



Bias in recruitment processes

Tomas Brage,

Professor of Physics, University of Lund

Member of

The Steering group of LERU PG EDI,

GENERA Network, and

GenderEX Horizon 2020 project



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What is bias?

Bias is a cognitive process, where the cultural and social context affects a person's decisions, judgement and actions.

It could be a negative effect if it is based on stereotypes, beliefs, prejudices and preconceived notions. It is therefore a threat to meritocracy!

It can lead to micro-aggressions (and worse) and non-events.

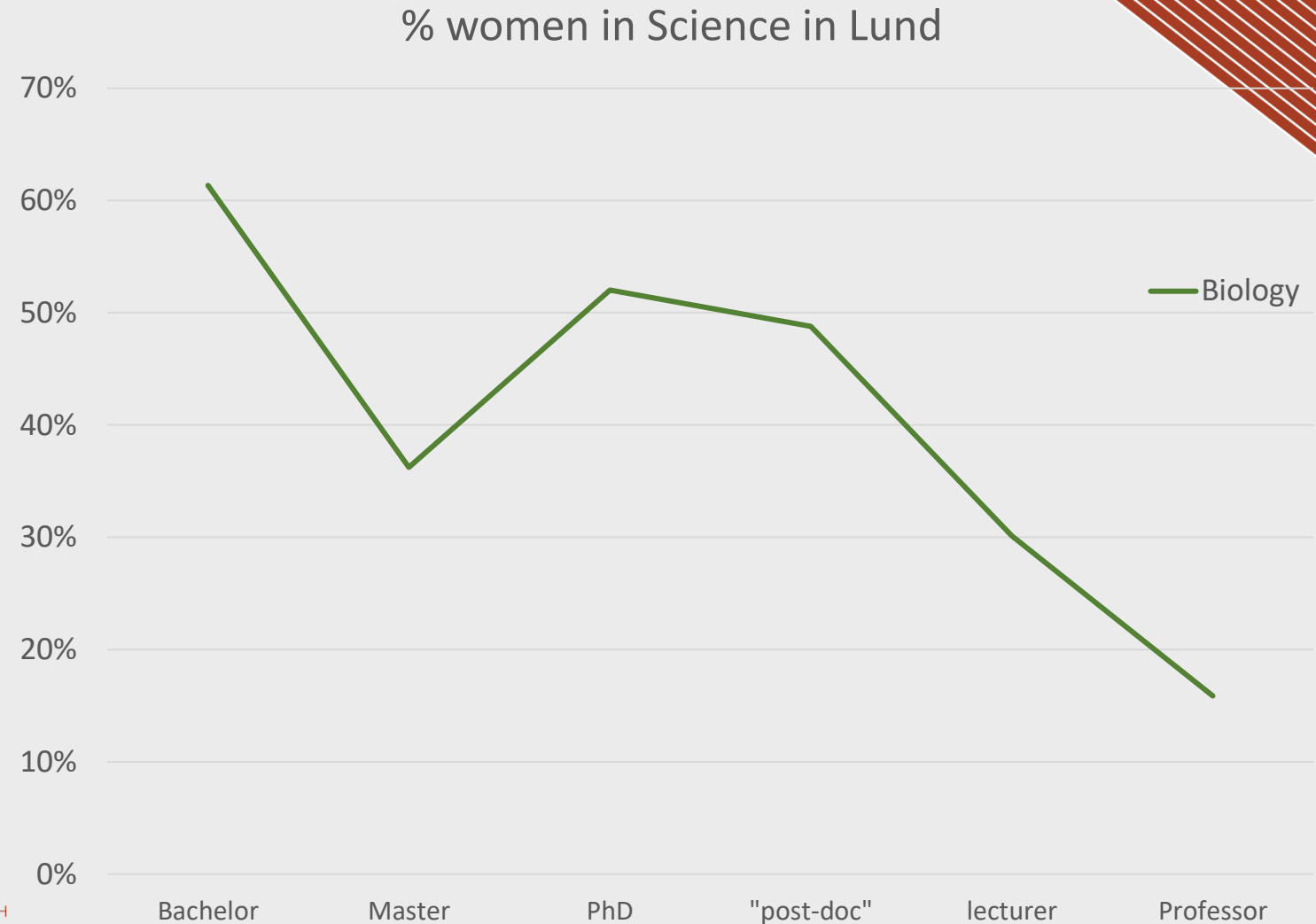
It is not only psychology, but also organizational.

