

Gender Bias in Recruiting: Developing a Social Practice Perspective

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Abstract

Unconscious bias training has become a popular intervention for eliminating discrimination in the workplace. Particularly recruitment processes are said to become fairer and more objective if gender biases are eliminated through training of personnel. However, the concept of gender bias, and particularly the idea that it can be trained away, has also been critiqued as too limited in its focus on individual mental processes, thereby neglecting effects of context, interaction and power. Taking this critique as our starting point, we argue that gender bias needs to be theorised in relation to a specific interaction and normative context. Building on cognitive social psychology, critical social psychology and on gender as a social practice we show that gender bias is not only an individual, but a fundamentally social activity that is embedded within organisational norms and power relations and reproduced in interaction. By theorising gender bias as a social practice, we expand the concept of gender bias beyond individual cognition. This perspective not only opens up the scope of explanation but is also a vital concept for exploring and combatting bias in recruiting.

KEYWORDS: implicit bias, gender, recruitment, social practice, critical social psychology

Why unconscious bias trainings are not enough

Unconscious bias training has been implemented in many organizational settings worldwide (OECD 2014; Williamson and Foley 2018), for instance in academia (Maes et al. 2012), to prevent discrimination rooted in biased employment decision making. The idea is that making unconscious bias conscious has become the “magic bullet” for solving any problem pertaining to discrimination, particularly in recruitment processes (Tate and Page 2018, 141). Making people aware of their biases is also supposed to change their behavior (Valian 1998). The assumption is that if we become aware of our own biases, we are made to think and learn. Research on bias training, in general, demonstrates that it is suitable for raising awareness (Carnes et al. 2015; Majumdar et al. 2004; Moss-Racusin et al. 2016). As indicated by a recent meta-analysis conducted by Bezrukova et al. (2016), diversity training also tends to increase the respective knowledge of the participants. However, these positive effects appear to be of short duration (Girod et al. 2016; Jackson, Hillard and Schneider 2014). And, more importantly, they not only fail to change behavior and prevent discrimination but may even legitimize it.

First, there is a rather “huge leap from knowing about bias to acting differently,” as Noon (2018, 200) argued. For instance, studies did not find a direct causal link between implicit association test scores and discrimination, and hence, concrete behavior (Forscher et al. 2019). While the training appears to change attitudes, the assumed effect on behavior is largely unknown and contested (Paluck and Green 2009; Price et al. 2005). A recent report by Britain’s Equality and Human Rights Commission (Atewologun, Tresh and Cornish 2018, 7), which examined 18 papers evaluating unconscious bias training, concluded that “the evidence for UBT’s [unconscious bias training] ability effectively to change behaviour is limited. Most of the evidence reviewed did not use valid measures of behaviour change.” Moreover, bias training may backfire and activate, instead of resolve, stereotypes (Apfelbaum et al. 2008; Duguid

and Thomas-Hunt 2015; Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2009).

Taking these shortcomings as a start, we elaborate on a more comprehensive understanding of gender bias that moves beyond mere cognition. Systematically unpacking the psychological concept of unconscious gender bias, we argue that the aims of bias training have so far been under-complex as they are too narrowly focused on raising individual awareness and initiating learning. From an organizational perspective, implementing bias training has been criticized for protecting “systemic ignorance” rather than eliminating it (Applebaum 2019, 130). Explaining discrimination with individual mental processes neglects institutional structures, norms, and power imbalances (Noon 2018, 198; Tate and Page 2018). This not only ignores the complex social and organizational situations and practices of recruiting but also bypasses important strands of social psychological theories. By reviewing pertinent psychological theories and debates, we show how gender bias can be theorized as a context-specific and interactive accomplishment embedded within organizational norms and power relations—in short, a social practice. Developing this distinctively psychological perspective, we contribute a fresh take on gender bias as a social practice. Our aim is to show how the concept of gender bias can be developed in a more comprehensive way to explain and tackle bias in recruiting. Having said that, we argue that tackling gender bias in recruiting will only be effective if interventions are aimed at changing organizational structures and practices that are implicated in (re)producing gender hierarchy (i.e., the habitual privileging of the masculine over the feminine) (Nentwich and Kelan 2014). In the concluding section, we elaborate on the implications for rethinking interventions aimed at reducing gender bias in recruitment.

