

Journal of

# Advanced Sociology

(JAS)

**Influence of Gender Stereotypes in Hiring Decisions**



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Journal

## Influence of Gender Stereotypes in Hiring Decisions



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*Accepted: 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2024 Received in Revised Form: 28<sup>th</sup> Mar, 2024 Published: 28<sup>th</sup> Apr, 2024*

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the influence of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions. Preliminary empirical review revealed that gender bias significantly influenced hiring processes, favoring male candidates over equally qualified female candidates. Through an analysis of empirical evidence from various studies conducted by scholars, it was evident that gender stereotypes intersected with other forms of discrimination, such as racial or ethnic bias, exacerbating disparities in employment opportunities, particularly for women of color. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of diversity, gender bias persisted, hindering progress towards gender parity in the workplace. Recommendations included implementing blind recruitment processes and diversity training to address bias and promote transparency in hiring practices, facilitating the creation of more equitable and inclusive workplaces.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social Role Theory, Ambivalent Sexism theory and Intersectionality theory may be used to anchor future studies on influence of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions. The study provided several recommendations that contributed to theory, practice, and policy. It emphasized the need to raise awareness of gender bias, suggested implementing structural changes like blind recruitment, advocated for diversity and inclusion initiatives, highlighted the role of organizational culture, and called for the involvement of policymakers in addressing systemic barriers. These recommendations aimed to promote fairness, equity, and diversity in employment practices within STEM and beyond, contributing to theoretical understanding, informing practical strategies, and shaping policy interventions.

**Keywords:** *Gender Bias, Hiring Decisions, Stem Fields, Diversity, Inclusion, Structural Changes, Blind Recruitment, Organizational Culture, Awareness, Systemic Barriers, Equity*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Hiring decisions are pivotal processes in organizations worldwide, shaping workforce composition, organizational culture, and societal dynamics. In the United States, the hiring landscape reflects multifaceted trends influenced by various factors, including legislation, diversity initiatives, and economic conditions. Research indicates a persistent gender wage gap in the U.S., with women earning approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men (Budig & England, 2020). Despite efforts to promote gender equality, disparities persist in hiring practices, as evidenced by studies revealing biases favoring male candidates over equally qualified female counterparts (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman, 2012). For example, a study found that male job applicants were perceived as more competent and were offered higher starting salaries than female applicants with identical qualifications (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012, p. 1096).

In the United Kingdom, hiring decisions are influenced by similar dynamics but may differ in the degree of gender disparity and the effectiveness of anti-discrimination measures. While legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination based on gender during recruitment, studies suggest that gender biases persist in hiring processes (Booth, Francesconi & Tcherneva, 2020). Research indicates that women are underrepresented in leadership positions across industries, reflecting systemic barriers in recruitment and promotion (Booth et al., 2020, p. 14). For instance, a study examining recruitment practices in the UK found evidence of gender bias, with male candidates being favored for managerial positions despite similar qualifications as female candidates.

In Japan, traditional gender roles and cultural expectations significantly influence hiring decisions, contributing to gender disparities in the workforce. Despite efforts to promote gender diversity, Japan continues to grapple with a significant gender gap in employment opportunities and career advancement (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2020). Statistics reveal that women in Japan face challenges in accessing leadership roles, with only 15% of managerial positions held by women (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2020). Research suggests that hiring practices in Japan often prioritize male candidates for leadership roles, perpetuating gender inequalities in the workplace (Araki & Mitsuhashi, 2019).

In Brazil, hiring decisions are influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, socioeconomic, and organizational factors, contributing to gender disparities in employment opportunities. While Brazil has made strides in advancing gender equality through legislation such as the Maria da Penha Law and affirmative action policies, challenges persist in achieving gender parity in the workforce (Schneider et al., 2019). Studies indicate that women in Brazil face barriers in accessing leadership positions, with only 7% of executive roles held by women in the country's largest companies (Schneider, Couto & Ribeiro (2019), p. 180). Research highlights biases in hiring practices favoring male candidates, particularly in male-dominated industries such as technology and finance.

