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Office of Equity and Inclusion

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## Sexism in Higher Education

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### OPENING DISCUSSION

**What is your definition of sexism?  
And how does it impact you directly?**

## DEFINITIONS

- **Sexism:** Refers to the range of attitudes, beliefs, policies, laws and behaviors that discriminate on the basis of gender; the subordination of one sex, female, based on the assumed superiority of the other sex, male.



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## DEFINITIONS

- **Sexism:** prejudicial attitudes and discrimination against women on the basis of their sex. Sexism ranges from the individual to the institutional level and includes (a) beliefs, (b) behaviors, (c) use of language and (d) policies reflecting and conveying a pervasive view that women are inferior.

-- Linguist Phil Herbst



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## DEFINING SEX AND GENDER

- **Sex assigned at birth:** usually determined by doctors when you're born (typically based on external genitalia). Sex is not a binary.
- **Gender:** culturally and socially constructed meanings, beliefs, and practices that a group associates with femininity or masculinity. Gender is not a binary.
- **Gender identity:** a person's own self-concept of their gender. This can be very personal, and everyone gets to choose this for themselves.



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## POWER AND MALE HEGEMONY

- **Patriarchy:** a hierarchical system of social organization in which cultural, political, and economic structures are controlled by men.
- **Male hegemony:** refers to the political and ideological domination of women and femme people in society.



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## POWER AND MALE HEGEMONY

Males have greater access to:

- Cultural prestige
- Political authority
- Corporate power
- Wealth
- Material comforts

**Ideology plays a role in legitimizing male hegemony**



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## BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BIASES FOR GENDER ROLES

- **Gender roles:** rights, responsibilities, expectations and relationships of people in a society.
- At birth, medical providers designate people as male or female based on primary sex characteristics, such as external genitalia.
- At puberty, hormonal differences produce secondary sex characteristics, such as changes in hormone levels or the development of chest tissue.



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## BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BIASES FOR GENDER ROLES

To what extent are differences culturally determined?

- **Gender ideology:** ideas of masculinity and femininity that are held to be valid in a particular society and time.
- **Gendered division of labor:** the process whereby productive tasks are separated on the basis of gender



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## GENDER INEQUALITY AND SOCIALIZATION

Agents of socialization:

- Parents and family: treatment, clothes, toys or chores
- Peers: pressure for behavior and aspirations
- Religion
- Media and language
- Education
  - **Gender bias:** favoritism toward one gender, e.g. aggressive boys and dependent girls get attention



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## THE FAMILY

Traditionally, the role of wife and mother has been a subordinate role in society. **(Not true for all cultures)**

The late 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw an increase of working wives and moms and the juggling of work and family.

Changing age demographics have seen women also become more responsible for the bulk of senior care.



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## LANGUAGE AND THE MEDIA

Language often reinforces traditional sex role stereotypes:

- i.e. Policeman vs police officer or referring to women as “girls”

Media portrays men and women in traditional roles

- Underrepresented women and
- Reinforce stereotypical ideas about women and physical attractiveness
- Invisibility of non-binary genders and gender roles



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## LANGUAGE AND THE MEDIA

Stereotypes are a source of prejudice and discrimination

- Feminine mystique
- Masculine mystique

Stereotypes place limits on us and our behavior



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## ORGANIZED RELIGION

Historically some monotheistic religions have been male dominated but in the last few decades, some of these religions have begun to ordain women as ministers.

In many instances, many organized religions continue to reinforce secular traditions and gender roles in many cultures

- **Where have you seen this present?**



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## SEXISM IN EDUCATION

Research show sexism is still a significant factor in education. Areas impacted include:

- Leadership roles
- Gender gaps in disciplines
- Participation and involvement in activities i.e. sports
- Other areas?



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## SEXISM IN EDUCATION (CONT.)

Research results on sexism in education show that generally:

- Instructors pay less attention to girls than boys
- Gap in math and science scores
- Girls careers/majors (math, science, engineering)
- Textbooks and gender stereotypes in curriculum
- Historically marginalized populations disproportionately impacted



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## HOWEVER...

The gender impacts male students...

- Male students falling behind especially in language skills
- More likely to drop out, stop out, or not continue
- Identified as having more behavioral, learning and social problems in school
- Disparate impact on male students of color

Studies notes that girls see educational achievement as key to better life whereas boys rely on traditional masculinity to get ahead



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## CONTEMPORARY GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality is maintained by:

- Individual sexism: anti-female bias by individuals
- Institutionalized sexism: discrimination engaged in at the organizational level
- Also, when inequality, prejudice and discrimination exist, the imbalance in power can lead to sexual harassment
- The erasure and de-legitimization of non-binary genders



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## GENDER INEQUALITY AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

**Sexual harassment:** unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

- The growing sexual harassment problem
  - A recent U.S. survey found that 83 percent of women indicated that they had been the target of some form of harassment

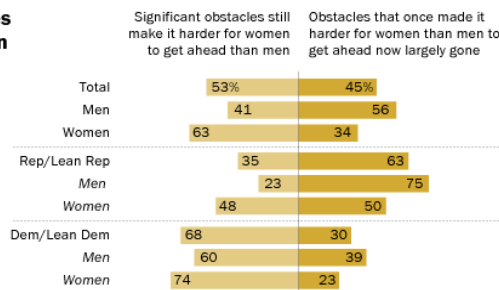


## GENDER INEQUALITY AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Just over half of Americans (53%) say there are “still significant obstacles that make it harder for women to get ahead than men,” while somewhat fewer (45%) say “the obstacles that once made it harder for women than men to get ahead are now largely gone.”

### Gender, partisan divides on obstacles for women in society today

*% who say ...*



Note: Don't know/No answer responses not shown.  
Source: Survey conducted June 7-July 5, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Where are potential opportunities for us to confront/address sexism here?
- Are there ways for us to use data to inform our practice on issues of sexism?
- As a leadership team what are our next steps to inform others and take action?



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## HOW TO CONFRONT SEXISM AT WORK

- **Address it immediately.**
  - When it comes to calling out inappropriate behavior, timing is everything. An immediate response is best because it allows you to be specific in what you address. It offers your colleague an immediate reference point and it avoids allowing such comments to become routine.



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## HOW TO CONFRONT SEXISM AT WORK

- **Frame the problem.**
  - Sexism has many negative effects for men, women, and non-binary people alike. However, those effects are not always obvious and they are experienced differently by different people. That being the case, it's important to frame your constructive criticism in the context of multiple people or scenarios when you take action.



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## HOW TO CONFRONT SEXISM AT WORK

- **Be willing to give the benefit of the doubt.**
  - When you can have a conversation about a comment or action, avoid assuming that your colleague had negative intentions. Having a declared mindset can set a negative or accusatory tone for your conversation, thereby making it less likely to be productive to impact change.



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## HOW TO CONFRONT SEXISM AT WORK

- **Provide alternatives.**
  - No matter how timely you are with feedback, some comments/ behavior are likely engrained into routines. We can break that routine by providing alternatives. Examples include saying, “Could you do X instead of Y?”, rather than just “Stop doing Y.”



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## HOW TO CONFRONT SEXISM AT WORK

- **Be direct and specific.**
  - This is probably the hardest tactic to stick with but it is far and away the most necessary. Being vague about what action was inappropriate or about how it made you feel can greatly diminish the impact of your message. It may also lead to confusion about what specifically came across as inappropriate or how seriously you take the matter.



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# THANK YOU

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