

MY FAVOURITE SRV CONCEPT - UNCONSCIOUSNESS

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We see what we see, and we believe it to be real.

This is the basis for SRV's teaching on unconsciousness. The corollary seems to be that if we understand unconsciousness, we can more deliberately consider what we believe and thus, how we relate to and assist people experiencing marginalisation.

What we don't often consider is that what we see isn't necessarily the same as what is right in front of us. We like to think we are rational. Not so apparently. Our brains are filled with deep-rooted patterns and personal experiences that can lead us to be very irrational. The notion of unconsciousness tells us two surprising and perhaps uncomfortable things. Firstly, that our thoughts and actions are largely determined by our unconscious mind. Secondly, this happens automatically - it is outside of our control.

Unconscious bias can be useful; much of it is influenced by the age-old need to make quick judgements for our safety. However, these biases that we are unaware of and which are in effect, speedy judgments of people and circumstances, can also be misleading. For example, it is common for us to rate the athletic ability of African American men higher than that of others. We also tend to associate professional roles more strongly to men than we do to women.

We feed our unconsciousness by avoiding thinking about unpleasant things and by sugar-coating reality. We change TV channels at horror stories; an employee is 'let go', not 'fired'; the military says it causes 'collateral damage', not that it 'kills civilians'. We all like to think that we don't exhibit behaviours that are sexist, racist, or ageist. We would be horrified to think we might act in ways that devalue people who are marginalised. However, each of us is more biased than we think we are, even the most open-minded person. We constantly receive messages about being fair and accepting - the possibility that we aren't confronts our view of ourselves, our very identity.

Unconscious biases play an astonishingly significant role in the decisions we make. They affect our feelings and therefore our behaviours. This then helps form our experiences which in turn form our mindsets and

assumptions, thus reinforcing how we perceive things. This process has both conscious and unconscious elements. However, most of the time the individual is unaware that their behaviour is influenced by their unconsciousness. We are drawn to information that matches our mindsets. We're more likely to be friends with people who agree with our own beliefs. This confirms what we already think and we unconsciously ignore or reject anything that threatens our beliefs and values. This is known as *confirmation bias*.

Devaluation of entire collectivities over generations can be explained by large scale, systemic unconsciousness. So much of devaluation in human services is unconscious. It continues to happen regardless of high morals that most people and services claim. These include 'mercy', 'equality', 'justice', and 'choice'. Human services will often work to sugar-coat wounding actions. This includes using misleading language, such as 'professional practice', 'good medicine' and 'only doing my job'.

The negative impacts of wounding are pushed into unconsciousness as people justify their actions with in-group/out-group bias (assigning greater value to their own group members than to the others). We can see this in the dreadful conditions at Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, based on a supposed need to defend against the 'other', in this case, terrorists. Similarly, there is much history of the use of electric prods and medication being used on people with intellectual disability for supposed behaviour control. The members of the in-group found this easier than addressing the conditions that created and maintained people's devalued and neglected lives.

If we don't understand devaluation, and how it is formed and maintained, we will struggle to deal with it well. We need to become conscious about the realities of unconsciousness. We need to see how unconsciousness feeds into the formation of devaluation. By doing so we become better prepared to use SRV to shift devaluation and see people get the good things of life.

Don't build roadblocks out of assumptions - Lorii Myers

Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in - Isaac Asimov