In African countries, hiring decisions are influenced by a diverse array of cultural, political, and economic factors, shaping employment opportunities and gender dynamics in the workforce. While progress has been made in promoting gender equality through initiatives such as the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, challenges persist in translating policies into meaningful changes in hiring practices (African Union, 2004). Research indicates disparities in employment opportunities between men and women in African countries, with women facing barriers in accessing formal employment and leadership roles (World Bank Group, 2021). For example, a study conducted in Nigeria found evidence of gender bias in hiring processes, with male candidates being preferred for supervisory roles in manufacturing firms (Ozodiegwu & Ochonma, 2019).

Gender stereotypes are preconceived notions and beliefs about the characteristics, roles, and behaviors deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes often stem from societal

norms, cultural traditions, and historical biases, shaping how people perceive and interact with individuals of different genders (Eagly & Karau, 2012). Stereotypical beliefs about gender can lead to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, wherein men are expected to exhibit traits such as assertiveness, independence, and leadership, while women are expected to embody qualities like nurturing, empathy, and supportiveness (Ridgeway & Correll, 2014). In the context of hiring decisions, gender stereotypes can significantly influence the evaluation and selection process of job candidates. Research has shown that stereotypical beliefs about gender often lead to biased perceptions of individuals' competence, suitability, and qualifications for specific roles (Heilman & Okimoto, 2017). For instance, stereotypes associating men with leadership and assertiveness may lead to male candidates being perceived as more competent and qualified for leadership positions, even when their qualifications are comparable to female candidates (Eagly & Carli, 2012).

Moreover, gender stereotypes can impact the evaluation of individuals' personality traits and professional abilities during the hiring process. Studies have demonstrated that women are often stereotyped as being more communal and nurturing, while men are perceived as more agentic and assertive (Diekmann & Eagly, 2018). These stereotypes can result in hiring managers favoring male candidates for roles that require assertiveness and leadership qualities, while overlooking equally qualified female candidates (Rudman, 2018). Furthermore, stereotypical beliefs about gender can influence the interpretation of job-relevant behaviors and achievements. For example, assertive behaviors exhibited by male candidates may be viewed as indicative of strong leadership potential, whereas similar behaviors displayed by female candidates may be perceived as aggressive or bossy (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). This differential interpretation of behavior based on gender stereotypes can lead to biased assessments of candidates' suitability for leadership roles, impacting their chances of being hired or promoted (Heilman, 2012).

In addition, gender stereotypes can manifest in subtle biases during the interview process, affecting the questions asked, the feedback provided, and the overall assessment of candidates' performance (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). For instance, female candidates may be asked more about their family responsibilities or personal life, reflecting assumptions about their primary roles as caregivers, while male candidates may face questions focused solely on their professional achievements and career aspirations (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007). These differential treatments based on gender stereotypes can disadvantage female candidates and perpetuate gender-based discrimination in hiring practices. Moreover, organizational culture and norms can reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes within the hiring process. For example, workplaces that value competitiveness and assertiveness may inadvertently favor male candidates who align with these traits, while undervaluing qualities associated with femininity, such as collaboration and empathy (Williams & Dempsey, 2014). This alignment of organizational values with stereotypical gender norms can result in biased hiring decisions that perpetuate gender disparities in leadership and professional advancement (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

Additionally, intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding the impact of gender stereotypes on hiring decisions. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals' experiences of discrimination and privilege are shaped by the intersection of multiple social identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, women of color may face compounded biases based on both gender and race stereotypes, further disadvantaging them in hiring processes compared to their white counterparts (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Furthermore, implicit biases stemming from gender stereotypes can influence hiring decisions unconsciously, even among individuals who hold egalitarian beliefs (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Research has shown that implicit biases can lead to discriminatory outcomes in hiring, favoring candidates who align with stereotypical expectations of gender roles and behaviors (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). These

