

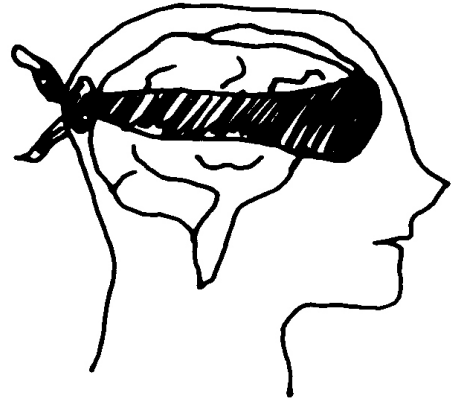
THE HALO EFFECT IN DESIGN TEACHING

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Unconscious Bias:

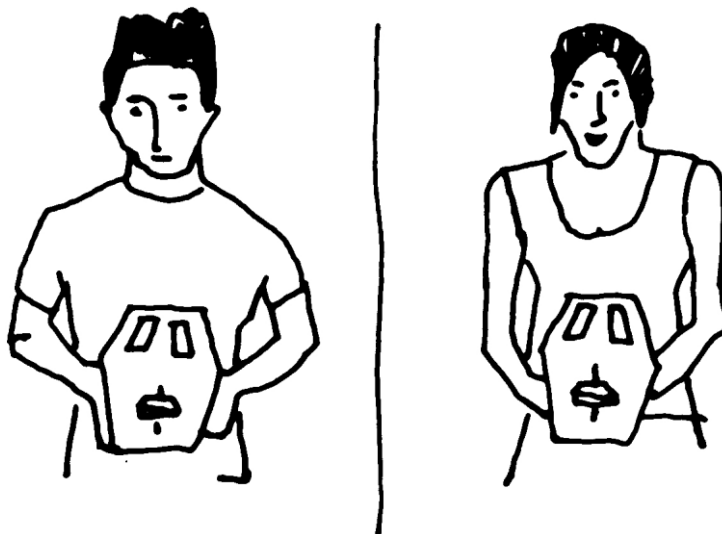
Everyone has some degree of unconscious bias, which can influence how educators behave toward their students. It is important to acknowledge these biases exist and consciously work to minimize their effect on student learning.



Halo Effect:

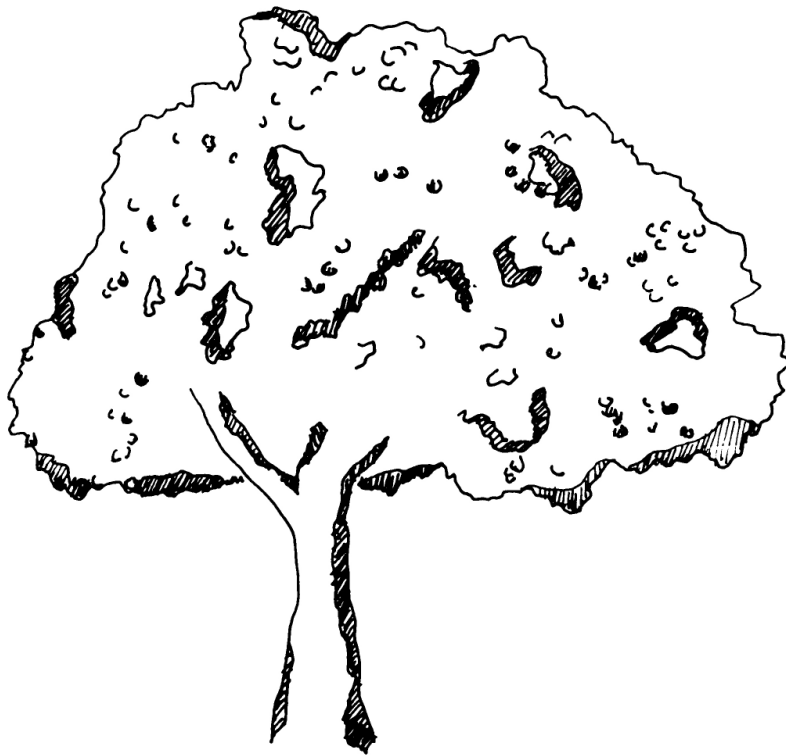
The halo effect is one form of unconscious cognitive bias. It is the tendency to generalize one outstanding personality trait to an overly favorable (or unfavorable) evaluation of the whole personality. It happens in the studio when professors are unable to discriminate between independent aspects of students' attributes and performance. We may like one student more than another, and therefore unknowingly treat them differently.