Gender bias in recruiting: Moving beyond the individual

Bias training is aimed at creating awareness and making unconscious bias conscious. However,

this objective is problematic in at least two ways. First, it neglects long-lasting debates in social psychology, in which the notion of unconscious bias is contested in particular (Fazio and Olsen 2003; Greenwald and Lai 2017). Introducing implicit bias, Banaji and Greenwald (1995) differentiated conscious and unconscious attitudes as two different modes of information processing (Gawronski, Hofmann and Wilbur 2006). The negative judgments and attitudes that a person might hold against a certain outgroup are explained as resulting from the automatic and often unnoticed activation of negative stereotypes. However, more recent studies have shown that implicit biases are not necessarily unconscious or automatized reactions but can also be interpreted as spontaneous affective reactions that people are aware of (Hahn and Gawronski 2019). Thus, paying attention to one's spontaneous affective reactions helps to prevent discriminatory behavior. Therefore, bias training should move beyond raising awareness and rather aim to acknowledge bias and act upon it.

Second, research on gender bias so far mainly focuses on individual cognition. The social context, power, and norms are not touched upon and are thus treated as a black box, thereby leaving important questions unanswered. This leaves out important aspects when it comes to explaining recruitment decisions, which do have a context. There is a company, an occupation, a job description that needs to be considered. Furthermore, employment decisions result from debate and discussion, even if they are often made by individuals. Finally, recruitment decisions are inherently social, and thus power and social norms are at stake and need to be taken into account. In the following three sections, we explain in greater detail how the concept of gender bias needs to be expanded, amplifying its potential by taking context, interaction, and social norms into account.

Gender bias beyond individual mental processes: Incorporating social context

Gender bias is assumed to be relevant for recruitment, particularly if there is a lack of fit or incongruity (Eagly and Karau 2002) between gender stereotypes and the characteristics of the job. Ashcraft (2013), for instance, argues that people not only derive identity from their work, but work also derives identity from associated people. More specifically, certain jobs have certain properties that fit certain persons, but not others. Thus, evaluations of possible job candidates are gendered because the required job features are automatically perceived to be matched by a male job candidate (Ashcraft 2013). Depending on the masculinity associated with a position, decision makers are likely to perceive women as ill-equipped or even deficient in terms of attributes that are thought to be relevant for succeeding in the job (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2012, 118). Thus, performance expectations for female applicants are lower, and so are their chances of getting the respective job. Furthermore, a female skill set is portrayed differently compared to a male skill set, for instance, in the context of being recommended as a member of a medical faculty, as shown by Trix and Psenka (2003). These automatic processes represent implicit biases, resulting in stereotypical thinking and discrimination.

Perceived masculinity is dependent on the job itself, but also occupation (military versus education), academic fields (sciences versus humanities), function, and organizational hierarchy (Heilman 2012, 118). The other side of the coin is stereotypes about women, which are more salient when women are perceived as typical females, for instance when they are physically attractive (Heilman and Stopeck 1985) or have children (Heilman and Okimoto 2008). Moreover, structural factors such as minority status or diversity policies can accentuate a women's gender in certain organizational contexts (Heilman 2012).

This lack of fit perception determines the way information is processed (i.e., attention,

interpretation, and recall of information) (Heilman 2012), which are related to the recruitment, selection, and promotion of women. A seminal meta-analysis by Koch, D'Mello, and Sackett (2015) on gender bias in employment decisions showed that the degree of incongruence between stereotypical gender traits and the gender stereotype of a job determines the strength of the bias, being most pronounced in male-dominated jobs. The authors also challenge the assumption that additional information on the evaluated person reduces or even removes gender bias. However, the perceived fit or congruity is dependent on the organizational context and the "cultural construal of leadership" (Koenig et al. 2011, 637). This is empirically supported by Koch et al. (2015), who found that women are more likely to face discrimination in male-dominated environments, which tend to be the ones highest in salary and prestige, but not in female-dominated or integrated ones. This research shows that information processing is not only an individual mental process but is highly dependent on the context.

