

Sexism in Danish Higher Education and Research

Understanding, Exploring, Acting

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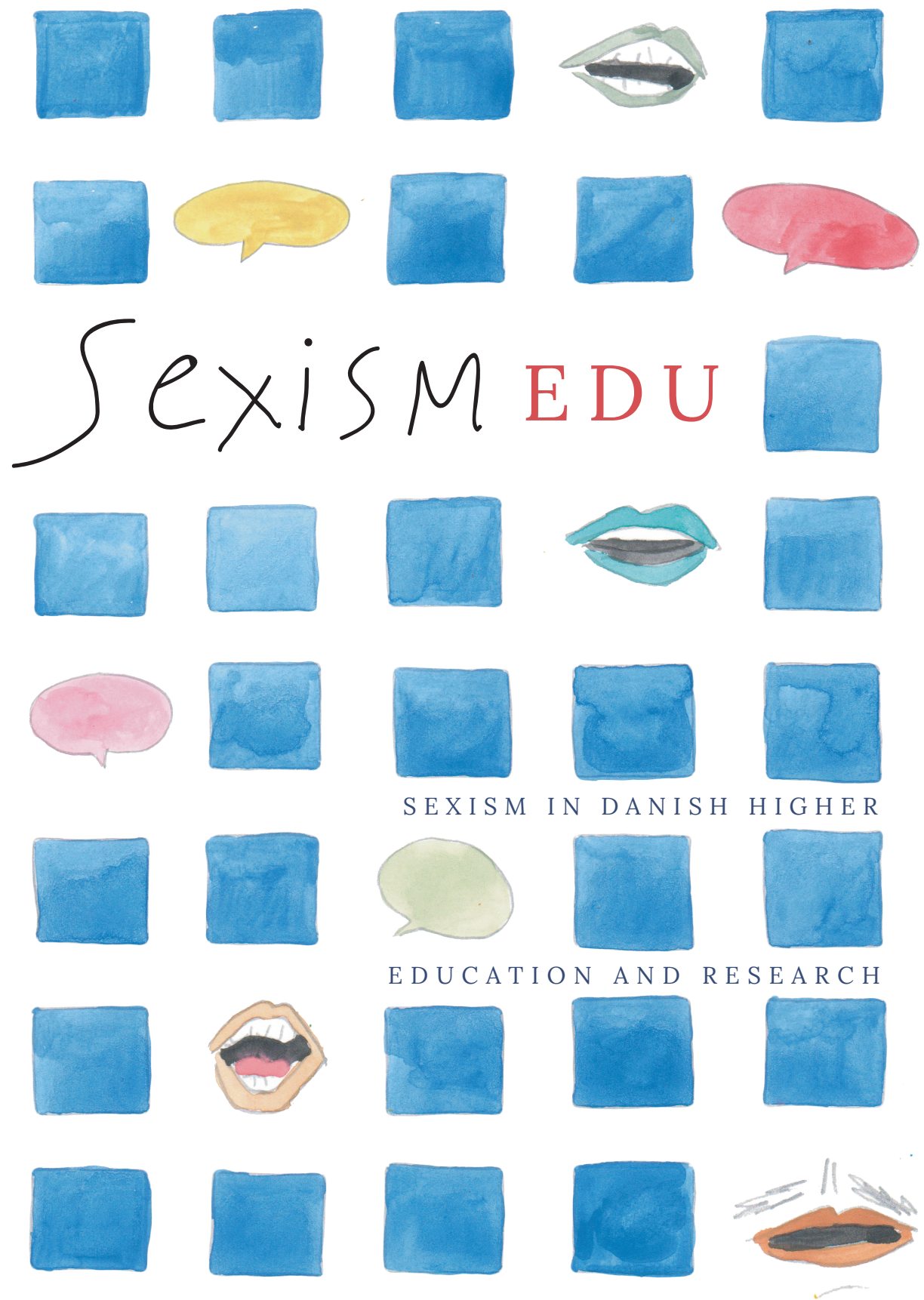
SEXISM IN DANISH HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

UNDERSTANDING, EXPLORING, ACTING

Written by: Anna Franciska Einersen, Jo Krøjer, Sorch MacLeod, Sara Louise Muhr, Ana María Munar, Eva Sophia Myers, Mie Plotnikof, and Lea Skewes

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This book is the result of the hundreds of brave employees at Danish higher education institutions who dared to step forward, either with their names or with their stories about sexism and sexual harassment through the initiative concerning Sexism in Danish academia, which we started by launching a petition in early October 2020. As the initiator group—16 individuals from six different research institutions—we are forever grateful for their courage and solidarity with each other and with us. Their many voices and stories show the surprising pervasiveness of sexism, with its many facets and types. They reveal how sexism traps our human flourishing and constrains what we can become individually, collectively, institutionally, and as a society. This book is a revolutionary exposition of the many voices, the transformation from “I have suffered” to “We have suffered.” The awakening of the *us* is in itself a political action toward change, assuring that we won’t forget or hide away the suffering that gendered and sexual harassment courses this day today. We dedicate this book to the change that is necessary in our society and institutions and hope that we hereby provide some justice to all those who have suffered wrongs rooted in sexism.

Since our petition and some of the stories were published in Politiken on October 9, 2020, we have been met with respect for taking this matter seriously and interest from many colleagues and by management at all levels, but we have also encountered questions, worries, and opposition. We want to thank all staff and management who have supported this initiative and who have dared to take new steps to approach sexism as this is genuinely a problem deeply rooted in both the structured organizing and culture of Danish academia. No single person, unit, or department can fix it alone. We all need to engage in this matter continuously—collectively and collaboratively in ongoing respectful efforts—if we are ever to mitigate and even eliminate the severe problems and effects that gendered and sexual harassment have on research environments, educational activities, and, not least, our collegial relationships.

