Research on Bias

Research shows that a great majority of people have implicit/unconscious associations that can influence their responses to situations and their decisions. The following list highlights evidence of bias in professional, evaluative settings which negatively impacts underrepresented groups.

Facilitation Notes: This curated list was compiled in 2012. Facilitators may also wish to consult more recent research like those featured in the book "An Inclusive Academy: Achieving Diversity and Equity" by Abigail Stewart and Virginia Valian (2018). The list below includes three studies to highlight in a 40-minute or 90-minute session, three additional references to include in the 90-minute session, and a list of further reading.

RESEARCH TO SHARE IN BOTH THE 40-MINUTE AND 90-MINUTE SESSIONS:

Bertrand & Mullainathan (2004)
Applicants with African American- sounding names had to send 15 resumes to get a callback, compared to 10 needed by applicants with white-sounding names. White names yielded as many callbacks as an additional eight years of experience.

Steinpreis et al. (1999)
A national study in which male and female faculty evaluated a curriculum vitae randomly assigned a male or a female name. Both male and female evaluators rated the male applicant higher in research, teaching and service experience and were more likely to hire the male rather than the female applicant.

Moss-Racusin et al. (2012)
A recent national study found that both female and male science faculty members harbor bias against female students. The faculty participants were given application materials from an undergraduate student applying for a lab manager position. All received the same exact materials, except half the participants received a male applicant's materials and the other half a female applicant's materials. Faculty participants rated the female applicant significantly lower than the male applicant in terms of competence, hireability, salary offers and willingness to mentor.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH TO SHARE IN THE 90-MINUTE SESSION:

Wenneras & Wold (1997)
Female postdoctoral applicants had to be significantly more productive than male applicants to receive the same peer review score. This meant that she either had to publish at least three more papers in a prestigious science journal or an additional 20 papers in lesser-known specialty journals to be judged as equivalent. The authors concluded that the systematic underrating of female applicants could help explain the lower success rates of female scientists in achieving high academic rank.

Adam (1981)
This study involved nearly identical resumes of law students applying to internships in Canadian law firms. Gay-labeled male applicants received 38% fewer offers as other male applicants. Gay-labeled female applicants received half as many offers as other female applicants.

Trix and Psenka (2003)
This study found systematic differences in letters of recommendation for females and males hired into academic medical faculty positions. Letters written for women were more likely to refer to their compassion, teaching, and effort as opposed to their achievements, research, and ability, the characteristics significantly stressed for male applicants. The traits stressed for the women are based on cultural stereotypes of women and are less valued for success in academic medicine.

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FURTHER READING

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