Findings from Research on Gender Bias in Letters of Recommendation

OVERVIEW:

Things to think about when reading and writing letters of recommendation: letters of recommendation for men and women contain different language and focus on different professional characteristics. These differences persist regardless of the gender of the letter writer.

SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES:

Length

Letters for men tend to be longer
Letters for women tend to be shorter

Language

Letters for men are more likely to include

Standout adjectives like: Outstanding Excellent

Agentic adjectives like: Assertive Confident Ambitious

Grindstone adjectives like: Conscientious Meticulous

Communal adjectives like: Helpful Kind Sympathetic

Focus

Letters for men tend to focus on their research, ability and career and are more likely to characterize the subject as a leader in his field.

Letters for women tend to focus on their teaching, training and how they help others and are more likely to include references to her personal life.

REFERENCES:


