

The Presence and Role of Biases in the Academic Life Cycle

Conscious or unconscious biases about gender (as well as age and race) influence decision-making on all levels: whether a child is encouraged to pursue the trades or a college degree; whether a resume is read; whether an job interview is offered.

In the academy, these biases affect all areas of the academic life-cycle: the treatment and evaluation of graduate students, the initial hiring process, applications for research grants and promotion, evaluations of teaching and research potential and quality – even the likelihood that a scholar’s publications will appear in a list of recommended readings for a course.

In circumstances where the gender of applicants for positions can be hidden, the effect on the gender equality among those applicants who advance through the hiring process is substantial. One very notable example is the increase in the number of women hired for orchestral jobs since many orchestras went to “blind auditions” where candidates play behind a curtain (<https://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2013/oct/14/blind-auditions-orchestras-gender-bias>). The tradition of blind-peer reviewing of submissions to journals has a similar result on acceptance rates by journals.

The challenge for us all is to be aware of our biases and to fight against them. This panel will explore three areas in which biases affect how women experience the academic life cycle in graduate studies, hiring, and the publication process, and what can be done to make us aware of these biases and to mitigate them.