

Meeting notes and shared resources for the Annual SoBA Lab Meeting on

Social Equality

Notes during meeting kindly taken by Kristina Haira

30/06/2022

Resources mentioned/discussed during the meeting (in Zoom chat)

[NAIDOC |](#)

[Social Robots for Supporting Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Diagnosis and Treatment - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

[Informal Caregivers Disclose Increasingly More to a Social Robot Over Time | Extended Abstracts of the 2022 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems \(acm.org\)](#)

Synopsis of the meeting

n.b.: The notes below are Kristina's (valiant!) attempt to capture the conversational thread that took place over zoom with lab members joining in from the UK, Israel and Australia. It has been lightly edited for clarity, but it is meant to be read/taken as a snapshot of some of the ideas and questions raised, by our group, at a particular point in time. Hopefully this will be useful for us as a lab to have to look back on how our thinking, actions, and priorities evolve across time.

Emily: Opened up the discussion to any thoughts

Ryssa:

A topic no one has shared but matters the most to me currently is the overturning of Roe vs Wade, as it has thrown my belief in humanity a little bit.

Emily:

That's a topic that could be talked about endlessly, there is a great article written by a law and ethics professor in the states [Peggy Cooper Davis – see attached article from *the Economist*], she draws parallels between the row vs wade decision and the treatment of black Americans throughout history.

The article links to the article which Ayeh shared as it ties together racism and sexism in not only a historical perspective but through a contemporary perspective of what many Americans are consciously or ideologically are trying to do with restricting human rights.

Jean-Noel:

A quick suggestion for the lab to take action by stating our goals, intentions and by being transparent about our practices, such as diversity within the lab.

Emily:

Great idea, the idea of accountability here sounds like the Athena SWAN initiative at Glasgow university which looks at the demographics of staff and students. The initial aim was to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in STEM employment in higher education and research. Athena SWAN has since expanded in their aim for greater equality and diversity.

The idea to have a similar initiative in the lab can be complicated as setting the boundaries, without resources such as HR staff, can be messy and the lab is immensely smaller than most institutions or departments. Larger institutions are also able to investigate the demographics of individuals who applied or were interviewed to actively recruit individuals from very specific demographics.

It is important to recognise diversity within the lab to some extent, for example, including the flags of everyone's country of origin during lectures about the lab. This shows how the lab is at most very international but that is not the same as racial diversity. The lab has been lucky as without active recruitment we have on some levels, very diverse cohorts of people applying for various positions.

Implementing a similar initiative will also be difficult as if, over a year or two, the lab hasn't recruiting individuals from specific backgrounds then the lab will have to propose actions that may not be practical, particularly without HR staff.

Question on any ideas to practically begin this?

Jean-Noel:

Agreed that the lab could be detrimentally affected depending on various factors. Maybe the lab could focus more on orientating ourselves, as opposed to suggestions for active recruitment, during public engagement. It could be good for us to engage with the public more on this point.

Emily:

Agreed on the public engagement point.

In equality and diversity panels, this work often falls on the individuals who are the least represented such as, people of colour, women, LGBTQIA, etc.

Ryssa:

The work falling on the minority was also mentioned in the Deaf Awareness training today.

Emily:

For public engagement events we participate in, we could make sure that every individual who works in the lab, especially those completing their PhD or post doc, is strongly encouraged to participate in at least one of these events. This should provide equal opportunities for engagement/involvement for everyone which is a much better strategy than only specifically including individuals that make the lab look diverse, and overburdening these individuals with participating in all (or the majority of) our events.

Question to the group: any other suggestions to have more representation at each event?

Jean-Noel:

Suggested to plan more events in specific socioeconomic areas.

I feel like there is a lot of things which individuals aren't able to learn about by virtue of their upbringing.

Emily:

Science festivals typically and, in my experience, explicitly widen access to low socioeconomic communities.

The lab doesn't have the resources to do the necessary surveys and outreach as compared to these large organisations which run these events, but the notion/sentiment is absolutely appreciated.

