The Link Between Structural Bias and the Biology/Socialization Controversy

2012 PEERs Seminar

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Brief Outline

• (1) Structural Bias Background
• (2) Biology and Socialization Background
• (3) Tying (1) and (2) Together
Structural Bias

Background Information
Definition: Structural Bias

- Values that society places on traits that people do not choose
- Inherent values that society uses to allocate resources
- Disproportionate allocation of resources based on social identity

Harvard Professor Asks: How many of you were first born? 75-80% of Students raised their hands [1]
“The natural distribution is neither just nor unjust; nor is it unjust that persons are born into society at some particular position. These are simply natural facts. What is just and unjust is the way that institutions deal with these facts.”

-John Rawls

[1]

Economic Diversity at 146 Top Colleges [1]
"The education system is an increasingly powerful mechanism for the intergenerational reproduction of privilege." - Anthony Carnevale [2]

SAT Scores vs. Family Income [2]
Parents don't own land, moved a lot
By highschool parents were in deep debt: medical and other
Good grades, good SAT score, no money = no chance of entering college system
Difference Principle makes college possible: government grants bring me closer to "starting line" of "typical" college student
**Structural Bias Fix**

• Difference principle: Those who excel in a structure can help those without access or who are underprivileged within the structure.

• Eg: Government taxing very wealthy to pay for programs to help poor.

“A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.” – James Keller

Background Information
Definition: Biology and Socialization

- Conflicting explanations that differences in interests are natural expressions of gender differences vs. a product of environmental upbringing
- Biology is unchanging, Socialization we have more impact
- Larry Summers – “Women in STEM”
Differences in Raising of Children

Gender based toys that demonstrate differences in different career expectations.
Distribution of Women in Science Fields

• uneven distribution of women recruitment to areas of science
  • 60% undergrads in Biology are women
  • 21% undergrads in Physics are women  [6]

• Differences can be from:
  • personal interest to subject matter (Biology)
  • influence of teachers and parents (Socialization)
  • girls are more likely to consider science careers when they have science role models and given encouragement (Socialization)
  • Exclusionary climate
Figuring Out an Identity
Structural Bias and Biology/Socialization

Tying them together
How They are Tied Together

• These problems proliferate because of a lack of attention
• This harms everyone
How They are Tied Together

- Biology and Socialization influences your “starting line” in the race of life
- Socialization is part of what allows people to combat structural biases
How Can we Combat Biases?

- Step 1) Acknowledge the problem may even come from you.
- Step 2) Actively think about these biases
- Step 3) Engage in conversations about inequality in society.
References


