RECOGNIZING THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST

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Outline

• Identifying the Hurdles
• Outright discrimination/structural barriers
• Schemas and implicit bias
• Stereotype threat (and solo status)
• Micro-messaging
• Feedback loops
• Discussion
Where things stand now

According to a report published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women, “Gender inequities have proven to be stubbornly resistant to change at the level of the professoriate; women continue to be disproportionately employed in part-time and limited-term positions; their rate of advancement through the ranks and their representation at the highest faculty ranks remains below that of men. These differences hold for minority faculty, they are compounded for minority women, and they are amplified at more elite institutions.” (Wylie, Jackson, and Fosado 2007)
What can we do?

• Admittedly there are pipeline issues, but *why* is the pipeline so leaky? And what other factors play a role?

• We need to identify the hurdles women, minorities (and others) face so we are better prepared to avoid or overcome them.

• The hurdles differ for each of us; understanding the variety of hurdles will help us each individually, and will help us help others.

• Dwelling upon the negative isn’t helpful, but gaining knowledge and agency is.
Discrimination

• Explicit discrimination still exists:
  – Rude, disparaging, disrespectful remarks
  – Sexist & homophobic assumptions about family status, etc.
  – Pressure to enter gendered specialties
  – Inappropriate humor
  – Backlash, e.g., against imagined advantages

• Structural barriers still exist:
  – Work/family balance remains a special challenge for women.
The entrepreneurial work culture

“Hard working colleagues set the bar for a top grade in research very very high. Many, perhaps most, of the top achieving people have no outside interests. One has been known to say that he regards all music as a distraction. Some of these colleagues are single and childless. All of them write papers on vacation, if they vacation at all.”

• Must we model ourselves on workaholics to be successful?
• What structural changes would ease this pressure?
• Are there *career* advantages to a full life outside of work?
  – Creativity requires rest, change of pace/context, support.
  – Move from model of work/life balance to work/life integration.

The “Motherhood Penalty”

• In addition to structural challenges for parents, research suggests that there is bias against mothers.
  – Given identical applications except for indications of parental status, “mothers received only half as many callbacks as their identically qualified childless counterparts.”
  – “Parenthood served as no disadvantage at all to men.”

Bias research in social psychology

• Old model of discrimination focused on *Explicit Discrimination*, i.e., conscious actions directed against members of a group.

• New model: *Implicit bias*
  
  – *Schemas*: Non-conscious expectations or stereotypes associated with members of a group that guide expectations, perceptions and behaviors.
  
  – Action based on schemas is pervasive and inevitable. But schemas can be distorting and result in poor judgment.

Schemas are widely shared

- Research shows that we *all* – regardless of gender or race – perceive and treat people based on schemas associated with social group membership.
- Even those who consciously *reject* the schemas may respond and act in ways that conform to them.
- People are typically not aware of them, but with effort can become aware of them and change them.
- Implicit association test:
  
  https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/

Schemas are “quick and dirty” cognitive mechanisms

• Schemas play a significant role when there is:
  – Ambiguity, lack of information
  – Stress from competing tasks, time pressure
  – Under-representation of the group in question (when the group does not reach critical mass)
  – Lack of accountability

• Schemas can be overridden when we avoid (and create structures to prevent) these conditions.
Schemas and Evaluation

• Applicants with African American-sounding names had to send 15 resumes to get a callback, compared to 10 for applicants with white-sounding names.

  • White names counted as an additional 8 years of experience.
  • The higher the resume quality, the greater the gap in callback rate.


• When evaluating identical application packages, male and female university psychology professors preferred 2:1 to hire “Brian” (or “Barack”?) over “Karen.”

Evaluation of Fellowship Applications

“...the success rate of female scientists applying for postdoctoral fellowships at the [Swedish Medical Research Council] during the 1990s has been less than half that of male applicants.”

Results of study: Women applying for a postdoctoral fellowship had to be 2.5 times more productive to receive the same reviewer rating as the average male applicant.

Similar findings:
- USA/GAO report on Peer Review in Federal Agency Grant Selection (1994)
- European Molecular Biology Organization Reports (2001)

Gender Schemas in Recommendations for Successful Medical School Faculty Applicants

**Letters for men:**
- Longer
- More references to CV, Publications, Patients, Colleagues

**Letters for women:**
- Shorter
- More references to personal life
- More “doubt raisers,” including hedges, faint praise, and irrelevancies (e.g., “It’s amazing how much she’s accomplished.” “It appears her health is stable.” “She is close to my wife.”)

More evidence of evaluation bias

• Race and gender stereotypes often lead to different standards of assessment.
  