We also want to thank Danske Universiteter, which have taken up this issue as a shared concern, and particularly, we are grateful for the financial support of our work in developing this book and the website SexismEDU.dk that has been granted by Aarhus University, the Copenhagen Business School, and the University of Southern Denmark (in alphabetical order). Without this support, we could not push our work against sexism and sexual harassment forward with such power and intensity, nor could we offer this book, including all its knowledge resources and exercises, for free to anyone who wishes to educate themselves and take action against sexism. Special thanks goes to all our peer reviewers for

their careful reading of this manuscript and for their valuable feedback. We hope that we can all use this book to move forward in rooting out sexism and sexual harassment.

INTRODUCTION

“Sexism goes so deep that at first it is hard to see; you think it is just reality.”

Alix Kates Shulman, *Burning Questions: A Novel*, 1978

In the Danish welfare society, which supports equal access to education, healthcare, and social services, we like to think that we have an environment that is respectful and inclusive, that gender is never a limiting factor, and that, when issues arise, people feel at ease to talk about them. As the stories in this book reveal, the reality is different. Instead, we live with stereotypes and biases that foster a sexist culture and lead to behavior that perceives and treats people differently (Muhr & Plotnikof, 2018; Romani et al., 2017). The response to our petition reveals how sexism is expressed in a variety of ways, some more subtle and some more openly hostile. Some forms of sexism even appear as well-meaning appraisal or masqueraded as jokes or compliments. This behavior—so common that we refer to it as “everyday” sexism—has become a normalized part of navigating workplace dynamics (Bocher, 2020).

In 1978, author and activist, Alix Kates Shulman wrote the words that began this chapter, which nicely sum up a core learning of this book. Schulman reminds us that many people do not even notice the existence of sexism because it is deeply integrated into our daily lives, experiences, and culture, such as in media, popular culture, politics, family organization, personal relationships, and, consequently, also our workplaces. Sexism at work has been shaping our minds in strange ways, causing employees to neglect, forget, or simply not know that they are entitled to equal respect and acknowledgement regardless of who they are, what they look like, and on what terms they are employed. This deeply embedded yet often invisible force of sexism continues to exist; it infiltrates and subsists in our workplaces and reproduces itself through structures, cultures, and behaviors we are all affected by.

In this book, you will be reading stories from people who have experienced sexism in a wide variety of ways, demonstrating the pervasiveness of sexism. Although our petition invited everyone to share their experiences, there was an overwhelming majority of people who identify as women who shared their experiences of sexism. Thus, we acknowledge that women in Danish Academia are the dominant protagonists of the many stories and examples that you will read about in this book. However, this does not in any way reduce sexism to a “women’s issue” because rigid gender roles—assumptions about gender and about femininity and masculinity—arise from sexism and hurt everyone. Reducing sexism to a “women’s issue” is part of the problem as it excludes men and people who identify as non-binary from the conversation. We particularly want to stress that, although not explicit in the debate on

sexism, men experience sexual harassment as well as sexual assault and that gender stereotypes subsist and affect men greatly, too. In fact, those same gender stereotypes may well hinder men from voicing their experiences and participating in the conversation about sexism. Norms of masculinity continue to exist that rest upon the idea that “real men” are those who don’t show their emotions, who don’t reach out for help when they need support, etc. and that reward men for not being soft, weak, or victims. With this book, we are not only saying sexism is wrong, but we are also inviting everyone, regardless of with which gender you identify, to reflect upon and consider the impact of gender inequality in your own life.

Dealing with sexism requires our increased attention to how it develops and manifests itself within social relations. *Why?* Because sexism is the social reproduction of a wrongdoing that has deep historical roots, legitimizes unfair and unethical behavior, and limits human potential and resources. Ultimately, sexism hold employees back. Sexist behaviors, biases, and gendered expectations have damaging consequences; for example, they have been shown to negatively affect employees’ performance, sense of belonging, mental and physical health, and job satisfaction (Dardenne & Dumont, 2007; Bocher et al., 2020). Sexism diminishes the possibilities of flourishing as it hijacks our agency and autonomy, holding back employees, our educational institutions, and societies. This book raises awareness and takes action against sexism. Against unwritten gendered expectations, rules, practices, and beliefs about the—often sexist—roles of individuals in our organizations. Unwritten and rarely stated explicitly and thus rarely questioned. We must first learn to listen to and see them if we are to act upon and change them.

Sexism has consequences for you, for us, for everyone. Sexism, as the stories in this book show, discriminates across and along different gender identifications, and by shaping our language, relationships, and collaborations, it affects and diminishes us all. Some speak up and question sexism, others try to challenge it more subtly; but mostly we either simply don’t recognize it, or if we do, we adapt to it or try to avoid it as an issue. We are *all* implicated in instances of sexism. Even if we haven’t personally experienced sexism, we are likely to witness it or perhaps even behave sexist although this might not be our intention. Reading this book might serve as an eye-opener, allowing us to realize that we have, in fact, experienced sexism. This is all due to the troubling effects of how sexism has become so naturalized and normal that we often don’t even notice it. This book will provide us with the ability to see it, to name it, and to respond to it.