Attractive = Good



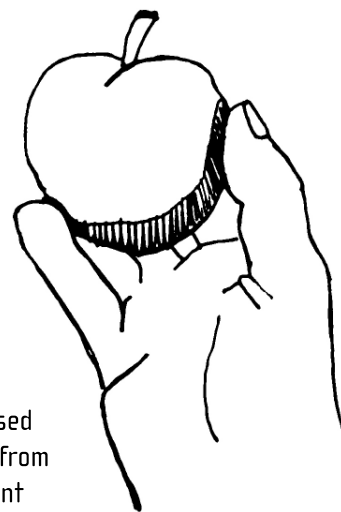
Effects of the Effect

On an individual level, educators can quickly form an impression of a student, based on a lifetime of cultural experiences--like breathing in a constant fog--and may have difficulty treating a student objectively thereafter. This halo effect can also function on a systemic level, based on ingrained but unconscious associations professors have with certain identity groups of students.[2]



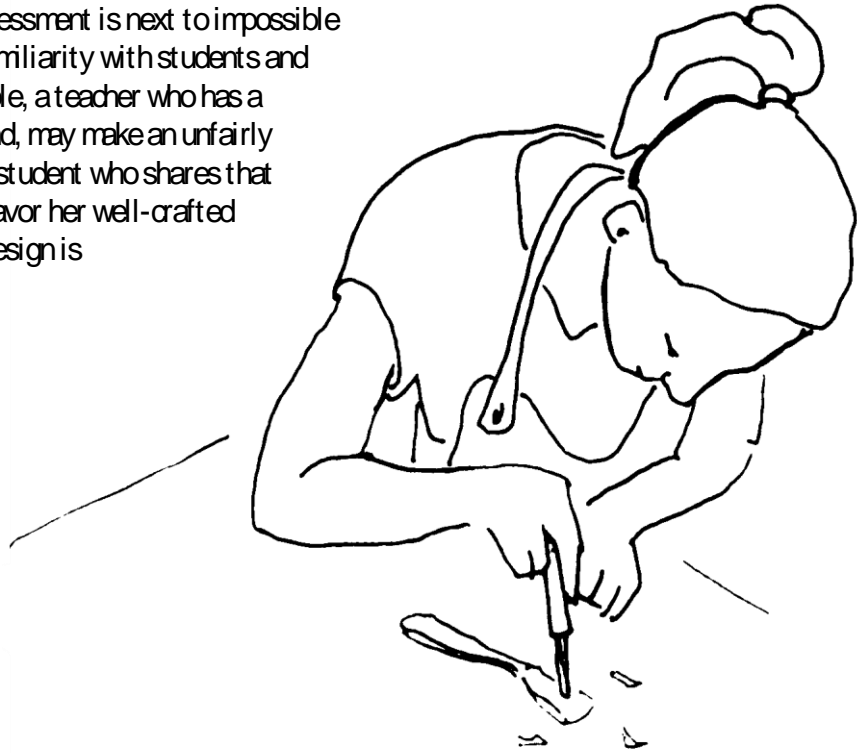
Why It Happens

The General Impression Model of why the halo effect occurs argues that a general impression of a student influences judgement and evaluation of that student in other unrelated dimensions. For example, if you are impressed with the overall appearance of a tree, you may be inclined to judge each fruit from that tree to be better than is objectively warranted. Another model, the Salient Dimensional model, proposes that assessment of an individual on one trait influences evaluations of that individuals' other traits.[3]



In Practice

In some university courses the halo effect may be mitigated somewhat by blind assessment techniques. But in many studio courses, blind assessment is next to impossible because of a teacher's familiarity with students and their projects. For example, a teacher who has a strong making background, may make an unfairly positive evaluation of a student who shares that interest, and also over-favor her well-crafted project, even when the design is somewhat deficient.