In a similar vein, gender schema theory (Anderson, Spiro and Montague 1977) has highlighted that our expectations of women and men as well as our evaluations of their work are shaped by gender schemata. Gender schemata are defined as "a set of implicit, or nonconscious, hypotheses about sex differences" (Valian 1998, 2). A central assumption of schema theory is that schemata are built up through multiple situations with similar information (Nishida 1999). Once a schema has been established, information is processed top-down through the schema and not bottom-up through the information contained in each encounter. Hence, the cultural and historical categorizations of gender are crucial for individual information processing and for what is perceived as normal (Nishida 1999).

While cognitive schema theory convincingly shows that the enactment of gender bias is context-dependent, it does not explain why and how these associations become relevant in different social situations, e.g. "how stereotypes and prejudice are communicated, taken up or resisted by others" (Durrheim 2012, 187). Stereotypes and

prejudice not only depend on the context in which they are activated, they are also fundamentally social activities (Shotter 1993). In the following sections, we further unpack these arguments that discursive psychology makes by emphasizing the interactive nature of gender bias.

Gender bias beyond automatized activation: The social function of prejudiced talk

Gender bias is usually explained with basic cognitive processes of categorization. Categorization organizes, orders, and manages information processing and serves to stabilize individual world views (Tajfel 1978). It is therefore suggested that thinking is pervasively infused with distortion and simplification as categories are either activated or not. The activation of a category is explained with salience and is hence purely situational: Either the situation makes a category salient, or it does not (Fiske and Taylor 2008). Once it is salient, cultural gender beliefs are activated and result in bias (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). However, research studying talk-in-interaction (Billig 1996; Edwards 1991) has emphasized that both the selection of a category and the category being effectuated in a situation is more than an automated process. Categorization in this perspective becomes "something we do, in talk, in order to accomplish social actions (persuasions, blamings, denial, refutations, accusations, etc.)" (Edwards 1991, 517). Hence, arguments are never only uttered; they are criticized and justified (Billig 1985, 1996). From this perspective, stereotypes serve as rhetorical resources: "Racial stereotypes are not simply repressed anachronistic remnants that leak, undetected, into behaviour. They are also rhetorical resources that are used to account for one's preferences and behaviours" (Durrheim 2012, 192). Hence, bias is always located in a situated argumentative exchange, and it is worth examining the situations in which more or less biased arguments are invoked, but then either supported or challenged (Billig 1985, 99).

Further investigating how categories are selected in interaction, Billig (1985) shows that categorization always also involves particularization. With particularization, Billig emphasizes that the particular features upon which a category is built need to be selected out of an array of possible distinctive features. Hence, he contrasts the view of the pervasive, inevitable, distorting use of the categorization process with the equally necessary and pervasive process of particularization. As these processes are not predetermined, the selection of a category is potentially open for discussion. "If the world can be categorized in different ways, then the choice of one particular categorization can be seen as being part of an argument against another way of viewing things and is to be defended by argument against argument" (Billig 1985, 97). Categories can be challenged by particularizations, and particularizations can be challenged by categorizations. Here, the rhetorical, argumentative perspective comes into play: every topic has its countertopic (e.g., every prejudiced attitude can be countered with a different attitude), both of which are enacted in argumentation. In fact, categorization and the activation of a certain cognitive schema are not necessarily inevitable and might be as open to critique as is enacting the power relations that are in place (Augoustinos 2016, 246). Gender bias in recruitment is thus not so much an automatized process but a "collaborative accomplishment" (Condor and Figgou 2012, 207).

The relevance of the argumentative nature of categorization for gender bias in recruitment is vitally shown by a recent study by van den Brink et al. (2016) analyzing committee meetings of recruitment panels in a Swedish bank and a Danish professional services firm. Both companies featured a promotion system that was based on performance reviews conducted by a committee after a certain employment period. The researchers describe several rhetorical strategies that inflated the male candidates' strengths while downplaying their weaknesses. This dynamic was reversed for female candidates; their strengths were downplayed while their weaknesses were inflated. For male candidates, this played out primarily by dedicating most of the available time to discussing

men's strengths rather than their weaknesses. Ambivalent descriptions of male candidates' abilities were often ignored by the committees or reframed as a positive—hence, categorization was countered with particularization. In addition, mainly men were ascribed "star potential" (van den Brink et al. 2016, 25). Candidates were praised for their humor, optimism, or charming personalities. None of these traits were part of the ideal candidate profile, but they gave the committee members the impression that the "chemistry is right" (van den Brink et al. 2016, 26).