This book:

- *Acknowledges* that the prevalence of different manifestations of sexism is closely linked to the persistent difficulties in achieving gender equality and equity in society at large, which in turn constitutes a structural and cultural barrier to fully mobilizing the human talent independently of gender, race, sexual orientation, or other identity categories.
- *Holds* that gender equality and equity are not the same. Gender equality manifests itself as the difference and plurality when the being of everyone is grounded in equal human rights, dignity, and a commitment to equal opportunities. Equality and freedom are deeply interlinked. Positive freedom manifests itself as our capacities of autonomy and agency to become, that is, as possibilities. It is those possibilities that are deeply diminished and constrained by sexist prejudice and discrimination; and equity—as actions to diminish inequality and discrimination—is a means to fight that.
- *Is mindful* that, despite the existence of organizational diversity and inclusion strategies, a gap still persists between policies, standards, and practice; between de jure and de facto gender equality. And that when sexism occurs, current institutional processes of monitoring, reporting, reconciliation, judgment, and retribution appear ineffective or insufficient.
- *Notes* that it was first in 2019 that the Council of Europe agreed upon an internationally recognized definition of sexism; and while this represents a growing realization of how sexism constitutes a worldwide problem, it also demonstrates how we are just now in the throes of change and that much remains to be done.
- *Affirms* that gender stereotypes and inherent biases shape the norms, behavior, and expectations of us all and that sexism is reinforced by such gender stereotypes affecting all genders.
- *Is aware* that sexism and sexist behavior are perpetrated at the individual, institutional, and societal levels and experienced with detrimental effect at all three levels.
- *Is concerned* that sexism is linked to having a negative impact on employees' physical and mental health, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity, which limits employees' opportunities and damages their wellbeing.
- *Commits* to contributing to practical solutions and forward-looking initiatives by introducing a toolbox with examples, exercises, pedagogics, and multiple knowledge resources that can be used as inspiration for change by academic individuals and institutions.

This book is structured in four parts. First, we introduce the nature and issues of sexism in the chapter “Understanding,” which provides information that will help readers understand what sexism is, how it operates, and how it is performed. Secondly, this is followed by the chapter “Exploring,” which presents a “methodological mix” including both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the multiple ways in which sexism operates. In the first part, we present an array of vignettes, developed from the accounts and testimonials submitted to our petition, which are divided into different categories of sexism. Each story is part of a category and presents questions that invite readers to work with the complexity of sexism. In the second part, we present our quantitative study—a survey questionnaire—which we sent out following our petition to capture the extent of sexism. The next chapter, “Acting,” includes practical knowledge and exercises for staff and managers to examine how they can approach local efforts to fight sexism, including tangible tips and tools for handling sexism in the workplace. Lastly, the book offers a collection of knowledge resources and references to learn more about the complexity and action possibilities to deal with sexism.

There is a growing realization of how sexism constitutes a worldwide problem; however, we are just now in the throes of change, and much remains to be done. We are only in the early stages of acknowledging the persistence of sexism and tackling it as an important issue, and so, this book will also be updated as time passes. Importantly, dismantling sexism remains a work in progress, and hopefully, this book will begin this process and be a first step toward change.

CHAPTER I: UNDERSTANDING

Understanding sexism

The issue of sexism is complex, which is why we find it important to tackle it in diverse ways—diverse in terms of perspectives, methods, and voices included. Our main concern is that formulating an effective response to sexism requires understanding sexism and the nature of its harm. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce sexism in its many forms and to address the following questions:

- What is sexism?
- How is sexism performed?
- Why do we perform sexism?
- Which factors enable sexism?
- What makes it difficult to speak up?

In part 1, we begin by defining sexism. We introduce the legal definition provided by the Council of Europe. In addition to this legal definition, we dedicate the section *interpreting* to explain important wording. Lastly, we introduce the term intersectionality to argue that sexism does not operate in isolated ways; rather, sexism intersects with and intensifies other forms of discrimination.

In part 2, we ask how sexism is performed, and we demonstrate this by means of a continuum to show the complexity and multifaceted ways in which sexism can be performed. Then, we devote a section to explaining the *drip-drip* effect of sexism. Next, we demonstrate how sexism is performed at three levels: 1) individual—experienced individually by a person or collectively as a group of persons; 2) institutional and sociocultural—as a “naturalized” and accepted way of navigating the workplace and reflected in the policies and practices of organizations; and 3) structural—as societal systems of domination and privilege. To best target sexism, we must be aware of all three levels and how they interact and work together to reproduce sexism.

In part 3, we ask why we perform sexism. To answer this question, we describe how sexism stems from gender stereotypes and unconscious biases, which shape the norms, behavior, and expectations of us all; thus, we all engage in discriminatory and sexist behavior. In the first section, we define gender stereotypes and unconscious bias and ask where they come from, and we introduce a few examples of how they work to demonstrate their pervasiveness and invite the reader to reflect. Next, we explain the

ongoing challenges of trying to break free from gendered expectations. In this section, we define stereotype threat, the likeability paradox—the warmth/competence scale—and the tight rope bias. These all shed light on the question *Why do we perform sexism?*—and might in turn shed light on the question—as well as with what consequences.

In part 4, we ask which factors enable sexism. In this section, we give recognition to several organizational-level factors, but in particular, we focus on 1) organizational climate (specifically, we outline in which climates sexism is most likely to occur), 2) a “chilly climate,” 3) institutionalized sexist banter, and 4) systemic sexism.

In part 5, we ask what makes it difficult to speak up. To answer this question, we argue 1) it is costly to speak up, and we explain why; 2) one might not be aware that the act is in fact sexist due to the pervasiveness and “naturalized” state of sexism; 3) speaking up holds the victim responsible; and 4) speaking up produces victimization and puts one at risk of victim-blaming.

In part 6, we offer a dictionary, explaining the difference between sex, gender, and sexuality, and demonstrate how these concepts interlink with sexism.

In part 7, we introduce a list of *reflection questions* to ask yourself after you have finished reading this first chapter.

Part 1: What is sexism? A definition

The precise origin of the term “sexism” is difficult to trace, but it almost certainly dates back to the 1960s and the political activities of feminists in various educational establishments (Code, 1991). Historically, there has been a tendency to restrict the term sexism to negative attitudes toward women (Glick & Fiske, 1996) because the concept of sexism was originally formulated to raise consciousness about the oppression of women. However, sexism is now considered as “an attitude of prejudice or discriminatory behavior based on gender” (Swim & Hyers, 2009), and the term has been expanded to include the oppression of any gender, including men, non-binary people, transgender people, etc.¹

Oftentimes, people believe that sexism is linked to sex,² which reduces sexism to acts of sexual objectification, making sexualized remarks, etc.; however, sexism isn’t necessarily about sex. Rather, sexism, as shall be demonstrated below, is a belief-system, and sexist behaviors and attitudes perpetuate gender stereotypes.³

Introducing a legal definition

For the purpose of this book as well as its recommendations, sexism is conceptualized in accordance with the definition provided by the Council of Europe:⁴

[Sexism is] any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behavior based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:

- i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or
- ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological, or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or
- iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or

¹ *Transgender* is when your gender identity differs from the sex on your birth certificate. *Non-binary people* identify outside the traditional categories of male and female. Please refer to our *dictionary* (part 6) to learn more.

² I.e., sexual intercourse

³ *Sex and gender* are often used interchangeably despite having different meanings. Please refer to our *dictionary* to learn the difference.

⁴ Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe March 27, 2019

- iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realization of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or
- v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Interpreting the legal definition

Having a clear definition of sexism forces a more general recognition that sexism is a problem; however, to further make sense of this definition, we must go through important wording to better understand it.

“Behavior based upon the idea that....”

The wording “behavior based upon the idea that a person or group of persons is inferior because of their sex” might make you want to state that such ideas do not resonate with you or that you simply don’t believe in such ideas. However, such an idea does not have to be explicit; thus, we don’t have to believe that, for example, women are inferior for us to be sexist toward women. This idea can also—and most likely will—be implicit and unconscious. The reason for this is that (conscious or unconscious) ideas regarding gender stem from gender stereotypes, whereby males and females are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by culturally embedded gendered expectations. For example, the idea that women are natural nurturers lead to men not facing societal expectations to care for their family in the same manner as women, which negatively affects women’s careers and salary but at the same time negatively affect men’s opportunities to take parental leave. In Denmark, for instance, fathers only account for 11% of the parental leave, meaning that, on average, a woman is away on maternity leave for 300 days, while a man takes only 30 days. Thus, even if we might not believe in the idea that women are natural nurturers, these numbers demonstrate how such an idea still informs us about how we should, for example, arrange our caring obligations when we have children. Thus, gendered ideas—conscious or not—still have certain effects on us. And when these effects are systemic, then they are perpetually reinforced.

“With the purpose or effect of....”

The wording “with the purpose or effect of” gives recognition to the fact that performing sexism can be intentional, an act that is “on purpose,” but it can also be unintentional, “not on purpose,” yet still have damaging effects on the individual. In fact, unintentional sexism is very common. The normalization of sexism has made it so integrated into our everyday lives that we often fail to recognize it, and equally we fail to recognize when we are the ones performing sexism.

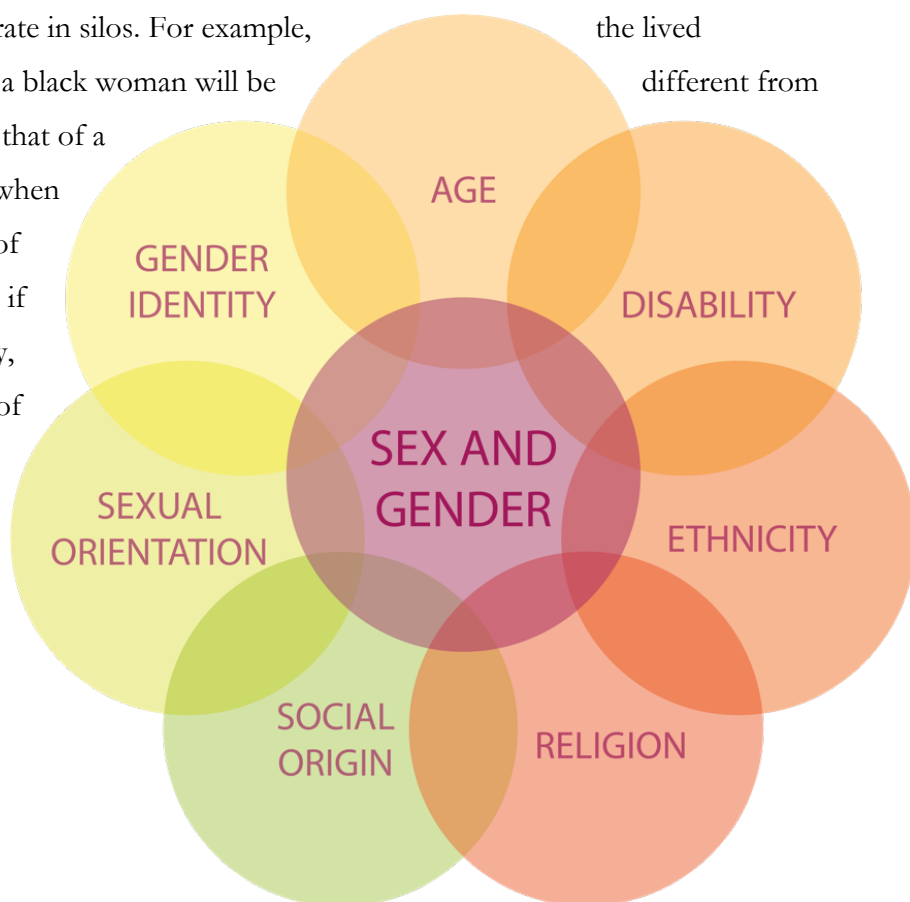
“Maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes....”

Sexism and gender stereotypes are closely related because sexism is a form of discrimination that derives from unconscious bias and is rooted in gender stereotypes. This will be elaborated in parts 4 and 5.

Intersectionality

Professor of Law Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics (see illustration) intersect and overlap with one another and end up reinforcing each other exponentially. Today, the term is widely used to describe the analytic approach to understanding lived experience from the lens of multiple intersecting categories of oppression (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality is a framework that can be used to understand how multiple forms of inequality may operate simultaneously and create systems of disadvantage. The key is that oppressive forms of behaviors within a society, such as racism, ageism, sexism, and homophobia, do not act independently but are instead interrelated and continuously shaped by one another.

People will experience sexism in ways complicated by other elements of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The key to understanding discrimination is that it does not operate in silos. For example, the lived experiences and inequalities faced by a black woman will be different from that of a white woman but also from that of a black man. Intersectionality, then, is when a person belongs to multiple groups of disadvantaged characteristics, such as if the person is black, a woman, and gay, this person will face multiple threats of disadvantage and inequality.



What might this look like in a work environment? A woman might experience sexism in the form of sexualized comments from a colleague. If she then replies, “I have a girlfriend,” her response might result in a homophobic response from her colleague, such as in the form of an inappropriate joke, saying, “You just haven’t found the right man yet.” This reply is likely to make her upset, but she might choose to say nothing because she does not want to become the “angry black woman,” which is a racial stereotype that characterizes black women as bad-tempered and overly aggressive (Evans & Moore, 2015).

In this example, this person experiences sexism, homophobia, and racism. However, her experiences of being a woman, gay, and black do not exist independently of each other. Rather, they all inform each other, creating a complex intersection of inequalities.

It will not be possible here to cover the full spectrum of identity categories (religion, class, etc.). However, we need to appreciate that the social category of gender is related in complex ways to other social categories, such as race and heterosexuality. This is relevant as an intersectional understanding of sexism is key to recognizing how experiences of sexism—including those shared in this book—can reflect different identity biases concurrently. Thus, the key to understanding discrimination is that it does not operate in silos. Understanding the interconnected nature of oppression will help us realize the interconnected nature of equality and equity.

It should be noted that while there is a spectrum of gender identities, due to constraints within the existing literature, this book often brings examples within the gender binary—male and female.

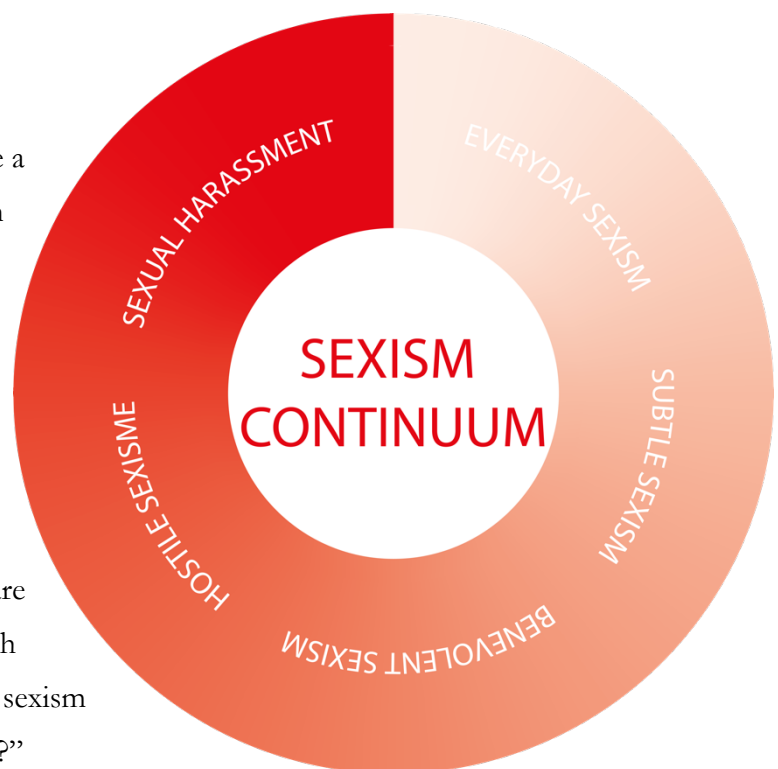
Part 2: How is sexism performed?

In this section, we ask how sexism is performed. To answer this question, we devote attention to the complexity and multifaceted ways in which sexism operates. By means of a continuum model, we demonstrate the many ways in which sexism can be performed.

This section is intended to contribute to further understanding and dealing with how sexism remains *active and hidden* in organizational life. Sexism can take the forms of implicit and explicit acts, attitudes, and cultures as well as institutional structures. It can be severe, as seen with sexual harassment, but it also exists in more subtle forms that most people don't even notice. In the workplace today, extreme, hostile, and overt sexist behaviors are rarely tolerated. However, a sexist mentality—based on gender stereotypes and social prejudice—remains alive and well and often goes unnoticed. While hostile explicit sexism is inarguably bad and inexcusable, this does not mean subtle sexism isn't also damaging—it can be even more dangerous because it is harder to detect and document, and even harder to call out. Subtle sexism is harder to pinpoint and handle, but to neglect the more subtle forms of sexism will not successfully eradicate sexism in the workplace. Thus, overcoming sexism requires an understanding of the wide variety of the ways in which sexism operates.

Sexism—A continuum

Given the complexity of sexism, we introduce a continuum model to demonstrate how sexism operates in multifaceted ways. “Everyday” sexism and subtle sexist behaviors are at one end of the continuum, and hostile sexism and sexual harassment are located at the other end. At the red end of the continuum, we are dealing with assault or explicit discrimination, whereas at the other end, we are dealing with everyday and subtle sexism, which operates in more invisible ways. This form of sexism might make you go “Is it just me? Am I crazy?” (You are not.)



Everyday sexism entails everyday types of experiences—frequently viewed as somewhat harmless remarks and jokes that are just part of organizational reality. However, these acts are often humiliating and contribute to a social climate where employees are demeaned, their self-regard lowered, and their activities and choices restricted in the workplace. Everyday sexism is performed in many different forms such as seemingly harmless comments or jokes about gender, for example, that women are naturally better at collaborating, childcare, cooking, or shopping. Such everyday remarks wherein we associate certain traits with feminine characteristics and, consequently, associate opposite traits with masculine characteristics (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014) contribute to and reproduce gender stereotypes that hurt everyone. When we say that women are more nurturing, compassionate, or intuitive, we distance men from their capacity for gentleness, compassion, intuition. Everyday sexism can also be not offering women work opportunities out of misplaced concern that they may not be able to manage it, such as assuming that women can't travel because of caring obligations but not assuming the same for men who are fathers.

Here is an example from our petition: Juliana is asked to arrange a conference. She wishes to share the responsibility of doing so; however, a colleague replies, “But you are the best.” Although she feels acknowledged by that compliment, she also knows that doing this type of work means not having time to do research; therefore, she feels unsure whether this is a genuine compliment. Another colleague says, “Yes we need those good feminine qualities.” Juliana now feels that rather than paying her a compliment, “feminine qualities” are being used as an excuse for her to arrange the conference. This everyday sexist remark reflects a gender stereotypical view of what women are “good at.”⁵

Subtle sexism is less easily recognized and questioned, partly because it is often taken for granted as part of the organizational culture and practices -“the way things are done here” (Husu, 2005). This makes it difficult to recognize and deal with, particularly in the workplace.

The subtleness can show itself as, for example, assuming women are sensitive and emotional. When subtle sexism is performed, a normal reaction is to feel put down but unable to really name it for what it is. This form of sexism might not seem worthy of notice to many because it is often unconsciously delivered in subtle snubs or dismissive looks, tones, and actions, such as cutting off women mid-

⁵ Note that the stories from our petition have been re-written to function as a narrative sketch introducing fictional characters while effectively representing the real-life examples. We elaborate this process and present more stories in Chapter 2, *Exploring*.

conversation. Subtle sexism is so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that it is often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous (Swim et al., 2004). This form of sexism often seems so small that by calling it out, one risks being called overly sensitive or overreacting.

Here is an example from our petition: Louise is having lunch with her colleague Martin and a professor who is their supervisor. At one point, the professor looks at his sock and sees a hole in it. He looks at Louise and says: “Now I know what I have you for” and points toward the hole in the sock. Martin and the professor laugh. Louise feels awkward and humiliated. She wonders, “Why would the professor point to her? Why not Martin?” Louise starts feeling self-conscious and insecure, yet she remains silent because this was just a joke.

Benevolent sexism (often in paternalistic ways, but not necessarily) communicates a more positive attitude toward, for instance, women that appears favorable but is actually sexist because it draws on stereotyped and essentialist views that, for example, portray women as incompetent or weak individuals. Benevolent sexism is often referred to as the subjectively perceived “positive” and seemingly “civil” form of sexism as it reflects beliefs that, for example, women should be “protected,” thus portraying women as weak individuals, or “provided for,” thus portraying women as unable to care for themselves, or “admired,” for example, for their good looks (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This form of sexism essentially applies what some might consider “positive” stereotypes of women, such as being mothering and caring. Thus, rather than *insulting* women, benevolent sexism “compliments” women based on stereotypes, such as by characterizing women as wonderful but weak. This form of sexism causes patronizing behavior toward women, such as over-helping and restricting them from stressful or “dangerous” activities. Take the example from above, assuming that women can’t travel because of caring obligations. Benevolent sexism is not assigning a female employee a task that requires travel because one wishes to do her a “favor” and let a mother be at home with her kids rather than travel. This can be viewed as a “favor” or as a form of “chivalrous” attitude toward women; however, these attitudes are damaging, for example, because that travel task could be beneficial for the employee’s future career opportunities. Despite the positive feelings benevolent sexism may indicate to the perceiver, its underpinnings lie in traditional gender stereotyping and the harm this causes.