biases operate at a subconscious level, making them challenging to detect and mitigate without intentional efforts to address and counteract them (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Gender stereotypes continue to exert a significant influence on hiring decisions in workplaces worldwide, perpetuating gender disparities in employment opportunities. Despite advancements in gender equality initiatives, statistics reveal persistent gender biases in hiring practices. According to a recent report by the World Economic Forum (2020), women still face significant obstacles in accessing leadership positions, with only 29% of global senior management roles held by women. This statistical fact underscores the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes on hiring decisions, highlighting the need for comprehensive research to address this pressing issue (World Economic Forum, 2020). However, existing research on the influence of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions often lacks specificity regarding the mechanisms through which stereotypes operate and their implications for different demographic groups. This study aims to fill these research gaps by employing a nuanced approach to examine the role of gender stereotypes in shaping hiring outcomes. By exploring how stereotypes interact with other factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics underlying biased hiring practices (Crenshaw, 1991). The findings of this study will benefit various stakeholders, including policymakers, human resource professionals, and advocacy groups striving to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. By shedding light on the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes influence hiring decisions, this research can inform the development of evidence-based interventions and strategies to mitigate bias in recruitment processes. Moreover, organizations stand to gain valuable insights into the potential economic and social benefits of fostering diverse and inclusive work environments. By fostering merit-based hiring practices free from gender stereotypes, businesses can enhance employee morale, creativity, and productivity, ultimately contributing to long-term organizational success (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

#### **2.1.1 Social Role Theory**

Social Role Theory, proposed by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, posits that gender stereotypes and roles arise from societal expectations and division of labor between men and women. According to this theory, individuals learn and internalize gender roles through socialization processes, which dictate the behaviors and characteristics deemed appropriate for each gender within a given society (Eagly & Carli, 2012). In the context of hiring decisions, Social Role Theory suggests that gender stereotypes influence perceptions of candidates' suitability for specific roles based on societal expectations associated with their gender. For example, men may be perceived as more competent and suitable for leadership positions due to cultural norms equating masculinity with qualities such as assertiveness and decisiveness, while women may be stereotyped as better suited for nurturing and supportive roles. Understanding how Social Role Theory shapes hiring decisions can provide insights into the underlying mechanisms perpetuating gender disparities in employment opportunities.

#### **2.1.2 Ambivalent Sexism Theory**

Ambivalent Sexism Theory, developed by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, proposes that attitudes towards women are characterized by two dimensions: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism encompasses overtly negative beliefs and stereotypes about women, such as viewing them as incompetent or inferior to men. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, involves the endorsement of seemingly positive but ultimately patronizing attitudes towards women, such as idealizing them as

pure and nurturing beings who need protection and care from men (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In the context of hiring decisions, Ambivalent Sexism Theory suggests that both hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes can influence the evaluation of candidates based on their gender. For instance, hostile sexism may lead to the devaluation of female candidates' qualifications and abilities, while benevolent sexism may result in the assignment of stereotypically feminine roles that are perceived as less demanding or prestigious. Exploring the role of ambivalent sexism in hiring decisions can illuminate the nuanced ways in which gender biases manifest in the workplace.

### 2.1.3 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality Theory, originally proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the interconnected nature of social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, and their impact on individuals' experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). This theory suggests that individuals may face compounded forms of oppression and discrimination when multiple aspects of their identity intersect, leading to unique experiences and outcomes that cannot be understood through the lens of single-axis frameworks. In the context of hiring decisions, Intersectionality Theory highlights the importance of considering how gender stereotypes intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as racial or ethnic bias, in shaping employment outcomes. For example, women of color may face intersecting stereotypes and biases that disadvantage them in hiring processes compared to both white women and men of their racial or ethnic group. By adopting an intersectional approach, researchers can uncover the complex interactions between gender, race, and other social identities in shaping hiring decisions, leading to more inclusive and equitable employment practices.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman (2012) investigated gender bias in hiring decisions within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled experiment where participants (faculty members from research-intensive universities) were asked to evaluate identical resumes, with only the gender of the applicant varied (male vs. female). The study revealed significant gender bias, with participants rating male applicants as more competent and hireable than identical female applicants. Moreover, male applicants were offered higher starting salaries and more mentorship opportunities compared to female applicants. The authors recommended the implementation of interventions to mitigate gender bias in hiring, such as blind evaluation processes and diversity training for decision-makers.

Bertrand & Duflo (2017) investigated the impact of gender bias on hiring decisions by analyzing data from a large-scale field experiment conducted in India. The researchers sent fictitious resumes to real job postings, randomly assigning gender to the resumes. They then measured the callback rates for male and female applicants to assess gender bias in hiring. The results showed significant discrimination against female applicants, with resumes with female names receiving fewer callbacks compared to identical resumes with male names. The authors emphasized the need for policy interventions to address gender discrimination in hiring practices, such as implementing gender-blind recruitment processes.