A second mechanism described was to downplay men's weaknesses. Weaknesses were often reframed as strengths or seen as something candidates would overcome with time, especially if they were young. For example, a male candidate who was described as "too passive" by the committee received feedback that he was "secure, calm and stable" (van den Brink et al. 2016, 26). The initial weakness was reframed as his specific leadership style. On the other hand, female candidates' strengths were downplayed, and their weaknesses inflated. Women's qualifications were usually not discussed in detail; they were evaluated based on whether they had passed the criteria for the management development program. Overall, when women were ascribed potential, it was usually the potential to reach an initial management position, not the "star potential" (van den Brink et al. 2016, 25) to rise to top management. Women's strengths were often reframed as weaknesses. For example, a candidate who was perceived as overly assertive got the feedback to be more "humble" or "gentle", traits that are not associated with being a successful manager, but with stereotypical female behavior (van den Brink et al. 2016, 28). Furthermore, unlike the male candidates, women's weaknesses, such as low self-esteem or lack of initiative, were perceived as irremediable flaws, not something they could overcome with training and experience.

The authors concluded that it was easier for the reviewers to envision the male candidates becoming successful managers because they fit the mold of the ideal candidate, while it was more difficult to picture the female candidates on a similar

career trajectory. The authors theorized their findings by drawing on the notion of gendered practices aimed at creating a good fit with the social norm—the image of the ideal worker. However, looking more closely into how this fit was created, it is not only the perceived fit with a pre-formed schema that the speakers in this situation effectuated, but the category itself was collaboratively created in the very interaction. Elaborating on the respective criteria, the reviewers in this study not only engaged in a process of categorization but also particularization. By developing and agreeing on specific categories and their fit for the objective of the review exercise in situ, gender bias was collaboratively accomplished (Condor and Figgou 2012) by putting forward arguments to advance the male candidates but failing to find reasons to advance women.

With this example, we can see that categories are rather flexible as well as highly selective. They serve as discursive resources that are used in context-specific, normative ways. Categorizing in this perspective is a “discursive practice that actively constructs versions of reality and identities for speakers and others” (Augoustinos 2016, 246). Hence, categories are not merely activated in an interaction but are also produced.

Gender bias beyond interaction: Social norms and organizational power relations

Intervening in an ongoing construction process is not as straightforward as we might think it is. Practicing gender constantly reproduces gendered practices (Martin 2006) and hence is connected to power relations and social norms or “hegemonic gender beliefs” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 514). Discursive psychologists, for instance, have shown that argumentative interactions are also very consequential for the positioning of the speakers. Taking up different positions within discourse, speakers position themselves in talk and in consequence construct themselves as a person (Davies and Harré 1990). For instance, in their

analysis of racist discourse in New Zealand, Potter and Wetherell (1998) have shown that people can and do position themselves within (i.e., identify with) both racist and anti-racist discourse within the same interview. Because talk fulfills different social (e.g., argumentative) functions, the same individual can construct varying and even contradictory versions of the same topic or reality depending on the immediate context. Taking up a certain position and putting forward a certain category to be used in an argument is thus motivated by the need to position the speaker as a certain kind of person—for instance, a tolerant, open-minded, or well-informed person.

This suggests that bias in recruiting often results from active self-positioning, as evidenced by research investigating the intensive maneuvering that occurs when discussing topics that might involve prejudiced talk (Augoustinos and Every 2007; Nentwich and Ostendorp 2016). *Calling a spade a spade* or the widespread use of disclaimers as *I am not racist, but* show that it is not *just talk* that is being done here, but an ideology that is negotiated, social norms that are applied and maintained, and identities that are produced. Prejudiced views are hence not uttered in an automated way but serve certain purposes. They “support, rationalize and legitimate the status quo” (Augoustinos 2016, 267). Billig (1988, 144) draws on Althusser to emphasize the self-making aspect of prejudiced talk and the contradictions in everyday discourse: “it is the ideological contradiction which ‘interpellates’ the subject.” As the prevailing social norms are referenced when talking, the speaker positions her or himself accordingly. Hence, from such a practice-based perspective, identities and social norms are produced as well as reproduced by prejudiced talk (Wetherell 2008). Positioning thus always bears the power to reproduce the social norms in place.

