'innate talent', their personality or their past experiences (the opportunities that they have had to become, so to speak)? Is it all three? If I am judging by the warmth I felt or might feel in future encounters, something I might retrospectively call 'enthusiasm', 'calmness', 'interest' or even 'intellect,' I need to be clear that my assessment is looking at the *how*, as well as the *what*, while also acknowledging, personally, that such influences are there. Employing techniques such as repeat interviews, holistic and strategically well-informed assessment procedures, for example, would begin to shift the emphasis away from the fraught fragility and haziness of similar interview situations.

As well as their strong academic records, Jonathan, Jere and Eleanor shared one more thing: tentativeness. In these encounters in particular, as well as with many others in this younger age bracket, there was a tendency to frequently apologise, begin statements with 'sorry', profess to misunderstand when in actuality they knew enough, or end answers with dreaded but conclusive 'I don't know' – even when said under their breath. This last point is no bad thing necessarily, we all do it; it seems to be a way of reducing the potential forthrightness or impact of our thoughts, or of adding a clarificatory statement at the end of a stream of consciousness or postulation. What is important is the fact that these students, with their abnormal school experiences, yet intense intellectual potential; these students who are as capable and successful as any other similarly aged student from any background, are the ones that apologise for their opinion. Most obviously, such admissions, or dispositions, influence the credibility assigned to a point or subtly may prime the interviewer to shape their assessment with negative bias.

'My experience with this kind of behaviour [schools that fail to support the brightest and let them know how brilliant they are and can be] became more apparent in Sixth Form. Some people seemed to just accept it, and accept the lower standards that the teachers had of them, but I think that I noticed it even more because of the high aspirations I had' – Gus (age 19)

Admittedly, this next point is a harder point to make, and even harder to generalise, but in our work – especially through Target Oxbridge, and the Target Oxbridge filmed interviews – we witness trends, perhaps emergent out of familial and school experiences, where students racialised as black, those of black, or mixed race black, African-Caribbean backgrounds are (a) unused to vocalising opinion, (b) unused to being asked for their insight, (c) unused to interpolating, and (d) have experienced forms of discrimination – however subtle – that have compressed their aspiration and self belief.

‘In Year 10, our teachers made predictions on the grades we would achieve for our GCSE results. These were based on something called FFT – Fischer Family Trust, which didn’t seem to take into account the grades I had been achieving in classwork assignments, or the SAT results I had achieved in Year 6 (5, 5, 4), but rather the area I lived in - Stratford, my mum’s profession, the fact that I was from a single-parent family and my ethnicity. The results that this data produce were then used as my predicted grades, which were mainly C’s, a few B’s and an A in Maths, which I think was only because I had already achieved a B in year 9 and my ability in this area could not be denied’ – Gus

Gus achieved 6As and 5Bs. ‘Innate talent’, personality and past experiences are insufficient terms: what is at stake here is, yes, a mix of these elements undoubtedly but, more importantly, a question of our very reality. It is a question of how we interact with each other and our expectations of the world. In conversations about this research, a prominent campaigner, organiser and academic, formerly in a very public role involved with the UK’s (missing) race equality agenda, commented simply that ‘unconscious racism may exist, but it is still racism’. He’s right. These students have been blamed for their lack of confidence, or the fact that they have not achieved as they might have, when that is actually the wrong diagnosis; that leads to a prescription and medication that is insufficient. In the words of Michael Gerson, used famously by Michael Gove, our social reality is in-part plagued by a ‘soft bigotry of low expectations’; toxically embedded to the extent that it is almost invisible. Contextualisation begins to account for one element of antecedent disadvantage, but engaging the dominant expectations about the world – the unsavoury constructions that perpetuate a persistent inequality in the educational, cultural and social experience of oppressed populations – is the next priority, just as important. This essay, this book, this project hopes to offer a way in which we can all better engage this effort at an important societal interface: graduate recruitment.

6. GETTING A FEEL FOR VIDEO INTERVIEWS

‘The very act of using it [visual technology] will always entail reducing the complex stories of daily life to a sequence of images upon a depthless screen’

– David Harvey (1989)

Recruiters are increasingly incorporating video technology into their assessment and sourcing processes, but to what end and with what justification? This essay analyses the recent, and as yet under-researched, emergence of video interviewing. During 2013, in the USA, HR managers used video interviews as part of the assessment process for around 6 out of every 10 new positions¹⁵. Indeed, during 2012, UK employers spent an average of two working weeks interviewing, 16% of the working week travelling to meet candidates and £3,286 on travel reimbursements¹⁶. The growth of so-called telepresent technology – the virtual interview or meeting that is unrestrained by time and space – has and will become increasingly relevant to the future of recruitment. Here, we combine our work on unconscious bias and social mobility in order to ask questions now that we may otherwise only think of in retrospect. How have we arrived here, and how deep is a depthless screen?

