

Gender balance and unconscious preference in recruitment

Fact sheet

NMBU includes gender equality and diversity in its strategic work and wants to ensure a gender balance at all levels of the organisation. This ambition is linked to Norwegian legislation on equality and discrimination.

In the state sector, the underrepresented gender (<40%) shall be employed, provided that they have equal or equivalent qualifications (positive action).

In order to achieve a gender balance at the highest academic level, NMBU has set the goal of having more women in permanent academic positions, particularly professors-hips. In connection with this, NMBU wants to raise awareness of so-called unconscious preference in evaluation and recruitment processes.

Unconscious preference happens when the brain draws quick conclusions, evaluating people and situations without being fully aware of it. Our preferences are influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experience. We have no control over these views and opinions, and neither can we be aware of their full impact and implications.

Unconscious preference can significantly affect recruitment and evaluation processes. Several experiments have highlighted gender and ethnicity preferences.

A study of the science faculties in higher education institutions (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012) asked employees to review a number of applications. The applications that were reviewed were identical except for the gender of the applicant's name.

Results showed that the science faculties were most likely to:

- assess male candidates as better qualified than female candidates
- prefer to hire male candidates over female candidates

As a member of an evaluation committee or recruitment committee, we ask you to be aware of possible unconscious preferences when evaluating your application(s).

Yours sincerely

NMBU Equality and Diversity Committee

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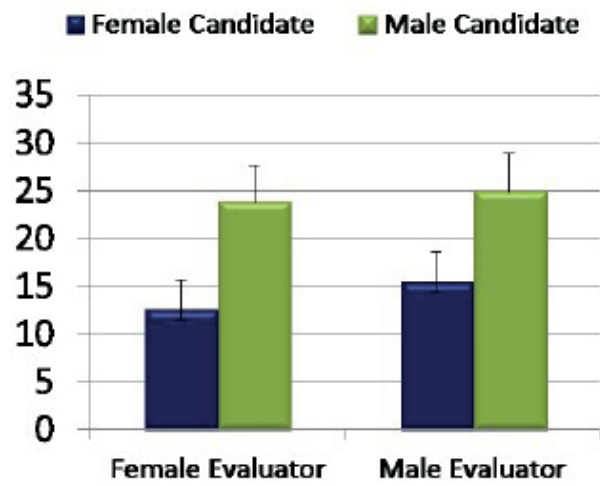


Unconscious Bias

Research shows that when presented with two equal candidates, one male and the other female, most evaluators prefer the male candidate – regardless of the evaluator's gender.

The Experiment:

- Experienced evaluators were given a resume and asked if they would hire the candidate for a position in engineering.
- Groups of evaluators had a balanced ratio of men to women.
- The same resume was given to all evaluators, with the exception of the name at the top.
- Some groups were asked to evaluate "Karen" and others were asked to evaluate "Brian."



Both male and female evaluators rated the male candidate as more viable than the female candidate.

The Results

- Since the resumes were identical except for the candidate's name, this study clearly demonstrates gender bias at work.
- Because both female and male evaluators rated the male candidate higher than the female candidate, this is clearly not a malicious or overt stereotype, but an unconscious bias that associates science more strongly with men.

The solution? Bring unconscious bias out into the open.

¹ Steinpreis, Anders & Ritzke (1999) *Sex Roles* 41(7/8): 509-528.

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