ADVANCE
AT THE EARTH INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Evidence of Unconscious Bias in Academic Settings

- **CVs** Even psychologists are more likely to hire a male job applicant than a female job applicant with an identical record. Steinpres et al. (1999) presented 238 psychologists with CVs from actual scientists; only the names were changed. Female tenure candidates were four times as likely to receive cautionary comments such as "we would have to see her job talk" and "I would need to see evidence that she had gotten these grants and publications on her own."

- **Letters** A study of over 300 recommendation letters for successful medical faculty applicants found that letters for females were shorter, placed less emphasis on research, more emphasis on teaching, contained more "grindstone adjectives" such as "hardworking" and "diligent," contained twice as many doubt-raisers, and were less likely to include stand-out adjectives such as "brilliant" and "superb" (Trix & Psenka, 2003).

- **Publications** A study of postdoctoral fellowships awarded in Sweden found that peer reviewers gave female applicants lower scores than male applicants who displayed the same level of scientific productivity (Wenneras and Wold, 1997).

- **Funding Success** Analysis of 128 applicants for a prestigious grant in Europe found that differences in male and female success rates depended on the discipline. Gender disparities were especially pronounced in Biology and the Earth Sciences (Brouns, 2000). During 2001-2003 female applicants for NIH grants received only 63% of the funding that male applicants received (RAND, 2005).

- **Salaries** Recent data indicate there is still a statistically significant differential (2.9% - 8.4%) in starting salaries for men and women faculty with comparable experience and rank (Toumanoff, 2005). Studies also show that salaries for women don't progress as quickly as salaries for men (Valian, 2005).

- **Small Numbers** Research has shown that women and minorities are judged more fairly when they are at least 30% of the applicant pool (Sackett et al., 1991; Heilman, 1980).

Other Research Findings

Gender

- Success is more frequently attributed to "skill" for males and "luck" for females, even when the evaluators are presented with evidence of equal success for both genders (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974).

- A 2000 study of symphony orchestras found that "blind" auditions increase the chance that a woman will be hired or promoted; researchers maintain that blind audition procedures alone accounted for 1/3 of the increase in the proportion of women musicians hired into top-tier American symphonies (Goldin and Rouse).

- Evaluators who are busy, distracted, or under time pressure give women lower ratings than men for the same written evaluations of performance (Martell, 1991). In such circumstances, evaluators are more likely to rely on stereotypes.

Race / Ethnicity

- A significant racial gap has been identified in the rate of callbacks for interviews; when resumes have traditionally white names they elicit 50% more callbacks than when they have black names (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2002).

- A 2000 study found that evaluators of candidates with ambiguous qualifications (i.e., unclear as to whether qualified or not) indicated stronger support for white applicants than for equally qualified African American applicants (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2000).

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Other Recommended Reading

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