Here is an example from our petition: Nina is a research assistant on a contract that will soon end, and she is experiencing that feeling of fear in regard to her future career. Will she be able to get a PhD position?

She decides to talk to the department head, who says, “You would probably fit better in a secretary position. I am unsure whether a PhD will be too much for you.”

Hostile sexism is an aggressive type of prejudice, and its expressions are, arguably, easy to identify (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism refers to negative views toward individuals who violate traditional gender roles, such as being hostile toward people who act not in accordance with gender norms and expectations. Hostile sexist behavior is when people, for instance, mock men who demonstrate emotions or ask for parental leave or disparage women who enter traditionally masculine domains. Hostile sexism can be explicitly insulting, making threatening or aggressive comments based on a person’s gender, harassing, or threatening someone for defying gender norms. Our petition points to many instances of hostile sexism toward people who identify as women, such as people expressing beliefs about women as incompetent, unintelligent, overly emotional, and sexually manipulative, as expressed in the myth “she slept her way to the top” or calling women “bitches” if they behave assertively. This corresponds to existing research demonstrating that when women behave in ways that don’t fit their gender stereotype—for example, by being assertive—they are being penalized for straying from gender stereotypes (Heilman, 1993, 2012; Muhr, 2019), but now, new research shows that this also happens to men. New research demonstrates that men also face backlash when they don’t adhere to masculine gender stereotypes, for example, when men show vulnerability, act nicer, display empathy, express sadness, exhibit modesty, and proclaim to be feminists (Rosette et al., 2015). Although we received few testimonials from people who identify as men, we have one example of a man defying masculine ideals, in this case, denouncing the stereotypical view that men appreciate any form of sexual attention. Instead of listening and taking the sexually related behavior seriously, the people he is describing the situation to laugh at and ridicule him for speaking up about his experience, which, in itself, reflects a sexist view of gender.

Here is the example from our petition: Charles begins to notice how Laura is always placing herself right next to him, and soon she also begins to join his other classes. Time passes, and the attention from Laura becomes more and more intensive. Charles is reading her assignment, and as he is checking her references, he is directly linked to a porn-website. He is stunned. He decides the next day to confront Laura about it and to tell her to stop. Charles tells his colleagues about the incident. They all laugh. Charles goes to the department head, who also laughs and says: “It is funny to see the university’s biggest man be afraid of such a little girl.”

According to the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), hostile sexism also characterizes women as whiny competitors who “are seeking special favors,” “exaggerate the problems they have at work,” and “complain about being discriminated against”; and, by casting women as complainers unable to succeed without special help, hostile sexism justifies men’s authority and status in the workplace (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Specifically, hostile sexism targets women who, by participating in traditionally male domains, pose a threat to the existing social hierarchy. Hostile sexism predicts negative evaluations of, for example, ambitious professional women (Glick et al., 2015), preferences for male authorities (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000), negative evaluations of female managerial candidates (Masser & Abrahams, 2004), beliefs in women’s incompetence in the workplace (Christopher & Wodja, 2008), and opposition to equal pay and opportunity policies (Sibley & Perry, 2010). According to ASI, there exists many hostile sexist myths in our workplaces, for example, that hiring policies favor women over men under the guise of asking for “equality.”

Here is an example from our petition: Riley was recently hired as an assistant professor. At a team-meeting, a male professor said, “Have you seen who they hired in Department X? I think it is so sad to see that the university is now beginning to hire women only because they are women.” Another colleague stated, “It’s those damn quotas! Soon every department will be filled with women, and we all know what that means!” Riley was really uncomfortable, but she gathered herself and asked, “What does that mean?” They all laughed. A colleague looked at her and said: “How do you feel about only getting hired because you are a woman?”

Importantly, hostile sexism is also a spectrum, which in severe cases reflect *misogyny*, that is, the hatred of or contempt for women. It is misogynistic, for example, believing that victims of sexual assault “ask for it” due to their behavior or clothing.

Sexual harassment in its overt forms includes, for example, unwanted kissing, touching of breasts or genitals, all forms of sexual assault, requests for sexual favors, making sexually explicit comments, uninvited massages, and sexually suggestive gestures, catcalls, etc. Sexual harassment also takes on more subtle forms and includes, for example, asking an employee about their sex life, making sexual jokes, commenting on the attractiveness of others in front of a colleague, sending suggestive texts, making unwelcomed sexually charged comments, or invitations to meetings that somehow turn into dates. Any of these actions can be deemed as sexual harassment if they happen often enough or are severe enough to make an employee uncomfortable, intimidated, or distracted enough to interfere with their work.

Here is an example from our petition: Martin is at the annual Christmas Party, having a great time dancing with a few fellow colleagues all in a good mood and cheerful. At this point, the fact that he identifies as a gay man is well-known among all of his colleagues. Yet, a few moments later a female colleague comes up to him dancing rather closely. At first, Martin thinks, *Oh well, this is probably just one of those “He is a gay man, and I can be a little more extroverted around him” kinds of attitudes.* Martin keeps on dancing with her to the extent that he feels comfortable. But then she grabs first his ass and then his crotch, smiling as if to tantalize him, and she says, “I might just turn you straight this evening.”