Macquarie University does have events for indigenous or refugee communities which follow cultural protocols. The lab has and will continue to reach out to present at many of these events.

In future, lets continue to discuss how we can improve our outreach.

Ryssa:

We have developed a good reputation with the organisers for these events through Macquarie. They do rely on us to bring the robots, often at short notice, so there will be many little outreach activities for everyone in the lab.

Emily:

There have also been many requests from Western Sydney University to do these outreach events. The public science fair at the Powerhouse Museum [scheduled for 20 August 2022] has also floated the idea of making public transport free that day to further widen access.

Equality and diversity measures across different campuses:

The dominance of American media has, in some situations/scenarios, narrowed thinking. Americans specifically are importing their problems on other institutions/universities. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement across America wasn't (necessarily) going to be aided by universities in all other parts of the world specifically employing more people of colour – for example, in central Europe, it has been argued that more pressing equality issues need to be addressed related to aiding immigrants within their own communities.

Educational institutions should focus more on the issues within their local communities rather than those that we are more globally aware of. Representation from local indigenous communities should be prioritised here, as they have really different challenges that are more relevant here and may resonate more to indigenous American communities than to the larger Black Lives Matter movement.

Ayeh:

In general, the most interesting article I found was Katerina's on mental health not being in your head but a problem within society.

Reflection on how virtues played into this as we individually tend to take it upon ourselves to try our best to self-assess, be honest with ourselves, and treat others with compassion and respect.

Emily:

That ties in Katerina's, Nate's, Ayeh's and Jean-Noël's posts. They all have similar compelling arguments which addresses the growing lack of compassion people have for each other which is capitalist driven.

Katerina:

Ties into the anti-psychiatry movement. The paper talks about the over diagnosis of mental illnesses mostly due to social expectations of how an individual should act. This can also lead to certain mental illnesses not being diagnosed properly due to stigma.

The DSM-5 is very descriptive and illusive sometimes when trying to pinpoint exactly what is going on. There should be better ways of categorising and diagnosing mental illness.

Emily:

This is reflected in the DSM history, for example, homosexuality was once included as a mental illness. There are great criticisms and ways forward listed in that article.

Maki:

The DSM alone doesn't have the power to diagnose anyone, what is also included is the patient and if they want to be helped, their families, most importantly the clinicians which are also human and have their own opinions and systemic treatment of different groups of people.

Emily:

The diagnostic, clinical and contextual complexity of psychiatric disorder diagnosis relates to a paper Guy co-authored recently on removing individual bias by talking to a voice agent or robot.

Katerina:

There is still a debate currently on bias with AI due to how googles face recognition feature isn't inclusive for people of colour.

Ryssa:

Any voice or embodied agent is going to be fully embedded in the biases of the day such as our present-day methodologies for making decisions on symptoms. All it would do is reduce the difference between individual clinicians, but it would still have all the same issues.

Emily:

How we combat biases with AI is best done with more and more training data. Will the biases reflect exactly what any individual psychiatrist has, likely no.

Jean-Noel:

Biases are embedded in the design. The idea is to apologise and fix the problem rather than embrace and accept it. Understanding your neurodiversity is an attribute to be celebrated rather than something to be fixed. Assigning an AI to fix that problem inherently ties into what the DSM-5 tries to do.

There should be more assistance to the community that allows an individual to become secure and comfortable with themselves.

Emily:

It will depend on the clinical presentation or issue.

The point of trying to fix over diagnosed mental illnesses with quick, effective medical solutions doesn't always work.

Jean-Noël:

It is the idea of it relating to someone's environment.

Guy:

But that's why we differentiate between different types of mental illnesses and what they are based on – biological markers or external settings. So, treatment is often argued based on symptoms and their cause.

Jean-Noël:

right! But your biology is affected by your environment to some extent and your biology can also affect your environment to some extent – they're not so clearly separated.

