

Scenario 2: Constructed Criteria

You are reviewing the hiring decisions in a large firm, after a complaint from an unsuccessful candidate for a Team Leader job.

The unsuccessful candidate has plenty of hands-on experience of the work but fewer qualifications. The successful candidate had less hands-on experience, but was well qualified.

The chair of the hiring committee justified the appointment by highlighting the importance of formal qualifications for the position.

The unsuccessful candidate alleges gender bias. She points to a parallel position which was filled in the firm, and for which an experience but under-qualified candidate was appointed over an inexperienced but well qualified candidate.

What advice would you give to chairs of future hiring committees so they could ensure a gender impartial hiring process?

Notes for participants

This scenario is based on experiments which showed that in a hiring choice for a new Chief of Police between a streetwise but uneducated and an educated but not streetwise candidates, participants shifted their criteria to emphasise the importance of the quality possessed by the male candidate. Their judgements of candidate quality were not effected by gender - so they rated the CVs shown to them as equally high quality, but the suitability for the job was affected by gender. (Uhlmann and Cohen, 2005).

Also relevant is work which shows that the same behaviours can be interpreted differently depending on how they align with stereotypes or expectations. Brescoll & Uhlmann (2008) showed that a man shown reacting angrily was judged to be justified, his anger caused by something about the situation. A video a woman reacting angrily was judged to show her to be emotional, and her anger unjustified.

Brescoll, V. L., & Uhlmann, E. L. (2008). Can an angry woman get ahead? Status conferral, gender, and expression of emotion in the workplace. *Psychological Science*, 19, 268–275.

Uhlmann, E. L., & Cohen, G. L. (2005). Constructed criteria redefining merit to justify discrimination. *Psychological Science*, 16(6), 474-480.