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

Jennifer Sheridan, Ph.D.
About WISELI

- WISELI – Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute
  - Research institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
  - Mission: Advancing and promoting women in academic Science, Technology, Mathematics, Engineering and Medicine (STEMM) – focus on faculty
  - Broader goals – fostering a diverse faculty body
  - Funding: NSF ADVANCE, NIH, Campus support
Introduction: Commitment vs. Results

- Despite broad commitment to the goal of diversity, why are results less than satisfactory?
  - Lack of training/education on the hiring process
  - Influence of unconscious bias and assumptions
Introduction

Why provide education for search committees?

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

## Searching for Excellence & Diversity®:
Workshops for Search Committee

### Guiding Principles
- Research Based
- Peer Training
- Active Learning
- Practical Information
- 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
6. Close the deal – successfully hire selected candidate
Why do you think it is important to develop a diverse faculty, or a diverse workforce?
Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

Diverse working groups are more productive, creative, and innovative than homogeneous groups

Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

Diverse groups engage in a higher level of critical analysis than do homogenous groups

Introduction: Benefits of Diversity

Diverse scholars and professionals can invigorate and expand disciplines and fields

- New approaches to teaching
- New research questions
- New perspectives and interpretations
- New concerns
Overview: Unconscious bias in the search process

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?
What is unconscious bias?

- A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that most people 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 judge *individuals* by the characteristics (real or imagined) of the *groups* to which they belong.
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.
- But – when evaluating people we can be led astray by our tendency to categorize people – and we tend to do so on the following dimensions:
  - Race/Ethnicity, Sex, and Age.
How is the research on bias 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 résumés/curriculum vitae, job performance, letters of recommendations, call backs for interviews, etc.
Examples of Research on Unconscious Bias

- **Estimating height**

- **Judging athleticism**

- **Evaluating verbal skills**
  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 a 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).
Unconscious bias in the search process

- Applications/CVs/Résumés
- Reference Letters
- Interviews/Evaluation of Leadership
Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae and Résumés

Curriculum vitae for positions in academic psychology


- 238 academic psychologists (118 male, 120 female) evaluated an actual cv randomly assigned a male or female name (Karen or Brian Miller)
  - One cv – at time of job application (jr-level)
  - One cv – at time of early tenure (sr-level)

- Entry level – academic psychologists move likely to hire male applicants and gave men higher ratings for:
  - Research
  - Teaching
  - Service

- Senior-level - 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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Evaluating résumés with African American- or white-sounding names


- 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 50% more likely to be called back to interview for positions
- For “white-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were 27% more likely to be called back; for “African American-sounding” names, applicants with better qualifications were only 8% more likely to be called back
Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae and Résumés

Additional examples

- **Motherhood Bias**

- **Sexual Orientation**

- **Arabic sounding-names**
  Compared call back for job interviews for applicants with Arabic- or Dutch-sounding names

  Compared call backs for job interviews for applicants with Arabic- or Swedish-sounding names

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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"
  - Women - Fewer standout adjectives ("outstanding" "excellent") and more **grindstone adjectives**
  - Women – 4X more references to personal lives
Top 3 semantic realms following the possessive for men and for women

Trix & Psenka 2003
Found fewer differences between letters for men and women in comparison to the Trix and Psenka study, but reaffirmed the comparative absence of outstanding adjectives in letters for women.
Evaluation of Job Interviews

Interviews for a leadership position


- Taped male and female candidates interviewing for a leadership position in a male dominated field
- Candidates were actors trained to perform an agentic or communal script
- 428 evaluators (approx. 50% women) viewed the taped interviewers and rated the “candidates” on competence, likeability, and hireability.
Assumptions about Gender and Behavior
Multiple authors over 30 years: e.g., Bem, Broverman, Eagly, Heilman Rudman

DESCRIPTIVE: How men and women actually behave

Men (agentic)
- Strong
- Decisive
- Assertive
- Tough
- Authoritative
- Independent

Women (communal)
- Nurturing
- Communal
- Nice
- Supportive
- Helpful
- Sympathetic

“Leader”

PREScriptive: How men and women “ought” to behave

Note: Social Penalties for Violating Gender Norms

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Competence: Agentic interviewees rated as more competent than communal interviewees.

Likeability: Agentic men rated more likeable than women; Communal men rated less likeable than women.

Hireability:
- Agentic interviewees more hireable than communal;
- No difference in hireability of communal men and women;
- **Agentic men more hireable than agentic women**

WHY? – SHIFTING CRITERIA
- For agentic men, communal men, communal women – competence weighted most heavily in hiring decisions.
- Agentic women likeability/social skills – a perceived weakness – weighted most heavily in hiring decisions.
Job Interviews - Other Examples

- **Sexual Orientation**

- **Accented English**

- **Weight**

- **Pregnancy**

- **Disability?**
Case Study Discussion
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

What Not to Do:

- Suppress bias and assumptions from one’s mind (or try to)
  - Studies demonstrating Stereotype Rebound effect

- Relying solely on a presumably “objective” ranking or rating system to reduce bias
Strategies that DO NOT work!

- **Stereotype suppression**
  - Banish stereotypes from one’s mind (i.e., gender or race “blind”)
  - Macrae et al. 1994, Experiment #2
  - Rebound effects

- **Belief in personal objectivity**
  - Leads to biased evaluations of women


(Uhlmann & Cohen, *Organ Behav Hum Decis Processes* 2007)
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

What to do before conducting evaluations:

- Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions.
  Uhlmann and Cohen, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 2007

- Diversify your search committee
  - Social tuning/increased motivation to respond w/o bias
  - Counterstereotype imaging

- Hold each member of the search committee responsible for recruiting and equitably evaluating an excellent and diverse applicant pool.
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

What to do before conducting evaluations (cont.):

- 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.
Minimizing Bias and Assumptions

What to do while conducting evaluations:

- Spend sufficient time and attention on evaluating each application

- Focus on each applicant as an individual and evaluate their entire application package – information minimizes bias

- Use inclusion rather than exclusion decision-making processes
  Hugenberg et al., *J. Personality and Social Psychology*, 2006

- Stop periodically to evaluate your criteria and their application

- Accountability - Be able to defend every decision
Reviewing Applicants

Searching for Excellence & Diversity
A Guide for Search Committees at the University of Wisconsin–Madison
Second Edition

“We need diversity in discipline, intellectual outlook, cognitive style, and personality to offer students the breadth of ideas that constitutes a dynamic intellectual community.”

Wisconsin
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Research on Bias and Assumptions


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Reference List

References cited in this presentation AND MORE are found at:

https://www.zotero.org/groups/wiseli_library/items/collectionKey/RFDB2B24
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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