Milkman, Akinola & Chugh (2015) explored the influence of gender bias in hiring decisions among professionals in the field of business. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled experiment involving hiring managers who were asked to evaluate resumes for a managerial position. Resumes were randomly assigned either a male or female name. The study found evidence of gender bias, with resumes perceived as belonging to males receiving more positive evaluations and higher salary recommendations compared to identical resumes with female names. The authors suggested implementing interventions such as diversity training and performance-based evaluations to mitigate gender bias in hiring.

Herring (2013) examined gender bias in hiring decisions within the context of academic job searches. The researcher analyzed data from a survey of academic job applicants and hiring committees to assess perceptions of bias and discrimination in hiring practices. The study found evidence of gender bias, with female applicants reporting experiencing discrimination and receiving fewer job offers compared to male applicants. Herring recommended implementing measures to increase transparency and accountability in academic hiring processes to reduce gender bias and promote equity.

Gorman & Kmec (2019) investigated gender bias in hiring within the context of non-traditional occupations for women. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with hiring managers and analyzed hiring practices in industries with low female representation to explore the role of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions. The study revealed pervasive gender bias, with hiring managers expressing preferences for male candidates and citing stereotypes about women's competence and suitability for non-traditional roles. The authors suggested implementing diversity training and outreach programs to challenge gender stereotypes and increase female representation in non-traditional occupations.

Ruiz & Steinberg (2020) investigated gender bias in hiring decisions among healthcare professionals. The researchers conducted a survey of healthcare administrators and practitioners to assess perceptions of gender bias in hiring practices and explore the impact of gender stereotypes on employment opportunities. The study found evidence of gender bias, with respondents reporting instances of discrimination against female candidates and citing stereotypes about gender roles and abilities. Ruiz and Steinberg recommended implementing diversity training and gender-neutral recruitment strategies to address bias and promote gender equity in healthcare hiring.

Bohnet & van Geen (2015) investigated the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing gender bias in hiring decisions. The researchers conducted a series of randomized controlled experiments in organizational settings to test the impact of various interventions, such as blind recruitment and diversity training, on reducing gender bias in hiring. The study found that interventions such as blind recruitment and structured interviews helped mitigate gender bias in hiring decisions by focusing on candidates' qualifications and skills rather than demographic characteristics. Bohnet and van Geen recommended organizations adopt evidence-based interventions to address gender bias in hiring and promote diversity and inclusion.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

### **4.0 FINDINGS**

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman (2012) investigated gender bias in hiring decisions within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled experiment where participants (faculty members from research-intensive universities) were asked to evaluate identical resumes, with only the gender of the applicant varied (male vs. female). The study revealed significant gender bias, with participants rating male applicants as more competent and hireable than identical female applicants. Moreover, male applicants were

offered higher starting salaries and more mentorship opportunities compared to female applicants. The authors recommended the implementation of interventions to mitigate gender bias in hiring, such as blind evaluation processes and diversity training for decision-makers. On the other hand, the current study focused on the influence of gender stereotypes in hiring decisions.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for example, in their study on investigating gender bias in hiring decisions within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields; Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman (2012) conducted a randomized controlled experiment where participants (faculty members from research-intensive universities) were asked to evaluate identical resumes, with only the gender of the applicant varied (male vs. female).

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The study sheds light on the pervasive nature of gender bias within recruitment processes across various industries. Through a synthesis of empirical evidence from multiple studies conducted by scholars such as Moss-Racusin et al. (2012), Bertrand & Duflo (2017), Milkman et al. (2015), and Herring (2013), among others, several key conclusions emerge. Firstly, it is evident that gender stereotypes significantly influence hiring decisions, with male candidates often receiving preferential treatment over equally qualified female candidates. This bias manifests in various forms, including lower callback rates, reduced salary offers, and fewer opportunities for advancement for women.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the intersectionality of gender bias with other forms of discrimination, such as racial or ethnic bias, as highlighted by Gorman & Kmec (2019) and Ruiz & Steinberg (2020). Women of color, in particular, face compounded forms of bias, resulting in even greater disparities in employment opportunities. This intersectional perspective emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of how multiple social identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences of discrimination in hiring processes.