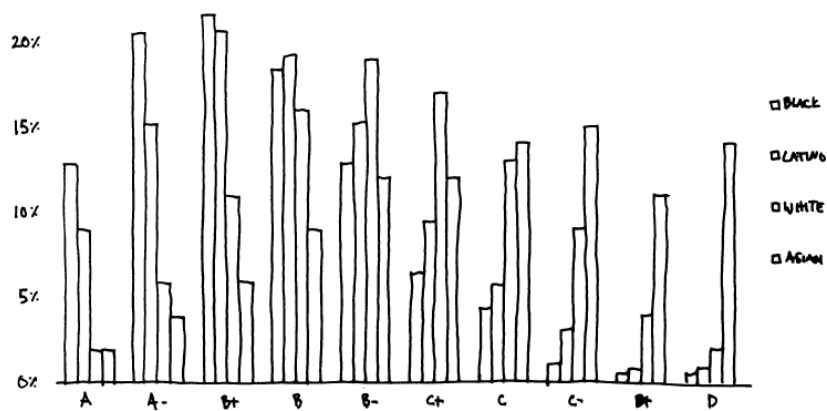


Removing the Halo

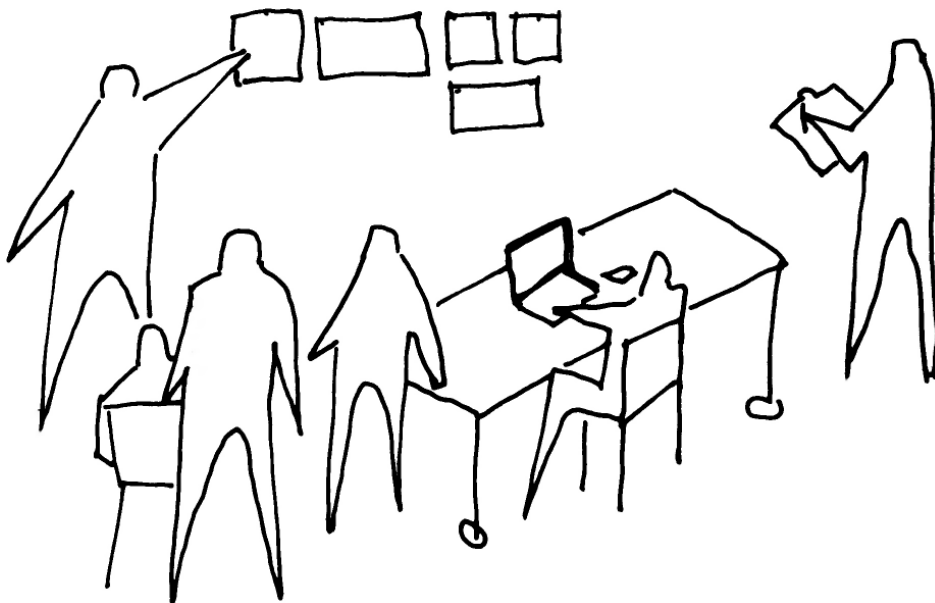
How can we minimize the halo effect in our studio courses? We can slow down and be aware we may be biased.[4] Some introspection can be a start. It takes time and internal motivation to self-correct entrenched patterns of behavior.



Conduct a self-audit with your own available data. Look at grade roll numbers in terms of race, gender, and other dimensions. Analyze how various selections are made, and pay attention to critique time and frequency with students based on their identity.



It might be a good idea to ask a colleague to observe your studio classes, paying attention to how you interact with your students, looking for how the halo effect may be present in your attitudes and behavior.



Even though the halo effect may be a pervasive problem, if we acknowledge it exists in our interactions, and take steps in the studio environment to reduce the negative results, we can create a more equitable learning environment.



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