Guy:

True – but when thinking about clinical diagnosis and treatment we have to separate the two to a certain extent and truly understand the nature of the illness or the emotional challenge. Is it a chronic pathology or a challenging phase? After experiencing rough external event (i.e., traumatic event) one can definitely develop a chronic psychopathology or mental illness (PTSD) – yet, we only diagnose it as such (and treat it accordingly) after observing symptoms for 6 months, otherwise it would be defined as acute stress and a challenging emotional state due to exposure to traumatic event rather than full on mental illness.

Emily:

That confronts the issue of our search for solutions, for example, the suggested gun violence solutions like “more good people with guns”.

As Jean-Noël said, someone's environment causes depression and it's incredibly unstable. It's sometimes about treating the cause instead of the symptoms.

Social deterioration and the fabric of society:

Evolving in a way where people are very isolated and don't have community connections that they used to have.

Relates to the Neurotechnology report we talked about a few weeks ago.

Are there any countries, cities, places that are doing a good job bringing people back together?

Has covid presented any opportunities?

Jean-Noël:

Connect with new people through online communities which have provided a platform for people to come together.

Ayeh:

Sometimes we need to accept an individual for who they are rather than be judgemental about what illness they have.

We may need to work on enhancing and making the DSM-5 better as its job is to judge an individual's mental health.

Its not societies job to judge others based on our ideals.

Guy:

I agree – I would rephrase judging to diagnosing

Ryssa:

When does non-judgement become neglect?

Ayeh:

I don't see how the two would be related... non-judgement I would say has to do with keeping an open heart and approaching situations with curiosity rather than a predisposed idea and overgeneralised categorisation of people as good or bad.

Diagnosing categorises people. Judging in the sense of categorising people.

In society, we shouldn't be basically taking that position of a judge and categorising people into right or wrong.

We should be treating people with compassion and acceptance because we don't know what they are going through, and we can't really understand what their experience is.

Emily:

Reminds me of the ads about coming forward if you have experienced extreme hardships. It was about the point of judging people based on very little information.

It comes back to Jean-Noël's and Katerina's articles about the breakdown of social fabrics and giving people the benefit of the doubt.

The pandemic has rocked the world over the past few years in ways that will be written about for the rest of our lifetimes and beyond. This disconnection relating to inflation and extreme financial pressure caused by the pandemic.

Is there a way that technology, social neuroscience research, can shine a light on this issue or propose any solutions to this this issue?

Ryssa:

The Providing a tool kit for caregivers during the pandemic lecture highlighted the extra burden on caregivers.

Guy:

Informal Caregivers Disclose Increasingly More to a Social Robot Over Time - article

Caregivers are unique people who we've found rarely even talk about themselves. During the pandemic they were also very isolated. While they might not suffer from mental illness, they do experience very difficult situations. They give us an insight into people that are under a lot of stress as we can test interventions or study these emotions with healthy populations.

Emily:

That really ties in with Nate's shared article and twitter thread with caregivers and inequalities.

Guy:

When acknowledging caregivers, from my research, we can see how we can support them. They finally had an outlet to talk about themselves even if it was with a robot and not a real person, it established a deep relationship over the course of the ten sessions. They went from answering a question on average 20 seconds to over a minute. This group of people could really use the help of different technologies.

Terry:

Sometimes it's not about finding new technologies but using the ones we already have.

There is sometimes a disconnect with the technology that is already available and what people are willing to use.

Resources and contributions by lab members on Slack before the meeting

Katerina Manoli:

<https://bostonreview.net/articles/mental-illness-is-not-in-your-head/> - "Mental Illness Is Not in Your Head. Decades of biological research haven't improved diagnosis or treatment. We should look to society, not to the brain".

[https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736\(22\)00008-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736(22)00008-3/fulltext) - "Quantifying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality on health, social, and economic indicators: a comprehensive review of data from March, 2020, to September, 2021".

