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 organisation’s hiring tendencies can also help reduce unconscious discrimination.

Reference letters for female medical faculty were shorter, more vague, and placed less emphasis on research than those for males.\(^6\)

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:\(^2\)

3 more articles in Nature or Science OR 20 more articles in specialist journals

The male candidate was offered a higher salary...

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

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

Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science & Technology (WWEST) is the operating name for the NSERC Chair for Women in Science and Engineering (CWSE), BC and Yukon Region. Our mission is to advance engineering and science as welcoming careers that serve our world through holistic understanding and creative, appropriate and sustainable solutions. 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 Chairholder

The Chair is held by Dr. Elizabeth Croft, P.Eng., FEC, FASME. Dr. Croft is the Associate Dean, Education and Professional Development in the Faculty of Applied Science, and a Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of British Columbia. She is also the Director of the Collaborative Advanced Robotics and Intelligent Systems (CARIS) Laboratory. Her research investigates how robotic systems can behave, and be perceived to behave, in a safe, predictable, and helpful manner. She is the lead investigator of “Engendering Engineering Success,” a 3-year interdisciplinary research project that aims to take an evidence-based approach to increasing the retention of women in engineering by understanding and changing aspects of workplace culture that place women at a disadvantage.

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