We are obsessed by acceleration. As Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, the processes of modernity replaced our old meaning structures with the intoxicating experience, and idea, of progress. So much so that in 1909, the prominent Italian poet and founder of the Futurist movement, Filippo Marinetti declared in the *Futurist Manifesto* that: ‘the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed’. It can sometimes feel as though speed gets the better of us. Even narrowing our gaze to the last three decades of human history, we have introduced technologies that profess, no matter how discretely, to not only alter our perception of reality, but also create entirely new realities too. Daily, we are producing, and participating within, new embodied experiences of the world and its many realities. As the French cultural theorist, Paul Virilio said: ‘the faster you go, the farther you have to look, and you lose lateral vision. You are fascinated’. During a Skype call one individual is virtually beamed across the Internet to another user through their own video camera while simultaneously receiving the same images from the individual(s) being communicated with. Skype, at its heart is a unique, and unprecedented, technology for engineering the experience of space-times.

Clearly, there is a sensuality to Skype and the use of videoing or reality streaming technologies. This sensuality enforces an implicit insistence that meaningful technology-based communication,

15 Briggs, H. (2013) Skype interviews: Is it more tricky to be grilled by video? *BBC News Magazine*

16 *Ibid.*

depends on getting as close to in-person, face-to-face, encounters as possible. This implicit assertion demands that we ask the question of *why* such sensuality is so important to confidently feeling that we ‘got to know somebody’, and for recruiters, what specifically is this ‘getting to know’?

There is a difference, that needs to be mentioned, between Skype (or Google Hangout) interviews, and those that are known, more generally, as ‘video interviews’. The former deals in simultaneity, the latter are based on the idea of recording a more sensual and comprehensive message than that which is captured on paper, or even over the phone. In each of these technologies, the infrastructure of visibility remains hidden to observers. Skype interviews, rather obviously, aim to simulate the in-person encounter, without the need for actual physical presence. Video interviews might involve a process where a recruiter sends a series of questions to an interviewee and they have a short amount of time to record their responses (anything from 30 seconds to two minutes) and move onto the next question. These videos are then available for review by selectors in such a way that it does not need both parties to be ‘in the interview’ at the same shared period of time: I might respond to the video interview questions 9pm on Tuesday, and be assessed at 11.30am Thursday, for example.

A 30-60 second response is, rather obviously, very different to the potential responses given as part of one hour long interviews. Admittedly, the skill to convey an honest, memorable and intelligent response in 30 to 60 seconds is admirable, and impressive; but it still remains a *skill*, a learnable one at that. The introduction of video interviews at various levels of sifting has witnessed a reduction of the time spent between an interviewer and interviewee from one hour of intense one-to-one contact, to a brief bullet encounter, for example. What does this reduction give us other than a soundbite economy of impressions? The movement towards trigger-action encounters push our decision making towards an increasingly intuitive realm (Essays 1 and 2). Especially with repetition, mechanisms of split-second assessment can easily inscribe themselves on assessors and on the process. There is an immediate question, then, of *when* such devices are used. The economies of thought that it demands, and the performative aspects of the encounter itself, make these interviews potentially fragile tools.

The advent and use of such technologies is so rapid that thinking in its philosophical, cultural and scientific dimensions operates at a lag. It might be said that we introduce such devices without an intellectual interrogation that is proportionate to the potential influence of the technologic proposition itself. Skype has over 300 million connected users and has, in ten years, facilitated over 1.4 trillion minutes of conversation¹⁷. An interesting Skype-produced commemorative info-graphic compares its pathway toward 300 million connected users with those achieved by other technological inventions: where Skype took ten years (2003-2013), Martin Cooper’s mobile phone took 25 years, while poor old Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone took a cumbersome 104. Obviously, the extraneous conditions for each invention were different; Bell, for example, did not have a generation of humans burned by the desire to constantly communicate their breakfast food choices or hourly geographic coordinates. His age was one of very different conceptions of intimacy. The illusion of physical presence, the idea that the reality

¹⁷ *Skype Celebrates a Decade of Meaningful Conversations!* By Elisa Steele, Skype* (2013)

we claim to participate in, during such moments, is an artificially produced one, is important to the judgements we think we are making: without sharing the same physical space, our sensitivities are channelled; voices, faces, and environments receive a greater sensual focus than during in-person encounters. But research on the differences is largely sparse.

