REDUCING STEREOTYPIC BIASES IN HIRING

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Findings from research in social psychology on stereotypic biases

• Gender stereotypes or “schemas” bias the evaluations that are made of individuals, often in “male advantaging” ways.
• Gender stereotypes function as cognitive shortcuts.
• Stereotyping often occurs through lack of awareness.
• Both men and women are prone to biases.
• Even well-intentioned, nonsexist people are capable of bias.
• Biasing processes are more extreme when:
  • individuals are tired, rushed or otherwise cognitively burdened.
  • women are rare in a unit (“tokens”).
  • jobs are “male-typed.”
  • valid performance information is lacking.
  • criteria are vague or ambiguous.
• The good news is that biases can be reduced.

How stereotypic biases disadvantage women

• Stereotyping leads to the use of a gender-differentiated double standard for assessing competence and ability.
• Stereotypic biases can be embedded in seemingly objective supporting materials (recommendation letters, teaching evaluations).
• Stereotyping can result in seeing successful women as unfeminine or difficult (the “double bind”).
• Stereotyping can result in shifting evaluation criteria for women and men.
• Stereotyping can result in even harsher biases against women who are mothers.

What can be done?

• Underlying principle: disrupt the tendency to use stereotypes as cognitive shortcuts.
• Strategies/solutions:
  • Devote adequate time.
  • Read candidates’ work rather than relying solely on support materials.
  • Critically analyze supporting materials (recommendation letters, teaching evaluations, research statements).
  • Be accountable – be prepared to explain your decisions and rankings.
  • Be transparent—what are the criteria, are they the same for men and women, are they the right criteria?
  • Structure diverse groups and allow for maximum participation.
  • Think about how the job ad and descriptions might impact the applicant pool and perceived fit of the candidates.
  • Consider using a candidate evaluation form.