WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Facilitator Notes

Sway – Unravelling Unconscious Bias
Chapter 9 to Epilogue

By Pragya Agarwal

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Is Publishing in the Chemical Sciences Gender Biased?
A report by Royal Society of Chemistry

DiVERSiTY
BOOK CLUB

DISCUSSION BOOKLET 3 – CRIB SHEET

"Knowing that one may be subject to bias is one thing; being able to correct it is another"

Jon Elster

Thinking back - *What challenged/surprised you from the chapters?*

This could be something pertinent or something that really grabbed your attention and made you think twice.

> This is an open question that we will likely use in some form in all the sessions. It is a good opportunity to gauge the feelings and understanding of the group.

Last session we considered how we listen to and shape the messages we choose to hear, the concept of "othering" and the dangers of micro-aggressions. We learned about the covert and subtle forms of prejudice that arise from a perception of cultural difference and how this can lead to the hardening of lines between in-groups and out-groups.

This session we will consider biases around accents, body image, and those within AI. We will also discuss why we need bias training, why we need to address our biases and how we "de-bias".

Discussion

What are is the "halo effect"? *Re-read pages 295-306*

> The "halo effect" is the tendency for a positive attribute to morph into a positive overall opinion of someone. For example, considering someone who is physically attractive to also be a good person, or that because someone is older, they must be competent.
>
> Simply, it is a heuristic shortcut that because someone is good in one area, they must be elsewhere also.

How does the "halo effect" relate to body image bias, and does this vary between men and women? *Re-read pages 305-315*

Agarwal highlights Cicero (P 295) linking physical and moral beauty. This is further discussed in relation to the "obesity penalty" faced by women and is of relevance as anecdotal evidence from female academics suggests that their weight influenced how seriously they were taken. A similar although less marked trend is seen in men.
Height bias has also been observed with taller people more likely to make more money, but shorter women more likely to receive more attention on dating sites.
Clearly, societally positive perceptions of physical attractiveness influence biases through a "halo effect" i.e. physically attractive features lead to positive opinions of people overall.

How can accents impact our perceptions? *Re-read pages 333-346*

We are more likely to be biased against those who have accents that are indicators of undesirable characteristics or that are different from our own, with linguistic profiling taking less than 30 seconds. Once this has occurred, lots of assumptions are made about the speaker. In-group vs out-group bias also occurs with people with similar accents reinforcing their social identity and people with differing accents lacking trust.

Is AI unbiased? What are the impacts of AI bias? *Re-read Chapter 11*

AI is biased as it is designed by humans who carry biases, for example the lack of diversity in development teams leads is reflected as bias in the product (P. 363 and 374). Furthermore, the datasets and decisions used to train AI can lead to further bias, for example facial recognition to predict criminality or sexuality. This is alongside the issues of "coded gaze" where robots fail to recognise darker skin colours (P. 379).
The impacts of AI bias can lead to racial profiling and false arrests (P. 384); technology not working properly for end-users and leads to a lack of diversity in products; and lost job opportunities (P. 366-7).

Reflecting
Do we need bias training?

Yes, we all have biases; both conscious and unconscious. It is only through becoming more aware of our biases that we can seek to correct them. While for some this may take the form of attending and actively engaging in "unconscious bias training" for others it may involve other methods.
It is important to note that attending unconscious bias training does not passively lead to a greater understanding of a person's bias; an active and ongoing process of self-reflection must be undertaken and sustained.

Application
Why do we need to be more aware of unconscious bias? *Re-read*
Chapter 12 – Good Intentions

If we are not aware of our unconscious biases, then we won't be aware when we make decisions that are biased, or our biases are used to justify explicit bias (e.g., headscarf ban in the Netherlands).
Understanding our biases, what triggers them and what makes us most vulnerable to them can help us become aware of the consequences of our unconscious biases and the behavioural outcomes that follow.
This will also help us appreciate the intersectionality of bias more.

How do we "de-bias," as individuals and as an organisation?

Re-read pages 411-414

First we must become aware of our own biases and implicit biases, and use these as a springboard for further interventions and undoing harmful stereotypes.
Here are a few examples raised by Agarwal, that practically apply this;
- Being aware of the language we use, such as avoiding generalisations (e.g. boys like dinosaurs vs this boy likes dinosaurs)
- Creating non-judgemental spaces in organisations to discuss biases
- Calling out microaggressions
- Inclusive job descriptions and avoiding gendered words or gender-coded words. Also blinding CVs.

Next Steps

First things first, thank you for taking part in the sessions, we hope you enjoyed them and will join us for the next book. Your contributions have been appreciated and the discussions we have had are contributing to making a more inclusive community for all. However, this is the last booklet in the series exploring Pragya Agarwal's' book and the linked RSC report, so any **comments**, **critiques** or **feedback** would be much appreciated by the authors of these booklets and the wider team.

Second, we will be holding a **"Positive Action and Discussion Session"** *that all participants will be invited to. In this session we will discuss how we can bring about positive change in the* **community**, **curriculum** *and* **culture** *of the department and University.*

We hope to see you all there!

Additional Notes;