What we can say, is that underlying the use of either Skype interviews or recorded, video, interviews is the notion that 'seeing is believing'. Non-verbal communication is not eliminated through technology, but instead channelled. The effect of using technology to separate the space, and maybe thereby the intensity of the encounter, might work to subdue, or certainly displace, the biases of impression that emerge in physically co-present encounters – sounds, smells and bodily proximity. In that same moment, however, what then is our attention drawn to? What 'feel' are we drawing on and what performances do we expect? The prominence of 'the face' becomes noticeable: here, and historically, the face is invoked as a particularly 'special image' or an expressive mediation between the person inside and the person outside. We trust, and have trusted faces, to show the 'true state of things'; we expect a great deal from them. In video interview situations, the face intensively supplies the information that informs our visual encounter, after the body has been reframed literally and metaphorically. Beautiful people do better, for example: attractive students receive more attention, handsome criminals receive lighter sentences than those deemed less attractive and even beautiful ill-people can look forward to warmer and more attentive care from their doctors¹⁸. We go out of our way to help beautiful people, because we want to be accepted by them. The need to 'get a better feel' for a candidate through an interview, can too easily play into our biases as the encounter narrows to prioritise the face, and its expressions as a proxy for personality – as well as many other associated characteristics such as trustworthiness – while also inflating our relative conceptions of someone's competence, for instance.

Empirical work on this specific form of interaction, particularly for recruiters is, at present, slim. However, by using work from within psychology on intuition and feelings of proximity, we might be able to evaluate some of the pitfalls of video interviewing. The battle between rationality and emotion, as well as the issue of human presence, is brought together in the philosophical 'train-cart dilemma': a small train-cart has come loose, and is hurtling uncontrollably down a set of tracks. There are five workers making repairs directly down the line, too far away for you to forewarn them, and the cart is travelling too fast to wait. You realise that they will be killed if you do not act. You happen to be near a remote switch, which by flicking you can divert the cart down a different track, where there is just one worker on the tracks. She will also be killed if the train goes her way. What do you do?

This is no trick question, and there is no hidden solution. You would be in the majority if you decided to flick the switch; it's about numbers, right? There is of course a deeper philosophical

18 Langlois, J. *et al.* (2000) Maxims or Myths of Beauty? A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 126, No. 3, 390-423; Grammar, K. *et al.* (2002) Darwinian aesthetics: sexual selection and the biology of beauty, *Biol. Rev.* (2003), 78, pp. 385-407; and Judge, T. *et al.* (2009) Does It Pay to Be Smart, Attractive, or Confident (or All Three)? Relationships Among General Mental Ability, Physical Attractiveness, Core Self-Evaluations, and Income, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 94, No. 3, 742-755.

dimension that questions the 'worth' of a life, versus *many* lives, but for our purposes, let's twist the original dilemma and consider the act of switching: the same cart is hurtling down the tracks and the same five people are assembled, as they were, further down the same line. This time, however, you are positioned on a footbridge over the tracks. As you're intuiting the same scene, you realise that the collective weight of the large, muscular, man carrying a huge tyre next you, would be enough to halt the cart in its tracks. If you push him off, you save the five people. Do you push him?

Now this begins to feel like murder. But, in the abstract scenarios we have described, the outcome of switching or pushing are the same: one life for five lives. The Kantian answer is that the difference in feeling originates in how people are being used – the first is just an unfortunate situation for the stray worker; the second is the active exploitation of someone as a means to an end. In psychology, however, there is another influential explanation: proximity and complicity. Indeed, by actively touching someone, interacting with them at close distance, you enliven emotional neurological responses. If you could drop the tyre carrying man from a footbridge using a switch, your decision may change again. Proximity turns the abstract into the personal. What if the same ideas were applied to video interviews? Might the distance between a selector and an interviewee allow for an element of emotional detachment, or what might such detachment encourage in terms of the interview, its experience and a selector's reflection upon it?

Irrespective of relative proximity, these interviews are always performances. A largely un – or under – considered effect of Skype is the removal of contiguous and comparable, perhaps even value neutral, spaces for all interviewees. By displacing the 'space of the interview', while at the same time diffracting it geographically, *where* an interview is, and how this space appears, develops an entirely new relevance. My bedroom, or a café? Bland student accommodation, or my dad's music room stuffed with questionable 70s punk paraphernalia? One look at the 'Seven Deadly Skype Interview Sins' on the *Huffington Post* website, or the *Forbes* article: 'How to nail a video interview' demonstrates the focus that is put on superficial appearances and, in other words, acting. In a recent radio interview given by an American academic and author of a popular book on digital interviews, the language of performance read like an advice list for a low-budget wannabe Hollywood movie: 'you need well positioned, soft and natural lights: one to the left, one to the right and one behind you'; 'make sure there is no grease on your face'; 'try to find a nice plain, or marble background... something that doesn't clash with the colour of your suit... make it look real natural'; and 'you need lots of eye-contact, try even putting a picture of the interviewer over the camera to make the experience more realistic'. Amusing though these tips were, there are valid questions that ideas of performativity raise, for example: how do you initiate a bodily 'hello' without a handshake? The answer seems to be through a head nod, but a very specific type of head nod, one that focuses (facially, of course) on giving the eyes prominence (leading actor), conveying sincerity and emotionally connecting with your interviewer (audience). Evidently on the side of user experience, those who are happy on a stage, those who understand the expressive delicacy of performance, may do better than those who don't.

The view from the video interview is a machinic-prosthetic one¹⁹. It is a perspective that is both distant and yet near, both abstract and yet visceral. We move, even as we are at rest. The tension sits between telepresence and physical presence. Structured video interviews may remove the symptomatic time lag that comes with Skype conversations, breaking our illusion of co-presence, but the same problematics of performance, faciality and bias still remain. Some say Skype is, by the very fact that it reduces geographic distance, an emancipatory mechanism that to some extent speaks through a language of social mobility: access no matter your situation or distance. For the most powerful firms, however, First Great Western travel expenses – provided you book three years in advance, and that the third train after two cancellations, arrives – are never the issue. There are, of course, other encouraging reasons for using such techniques, perhaps for instance though time saved and the general ease, theoretically speaking, of hosting interviews online. Admittedly, if you are reducing very large numbers down to smaller numbers who are then offered in-person interviews, or the equivalent, then video interviews are a useful, number cutting, selection tool, if the problematics explored here are accounted for.

What is important to note in 2014 – the year 11AS (*anno Skype*) – is the gradual dissolution of technology into everyday life. Our use of these techniques, at the moment, may remain striated, but eventually its clunkiness will smooth over. We may soon end up in the world presented by Spike Jonze's 2013 film *Her*, where a sensitive but lonely and recently divorced man played by Joachim Phoenix, who makes a living by writing personal letters for others, falls for a woman who is artificially generated for him – the sensual female voice of 'Samantha' (Scarlett Johansson) his new computer operating system. Online video technology is used for education, business and relationships of all kinds. Skype has been activated at the bottom of the ocean and at the top of Mount Everest, but we must be careful, for 'the invention of the ship was also the invention of the shipwreck' (Paul Virilio). Video technology contains within it the conditions for its own misuse. It embodies the intoxication of speed. Might we be moving too fast, or substituting our own senses for the neutrality – or predictability – of technology; acknowledging our flaws and admitting that it's best I don't come close to you because I'm probably going to be biased? Such words might be at best an overstatement, and at worst an unqualified mistake. Use these technologies, but use them knowing the sensual demands they make; and use them knowing that too much of a retreat from mundane space-time may deliver us to a place where reality exists, but where it has lost any metaphysical meaning: a gluttonous world of telesexuality.

19 R., Bishop and J. Phillips (2002) Sighted Weapons and Modernist Opacity: Aesthetics, Poetics, Prosthetics, *Boundary 2*, 29(2), 157-179.

RARE RECOMMENDS

The six essays that have come prior, if you could not break out of the (unconscious) habit of chronological reading, were intended to provoke reflection upon how we make decisions. Indeed, who is it, which one of our selves comes to inform our actions? Their purpose, in many ways, was to encourage both self-reflection and critical reflection on recruitment practice. This section is more direct. Its purpose is to present a way forward that combines our unconscious bias concerns with Rare's broader project of contextualisation of paper and person.

As with last year, the fundamental lesson remains that because of social and educational inequality – because, in our terms, not everyone is born into, or grows up with, the same amount of capital – applying the same standards for everyone, or not interrogating each human encounter thoroughly, regardless of context, will result in missing talent.

Last year contextualisation meant: different candidates being seen. It was an intervention that encouraged informed adjustments of usual criteria, or attention to contextual (family, educational and social) factors, so that candidates who might otherwise be missed are brought to interview. Our research suggested that 'context offers an effective strategy to engage a wider pool of talented individuals, more accurately evaluated, as part of a holistic recruitment process' (p75). The same recommendations must apply; with the addition of what we have learned from looking at what happens once candidates make it through to their interviews:

1. Reflection and monitoring: as ever – but now, never more importantly – organisations must go kinetic, by *going data*.

- Organisations must carry out self-assessment, looking at what data is available, and what the apparent trends are.
- By monitoring the numbers of people applying, being shortlisted, and being selected at interview by protected characteristic, organisations will be able to uncover underlying trends; how do certain groups (stratified by socioeconomic status, gender and race individually, and in various combinations, for example) perform at each stage of the process?



2. Cultures of equality: with Raymond Williams still in mind, cultures are 'shared systems of meanings and beliefs'. Organisationally, a commitment to addressing implicit biases, un-egalitarian work place practices, metalanguages or relationships, for example, must go beyond words; these words must be enacted. Businesses should look at:

- The work-place languages or references that are commonly used (the cultural canon) in the view to moving away from gendered or discriminatory everyday practice;
- The type of events that are celebrated (or not celebrated, rather); and
- The images that appear in publications, the paintings that appear on walls, and/or the names of certain meeting rooms.

All of these things matter, all of these elements individually produce, and reinforce, a feeling, an expectation and a culture. Does this culture reflect what you think your values really are?

3. Transparency: Ensure that all shortlisting exercises and interviews are properly documented in a consistent manner to show why people were shortlisted and recruited, and how they were more suitable for the post compared with other applicants.

- There should be feedback mechanisms in-place, where decisions are clearly and repetitively recorded and monitored.
- The language of such decisions should be examined to ensure that the justification uses the same, agreed, assessment characteristics and languages – is language subjective or does it reflect the agreed values and of assessment?
- Where possible, audit the paperwork from previous recruitment seasons to help examine previous trends.
- Ensuring detailed paperwork will help maintain proper process and provide the confidence in the face of any challenge.

4. Contextual information: a blend of blind and contextualised will offer the most realistic and egalitarian recruitment process.

- It is the process, as a whole, that needs information, not each isolated moment.
- Over-information causes anchoring and expectation biases, based on everything – gender, race, university, subject, school and accent, for example.



5. Anonymous shortlisting: the interview itself can be affected by the priming effect of contextual information – knowing which university the candidate attended, or the course they have studied has been proven to shape expectations, and engage antecedent biases or favourable attitudes.

- Shortlisting should be anonymous.
- Interviewers should only receive the information relevant to their assessment; this may mean interviews are conducted ‘blind’.

6. Interviews both with and without context: the best interviews will be conducted blind, reviewed without contextual information, *and* reviewed, post hoc, with contextual information too. In studies that borrow the analogy of the remembering self versus the experiencing self, the difference between the review without information and the subsequent review with information may allow for a more robust assessment. It is important to use contextual information strategically.

7. Training: we recommend robust training both for HR teams and for the interviewers.

- Training should combine discussion, evaluative conditioning techniques, and expert guidance (using some of the materials outlined by Rare).
- Elements of this training should be retaken yearly, especially the materials whose aim is to condition, or engage, unconscious bias during the live recruitment season.

8. Assessment of qualities / questions asked: every standardised question at interview and during the assessment process should be interrogated for its direct connection to the information needed to make an informed and fair assessment.

- The question of what you are looking for will also apply to the language and performance of the interview itself. How important, really, is a firm handshake? What is a firm handshake a proxy for?
- Interviews will deviate from the standard model, but the general approach should be informed by an agreed, and recorded, core understanding of what is being looked for.

FIVE BIG IDEAS FOR 2015

This book is intended to be the first edition of this series of unconscious bias essays that will expand in the future as our work, and the *Potential Not Polish* project, continues. Our aim is a pan-industry gold standard for contextual recruitment. Contextual recruitment combines the paper and the person in the understanding that they both might exhibit or express elements of disadvantage that mean how we understand and perceive them might not be a fair reflection of their ability to shine in our organisations. Our intention, going forward, is that our work on social mobility and unconscious bias will walk hand in hand, as we continue to pursue ways of better evaluating the paper and the person, and thereby pursuing ways of recruiting better, and more diverse, talent.

Listed below are a series of projects, materials and devices that Rare will be developing in 2015 and beyond. These will add to our work in 2013, and, hopefully, provide the beginnings of robustly contextual recruitment and a gold standard of assessment.