Emily Cross (she/her)

This is a piece Rich shared with me recently, and even though pretty much nothing in this is new, I think it clearly and elegantly summarises the challenges (and a few key steps forward) for fixing the leaky pipeline of women in neuroscience

[LessonsStoriesWomenNeurosci.pdf](#)

Nate Caruana

I came across this - which I think is interesting in terms of inequality in AI but also more broadly social inequality in healthcare and COVID responses. I have recently come across a few threads on Twitter - one from a very well known Australian epidemiologist talking about the social inequalities in how we respond to the pro-Freedom covid response which favours wealthy people who can afford to mitigate risks if they get covid. I will try to find the thread. As a side note - i think it is also interesting how varied covid responses are now post opening up, which I think is saying a lot about some people's approach to social equality.

[bmj.n304.full.pdf](#)

one of the

tweets: https://twitter.com/Globalbiosec/status/1539350467545042944?s=20&t=9HzB1Yf2G_2Jv5j-Wk3vgA

Ryssa Moffat

Not the newest, but still interesting: <https://theconversation.com/universal-basic-income-could-improve-the-nations-mental-health-123816>

[Universal basic income could improve the nation's mental health](#)

Mental health experts have called for universal basic income as far back as 1969.

Maki Rooksby (they/she)

I'd like to share two apparently unrelated articles that nevertheless seem to resonate together in my (little) mind. One is a piece on personal pronouns by a philosopher whose writings I enjoy reading (when I have time). I like the way that the article introduces and explores different pronouns, but then considers what all this should be all about towards the end, i.e., the ethics concerning how we could be to each other that goes beyond words

: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n13/amia-srinivasan/he-she-one-they-ho-hus-hum-ita>

The other concerns an active line of research in attachment and childhood experiences (my previous life), around an idea which came to be termed as differential susceptibility hypothesis. Evidence that keep emerging by excellent research teams around the world remain mixed, but at the core of the concept, it is all about individual differences: how we are impacted by what we encounter in life, are all different for each of us, because how we perceive a given event, is not just determined by the nature of the event, but how each of us are as a person. To me, the concluding words of the article on pronouns, and the hypothesis seem to serve as a helpful reminder for considering social equality together.

[Belsky CurrentDirections07.pdf](#)

Hannah Cahill (she/her)

I have been reading "The Adult Side of Dyslexia" By Kelli Sandman-Hurley as it is a collection of lived experiences of my population of interest (being poor readers).

However, this is a physical book and I understand not everyone may have a chance to get their hands on it so I went on a bit of a hunt to find something a little easier for people to access.

I came across this article when in my search that was discussing a study that found that dyslexic children from low SES backgrounds benefitted more and had more cortical thickening from a summer reading program than dyslexic children from higher SES backgrounds.

Obviously there are a number of factors involved, higher SES families have more resources to support their dyslexic child, read to and talk to them providing with a greater vocabulary than lower SES families with dyslexic children.

Dyslexia doesn't discriminate, but unfortunately society does so reading articles like this does give me hope going forward.

I will leave the link and research article below for those interested.

Also, I thought I'd mention that I have been doing some volunteering for the Black Dog Institute in their Futureproofing study on youth mental health and for the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation. So, in the spirit of social equality I am happy to talk about them during the checkin if you'd like.

Webpage: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/06/170612153536.htm> (edited)

Research article from post above

[bhx131.pdf](#)

Terry Goetz (they)

I'd like to share an optimistic spin on a frequently-discussed topic in social justice research: epistemic (in)justice. Epistemic injustice can be defined as injustice relating to knowledge and (according to Miranda Fricker, who popularized the concept) comes in two main forms.

- Testimonial injustice: attributing to someone less credibility than they are due as a knower because of prejudice against a group to which they belong. (For example, a health care provider dismissing what a man says about his child's health and only believing it when the child's mother says she has made similar observations.)
- Hermeneutical injustice: injustice relating to the concepts and categories we use to interpret our experiences. (For example, many people are still unfamiliar with the concept of 'reproductive coercion', which means that those who are subject to it cannot discuss what they are experiencing with others, that individuals don't recognize the signs of such abuse and that society does not allocate appropriate funding for services which support victims.)

