Evaluating Faculty Candidates: Understanding and minimizing the influence of unconscious bias

Eve Fine, Ph.D.
Jennifer Sheridan, Ph.D.
Introduction

Why provide education for search committees?

- Faculty members receive little education about the search process
- A faculty search is costly (time and money)
- Provides an opportunity to achieve campus goals of diversifying the faculty
# Guiding Principles

- Research Based
- Peer Training
- Active Learning
- Accountability

## Content

1. Run an effective and efficient search committee
2. Actively recruit an excellent and diverse applicant pool
3. Raise awareness of unconscious bias and assumptions and their influence on evaluation of candidates
4. Ensure a fair and thorough review of candidates
5. Develop and implement an effective interview process

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Introduction

Searching for Excellence & Diversity®:
Workshops for Search Committee

Content

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Overview

1. What is “unconscious bias”?
2. How might unconscious biases influence evaluation of faculty candidates?
3. How can a search committee minimize the influence of bias?
4. Does educating search committees work?
What is unconscious bias?

- A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that most people – men and women – hold unconscious biases about groups of people.
- Depending on the discipline unconscious biases can also be referred to as:
  - Schemas
  - Stereotypes
  - Mental models
  - Cognitive shortcuts
  - Statistical discrimination
  - Implicit associations
  - Spontaneous trait inference

The tendency of our minds to apply characteristics of groups (real or imagined) to our judgments about individual group members.

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What is unconscious bias?

- Most of us routinely rely on unconscious assumptions even though we intend to be fair and believe that we are fair.
- Human brain works by categorizing people, objects and events around us -- this allows us to quickly and efficiently organize and retrieve information.
How is the research on bias and prejudice conducted?

- **Blind, randomized trials**
  - Give each group of evaluators pictures, words, or applications with a racial or gender indicator
  - Compare evaluations

- **Real life studies**
  - Evaluate actual resumés/curriculum vitae, job performance, letters of recommendations, call backs for interviews, etc.
Examples of Blind, Randomized Trials


- When asked to rate the quality of verbal skills indicated by a short text, evaluators rated the skills lower if they were told an African American wrote the text than if they were told a white person wrote it, and rated verbal skills higher when told that a woman wrote it than when told a man wrote it. Biernat and Manis. (1994). “Shifting Standards and Stereotype-based Judgments.” *J Pers & Soc Psychol* 66: 5-20.
Examples of Real Life Studies

Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae


- Curriculum vitae of an actual applicant evaluated by 238 academic psychologists (118 male, 120 female)
  - One cv – at time of job application (jr-level)
  - One cv – at time of early tenure (sr-level)

- Randomly assigned a male or female name to each cv
Examples of Real Life Studies

Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae (Cont.)
Steinpreis et al., *Sex Roles* 41: 509 1999

- For entry-level cv: Academic psychologists were more likely to hire male applicants and gave men higher ratings for
  - Teaching
  - Research
  - Service Experience

- For tenure-level cv: Academic psychologists were equally likely to tenure men and women candidates, but were four-times more likely to include cautionary comments on cv’s with a female name.

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Examples of Real Life Studies

Evaluation of Resumés


- Resumes sent to a variety of employers advertising openings in local newspapers in Chicago and Boston
- Randomly assigned “white-sounding” or “African American-sounding” names to resumes
- Applicants with “white-sounding” names were more likely to be called back to interview for positions.
- For “white-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were more likely to be called back. For “African American-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were not more likely to be called back.
Analysis of Letters of Recommendation


- 312 letters of recommendation for medical faculty successfully hired at large U.S. medical school
- Letters for women vs men:
  - Shorter
  - More letters for women with “minimal assurance”
  - More gendered terms in letters for women
  - More letters for women included “doubt raisers”
  - Men more frequently referred to as “researchers” and “colleagues”. Women more frequently referred to as “teachers” and “students”
  - Women – 4X more references to personal lives
  - Women - Fewer standout adjectives (“outstanding” “excellent”) and more grindstone adjectives.
Other Examples

- **Gender Stereotypes & Leadership**

- **Motherhood Bias**

- **Sexual Orientation**
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

- Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions

- Diversify your search committee
  - Social tuning/increased motivation to respond w/o bias
  - Counterstereotype imaging
    Blair, Ma, and Lenton, *J. Personality and Social Psychology*, 2001

- Critical Mass – increase proportion of women and minorities in the applicant pool
  Heilman, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 1980; van Ommeren et al., *Psychological Reports*, 2005

- Develop and prioritize criteria prior to evaluating applicants

- Spend sufficient time and attention on evaluating each application

- Use inclusion rather than exclusion decision-making processes
  Hugenberg et al., *J. Personality and Social Psychology*, 2006
http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/docs/BiasBrochure_2ndEd.pdf

http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/docs/SearchBook.pdf
Is it working?

- Faculty attendance/experience of workshop
- Changing outcomes
- Unexpected outcomes
Faculty attendance/experience of workshop

- Attendance numbers
Faculty attendance/experience of workshop

- Attendance numbers
- Evaluation form data
Usefulness Ratings* of 5 Workshop Elements

* Not at all useful, Somewhat useful, Very useful
Workshop "Very Useful"

* Vs. Somewhat useful or Not at all useful.

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Faculty attendance/experience of workshop

- Attendance numbers
- Evaluation form data
- Requirements
  - 2 deans require attendance at workshop before releasing a faculty position to the department
  - Attendance at workshop by a critical mass in the department is one way a department can have access to new “Strategic Pipeline and Recruitment” funds

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Changing outcomes

- Hiring pools, interview lists
  - No data
- New hires
Changing outcomes

- Hiring pools, interview lists
  - No data
- New hires
- Experience of candidates
* Agree Strongly to the item "I was satisfied with the hiring process overall."
Unexpected outcomes

- Changing attitudes towards diversity
The climate for faculty of color in my department is good

* Significant t-test between minority and majority faculty at p<.05.

^ Significant t-test between dept. chairs and all other faculty at p<.05.
The climate for faculty of color in my department is good

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participated in Hiring Workshop</th>
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Relevant Publications

- Sheridan, Jennifer; Eve Fine; Christine Maidl Pribbenow; Jo Handelsman; Molly Carnes. 2010. “Searching for Excellence & Diversity: Increasing the Hiring of Women Faculty at One Academic Medical Center.” *Academic Medicine*. 85(6):999-1007.


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