How can we “measure” bias?

1. Statistics of “success rates”
2. “Experiments”
3. Statistics of processes and organisations.
4. Experiences from observers.

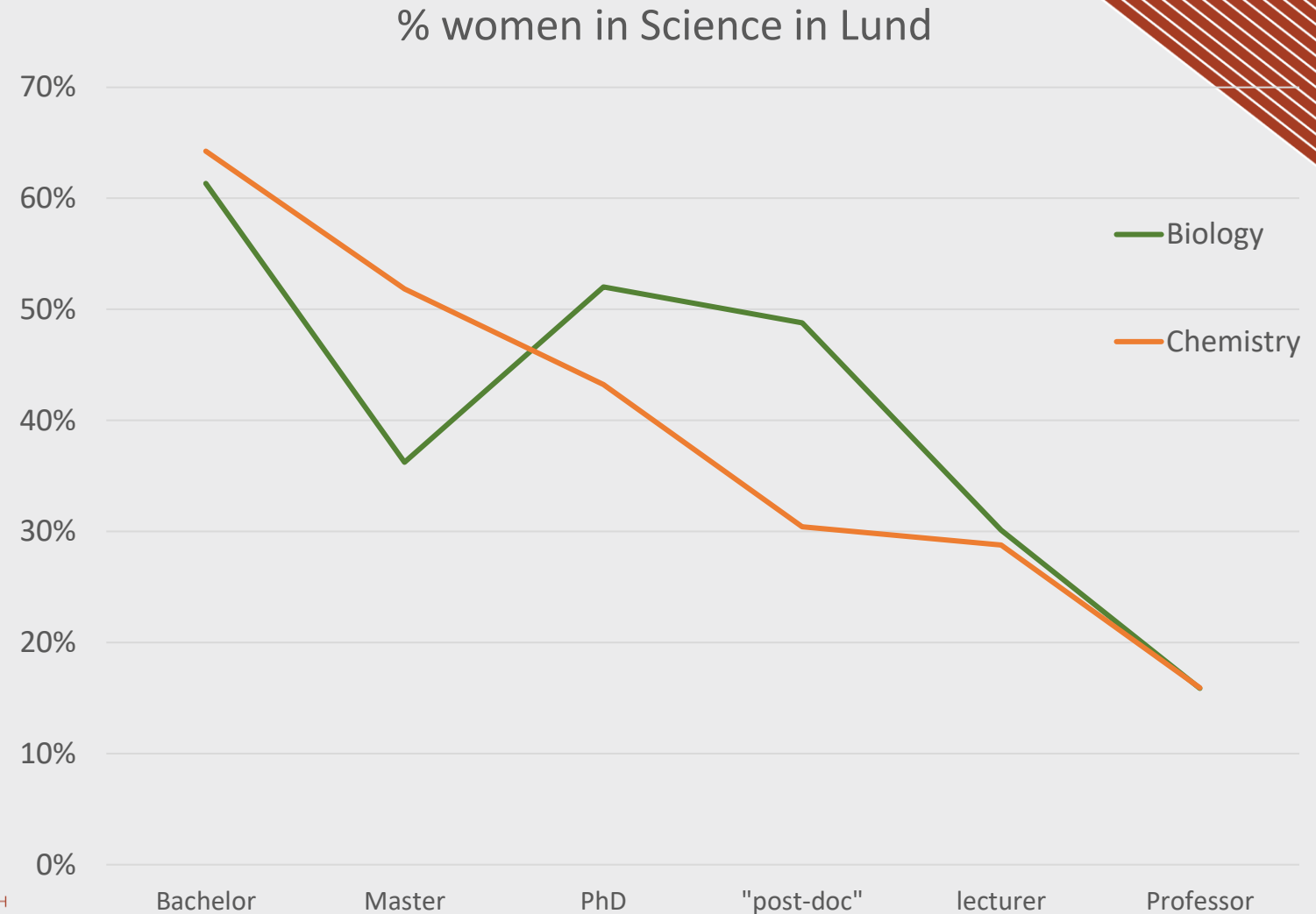
Evidence of bias 1

Career paths in a typical Science faculty.