1. Rare's Implicit Association Test²⁰

The IAT is used to examine positive or negative associations. In so doing it measures our implicit biases. First used in 1998, the IAT has quickly become the dominant methodology for measuring implicit bias. At its core, it measures response latency: the time taken between the delivery of a stimulus – a word, image, or sound – and the person's response. Modern tests are designed to engage automatic associations and perceptions of difference such as black versus white, or attributes such as good versus bad.

The procedure, in the original Harvard model (Greenwald *et al.*, 1998) involves a series of tasks, where the participant uses the 'left' or 'right' keys on the computer to categorise the stimulus instinctively. IAT scores are calculated based on response time differences between the various stimuli using a so-called 'D Score' algorithm, which essentially it combines a participant's latency

²⁰ There are several critiques of the IAT (e.g. Blanton and Jaccard, 2006). Criticisms aside, the IAT remains an important and illustrative tool for researching and identifying implicit associations. The ECU (2013) provides a powerful summary: 'at present, it is the dominant method for assessing implicit associations because of its robust psychometric features, flexibility, and resistance to faking (Nosek *et al.*, 2007). The predictive validity of the IAT is also well established, with a meta-analysis showing that the IAT was a reliable predictor of many behaviours (e.g. consumer choice, academic major, and voter choice) and clearly superior to self-reports when predicting discriminatory behaviours (Greenwald *et al.*, in press). In addition, neuroscience research has supported the IAT's validity by showing that it correlates with brain regions associated with emotional conditioning (e.g. Cunningham *et al.*, 2003; Phelps *et al.*, 2000).'

variability (the time difference between certain instinctive responses) with other recorded information, including self-report (declaration of conscious biases, or their conscious absence) for example.

Research suggests that the most effective use of the IAT is as part of a supportive programme of interventions, with clear, discursive, feedback loops. The Rare IAT will look to examine various relationships beyond simply visual ones. Using the audio-visual material gathered by this research, it will tap into various class, race, gender and social performances, using them to uncover forms of bias. We want to understand associative responses between images of ‘success’ and race, accent and trustworthiness, and race and class, for example. The IAT will be used as part of our on-going research, and as part of our unconscious bias training package.

2. Rare’s evaluative conditioning video

Evaluative conditioning aims to disrupt latent biases by using associative conditioning (repeated pairing of two stimuli together). In a study by Olson and Fazio (2006) where participants underwent such conditioning, it only took 24 exposures to achieve a reduction in implicit bias. In comparison to many bias-reduction interventions that require considerable energy on behalf of participants, change occurs through a relatively effortless learning mechanism. Rare are developing a video project, which will act as a priming and counter-stereotyping device that questions assumptions by producing counter-intuitive examples. It interrogates various signifiers such as race, class and other protected characteristics such as gender and sexuality. Beyond the videos being a useful thinking device in unconscious bias masterclasses, it is hoped that these videos will be involved during assessment season as a direct conditioning initiative that aims to actively reduce the potential influence of bias, exactly when it might matter most. We recommend that it should be watched during, or at the beginning of, interview season to make the process fairer.

3. Rare’s university ranking system

Rare are working on developing a systematic way of improving the decisions we and recruiters are making when it comes to ‘judging’ relative university performance. It extends our work from 2013 on contextualising academic performance alongside contextualising social, educational and personal background. In the current system when making inferences about the relative ability of one candidate over another by looking at their university of study, we are – often without interrogation – ranking a mid 2.1 in Law at Oxford above a mid 1st in Law at KCL. Our questions are: why is this so? What unconscious influences have constructed this expectation / impression? How might it be inherently biased?

Using a combination of relevant league table data, as well as information on the educational and social profiles of each cohort for each year, of each subject, at each university, we are developing tools to inform comparison by university *and* by course.

4. Unconscious bias package

Following Devine *et al.* 2012, the most effective, and long-lasting, bias reduction interventions are those that use mixed methods, with long-term habitual change as the goal. The most effective projects are those that encourage awareness of bias, and clear strategies for building upon this awareness.

Rare have designed an unconscious bias programme that brings together all dimensions of our contextual research and practice. The aim is to learn about our biases, the situations that trigger particular variations of them, and how we might then replace biased response with those that more faithfully reflect our non-biased goals. The E-learning package uses the evaluative conditioning and IAT materials described above, as well as the video footage still to be collected, of real Rare candidates undergoing various forms of assessment and evaluation. The package develops various techniques such as stereotype replacement, counter priming and perspective taking, as developed through the literature, our empirical work and the essays too.