Having said that, prejudice talk not only positions *the other*, but also the speaker (Nentwich and Ostendorp 2016). As a matter of fact, speaking up is not without consequences but positions the speaker as either credible or incredible, and therefore as a competent or incompetent organizational member. As criteria are constructed in a

collaborative way and by creating a good fit with the social norms in place, it is almost impossible to challenge or criticize what is going on. Violating the collaboratively accomplished categories, the speaker would discredit him or herself as naïve or not familiar with the specific requirements and hence risk his or her personal standing in this setting. Understanding gender bias as a social practice incorporates this kind of motivation, namely, to be perceived as a credible speaker.

To further develop such a practice perspective on identity and stereotyping, it is crucial to investigate the cultural knowledge captured by stereotypes (Durrheim et al. 2009). Regarding gender bias, studies on the gendered organization and the ideal worker norm (Acker 1990) contribute valuable insights. For instance, Gherardi (1994) emphasizes that organizations have their specific codes or cultures of how to behave as a man or a woman. Employees might not be fully aware of these often very implicit rules, but they know what kind of behavior, clothing, or dress is required of them to be in line with the norms in place. A prevailing norm concerning gender, however, is the general association linking masculinity to power, authority, and career orientation (Gherardi 1994). When we speak about the ideal manager, we most likely envision a man (Schein 1996). Moreover, there is evidence that while men are considered as *natural* leaders, women are depicted as better suited for follower positions. This gender hierarchy constitutes an important organizational gendered practice (Martin 2006) that results in activating as well as perpetuating gender bias (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The attitudes or discursive positions available to speakers in a given interaction, in turn, are shaped by inherent power relations and thus the social position(s) they claim. In other words, while in theory, every prejudiced evaluation can be countered (and potentially invalidated) by an unbiased evaluation—for instance, of a job applicant's qualifications—in reality, such rhetorical maneuvers are restricted by situational, normative constraints. For example, research on the perceived validity of discrimination claims has shown that members of the dominant group perceive members of marginalized groups (e.g., women denouncing sexism or

people of color denouncing racism) as oversensitive and thus not credible (Calder-Dawe 2015; Kahn et al. 2016). Hence, inhabiting marginalized social identities entails not having the power (or right) to claim certain subject positions (e.g., a critic of biased behavior). Regarding designing training for gender bias in recruitment, critical pedagogy scholars have concluded that it is those who have privilege who need to teach other privileged individuals *about* privilege (Messner 2011).

Furthermore, there is evidence that the dominant group of an organization is not interested in changing unequal practices. De Castillo (2018) recently introduced the resistance model, claiming that the implicit bias model leaves out a central aspect, namely the underlying motivations and incentives for attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, unconscious prejudice is supported by psychological resistance, maintaining related unequal structures, which benefit the dominant group of an organization. A related topic is gatekeeping practices (Tienari et al. 2013). Trix and Psenka (2003) investigated the role of gatekeeping practices among medical faculty, leading to the selection of similar people. In letters of recommendation for medical faculty, a gender schema was reinforced that portrays male applicants as researchers and professionals while portraying women as teachers and students.

That gender bias is also constructed in organizational practices is demonstrated by Holgersson's (2013) study on the hiring practices of Swedish managers. Her research reveals that the search process was often organized in rather informal ways and started with a specific (male) candidate in mind. Besides formal qualification, social acceptability turned out to be an important criterion, although only informally. This included being male, of middle age and Swedish nationality, heterosexual, and preferably married (Holgersson 2013, 459). These informal guidelines resulted in candidates who fulfilled these criteria; in other words, they looked like a manager, so they did not need to fulfill all formal requirements to be hired. A good fit with this norm was also achieved by the senior managers' practice of grooming younger men to take on management positions in the

future, and the protégées, in turn, signaling that they were ready for a career move. Hence, a good fit is achieved through homosocial networks. As women cannot match the informal blueprint of the norm of the ideal candidate, they are not identified and remain excluded from these networks that support men's careers. It is the ideal worker norm that is accomplished, not only collaboratively through interaction, but also by routinized organizational practices such as the process of continuously defining and redefining the competencies of job applicants throughout recruitment.