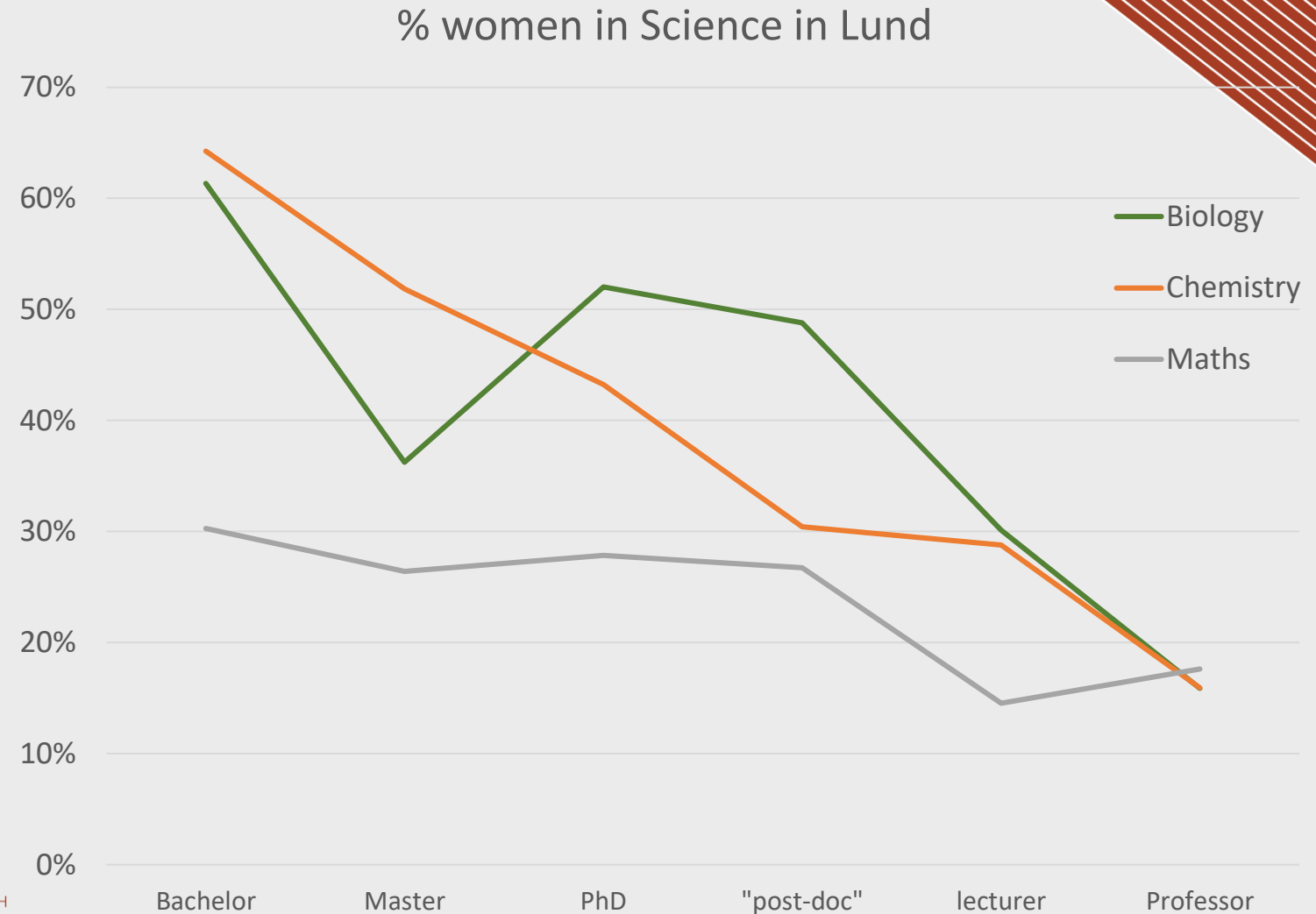
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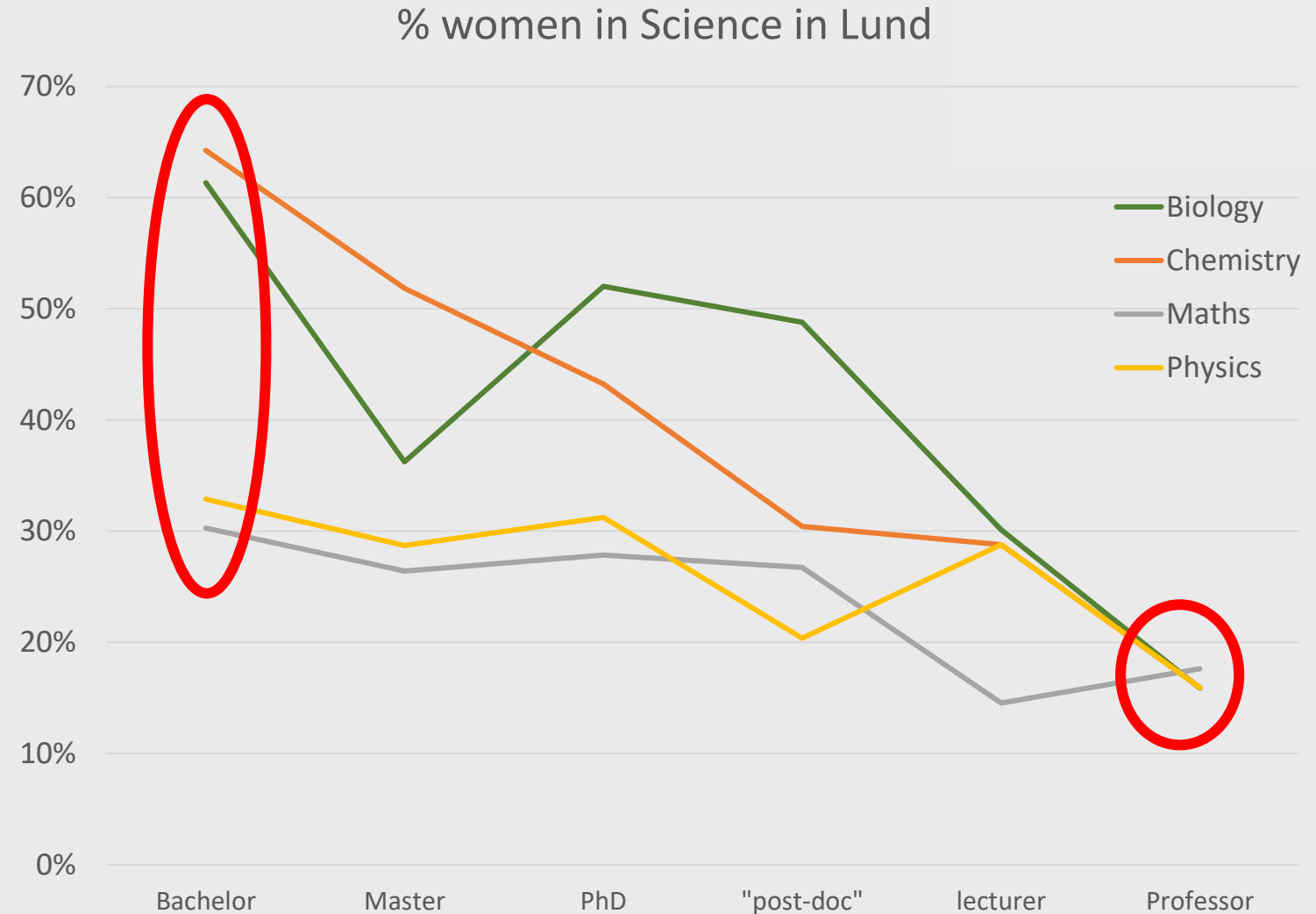