Much of the discussion around epistemic injustice is dedicated to uncovering instances of this type of injustice. However, I would argue that there is also valuable work being done in redressing such injustice, and that researchers in the social sciences are particularly well-placed to actively contribute to epistemic justice/fairness. This can, for example, take the form of research projects which focus on the experiences of those who are less often heard on a particular topic, or identifying and naming phenomena which play a role in everyday life. We might call it 'identifying a gap in the literature' or 'coining a new term', but such common steps in research can themselves be important contributions to social justice.

Jean-Noël George (They/He)

Completely forgot to send in a comment! Since 2020 I've been reckoning with academia as an institution, what my place within academia means, as well as the research I conduct. So, in preparation for my PhD, I've been having a little read around. Somewhat related to Terry's statement (and inadvertently yesterday's lab), I feel like this paper I attached is of note! Not only because of its present and potential impact on social justices, but it potentially implicates the area of research we do as a lab, too! (Increasingly) much of academia is intertwined with industry and, whether by force or affinity, [adopts capitalist, profit-driven practices](#). And I can see why, given that universities are only partially state-supported. However, because of our proximity to capitalism and the privilege of our position, I do think that we should pay close mind to analyses and critiques of capitalism, especially within the scope of technology, robotics and AI, as a part of our introspection and reflection as a lab. What stood out to me a lot from this paper is the concept of reciprocity and mutual dependency, and how this dynamic allows for self determination and justice for the many. As a closing thought, a question that came up for me

was 'How does my (and our) work support, and put into practise, the concept of reciprocity, mutual dependency, and self-determination?' (edited)

[Surveillance Capitalism and the Challenge of Collective Action.pdf](#)

Ayeh Alhasan

Sorry for the delay in posting but I really wanted to sit down and give this post the time it deserves and I was only able to do so today. *Disclaimer* this will be a super lengthy post, and I apologise in advance. As I was searching for inspiring papers that touch upon issues of social inequality we face today, I came across a very interesting paper titled: Systemic racism, systemic sexism, and the embryological enterprise (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ydbio.2021.02.001>). The paper basically gives a very detailed historical account of how racism and sexism have infiltrated every fold of western society, including science. It clearly illustrates how these issues are deeply rooted in certain ideological beliefs regarding the origin of life and how they had influenced and informed some of the most prominent theories in biology such as the great chain of being and the theory of evolution. This urged me to look into the issue from an Islamic perspective and I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few insights. I was inspired to look up a very influential sermon delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on his only pilgrimage which was performed near the end of his life, around 1400 years ago. This sermon is known as the 'Farewell Sermon' also final or last sermon and is considered to have summed up the main tenets of his teachings. Interestingly enough, the issues addressed are found to be still very relevant today. You can find an English translation of the sermon here: <https://medium.com/launchgood/a-parting-message-human-rights-in-the-prophets-last-sermon-1ea066674a40>. Some of the most relevant statements for our discussion include the following:

- All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white except by piety and good action.
- It is true that you have certain rights over your women, but they also have rights over you... Treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers.
- God has forbidden you to take usury (riba), therefore all riba obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer inequity.
- ... give your financial obligation (Zakat) of your wealth. The third point here is regarding the prohibition of taking interest on lending money. By doing this we avoid an economy where the rich keeps getting richer and the poor poorer based purely on the exchange of money itself. The fourth point refers to the Islamic taxation law which is very similar to today's tax system but in which a small percentage of one's savings (2.5%), rather than income, is given out to

