Are You Hired?

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What if everybody could change the definition of a word? Well, it is possible. There are millions of day-to-day interactions between people, whether it is talking to a friend, a teacher, a boss, or a stranger. There are also daily interactions between men and women. However, these daily interactions could shape, or be shaped by societal expectations. Gender stereotyping is a widely held perception of a man or a woman. It can change the definitions of the words female and male. Additionally, it is ubiquitous. For example, in politics, men are taken more seriously than women. Another situation is that beauty and skincare are still predominantly targeted towards women. While more men today wear makeup, it is still seen as unconventional. Moreover, gender stereotyping is prevalent in the work industry. A gender-anonymous hiring process is ineffective when trying to combat gender stereotypes in the workplace because it negatively impacts companies and applicants, and may not reduce bias and promote diversity.

In history, there have been notable improvements in gender equality. Dating all the way back to 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention marked a significant start in measures to advocate for women's rights. After constant efforts of women fighting for women's suffrage, women achieved a great feat when the nineteenth amendment was passed in 1920. Women have also taken on greater roles in traditionally male-dominated fields. This ranged from working in factories during World War II to breaking barriers in space exploration with figures like Sally Ride. Similarly, the roles of men also shifted as society changed. Stay-at-home dads are more common and males have a more significant role in female-dominated industries, such as the fashion industry.

However, despite years of improvements and advancements, societal norms continue to enforce, and reinforce, restrictive gender roles that shape opportunities, expectations and societal views. One factor that leads to this is the cultural lag hypothesis. The cultural lag hypothesis is the idea that beliefs and cultural ideas take time to catch up to societal changes (Haines et al., 2016). This delay has a significant impact on gender stereotyping because, while societal changes such as increased female participation in the workplace have occurred, traditional beliefs about gender roles often lag behind. Therefore, gender norms continue to be prevalent in society. Moreover, even though there have been significant legal breakthroughs to reduce gender disparities, such as Title IX and the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the effects of long-standing stereotypes remain deeply ingrained in parts of today's society, such as in education, the media, and especially in the workforce. According to *The Brookings Institution*, women working full-time make, on average, 17 percent less each week compared to men, despite having backgrounds and experiences that are "nearly identical" (Yellen, 2020). This shows that even with the same qualifications and factors as men, women are still being discriminated against.

There are descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes. Descriptive stereotypes are the defined traits, attitudes, and behaviors traditionally linked to men and women, and how they dictate societal expectations about how individuals should be "consistent" and act in alignment with their gender (Heilman, 2012). The qualities that are associated with men and women have been consistent over time despite changes in setting and the diverse environments (Heilman, 2012). While men are seen as agentic, "competitive, dominant, risk-taking, logical thinkers, and have an athletic/strong build", women are seen as communal, "emotional, passive, congenial, and attentive to their physical appearances (e.g long hair, slender build)" (Leskinen et al., 2015). These descriptive stereotypes lead to a perception that men and women "lack fit" of the attributes

needed to succeed in a position that is predominately male or female (Heilman, 2012). For example, because women are not seen as domineering, they aren't fit to take on a leadership position. This leads to the idea that certain jobs and positions are inherently male or female. A study revealed that when individuals were requested to outline characteristics of a job, more than 60% of people mentioned the employee's gender as one (Leskinen et al., 2015). On the other hand, prescriptive stereotyping is what men and women should be like. It is not just about the words that describe a woman or man, but also that they should follow them. For example, men should be dominant and women should not.

Moreover, researchers found that people typically determine the gender type of occupation based on two factors: the proportion of men and women in the field and the traditions considered necessary for the role (Leskinen et al., 2015). Women who succeed in male-dominated fields like management or engineering often face backlash, as their success challenges these gendered expectations. As a result, women tend to lose their confidence in the hiring process, "deselecting themselves if they do not fulfill 100% of the required criteria" (*Sexism at Work*, n.d.). In addition, women also applied less to jobs that are emphasized or traditionally targeted towards jobs that are mainly associated with the characerics of a man. As a result, more jobs are discriminated against. For example, although women represent approximately half of the U.S. workforce, fewer than 6% of CEOs listed in the *Fortune 1000* are women (Haines et al., 2016). In politics, women are underrepresented in the U.S. Congress, where they constituted only 20% of the Senate and 18% of the House of Representatives in 2014 (Haines et al., 2016). Women are no better represented in statewide executive offices, with approximately 23% of those positions held by women in 2014 (Haines et al., 2016). In sports, the media coverage of female athletes on major networks is under 2%, even though the number of

female athletes have risen significantly (Haines et al., 2016). Similarly, men are unlikely to become elementary school teachers because it is a job that is commonly associated with women (Moss-Racusin et al., n.d.).