Rethinking gender bias in recruiting: A social practice perspective

We have seen so far that gender bias in employment decision making is highly context-dependent and collaboratively accomplished by rhetorical strategies in interaction. It confirms, as well as reproduces, the social norms in place; regarding gender, this manifests in the qualities and skills ascribed to the ideal (male) candidate. If we conceive of gender bias as a social practice that produces identities as well as social norms and thus reproduces contextual and culturally specific ideals, its entanglement with organizational hierarchies and power relations comes to the forefront.

The respective context in which the stereotype is activated shows that the main objective of stereotypical talk is to create a good fit with the norms or ideals in place. Rhetorical strategies are employed that create said fit while at the same time positioning the speaker in a favorable light. What makes this process implicit is that biased notions based on gender stereotypes are not uttered explicitly but are collectively constructed in highly orchestrated ways that rely on cultural as well as situational knowledge. As we are held accountable for what we say by others, prejudiced views are rather uttered "by implication," as Durrheim (2012, 189 et seq.) suggests. As his research on mundane talk on race shows, often the category itself is not mentioned, but a concern is voiced that is only loosely connected to the category but needs further interpretation and cultural knowledge to

be understood. For instance, uttering an opinion on black people on the beach, speakers would not refer to race as a category (black people) but problematize their behavior. Only when all interaction partners know what the talk is about, the prejudiced meaning of it is understood. In this way, the speaker is probing the social norms applicable to the situation. Hence, uttering prejudiced views relies on the competence of the listener to understand the implication and needs to be perceived as a joint action (Shotter 1993).

Conceptualizing gender bias as a social practice also allows us to incorporate findings from sociology and gender studies to enhance our knowledge on how bias is *done* in organizational practices. However, while the literature on gendered practices in organizations has explained the exclusion of women in recruitment processes with gendered and gendering practices (van den Brink et al. 2016), homosociality (Holgerson 2013), or self-group distancing (Derks, van Laar and Ellemers 2016), the concept of *bias as a social practice* holds the potential to highlight further aspects. Most importantly, discourse psychology's focus on the maneuvering of the speaking subjects has shown that human beings are by no means *cultural dupes*. They are not merely setting in place what social norms have *told* them to do and hence are merely executing the power relations in place, but as well actively interpreting and hence capable of changing and subverting those very norms. Having said that, there is definitely some agency involved. Given that members of recruitment panels have limited degrees of freedom as the image of an ideal candidate is setting clear normative boundaries for them, they are at the same time highly motivated to prove themselves as knowledgeable subjects. Perceiving them as competent members of the organisation sheds further light on the possibilities of changing or reducing bias.

At the same time, the interactions and discursive activities that make up the recruitment process are fundamentally shaped by the distribution of privilege. Those who fit the image of the ideal worker or candidate themselves are the ones who can most effectively challenge and critique

it as they are speaking from a position of power (Nentwich, Ozbilgin and Tatli 2015). However, such a move requires that the legitimacy of both the critique of the ideal candidate and alternative concepts are established, which in turn necessitates a more fundamental change in the organization's way of doing things and hence a change in organizational practices, ideals, and desires (Byrne et al. 2019). Otherwise, anti-bias initiatives lack legitimacy and become an exercise in "confessing bias" (Applebaum 2019, 139) as opposed to actually counteracting it. Reconceptualizing gender bias in recruitment as a social practice rooted in organizational norms and power relations means shifting the focus away from the individual (and her or his supposedly context-independent biased notions) and toward the organizational structure and logic. In other words, there is more to it than only making individuals (i.e., members of recruitment panels) aware of what is going on. It is necessary for the organization as a whole to engage in a process of critical reflection to generate an understanding of which concrete practices, norms, and ideals create the preconditions for biased recruitment outcomes (Murgia and Poggio 2009). Most importantly, this "reflexive undoing" should tackle the "organizational subjectivities, and the normative conditions upon which they depend, and not organizational subjects" as Reich, Rumens, and Tyler (2016, 2075) emphasized. However, such a process would need to incorporate addressing issues of identity and privilege and thus the targeted inclusion of (white) men. Insights from education studies on the use of critical reflexivity around privilege could be useful for designing training on the male norm (Souto-Manning 2011).

