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RESEARCH PULSE

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GREETINGS FROM RESEARCH PULSE

Hello everyone and a Happy 2025.

Thank you for following our research updates in the past year.

In 2025, we continue to share more research engagements and developments.

In this first issue of Research Pulse for 2025, we would like to share interesting insights from our colleagues, which include a research piece on *equality or fairness* by Dr. Hazik Mohamed, as well as tips for a *3-minute research presentation* by Ms. Joelle Yap.

Thanks for tuning in.

Best Wishes,
Dr. Adrian Tan
Research Director
Curtin Singapore

Do People Want Equality or Fairness?

Contributed by Dr. Hazik Mohamed

The long-running argument between fairness and equality touches on fundamental issues of social justice and human morality.

While fairness refers to the just and equitable treatment of individuals based on their unique circumstances and contributions, economic equality refers to a uniform distribution of resources among people. Many contend that people's basic desire is for fairness rather than equality.

Harry Frankfurt, a philosopher, contends in his book *On Inequality* that there is no inherent value to economic equality. Frankfurt makes both a psychological and a moral argument that, if people give it some thought, they will come to the conclusion that, in the end, it is not inequality that is upsetting them.



People may be concerned about what they perceive to be unfair reasons for economic disparity, which is understandable considering how much influence wealth and income have over you.



The possible repercussions of economic inequality also worry us. We might believe it weakens democracy, escalates crime, or lowers overall happiness levels. Most people's concerns are about poverty, not about some having less than others, but about "those with less having too little." Frankfurt contends, however, that inequality does not inherently bother us.

He draws attention to the fact that, despite the possibility that these disparities may be larger than those between the moderately well-off and the impoverished, few people are concerned about the differences between the very rich and the very well-off.

He claims that there would be perfect equality in a world where everyone lived in abject poverty, but few people would choose that over the one we currently inhabit. Therefore, "equality" may not truly represent what we value.

Psychological Perspectives on Fairness and Equality

Studies in psychology show that people have a basic sense of justice from a young age. Often, the need for strict equality is subordinated to this innate sense of justice.

According to a 2016 study by Gerdes and colleagues, children preferred fair distribution based on effort and need over an equal split when asked to divide resources among peers.

This is consistent with a study by Baumard, Mascaro, and Chevallier (2012), which showed even young children can distinguish between equality and fairness, frequently choosing distributions that prioritize effort and contribution over equal shares.



Researchers have discovered that even in the most extreme circumstances, children exhibit a strong bias towards equal divisions when asked to distribute items to strangers.

Children between the ages of six and eight were told by psychologists Alex Shaw and Kristina Olson (2011) about two boys named Dan and Mark who had cleaned their room and would be receiving erasers as a reward. However, because there were five boys, an equal distribution of the prizes was not possible. Most children said that instead of creating an uneven division, the experimenter should discard the fifth eraser. They could not have been concerned about inciting jealousy or rage because they did this even though they could have given the eraser to Dan or Mark without the other person knowing.

Although these answers appear to be motivated by a desire for equality, it is more likely that they are motivated by a sense of justice. Dan and Mark should receive the same compensation only because they completed the same amount of work. Thus, the kids were quite at ease giving three to Dan and two to Mark when Shaw and Olson said, "Dan did more work than Mark."



The preference for justice over equality is visible in a number of domains in real-world settings. Employees, for instance, typically accept pay differentials at work when they believe they accurately reflect effort, skill, and contribution. Perceptions of fairness in pay structures have a significant impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while mere equality in pay did not yield the same positive outcomes, according to research by Pfeffer and Langton (1993).

One more instance is observed in social welfare initiatives. Research has indicated that people are more in favor of welfare and progressive taxation policies that increase the resources available to the poor rather than dividing benefits equally among all socioeconomic groups. This preference highlights a societal tendency away from achieving strict economic equality and toward justice and meeting needs.



The Role of Fairness in Society

Trust and social cohesiveness are critically dependent on fairness. According to Tyler and Lind (1992), treating people fairly in the political and legal systems increases their legitimacy and compliance. People are more inclined to follow rules and laws when they think the systems are just, which promotes social stability. Research supports this perspective by demonstrating that public trust and cooperation are positively correlated with perceptions of procedural fairness in legal settings (Tyler, 2006).



Furthermore, fairness frequently directs diplomatic discussions and conflict resolution in the field of international relations. Research by Albin and Druckman (2012) shows that equitable negotiation procedures, in which participants believe their opinions and contributions are fairly taken into account, increase the likelihood of long-lasting agreements. This idea also applies to international projects like climate agreements, where successful collective action relies on nations making fair contributions according to their capacities and obligations.