5. Rare's Step Up Programme

Step Up aims to address 'it': the idea that there is something more than competency that factors into the recruitment decision-making process. It is a pre-Legal Practice Course, social mobility programme, for exceptional students whose previous experiences mean that they lack the necessary social and cultural capital to – as yet – excel at interview and in a legal career. The lack of 'it' registers often unconsciously, or is disguised in terms that describe an impression that 'fails to resonate' with an assessor or lacks an obvious 'fit', for example.

The programme looks to engage this lack of capital through two forms of criticality: of the self and of the world (business, cultures, news and people). To do so, and thereby address 'it', we bring together techniques that build: self-confidence, the ability to perform in different environments, commercial fluency, adaptability, efficiency and organisation.

The result will be a strong, supportive and well-networked cohort of individuals. They will have found their own 'it' where once it might have been perceived as absent. For businesses, this provides access to a unique, highly talented, and otherwise overlooked group of high value

candidates. Thinking back to Peter (p41), this is not necessarily a 'fix' for not knowing what Catch-22 is but it allows talented individuals to develop the confidence and awareness to be able to ask, interpolate, grow and achieve.

Summary

- **What:** *Step Up*, a pre-LPC development programme that takes high-potential candidates from under-represented groups who have not hitherto managed to secure training contracts and prepares them for the corporate law assessment process and a career in corporate law.
- **Why:** sometimes the difference between a 'yes' and a 'no' at interview is 'having it'. We suggest that 'it' relies – in part – on two things that if addressed, may enable organisations to broaden their talent pool: (a) specific unconscious biases expressed by the interviewer; and (b) a lack of cultural and social exposure during the candidate's upbringing and more recent life-course.
- **Who:** candidates from under-represented ethnic or social groups who have not yet secured training contracts, and who have genuinely lacked the exposures and opportunities that would allow them to fulfil their potential.
- **How:** tailored work experience at Rare; a series of current affairs writing, reading, listening and speaking tasks; pan-industry business seminars to improve commercial awareness and interpolative capabilities; and professional skills training – presentations, debating and client engagement.
- **When:** the pilot programme will run between July and December 2015.
- **Outcome:** highly valuable, accelerated, people from places that made them unlikely to ever have the 'it' of what we think is a corporate lawyer, becoming corporate lawyers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the second year in a row we would like to thank our sponsors, Clifford Chance. Their support has been invaluable on what has been an exciting and highly rewarding investigation into the idea of context, in all its forms; from social mobility, through race, to unconscious biases. The *Potential Not Polish* research, with Clifford Chance's continued support, advice and leadership has already led to the emergence of Rare's pioneering contextual recruitment programme and, most importantly, promises to continue delivering more innovative ideas and practices into 2015 and beyond.

Numerous individuals have also contributed to this on-going project, not least the many students and Rare candidates who kindly offered their thoughts, shared their stories and allowed their interviews to be filmed. There are also others who deserve particular mention – you know who you are: Melissa; Andre; Naomi; Jayne; Laura; Jackie; Carlton and, of course, Raph.

This is the first edition of a continued engagement with our unconscious and we hope that you will join us on this important journey. What do you think?²¹

²¹ Perhaps read essays 1 and 2 before answering...

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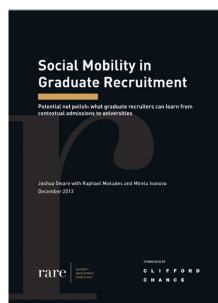
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PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS



Social Mobility in Graduate Recruitment
December 2013

Social Mobility in Graduate Recruitment: potential not polish explored the past decade of contextual information use in university admissions, setting forth an ambitious plan that looked to change the way we see individuals and their achievements.



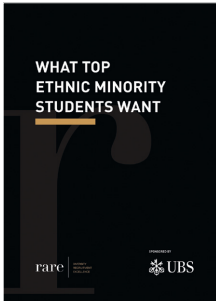
Five Years On
December 2012

Five Years On is a study of top ethnic minority graduates in the first five years of their careers. The report uses data analysis, focus groups and one-on-one interviews to paint a picture of what it takes to create race equality at work – both in terms of what organisations and individuals can do.



Class, Race and Graduate Recruitment: Best Practices
December 2011

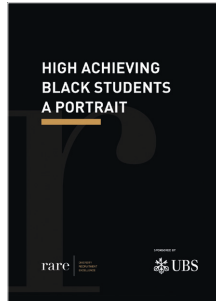
An ambitious research project into the success of candidates from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The research looks at different stages of the recruitment process and combines qualitative and quantitative data to produce a list of recommendations to ensure fairness throughout the entire process.



