

Linguistic and Cognitive biases for social roles: an intersectional feminism perspective

Contents:

The class will analyse cognitive and linguistic biases, in particular gender biases, in a philosophical perspective. Students will engage with both theoretical literature and empirical studies. In particular, the aim of this class is to familiarise students with fundamental issues in feminist analysis while also applying the tools provided by Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language to applied and practical philosophical questions. Theories of concepts and cognitive representations, and theories of linguistic social meaning will be applied to stereotypes and biases analysed in sociology and gender studies.

The course is structured in five different modules.

In the first module, students will familiarise with the concept of intersectional feminism, its main theoretical and practical claims and the appropriate vocabulary.

In the second module, we will start analysing biases in research and scientific enterprise. We will start by considering so-called "neurosexism", biased research and misinterpretation of brain imaging. We will also talk about the impact of toys and stereotypes on infants cognitive development and, finally, about the "default male fallacy" and its impact on medical research.

In the third module, we will discuss gender biases in language. Students will receive an introduction to the topic of Language and Power, analyse metaphors in political discourse and engage with basic topics in social meaning construction and socio-linguistics.

In the fourth module, students will familiarise with some theoretical tools in analytical feminism and then apply these concepts in relation to specific theories of concepts and cognitive representations, in particular related to Dual Character Concepts theory and empirical investigation.

In the fifth module, we will discuss literature concerned with implicit biases, looking specifically at implicit biases in the job market and, finally, at implicit biases in philosophy.

A syllabus can be found below.

Code of conduct:

Discussion and debate are fundamental to philosophical inquiry and therefore encouraged during this class. However, I do not tolerate any form of discrimination or violence (physical or verbal) in my class. My aim is to carry on my teaching duties in a respectful, safe environment for both me and my students, and I expect students to share this objective.

If I observe or hear a person in my class attacking, harrassing or ridiculing someone else because of their outer appearance, language, age, origin, gender, sexual orientation,

religion, nationality, abilities, or because of physical or mental impairments or disabilities, I will take action to stop this kind of behavior. Basic respect and decency towards others are not a matter of debate.

Accessibility and how to get in touch:

If you have any specific need for special accommodation, due to physical or mental disabilities, please feel free to contact me in private. In general, any student who wishes to discuss specific problems and issues related to the class is very welcome to get in contact with me. You can do so by email or by coming to my office hours, which will be Tuesday from 10.00 to 12.00 and Wednesday from 16.00 to 17.00. You can always drop by my office any other time of the week, but please send me an email before if you want to make sure you will find me.

Credits:

BN: active participation and engagement in the class is what is required for a BN. Normally this involves taking part in the discussion during the seminar, but in case of special needs this requirement can be adapted and discussed.

AP: It is possible to write an essay, make an oral presentation during the seminar, or have an oral exam in order to get an AP. Modalities, themes, topics and times should be discussed with me in advance.

For those who are interested in writing an essay for this class: I strongly encourage you to write in English. While I am aware that using a second language for academic writing is not immediate, it is a great exercise, and mastering this skill will be extremely useful in a large variety of careers. Please keep in mind that I will not in any case evaluate you on your grammar or English skills, but solely on the basis of the contents and quality of argumentation.

Prerequisites:

The participants should be willing to read and discuss advanced philosophical literature in English. Basic knowledge of the philosophy of mind and metaphysics is recommended. No prior knowledge of linguistics is necessary, but students should be prepared to engage with empirical papers in linguistics, cognitive science and experimental philosophy.

Syllabus and literature:

Module 1: what is intersectional feminism

1.1 Data-Driven intersectional feminism

Reading assignment 1: K.Crenshaw (1989) "A black feminist critique of anti discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics" University of Chicago Legal Forum

1.2 The notion of intersectionality

Reading assignment 2: Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender, Hypatia Volume 26, Issue 4

1.3 The notion of patriarchy

Reading assignment 3: K. Manne, *Down girl*, 2018 (Chapter 1)

1.4 Elaborating on the concept of race and gender

Reading assignment 4: S. Haslanger "Gender and race: (what) are they? And (what) do we want them to be?" *Nous* 34:1 ~2000! 31–55

Module 2: Research and academic biases in science

2.1 Neurosexism and the construction of the "different" brain

Reading assignment 5: The gendered brain (G. Rippon, 2019) Chapter 4: "Brain myths, neurotrash and neurosexism"

2.2 Nature/nurture, essentialism, and gendered toys

Reading assignment 6: The gendered brain (G. Rippon, 2019) Chapter : "The gendered waters in which we swim: the pink and blue tsunami"

2.3 Data gap in research

Assignment: Episode 363 of 99% Invisible: Invisible women (27 min.)

Reading assignment 7: Invisible Women: data bias in a world designed for women (2019); Chapter 10 "The drugs don't work"

Module 3: Sex, gender and language

3.1 Language and Power: introduction

Reading assignment 8: Introduction to key topics in language and power (Simpson & Mayr, 2010) (Introduction chapter)

3.2 Abstract concepts grounding and metaphors

Reading assignment 9: Brown-tide rising: metaphors of latinos in contemporary American discourse (O. Santa Ana, 2002) Chapter 2: "How metaphors shape public opinion"

3.3 Socio-linguistics, social meaning and the world we construct with words

Assignment: listen to Episode 39 of the podcast The vocal Fries, "Beyoncé, Hoodies and Obama Linguistics" (1 h and 6 minutes) OR episode 9 "ChicaNO?ChicanYES! " (39 minutes)

Module 4: Mental representation and psychological concepts modelling

4.1 Dual character concepts: modelling normative and descriptive approaches to social roles

Reading assignment 10: Del Pinal, G., & Reuter, K. (2017). "Dual character concepts in social cognition: Commitments and the normative dimension of conceptual representation". *Cognitive Science*, 41, 477-501.

4.3 Dual Character concepts: analysing the bias empirically

Reading assignment 11: Del Pinal, G. and Madva, A. and Reuter, K. (2017) "Stereotypes, Conceptual Centrality and Gender Bias: An Empirical Investigation", *Ratio*

Module 5: Implicit biases

5.1 Implicit gender biases

Reading assignment 12: Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination
Eric Luis Uhlmann, Geoffrey L. Cohen (2005)

5.2 Implicit gender bias in Philosophy

Reading assignment 13: Implicit bias and philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology
Chapter 2.6: Philosophers Explicitly Associate
Philosophy with Maleness: An Examination of Implicit and Explicit Gender Stereotypes in
Philosophy
Laura Di Bella, Eleanor Miles, and Jennifer Saul

Final class: recap