Conclusion

Fairness is the principle that more closely aligns with human psychology and societal needs, even though equality is a noble ideal. In general, people want to be treated fairly and have their contributions and circumstances considered. Fairness is preferred over strict equality in a variety of contexts, including the workplace and social welfare programs, and it is essential to preserve social cohesiveness and trust. Societies can attain more equitable and sustainable results by placing a higher priority on fairness. This will guarantee that resources are distributed in a way that takes effort, need, and contribution into account.



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Tips for a 3-Minute Research Presentation

Contributed by Ms. Joelle Yap

In 2024, I participated in a 3-minute presentation segment at the Curtin School of Nursing's 50th Anniversary Nursing Conference. Together with five other PhD candidates, we had 180 seconds to present what our research was about using a static slide and without a script. Here are some extracts from my presentation and five tips based on my experience.

Background:

3-minute presentations build on the classic "elevator pitch," where you have to convey your research to someone (perhaps with funding or the right connections) while in an elevator. That person may not be familiar with your field of expertise, but by the time they exit, you should have successfully gained their understanding and support for your research.

Tip 1: Simplify.

My slide had only three letters. Keep your script short and simple too.

Tip 2: Find a hook.

Grab the audience's attention. My hook was a 7-second pause to illustrate that during natural disasters, people do not hear ... [silence]. Because “nurses often remain silent or go unnoticed during disasters.”

Tip 3: Have fun.

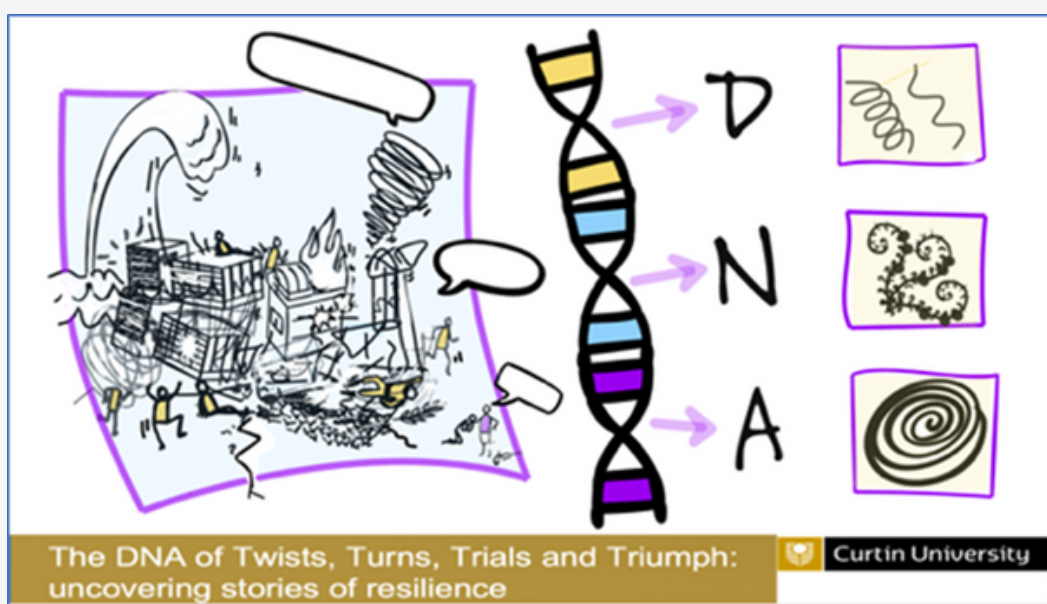
It is a lot more difficult than a usual presentation, so remember to have fun and enjoy the process.

Tip 4: Practice, practice, practice.

Practice turns "good" into "better"; Practice builds confidence; Practice ensures you stay within the 180-second limit.

Tip 5: End with a twist.

In my presentation, I played with the meaning and acronym of DNA—Dual helix, Nature, and Amalgamation. At the end, I returned to my opening theme about silence and concluded by saying that to break that silence, I wanted to be a Disaster Nursing Advocate.



Additional Info:

There have been various versions of the 3-minute presentation, one of which is the 3-minute thesis (3MT), which was started by the University of Queensland for its PhD candidates and expanded to more than 200 universities worldwide.

More information about 3MTs can be found here:

<https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/higher-degrees-researchstart-your-3mt-journey-here>