What Top Ethnic Minority Students Want

December 2010

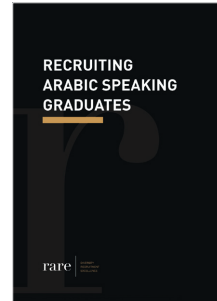
Unique research into the factors influencing the career choices made by high-achieving young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This research – a corollary of ‘High Achieving Black Students’ – leverages information gathered by Rare’s proprietary ‘What Makes You Tick?’ questionnaire.



High Achieving Black Students: A Portrait

December 2009

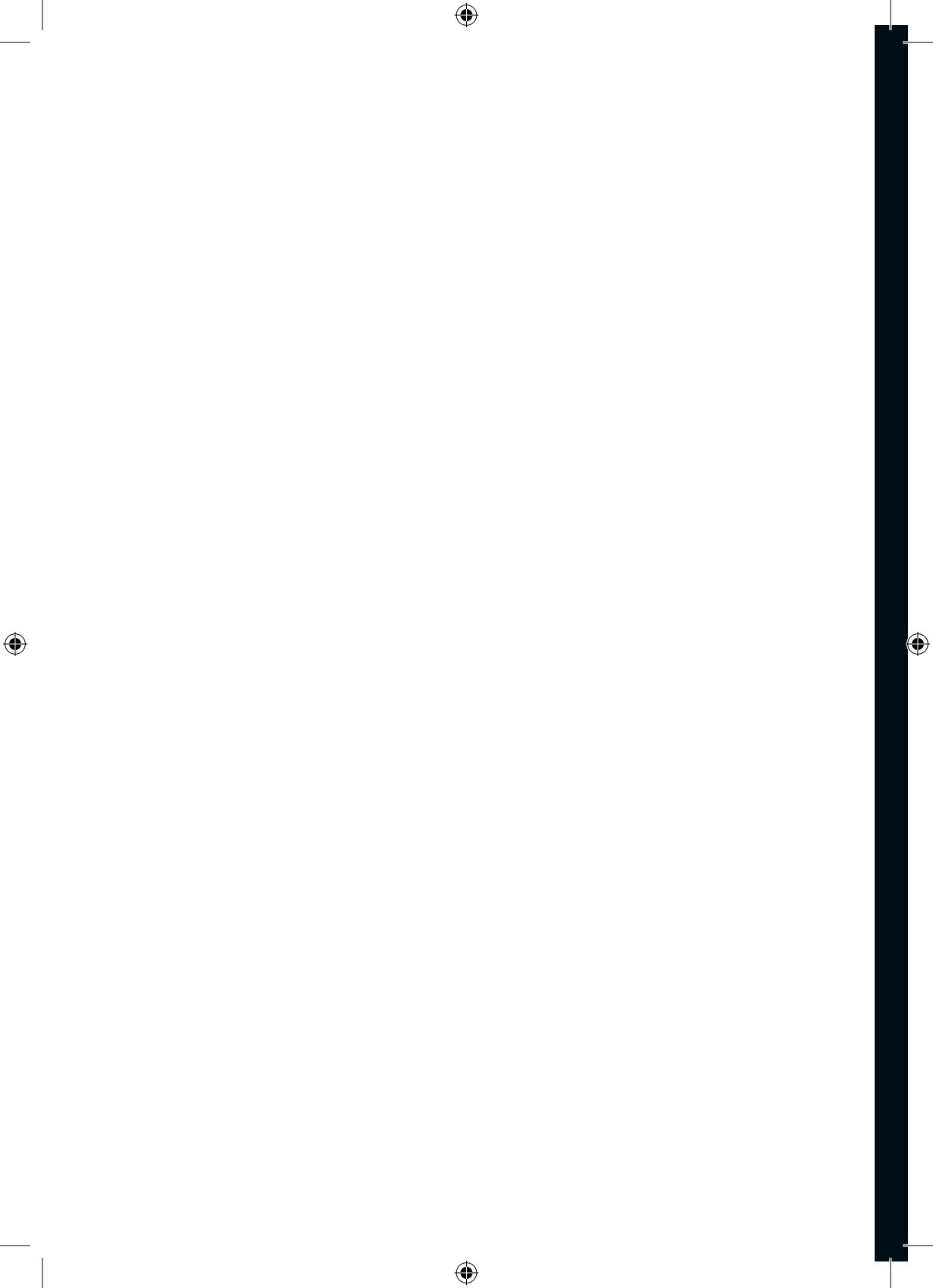
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