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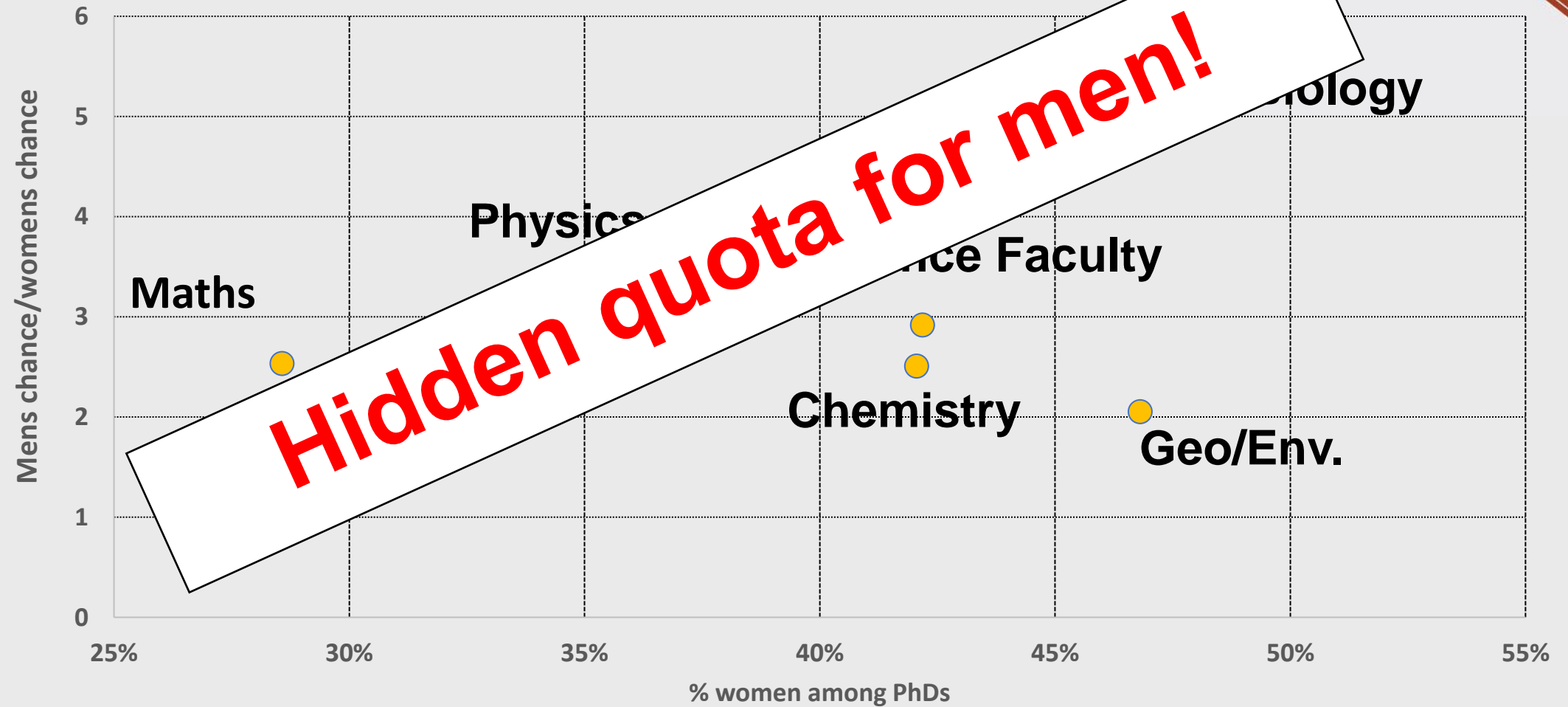
Career paths in a typical Science faculty.