Furthermore, these stereotypes have been constantly enforced in our society, becoming deeply ingrained in our culture and everyday interactions. Eventually, gender biases become an unconscious act and automatic, resulting in quick impressions of an individual. According to the *European Institute of Gender Equality*, one study has shown that evaluators unconsciously adjust their criteria to favor whichever qualities of a preferred gender. As a result, women received lower selection ratings and compensation offers compared to men. In addition, this study showed how certain characteristics had different meanings when considering gender. For example, being "family-oriented" was initially not considered as an important qualification for candidates. However, when a male candidate had this trait, evaluators treated it as a valuable quality. In contrast, this same attribute may not have been given the same level of importance or could have been overlooked when assessing female candidates. Moreover, studies have also shown that feedback given to women has been more critical yet lacks clear, constructive guidance. Evaluators were more likely to describe men with "task-oriented traits like analytic and competent", while women were more frequently described with "relationship-oriented adjectives like compassionate and enthusiastic" (*Sexism at Work*, n.d.).

Ultimately, a self-perpetuating cycle is created where men and women are penalized regardless of their behavior, which can contribute to the gender disparities in the workplace. If one were to defy these stereotypes, then they may be criticized and receive backlash and disapproval. This shows how no matter how an individual may act, they will still be trapped in the gender expectations. An article by Leskinine, Emily A, et al. presents a study of 425 working

women and tested how deviations from stereotypical femininity led to gender harassment, specifically sexist remarks and gender policing. As a result, these researchers found that women were caught in a "Catch-22" (Leskinen et al., 2015). Women face a Catch-22 because professional success in many high-paying fields requires adopting traditionally masculine behaviors and traits, such as assertiveness and confidence (Leskinen et al., 2015). However, these traits that are necessary for success also increase women's risk of experiencing harassment. It is contradictory because in order to succeed, women must conform to gender expectations that are typically men, but in doing so, they become targets for criticism or harassment for defying traditional female gender roles. Similarly, men have also experienced rejection in fields like nursing, which has traditionally been, and still is, a predominantly female profession (Moss-Racusin et al., n.d.).

A gender-anonymous hiring process is when a company removes any gender-related identifiers from applicants' resumes, applications, and other hiring materials to prevent bias during the hiring process. The goal is to evaluate applicants solely based on their qualifications, skills, and experience. However, although this method sounds effective, it does not achieve the goals it hopes to.

A gender-anonymous hiring process negatively affects both companies and candidates because it limits the ability to assess candidates holistically, as it overlooks contextual information relevant to evaluating a candidate and takes away a form of getting to know the applicant's personality. Gaps in employment may be more difficult to interpret without knowing the applicant's background, which can complicate recruiters' assessments. Certain decisions, such as maternity leave or family backgrounds, may not make sense without gender context,

potentially leaving out important context that supports their qualifications (Foley & Williamson, 2018).

Moreover, having a gender anonymous hiring process may involve interviews being taken out. Interviews are essential to see an applicant's personality and character. In a study by *CareerBuilders* in 2015, 44 percent of 5013 candidates stated that the interview experience is the "single most influential factor in the hiring process" (Maurer, 2023). In addition, *Linkedin*, a professional network used to find jobs and learn skills that can help one succeed in their career, states that the interviews are critical in the hiring process because they reveal how well a candidate's personality, character and attitudes align with the company's values, mission, and work environment. There are many criteria in an interview that employers use to assess candidates, such as if the candidate would stay with the company for a long time or assessing how well a candidate may integrate an existing team (Wakefield Talabisco International, 2024). Interviews give candidates opportunities to "bring their resume to life" and to showcase strengths that may not be fully captured on paper, which can be limiting in its ability to reflect personality and soft skills (Wakefield Talabisco International, 2024). They allow applicants to highlight and emphasize specific qualities that make them a strong fit for the role in a more engaging way, often leaving a lasting impression on the recruiter and increasing their chances of being hired. Furthermore, interviews give candidates a chance to explain any gaps or weaknesses in their resumes (Wakefield Talabisco International, 2024). By discussing these openly, they can share what they have learned and how they have grown, showing resilience and willingness to improve–qualities that help build trust with employers (Wakefield Talabisco International, 2024). According to *Yello*, 90 percent of employers consider interviews to be crucial to success and 49 percent of employees believe that the interview has the biggest impact on the candidate's

experience. However, with a gender-anonymous application, such a crucial part would be eliminated because it would reveal gender.

While the idea of anonymizing job applications is well-intentioned and aimed at reducing bias, there is a complex implementation process. This process would take a long time to implement and it is error prone (Rinne, 2018). In addition, a study has shown that many managers were skeptical of this process because it would require significant changes to existing hiring processes (Foley & Williamson, 2018). If removing identifying information is done manually, it would add a greater workload for HR staff, especially in large companies with many applications (Foley & Williamson, 2018). Managers expressed concern that these extra steps could slow down the hiring process or divert resources from other priorities (Foley & Williamson, 2018). Even if the process is not manual, there would have to be changes in software systems, as they are not designed to eliminate gender-revealing information (Foley & Williamson, 2018). This would make the shift technically demanding and, similarly, time-consuming (Foley & Williamson, 2018). Because of this, companies may lack the motivation to invest in or prioritize the implementation. In addition, the article talks about how a few managers viewed this process as a challenge to their ability to make fair decisions (Foley & Williamson, 2018). This reduced the openness to adopt this method (Foley & Williamson, 2018). Ultimately, this all goes back to the applicant. According to *Iza World of Labor*, minority and other disadvantaged applicants may still experience lower call back rates, even with blind hiring. Additionally, it prevents hiring based on emotional intelligence, making it harder to determine whether a candidate is a good fit for the role (*The Pros and Cons of Blind Hiring*, n.d.). The article also notes that blind hiring often emphasizes skills assessments, which candidates may see as "free work" due to the significant time and effort involved, making the process "burdensome"

and discouraging (*The Pros and Cons of Blind Hiring*, n.d.). This added workload may deter qualified applicants from applying, ultimately limiting the talent pool (*The Pros and Cons of Blind Hiring*, n.d.).

      While supporters of gender-anonymous hiring processes argue that it can reduce bias and promote diversity, this approach is not as effective as it may seem. The assumption is that anonymity creates an equal playing field. However, research on European countries showed negative outcomes for female applicants. In Switzerland and Belgium, for example, a higher percentage of females than males were hired with the standard application compared to the anonymous processes (Krause et al., 2012). Similarly, a company in France aimed to reduce discrimination against women by implementing this process, however, women didn't consistently receive more callbacks than men (Krause et al., 2012). This shows that even if companies want to actively improve diversity, these applications prevent them from identifying and supporting the very groups they aim to support. A similar issue arises with the platform *Dweet*, which uses an AI algorithm to anonymize applications to increase hiring based on skills (Shoaib, 2023). While they claim to reduce bias and "bring fresh eyes and objectivity", some are concerned that AI might reinforce existing biases, since it learns from past hiring decisions and performance evaluations, assuming that it is fair and unbiased when in reality it may have been influenced by discrimination (Shoaib, 2023).

      The Church emphasizes the need for greater equality for women, calling for "real equality" in areas like pay and career advancements (*Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) | John Paul II*, 1995). In Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Women*, he stresses that women's contributions are vital to building society (*Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) | John Paul II*, 1995). In addition, the Pope references the Book of Genesis, which teaches that men and women are created in the

image and likeness of God (*Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) | John Paul II*, 1995). This idea is the foundation for treating all people with respect, because each person reflects something of God's nature and character (Armstrong, 2021). The Genesis account also states that women are created as a "helper" for man, not as a subordinate, but as an equal partner (*Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) | John Paul II*, 1995). It is a mutual and complementary relationship where "woman compliments man, just as man compliments woman" (*Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) | John Paul II*, 1995). Thus, gender stereotyping not only breaks this mutual respect but also contradicts the harmony God intended in creation.

To promote gender equality in the workplace, it is important to normalize professions that are traditionally associated with a specific gender. This can increase individuals' confidence in applying for roles that may not typically be linked to their gender and challenge the belief that certain jobs are only meant for men or women. One way to achieve this is by highlighting individuals who break gender norms in their fields. The more individuals see a diverse representation across various industries, the more normalized it becomes. An example is career days. When people, especially children or young adults, see, for example, women excelling in fields like STEM or men in fields like design, it challenges societal expectations and encourages individuals to pursue their interests regardless of gender norms. In addition, perceptions can be changed through the use of social media and the internet, which is used by a wide range of ages. One can create posts, videos, online forums, support groups, or communities that promote gender equality. By providing a space for individuals to share their inclusive content, one can help shift public opinions and views, making it more normalized for all genders to pursue careers outside of societal stereotypes. Over time, this can reduce prescriptive stereotypes and eliminate the idea

of how people "should" be based on their gender and instead support the idea that anyone can pursue any career, regardless of gender identity.

A gender-anonymous hiring process is ineffective when trying to combat gender stereotypes in the workplace because it negatively impacts companies and applicants, and may not reduce bias and promote diversity. Although well-intentioned, it removes crucial parts of how recruiters evaluate candidates, is time-consuming and error prone, puts candidates at a disadvantage, and does not reduce bias in hiring processes. While changing personal beliefs and cultural attitudes is complex, taking the steps to reduce gender stereotypes is better than maintaining the status quo. Mitigating this issue will take time and a consistent effort, especially given societal delays explained by theories like the cultural lag hypothesis. As society continues to grow and evolve, traditional binary genders no longer capture the full spectrum of gender identities. With an increasing awareness of more gender identities–such as non-binary, transgender, queer, and all of whom are part of the LGBTQ+ community–gender stereotypes are not only reinforced but expanded and become more layered. Therefore, as identities become more diverse, the world needs to be more inclusive of every individual and identity, including in the workplace and hiring process, to reflect the range of identities that exist today.

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