the poor and needy as an obligation. In addition to the obligatory tax, Muslims are constantly urged to give from their wealth in charity purely for the sake of God and for their own sakes and not as a favor upon the poor and disadvantaged. For example, the Qur'an (2:264) mentions: "O believers! Do not waste your charity with reminders of your generosity or hurtful words, like those who donate their wealth just to show off and do not believe in Allah or the Last Day. Their example is that of a hard barren rock covered with a thin layer of soil hit by a strong rain—leaving it just a bare stone. Such people are unable to preserve the reward of their charity. Allah does not guide such disbelieving people." (2:265) "And the example of those who donate their wealth, seeking Allah's pleasure and believing the reward is certain, is that of a garden on a fertile hill: when heavy rain falls, it yields up twice its normal produce. If no heavy rain falls, a drizzle is sufficient. And Allah is All-Seeing of what you do." For a more detailed account and comparison between the Islamic perspective on social justice and the most dominant western theories, please refer to this paper:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/eb018807> Knowing that these were the very basic tenets based on which the Islamic civilization was established more than 1400 years ago, one would assume that 'Islamic' countries today would be further ahead and leading the way on the social justice front. But this is far from the truth. Generally we find that political participation of the masses is limited, gender based discriminatory laws are still predominant, discriminatory laws against minorities prevalent and support for the poor people and those with disabilities is minimal among many, many other issues. I know that it would be naïve to oversimplify these problems. Ignoring the success of such revolutionary tenets in achieving a relatively high level of justice and prosperity during the [Islamic Golden Age](#) (between the 8th and 13th centuries), and disregarding the very recent history of colonization as well as the ongoing geopolitical issues in the region would be unjust in its own regard. But if we try to simply compare between the western perspective and the Islamic one, we find that even without a deep rooted history of ideological justifications for discriminatory beliefs, we still find social injustice manifest in society. Why is this the case? Is it due to the lack of representation of women and minorities in societies which are predominantly led by males and the majority group? Is it simply the result of capitalist greed for wealth and power? Could it be a more universal issue of lacking virtue in our global society? Maybe the problem is not in capitalism per se, but in how it is implemented with greed, arrogance and lack of compassion. If this was indeed a crisis of virtue, what can we do to embody, instill and most importantly motivate 'virtue' to overcome greed and other 'vices' in today's increasingly more secular world? Are, then, ethical codes of conduct the solution? Should we be investing more time and energy into developing and assessing the efficacy of ethical codes? What would motivate the general population, especially the rich and powerful, to follow these codes? I think these are all very important questions to reflect on in our strive for global social justice in today's world. (edited)

[Systemic racism, systemic sexism, and the embryological enterprise](#)

[A Parting Message: Human Rights in the Prophet's Last Sermon](#)

[OUTLINING SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: AN EXPLORATION | Emerald Insight](#)

Emily Cross

WOW YOU ALL! This thread is amazing- and, ahem, clearly about 6 months' worth of material to digest and discuss! We will only begin to chip away at a few of the topics presented here today (alas) - but I'm very much looking forward to starting and continuing these conversations with you as a group, and I feel like my mind has been substantially expanded simply by reading your words, attachments, and linked articles!

and whoa, this quote (in the paper Ayeh shared) from our man, Hegel (1821) "The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlines it is the rather vague unity of feeling." just.... wow...!

[Ayeh Alhasan](#)

Hi guys, just wanted to reiterate my point as I don't feel like I made it clear enough. I guess what I meant to say regarding the DSM was that it is used by clinicians to make a judgement regarding whether to grant a diagnosis or not and which diagnosis to make. The diagnosis is a clinician's judgement at the end of the day and hence can either be accurate or mistaken. I know of many cases where people were misdiagnosed or overdiagnosed and this depends on both the DSM as well as the skill of the clinician. But the DSM itself was put together as a tool to help clinician make more accurate judgements/diagnoses.

Advocating for neu

rodiversity, however, is very much needed, in my opinion, in society rather than clinical practice. So, in society we shouldn't be judging people based on these diagnoses (as in make judgements regarding their character). We shouldn't even judge others based on the ideals that we hold ourselves accountable for and our understanding of what's right or wrong because everyone is unique and has their own unique experience in life (with a diagnosis or not). Hence, we need to keep in mind how diverse we are and treat each other with more compassion and kindness.

Hope that makes it a bit more clear. It was a lovely discussion! Looking forward to many more.