Many different curves – but the same outcome

Weak dependence on input!

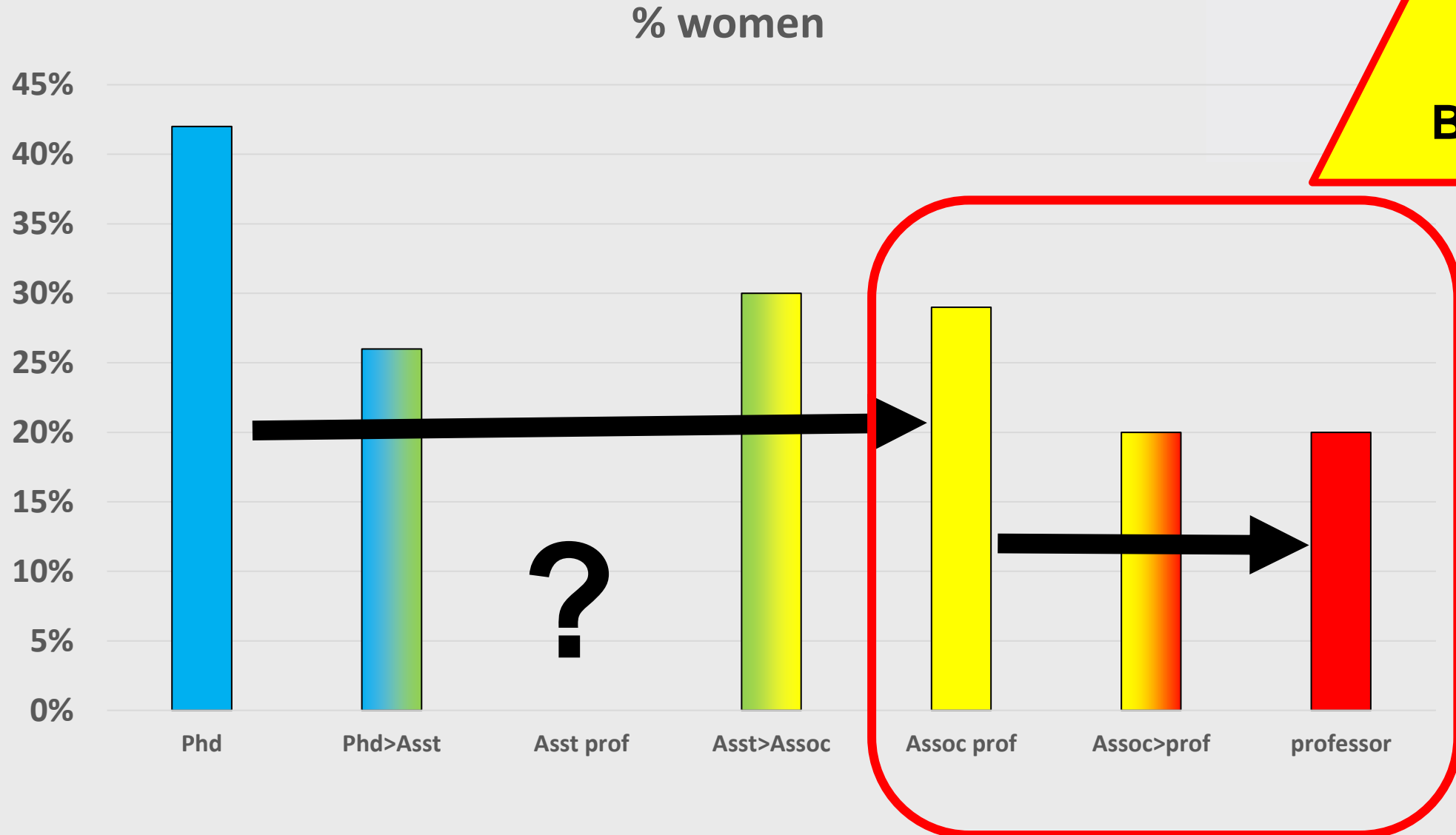


PhD's: Mens compared to Womens chance to become a Professor



Flexible cascade model

- Science Faculty in Lund



Evidence of Bias 2

Evaluations of texts, with grade 1-5

	Men about		Women about	
	Ingvar (Male)	Ingvor (Female)	Ingvar (Male)	Ingvor (Female)
Credible	4.9	3.4	4.5	3.5
Nonchalant	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.3
Humane	2.9	2.7	3.2	3.8
Competent	4.3	3.0	3.7	3.3

Examples of bias against women

- Receive smaller grant allocations
(*Ex: Swedish Research Council 2020*)
- Worse evaluations of abstracts for conferences
- Worse student evaluations
- Men 8 times more likely to win awards (?)
- Fewer leadership positions
- Worse letters of recommendations

.....



Actions against bias:

- **Awareness training** – education, information, workshops.
(<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>)
- It is not enough – could be damaging!
- Need **"Bias observers"** to remind us during meetings, selection committees etc. (*LERU advice paper on bias and meritocracy 2018 and pilot education at LU 2020-2021*).

Evidence of bias 3

Nielsen (2015) Nature 525 427 – Studie vid Aarhus universitet 2004-2013

Appointment of Professors and Lecturers:

- 20% closed (30% later years)
- 40% only one applicant

Women part of appointed professors:

- Closed: 12%
- Open: 23%

Similar results from Netherlands and Finland

Van den Brink (2010) and Husu (2000)



Does Meritocracy work?

Nielsen (2015) *Nature* 525 427 – Studie vid Aarhus universitet 2004-2013

If meritocracy worked, then

"The university would be a realm of the *justly unequal*"

Contradiction!

