Language, Workplace and Unconscious Bias

• Quiz #7 is due Monday, April 20 by noon: https://lessons.ummu.umich.edu/2k/370w09/quiz_07
• The study guide is now available in the resources folder in Ctools
• Extra credit opportunity: To be turned in in section on Friday, April 17. Write an essay question that you think would be nice to answer on the final exam. It should be a question that draws on course concepts and that would take about 10-15 minutes to answer. This extra credit is worth .5 points.
Which gender?

1. my neighbor is a flight attendant
2. my neighbor is a doctor
3. my neighbor cares for children
Trix and Psenka

- Are letters of recommendation for American medical college faculty positions different for males and females?
Gender Schema

• “sets largely of non-conscious assumptions about sex differences in men and women” (Valian, 1998)
  – schemas are “non-conscious hypotheses”

• In what ways could a gender bias in letters evidence a particular gender schema?
Analysis: Gender Terms

TEXT 5. EXAMPLES OF USE OF GENDER TERMS IN DIFFERENT LETTERS

Dr Gray is a thorough, hardworking, extremely intelligent and insightful woman. She is an extremely intelligent young lady with an admirable work ethic. On a personal level Sarah is, in my opinion, the quintessence of the contemporary lady physician who very ably combines dedication, intelligence, idealism, compassion and responsibility without compromise.

I believe Dr Harvey to be a man of great personal integrity. Overall, we have found William a highly intelligent and hard working young man. He is entirely dedicated to patient care, personable, a gentleman in every sense of the word.

• 10% of female applicants had such gender terms, 5% of males
I am writing in support of Sarah Gray MD's application for the position of Associate Professor of Nephrology in your department. I have worked closely with Dr. Gray both as her chairman and as a fellow faculty member doing pediatric nephrology for the past three years. She is a superb clinician and academician. I truly enjoyed working with her. Your gain is my loss. I believe that you will find that she will be a genuine adjunct to your faculty. If you require more specific information, please do not hesitate to notify me.

Overall, we have found Bill to be a highly intelligent and hard working young man. He communicates and collaborates well with his peers and supervisors. On a more personal side, it saddened us to see him leave our institution yet we were not able to retain him for lack of funds. We believe that Bill is a promising, highly
Analysis: Semantic Domains

- Possessive phrases referring to the applicant
  - “her teaching”, “his research”
- Training, teaching, application, research, skills & abilities, career
  - Do you think these would be used differently between genders?
Figure 3. Semantic realms following possessives. Rank-ordered within gender sets from equal numbers of letters ‘her training’; ‘his research’
Analysis: Other Features

- Length (Avg. 253 for males, 227 for females)
- Letters of minimal assurance (15% of female applicants, 6% of male)
- Doubt raisers, e.g. negative language, hedges, potentially negative, unexplained, faint praise, irrelevancy (24% of letters for female applicants had a “doubt raiser”, 12% of male)
Dear Dr Alfred Koop:

It gives me great pleasure in writing this recommendation letter for Dr Sarah Gray. I have worked with Sarah as a resident and as staff at St. Joseph Metropolitan Hospital. She is knowledgeable, pleasant, and easy to get along with. I have known Sarah for approximately 4 years, becoming socially friendly with her and her husband, particularly over the past year and a half.

Obviously, Sarah is a very well-trained, compassionate lady physician who has very good clinical skills. She is known for her bedside manner, and tries hard to communicate with the patients and the physicians. I get a sense that she is looking to develop a clinical program now that she has chosen to leave the laboratory and concentrate exclusively on clinical medicine.

I highly recommend Dr. Gray and will be happy to answer any further questions in this regard.

Charles Lewis, MD
Chairman, Department of Psychiatry
Trix and Psenka

• What are the take-home messages of this article?
What are the take-home messages of this article?

– Letters are systematically different for males and females
– Unconscious bias may affect job prospects
– Unconscious bias may help explain dirth of women in higher positions in academic medicine.
Unconscious Bias

• “We all form hypotheses about social groups”
• Our perceptions of others are affected by the social groups they belong to.
• Fairness involves first becoming aware of these often unconscious perceptions.

(Valian 1998)
Unconscious Bias

- Trix and Psenka
- Rubin: Who remembers what the Rubin reading was about?
Unconscious Bias: CVs

• Same CV sent to 238 academic psychologists; some told name was Karen Miller, some told Brian Miller.
• Asked if they would hire applicant.
• Results:
  – Both male and female reviewers more likely to hire male applicant
  – Both male and female reviewers more positively evaluate qualifications (research, teaching, service contributions) of male applicant.
Unconscious Bias: Health Care

• Health Care: does unconscious bias in medical care lead to worse outcomes for minorities?
• “An elegantly designed prospective study has demonstrated clearly that disparaging racial stereotyping, not clinical data, was predictive of refusal to recommend bypass surgery for many African-American patients in one large series of cases.” (Geiger 2001)
Unconscious Bias: Orchestra Auditions

• In a blind audition, a screen is placed between evaluator and performer, keeping gender unknown.

• With blind auditions, 50% increase in chance women advance out of preliminary rounds.
Talk to your neighbor

• In what other settings could unconscious bias be playing a role?
• How might it manifest itself in language?
• Reactions generally?
What do you do?

• Letters of recommendation
• Student evaluations (cf. Rubin article), www.ratemyprofessors.com
• What other settings?