  – Women and minorities are more easily judged competent, but standards for excellence are set higher than for men and whites. (Biernat & Kobrynowicz 1997)

  – High prestige jobs are coded masculine (requiring competence, ambition, competitiveness), but women who are “masculine” in this way are judged to be cold, aggressive, haughty, so not a good “fit” for the workplace. (Fine 2010, Ch. 5)
Stereotype Threat

- **Stereotype threat** occurs when your group is stereotyped as performing poorly in a domain and your performance may appear to confirm the negative stereotype.
  - Performance decreases on *computational* and *recall* tasks.
  - Conscious awareness of the threat is not necessary for the effects.

- Stereotype threat is *situational*: performance decreases *only* in settings where the stereotype is activated.

- Threat can be activated with little or no explicit mention of stereotyped group.
  - If the stereotype is culturally ubiquitous.
  - If there are implicit cues.
Micro-messaging

• When we speak, we assume that others take their message from our words and that we convey what we intend.
• However, we all rely on much more than words to interpret others.
• Implicit attitudes (biases) are more often expressed in body language than in speech, even by those who do not consciously endorse the bias.
  – What are some micro-messages that say “you don’t belong here”? They can trigger stereotype threat.
  – Micro-inequities can be countered by micro-affirmations.
Solo Status

• **Solo status** occurs when one is the only member of one’s social group in a setting.

• Solo status increases the risk of stereotype threat; public settings also exacerbate the effects.

• Both stereotype threat and solo status are plausibly the result of intrusive metacognition.

• Addressing solo status can reduce stereotype threat – critical mass matters.
How to combat stereotype threat

• *Reframe the task*
  – Does it have to be viewed as diagnostic of your abilities? Is it really a “test”?

• *Affirm/embrace complex identities: “Reducing the salience of a threatened identity appears to serve a protective function, supporting continued high performance...”*
  – Embrace an identity that is non-stereotyped.
  – Identify with a characteristic shared across ingroup/outgroup.
  – Affirm your valued and unique characteristics.

http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/reduce.html
More strategies

• *Explain the anxiety* in ways that don’t validate the stereotype
  – Attribute struggle to “an external, temporary cause.”
  – Reframe the anxiety as a potential performance enhancer.
• Do you think intelligence is “fixed” (not changing over time or context) or *“like a muscle”* that can strengthen and develop?
  – The latter “incremental theorists” are less susceptible to stereotype threat.
  – They are “likely to increase effort to further learning and to overcome obstacles.” *(Dweck & Sorich, 1999; Mueller & Dweck 1998).*

http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/reduce.html
Summing up: strategies

• Outright discrimination
  ➢ Use institutional means of redress

• Structural barriers
  ➢ Demand institutional change; convert barriers to bridges

• Schemas and implicit bias
  ➢ Slow down; hold evaluators accountable; build critical mass

• Stereotype threat (RE-AIM)
  ➢ Reframe the task; Explain anxiety; activate Alternative identities; adopt Incremental view of intelligence; find role Models.
Accumulation of advantage & disadvantage

• Like interest on capital, advantages accrue.
• Like interest on debt, disadvantages accrue.
• Small differences in treatment can accumulate to cause major consequences in salary, promotion, prestige.
Accumulation of disadvantage feedback loop

Affects educational opportunities, publication rate, funding, climate of support, etc.

Performance is underestimated

Under-performance on tasks

Evaluation Bias
Stereotype Threat

“Confirms” schema

Lack of critical mass

LOWERED CAREER SUCCESS RATE
Accumulation of disadvantage feedback loop

LOWERED CAREER SUCCESS RATE

Affects educational opportunities, publication rate, funding, climate of support, etc.

Under-Performance on tasks

Stereotype threat

“Confirms” schema

Lack of critical mass
Possible Next Steps

• Challenge the myth of non-bias
  o Even individuals who are strongly egalitarian may still rely on problematic schemas.
  o Confidence in your own fairness may prevent you from being as fair as you aim to be.
    ▪ E.g., If you assume that you are are always fair, then you conclude that others’ weaknesses must be their own fault.

• Check yourself. Create mechanisms of accountability. Work together to make a difference.
More steps?

• Mentoring
  o Research suggests that not everyone receives the benefits of informal (or even formal) mentoring.
  o How does mentoring occur in your unit, and how might it be improved? How might it be made more equitable?
Accumulation of disadvantage feedback loop – revisited!

Affects educational opportunities, publication rate, funding, climate of support, etc.

Performance is underestimated

Heightened under-performance on tasks

Valued appropriately

Improved

“ Confirms” schema

“Disconfirms” critical mass

LOWERED CAREER SUCCESS RATE

EVALUATION BIAS

Stereotype threat

Disconfirms

Creates
Thank you for your attention

And special thanks to:

Samantha Brennan  Hazel Sive
Thomas F. DeFrantz  Abigail Stewart
Deborah K. Fitzgerald  JoAnne Yates

for their contributions.

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