Bias and non-objectivity destroys meritocracy

which is emphasized by "procedures" to circumvent it



Actions against bias ... and for meritocracy

- Create open and transparent **selection processes**
- Monitor meeting procedures – educate chairs.
- Make a time-line of promotion and recruitment processes and let bias observers find "weak spots" and "leakage"



Evidence of bias 4:

Ex: Swedish Research Council

Work against bias in evaluation panels.

Wennerås & Vold 1998 *Nepotism and sexism in peer review*:

- Women had to publish 2.6 times as much as men to receive grants.
 - “Matilda effect”
- Men supported men, women supported men.
- Cognitive bias: Scientific proximity was rewarding.
- Personal/Institutional bias: someone you know, from your institution
 - Mathew effect

Swedish research council, cont'd

Later reports (2012, 2016, 2020)

- Different wordings:
 - Male applicants: excellent, respected, a rising star, front figure
 - Female applicants: good, strong, good merits, high novelty
- Questioning women independence from co-authors
 - Supervisors, husbands, relatives, ...
- Leadership: Men trusted, women questioned.

Swedish research council, cont'd

Ageism combined (intersected with) sex:

- Myth of youth – “made all major discoveries before 30” – which fits male life-cycle
- Age is also an advantage for men (experience, invaluable, world leading), but not for women (too old).

Swedish Research Council – solutions



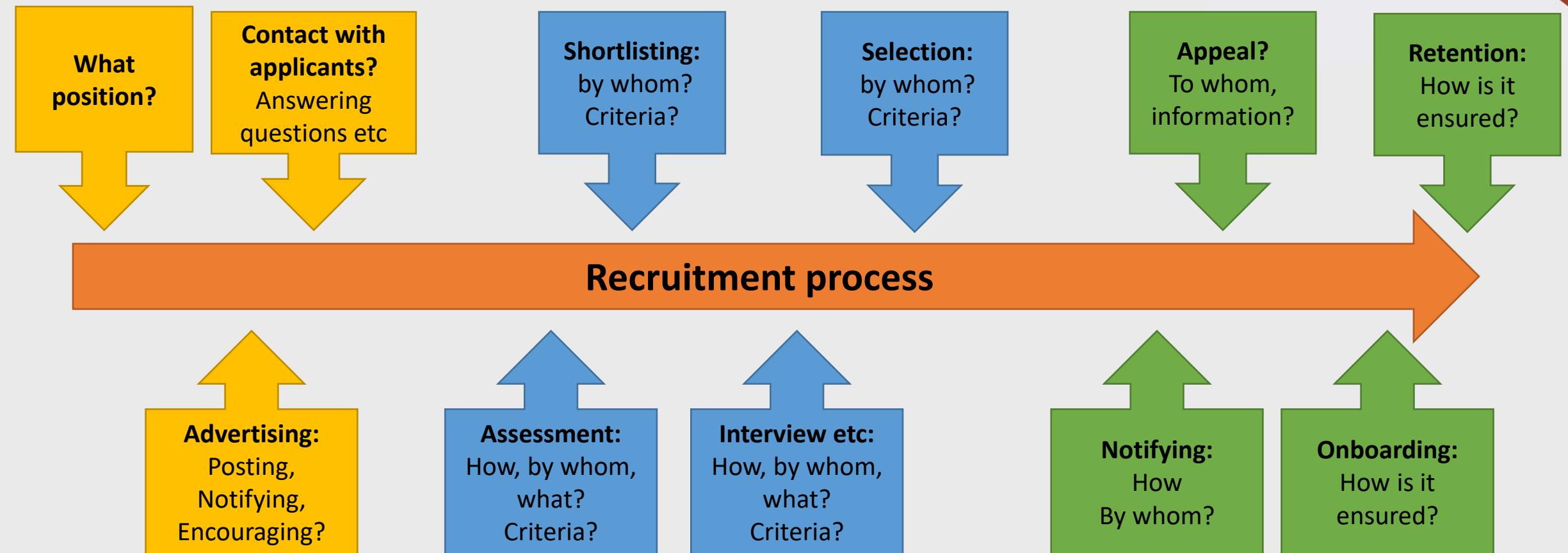
- Observers were essential – followed process and pointed to bias.
- Clear and transparent processes – stick to the criteria and agenda.
- Formalised meetings, down to speaking time and seating.
- No informal discussion in breaks, dinners etc
- Trained panel-members and chairs, with assistants from the council.