What else is there to learn for bias training? Apparently, there is a strong need to move beyond a perspective of "the gender we think" to a perspective of "the gender we do" (Gherardi 1994, 591). Because the doing of gender—which usually maintains the gender hierarchy (Nentwich and Kelan 2014)—resides in everyday interactions and behaviors, which in turn are shaped by gendered organizational practices and structures, gender-equitable recruitment requires an active

effort to undo gender (Tienari et al. 2013). Neglecting these structural and institutional aspects of discrimination might even result in the stabilization and further legitimization of discrimination, as power imbalances are not taken into account (Tate and Page 2018). How could these insights inform the practical implementation of anti-bias training?

First of all, the scope of training must incorporate internal mental processes and reflections about how information is processed in complex social situations. Training concepts should be targeted at restructuring the cognitive schemata (Rumelhart and Norman 1978). This process demands sufficient exposure to discrepant experiences, conscious reflection on one's experience, or active efforts to reorganize what one knows. To combat bias, training needs to not only inform participants about their biases but also motivate them to self-reflect, unlearn, and provide participants with concrete steps for acting differently in specific situations (Lindsey, King, Hebl and Levine 2015; Rumelhart and Norman 1978). Bias training from this perspective would need to educate participants on how to prevent the production of certain categories while supporting others. In practice, this means that training must provide guidelines on how to intervene in interactions in situ to disrupt the ongoing practice (of) gender (Martin 2006). Training must take into account that biases are based on unspoken institutional rules. They are gendered practices (Martin 2006) that are performed in interaction. Rather than trying to change personal attitudes, training should be designed on changing these practices and hence focus on interactions and institutional practices as a site of change (Deutsch 2007) (e.g., by making visible and questioning the hierarchical categorization of masculine-and feminine-connotated skills and competences) (Murgia and Poggio 2014).

Furthermore, training should not attempt to address the issue of implicit bias in an unspecific way. Bias is not enacted in a general way but rather provoked by a specific situation and in a particular setting. Successful training will take this into account and focus on the norms and practices of a specific situation, such as the

meetings of a promotion committee. The training should enable participants to identify crucial, bias-prone situations within the interaction, as well as problematic norms employed in the process, and invite them to experiment with possible alternatives. For instance, van den Brink et al. (2016, 28) describe the interpretation of assertiveness in women as being too forward or too critical. Bias training should encourage committee members to first take notice of the double standard of interpreting men's assertiveness as advantageous and women's assertiveness as detrimental for a management position. Furthermore, they should sharpen participants' awareness of when and how this bias is typically enacted in the committee's meetings. Finally, committee members need to be trained to actually intervene in the interaction. This could even go as far as Witzig and Seyfarth (2020) suggest by providing participants with a set of appropriate responses for uttering critique and resistance in the very moment of the interaction. For instance, by questioning a given interpretation instead of confirming it: You mention that Sarah is too confident. Generally, we want our managers to be assertive. How is this different? As laid out earlier, for the training to be effective, it needs to include a discussion of power and privilege to create awareness of the differential preconditions for the recruitment committee members (for instance, based on gender or seniority) to voice critique.

To conclude, what is needed in bias training is a thorough reflection of those practices that produce biased categorizations of men and women and masculine and feminine competences. Such an approach to bias training is about cultural

change rather than altering individuals' mental processes and thus lays the foundations for the undoing of gender (hierarchy) in the context of recruitment (Nentwich and Kelan 2014). Undoing gender requires tackling both institutional practices, such as implementing new guidelines that lay out best practices around designing job profiles and evaluating job applications, as well as typical interaction patterns, such as promotion committee members co-constructing female assertiveness as detrimental.

Conclusion

In this article, we developed the notion of gender bias in recruitment as a social practice. Taking a critique of the conceptual foundations of conventional bias training as a starting point, we argued that gender bias in recruitment happens within particular social contexts, notably in gendered organizations (Acker 1990), is performed as prejudiced talk that fulfills clear social functions, such as positioning oneself as a credible speaker, and is enabled by organizational norms and power relations. As we have shown, this conceptual relocating of gender-biased recruitment outcomes within everyday interactions and identity work, in particular, the doing of gender, has concrete implications for the design and implementation of anti-bias initiatives. We hope that our contribution is useful for both the theoretical advancement of current debates on improving organizational diversity and for informing the work of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion practitioners.

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