

Subtle Biases in Job Selection

Although laws may seem to govern many of our behaviors, there are still ways, many of which are very subtle, in which even good-intentioned people show biases toward others. Becoming aware of such biases is the first step toward remediating them.

A) We all have personal biases: Such biases (even unconscious) can include bias about sexuality, weight, gender, type of career, chosen, race, skin-tone, age, gender & science, disability, religion. We hope that we are well-intentioned and try not to have or at least show strong biases, especially against protected groups, but people, being people, still have subtle, but powerful biases. To examine your own implicit biases, we encourage you to visit the following website.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

B) Where are these biases? Implicit bias exist across the employment cycle. Below are a few examples:

First, there are Application Packet Biases. Couple of examples:

In the recommendation letters. Both male and female letter writers tend to write **longer and stronger** letters for male than female applicants. Women's letters tend to have more "**doubt raisers**" and women are often discussed in terms of their **communal (and not agentic)** traits despite the fact that most universities seek agentic applicants (Trix & Psenka, 2003).

Research Papers and C.V.s. Vitas of recognizable ethnic minority names (particularly if Black) are evaluated more negatively than are those of White names (King, Mendoza, Madera, Hebl, & Knight, 2006). One exception is that of Asian Americans, who are often evaluated more favorably than other ethnic groups (King et al., 2006).

Articles and C.V.s written by **men are evaluated more favorably** than are articles and C.V.s written by women, even after controlling for the article (Paludi & Bauer, 1983; Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999).

Second, there are Biases in the Interview.

1) We like people who are like us. When people are like us, a similarity effect can be present. The similarity can be in research area, personal interests, common identity ingroup cues (same school, same state, same sports fans) or even people who were trained in the same field as us or who do research similar to us. There is also a matching phenomenon – people even date and marry individuals who look similar to themselves.

2) Verbal and Nonverbal cues. If interviewer does a lot of talking and there is less silence, applicant is often liked more (Cascio). Smiling and nodding, attentiveness, and smaller interpersonal distance all increase comfort and interest, and potentially indirectly performance in an interview. Research indicates that Whites often nervous in interactions with Blacks. Moreover, there can be a cross-race reliance on nonverbal cues. This research reveals that there is a great deal of mistrust, misperceptions, and miscommunication that continue to occur

between the races (Shelton, Hebl, Richeson, & Dovidio, in press). We are more likely to have awkward interpersonal behaviors if there is bias.

3) Appearance bias can also exist, particularly with regard to an individual's perceived attractiveness, weight (obesity) or age .

As Cascio and Aguinis state: "The interview is sometimes a search for negative information". Appearance bias can be present, albeit unconsciously, as a search for negative information.

4) Stereotypes of a "good applicant" - We all have stereotypes of what they look like, how they act, and what sort of background that they have. If the applicant does not fit the stereotype, it can result in an implicit bias against that applicant.

5) Contrast effects – if person before or after is good / bad, makes difference. (*Exeter-all brought in the same day!*). If the first interview is not very strong, the second candidate can look much better in comparison. This is true even if the second candidate would not been seen as positively if he/she stood alone.

6) Similarly, there is a concept called "shifting standards." Research reveals that stereotypes seem to prompt lower minimum standards for women (i.e., getting them into the pool) but prompt higher confirmatory standards (i.e., actually hiring them) than for men (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001).

Third, there are other Biases we have: Job/Gender Congruency.

1) **In masculine-stereotyped occupations** (i.e, sciences and engineering), men's performance is evaluated more positively than is women's, even after controlling for the performance itself. This bias shows up in scores of studies and is consistent (i.e., Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988; Top, 1991).

2) **When women act in noncommunal ways**, they are penalized by evaluators; however, when they act in communal ways, they don't get the job (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

C) What to do? MOST IMPORTANTLY, be aware of these biases!

After becoming aware, there are several other things we can do:

1) Use a diverse set of interviewers – use many different individuals so the idiosyncratic biases of one individual does not affect the whole.

2) Use structure as much as possible – question standardization, response evaluation and scoring, basing questions on job analysis, limiting prompting and elaborating cues, not allowing questions from interviewer until the end

3) If not structure, use an interview guide and take notes to guide your memory.

4) Increase information - biases are less likely to occur as the amount of information increases (Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). Hence, using only vitas is more likely to result in biases than is using extensive information (i.e., contacting references, written statements).

5) Hold yourself and your colleagues accountable for taking into account biases and working to move beyond them.

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