LERU – training of UBO

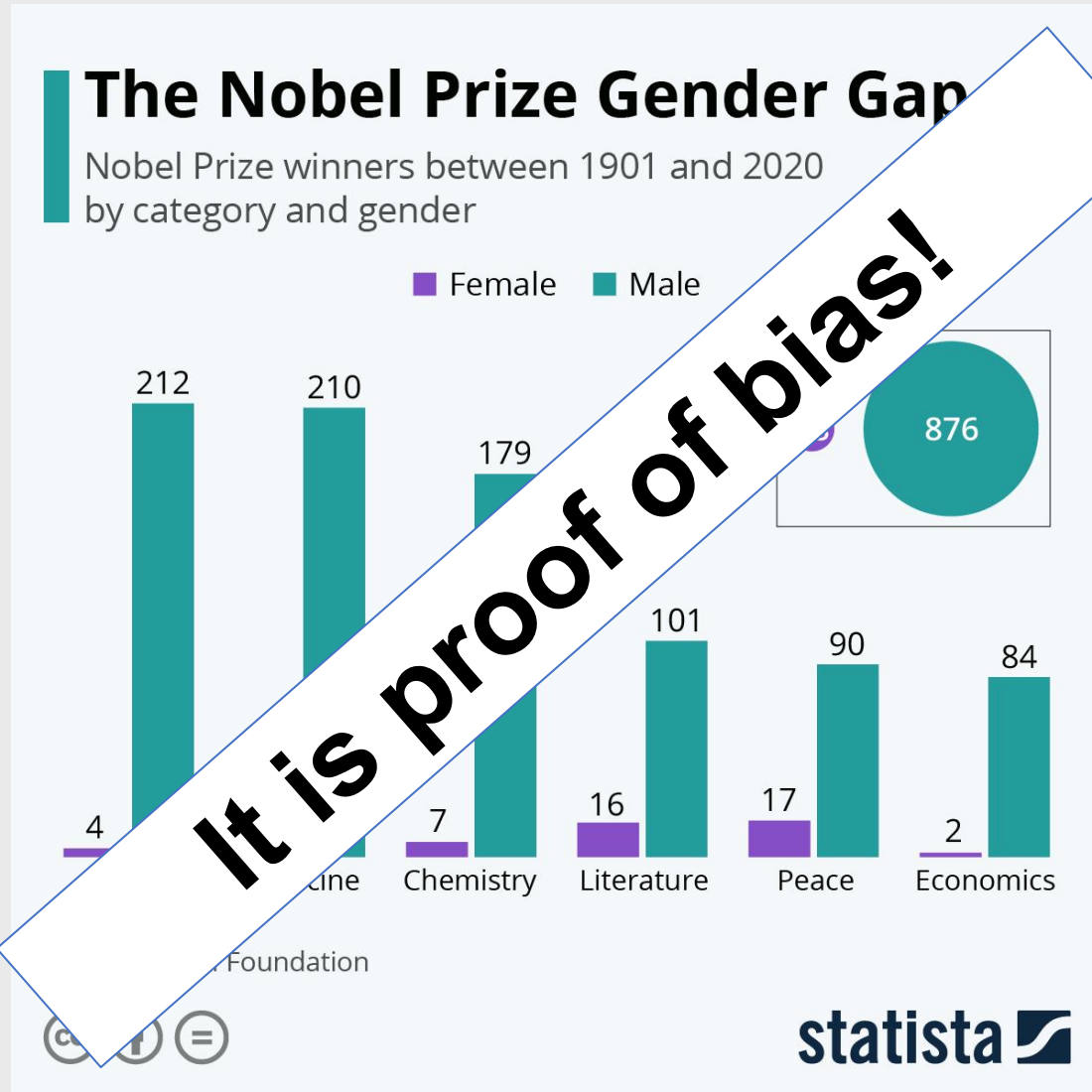
Pilot project in Lund, next time in December 2021.

Four half-day workshop (first two IRL, second two online)

Recruitment processes – a “mine-field of bias”



Once a year ...



Thank you for the attention!



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