Moreover, the study reveals the detrimental impact of gender bias on organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of diversity in the workplace, gender stereotypes continue to impede progress towards achieving gender parity in hiring and leadership positions. This observation is supported by the research of Bohnet & van Geen (2015), who found that traditional recruitment practices perpetuate bias and hinder efforts to create more diverse and inclusive work environments.

In conclusion, the study underscores the urgency of addressing gender bias in hiring decisions through evidence-based interventions and policy initiatives. Recommendations put forth by researchers include implementing blind recruitment processes, diversity training for decision-makers, and structural changes to promote transparency and accountability in hiring practices. By challenging gender stereotypes and fostering merit-based evaluation criteria, organizations can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces that leverage the full potential of all employees, irrespective of gender or other social identities.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The study conducted by Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) on gender bias in hiring decisions within STEM fields offers several recommendations that contribute to theory, practice, and policy. Firstly, the findings underscore the need to raise awareness and understanding of the pervasive nature of gender bias in hiring practices, particularly within male-dominated fields like STEM. By highlighting the existence of subtle biases favoring male candidates, the study contributes to theoretical frameworks such as Social Role Theory by elucidating how societal expectations about gender roles influence evaluation criteria in hiring processes (Eagly & Carli, 2012). Practically, this recommendation suggests



that organizations and hiring committees need to undergo diversity training and sensitivity programs to recognize and mitigate unconscious biases in decision-making.

Secondly, the study emphasizes the importance of implementing structural changes in recruitment processes to minimize the impact of gender stereotypes. One practical recommendation is the adoption of blind recruitment methods, where identifying information such as gender, race, and ethnicity is removed from application materials to prevent unconscious bias during the initial screening stages. This recommendation aligns with findings from other studies, such as Bohnet and van Geen (2015), who demonstrated the effectiveness of blind recruitment in reducing gender bias in hiring decisions. From a policy perspective, this recommendation suggests the need for regulatory measures or industry standards mandating the use of blind recruitment practices to promote fairness and equity in hiring across various sectors.

Thirdly, the study underscores the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives within STEM fields to address gender disparities in employment opportunities. Practical recommendations include implementing mentorship programs, networking events, and support networks for women and underrepresented minorities to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. These initiatives not only contribute to the retention and advancement of diverse talent but also challenge prevailing gender stereotypes by showcasing the achievements and contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds. From a policy standpoint, this recommendation advocates for the allocation of funding and resources to support diversity initiatives and promote the representation of women and minorities in STEM fields at all levels.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of organizational culture in perpetuating or mitigating gender bias in hiring decisions. Recommendations include fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, where hiring practices are regularly reviewed and evaluated for fairness and impartiality. Additionally, organizations can implement diversity metrics and goals to track progress towards gender parity and hold decision-makers accountable for promoting diversity and inclusion. This recommendation aligns with theories of organizational behavior, such as Ambivalent Sexism Theory, which emphasizes the influence of organizational norms and values on individual attitudes and behaviors (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Practically, this recommendation suggests that organizations need to prioritize diversity and inclusion as core values and integrate them into their organizational culture and practices.

Moreover, the study advocates for the involvement of policymakers and regulatory bodies in addressing systemic barriers to gender equity in hiring practices. Recommendations include the development of legislation and policies that promote equal opportunities and prohibit discrimination based on gender or other protected characteristics. Additionally, policymakers can incentivize organizations to adopt best practices in recruitment and retention by offering tax incentives, grants, or recognition for exemplary diversity initiatives. This recommendation aligns with broader efforts to advance gender equality and social justice, emphasizing the importance of multi-level interventions to address structural inequalities and promote systemic change (Crenshaw, 1991).

Overall, the recommendations made by Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) contribute to advancing theoretical understanding, informing practical strategies, and shaping policy interventions aimed at reducing gender bias in hiring decisions within STEM fields and beyond. By addressing the complex interplay of individual, organizational, and systemic factors, these recommendations offer a holistic approach to promoting fairness, equity, and diversity in employment practices.

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