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 organization’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”
  - Female: 16%
  - Male: 4%
- “accomplishment” and “achievement”
  - Female: 13%
  - Male: 3%
- “successful”
  - Female: 7%
  - Male: 3%

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: \(^2\)

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{♂} \\
$30,238.10 \\
\text{♀} \\
$26,507.94
\end{array}\]

The male candidate was offered a higher salary...

... more mentorship

... and was rated more “competent” and “hireable.”

Women are 50% more likely to advance in an orchestra audition if they can’t be seen.\(^3\)

Try the Implicit Bias test: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/)
References


Recommended Readings

2. Harvard Implicit Association Test: https://implicit.harvard.edu/

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

About WWEST 2015-2020

Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science and Technology (WWEST) is the operating name for the 2015-2020 NSERC Chair for Women in Science and Technology (CWSE), BC and Yukon Region. Our mission is to promote science and to engage students, industry, and the community to increase the awareness and participation of women and other under-represented groups in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). WWEST works locally and, in conjunction with the other CWSE Chairs, nationally on policy, research, advocacy, facilitation, and pilot programs that support women in science and engineering.

About the 2015-2020 WWEST Chairholder

Dr. Lesley Shannon P.Eng is an Associate Professor and Chair for the Computer Engineering Option in the School of Engineering Science at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Shannon studies computer systems design. She works in a rapidly growing field that combines custom computing hardware and software to design and implement application-specific computer systems for applications in a wide range of areas including robotics, machine learning, aerospace and biomedical systems, multimedia applications, and cloud computing. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate students in the area of Computer Engineering; she received the 2014 APEGBC Teaching Award of Excellence in recognition of her classroom and out-of-class mentoring activities and her contributions in leading a redesign of the School's undergraduate curriculum at SFU. Dr. Shannon has long been an advocate of increasing the diversity of students and workers in science- and engineering-related fields and was instrumental in developing programs to support a successful transition from high school into university.

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