Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias refers to the assumptions and conclusions we jump to without thinking.[1]

An example might be assuming that an older person walking with a child is their grandparent. These biases do not indicate hostility towards certain groups; they reflect how the individual has been socialized.

Several studies demonstrate the impact unconscious bias can have on the hiring process, particularly for women.

These biases may not be intentional but their impact is severe. The effects of unconscious bias will not be overcome by maintaining our current efforts to recruit and retain more women.[2]

To reduce unconscious bias in hiring, committees and individuals need to be educated about its existence and effects in academia and industry.

Online tools such as the Harvard Implicit Association Test can help identify an individual's unconscious biases. Sharing research and becoming aware of your organisation's hiring tendencies can also help reduce unconscious discrimination.

To be seen as equally "**competent**" by reviewers, female researchers need to publish:

3 more articles in *Nature* or *Science* **OR** **20 more** articles in specialist journals
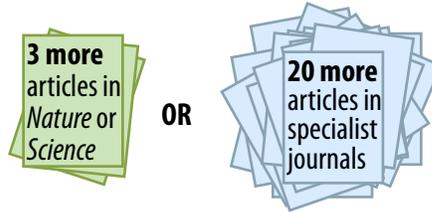
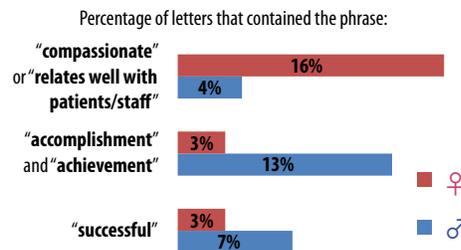than male applicants when applying for a medical fellowship.[5]

"We would have to see her job talk"

*"I would need to see evidence that she had gotten these grants and publications on her own"*

Psychology professors reviewing identical CVs were **4x** more likely to write **cautionary comments** for female applicants.[4]

Reference letters for female medical faculty were **shorter**, more **vague**, and placed **less emphasis on research** than those for males.[6]

Percentage of letters that contained the phrase:

"**compassionate**" or "**relates well with patients/staff**" — 16% / 4%
"**accomplishment**" and "**achievement**" — 3% / 13%
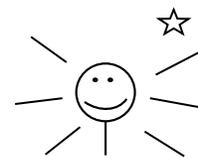"**successful**" — 3% / 7%

♀ (red) ♂ (blue)

The average letter length for women was **227** words, compared to **253** words for men.[6]

US science professors were asked to evaluate a CV for a **lab manager**:[2]

$30,238.10 ♂ | $26,507.94 ♀
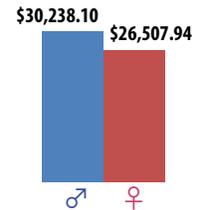
The male candidate was offered a **higher salary**...

... more **mentorship**

... and was rated more "**competent**" and "**hireable**."

♂ CV | ♀ CV

The catch? Other than the names at the top, the CVs were **identical**.[2]

Women are **50%** more likely to advance in an orchestra audition if they **can't be seen**.[3]

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References

1. Network Exchange. (2012). *Unconscious bias.* Retrieved July 11, 2013, from http://www.centralexchange.org/Repository/5/Document/NX%20Exchange%20Unconscious%20Bias%2009%2025%2012%20v4.pdf
2. Moss-Racusin, C. et al. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *109*(41), 16474-16479.
3. Goldin, C. & Rouse, C. (2000). Orchestrating impartiality: The impact of "blind" auditions on female musicians. *The American Economic Review, 90*(4), 715-741.
4. Steinpreis, R., Andres, K. & Ritzke, D. (1999). The impact of gender on the review of the curricula vitae of job applicants and tenure candidates: A national empirical study. *Sex Roles*, *41*(7/8), 509-528.
5. Wennerås, C. & Wold, A. (1997). Nepotism and sexism in peer-review. *Nature, 387*, 341-343.
6. Trix, F. & Psenka, C. (2003). Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society,* 14(2), 191-220.

Recommended Readings

1. Coorice, A. (2009). Unconscious bias in faculty and leadership recruitment: A literature review. *Association of American Medical Colleges Analysis in Brief, 9*(2).
2. Harvard Implicit Association Test: https://implicit.harvard.edu/
3. Bertrand, M. & Mullainathan, S. (2003). Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. *The American Economic Review, 94*(4), 991-1013.
4. Fine, E. & Handelsman, J. (2006). *Reviewing applicants: Research on bias and assumptions.* Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) University of Wisconsin-Madison. Retrieved from: http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/docs/BiasBrochure_3rdEd.pdf

More resources can be found at: http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/

About eng•cite

eng•cite is the working name of the Goldcorp Professorship in Women in Engineering at UBC. The Professorship – established in 2014 – is a vital aspect of the UBC Faculty of Applied Science's efforts to promote the engineering field to young women, to meet its goal to increase female enrollment in Engineering to 50% and to address a national shortage of Engineers expected by 2020.

The Goldcorp Professorship is a catalyst of change for the engineering field, with a commitment to help UBC become the national leader for gender diversity in engineering. Dr. Sheryl Staub-French, who holds the Professorship, works with teachers, counsellors, parents and high school students to promote engineering education, and provide mentorship and role models for young women who might not otherwise consider or pursue engineering education and careers.

Find out more at: engcite.ca

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