In sum, sexism comes in various forms and is part of a continuum. Our continuum model demonstrates how one form of sexism cannot readily be distinguished from another; rather, each element in the continuum shades into the other elements. Thus, the different forms of sexism at one end of the continuum make way for more hostile forms of sexism. As several researchers demonstrate, sexual harassment is actually rooted in everyday sexism (Buchanan et al., 2014). This doesn’t mean that, for example, telling a sexist joke is directly linked to sexual harassment; rather, it means that sexist jokes foster a culture where sexual harassment and other forms of harassment can more easily be performed. It means that a single joke *itself* does not do major damage but that each individual sexist joke or comment or act adds up over time, creating a sexist work environment, which in turn reproduces gender inequality. Therefore, a critical focus should be on the connections among the various forms of sexism rather than seeing one form of sexism as a distinct set of discrimination.

When we react with outrage to acts of hostile sexual harassment or gender violence, we tend to express shock at the perpetrator, and we bracket such perpetrators into “others,” separating them from the society we exist in and the organizations we work within. Such “othering” of offenders is our collective way of saying, “they cannot be us”; however, there is a whole lot of truth in saying, “we enable them.” We enable hostile sexism and even gender violence by normalizing everyday sexism; that is, our casual remarks, jokes, everyday attitudes, and actions contribute to this normalization. Even if we are not discriminating directly, or intending to perform sexism, we are contributing to the culture that breeds discrimination, and, furthermore, we help maintain the *drip-drip* effect of sexism.

The drip-drip effect of sexism

The *drip-drip* effect marks those frequent sexist acts that occur over a long time. Taken individually, these acts may not seem like that big a deal. However, that is in part what makes them so damaging

(Draeger, 2016). If we view (and react to) acts of sexism as isolated instances, these acts may not be in violation with company policy, not prosecutable in court, and they may seem easy to brush off, but it is the repetition of these acts and thus the continuousness of sexism that is harmful in the long run. The real danger lies in it being possible to see sexist comments, acts, or jokes as normal and acceptable. We then create an organizational culture where the *ordinary* occurrence of sexist behavior leads us all to believe that this is just “how it is,” an organizational “reality” that we must all surrender to and accept as part of everyday working life.

The *drip-drip* effect reminds us that everyday subtle sexism and hard-to-detect sexist comments and acts have an insidious effect because over time people start to conform to stereotypes (Steele, 1999), which is called “stereotype threat” (go to part 3 to learn more). People begin to question their own abilities and worth and start experiencing feelings of incompetence, dissatisfaction, and even unsafety in the workplace (Dardenne et al., 2007). In general, the *drip-drip* effects of sexism negatively affect physical and mental health (Waldo, 1999) and employees’ productivity as well as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Waldo, 1999), increase stress levels (Driscoll et al., 1996), and negatively affect careers as well as organizational culture (Bond et al., 2004; Gutek, 2001). Moreover, various studies reveal that sexist jokes and gender stereotypes are some of the main factors in reproducing gender inequality and that sexist humor helps to maintain a sexist social order (Kochersberger & Holden, 2013; Bemiller & Schneider, 2010; Crawford, 2000).

A common implicit assumption of subtle sexism is that its outcomes are less severe than more hostile forms of sexism. However, contrary to this assumption, recent research suggests that task performance suffers greatly as a result of subtle and benevolent sexism (Dardenne et al., 2007, 2013; Dumont et al., 2010). Furthermore, research demonstrates that experiencing subtle sexism and hostile sexism actually differs in their consequences for performance.

Experiences of hostile sexism tend to generate less intrusive thoughts since hostility is explicitly manifested and external. Because hostile sexism is easily identified as sexism, related statements are more easily placed back at the person expressing them, and fewer mental intrusions are experienced (Dardenne et al., 2007).

Experiencing hostile sexism is likely to make one angry, which make it easier to identify the wrongdoing and justify the desire for retribution. We might say that experiencing hostile sexism can serve as a catalyst for developing an “I’ll show them” attitude. However, anger, while a meaningful emotional reaction, is not the same as having positive freedom, agency, or power. In cases where there is a major power asymmetry between those that experience hostile sexism and those that commit it, victims feel both angry and powerless.



On the other hand, subtle sexism—while only implicitly suggesting an individual lack of abilities due to their gender—is harder to categorize as sexism and will therefore not elicit as much motivation to react/resist as hostile sexism. Thus, the *drip-drip* effect of everyday and subtle sexism has the damaging consequence that we might come to accept sexism instead of fighting it.

To conclude, sexism—in all its various forms—is harmful, not least because of the *drip-drip* effect.

Three levels of experiencing and perpetuating sexism

To further answer the question as to how sexism is performed, we offer a three-level model of experiencing and perpetuating sexism. With this model, we demonstrate how sexism and sexist behavior occur across the full range of human activity. Importantly, **culture** is an overarching category that saturates across all levels; thus, culture runs through all levels and glues them together.

To combat sexism is to induce behavioral and cultural change at all three levels. The three levels of experiencing and perpetuating sexism are:

Structural
Cultural
Individual



Sexism operates at 1) an individual level, which means that sexism is experienced or perpetuated individually or collectively by a person or a group of persons. Sexism operates at 2) an institutional level, which overall refers to how sexism work as “social reality” shaping our institutions. Lastly, sexism operates at 3) a structural level/societal level, which refers to the societal systems of domination and privilege, such as through societal gender inequalities and social norms and behaviors. This book takes every level into account as they influence each other. Importantly, sexism takes overt, covert, and hidden forms on all these levels.

Consider this example of how the three levels interconnect: The expectations shaped by societal culture (structural level) for a woman may be that she “naturally” should want to have kids. This woman might not be considered for a promotion (institutional level) because the hiring committee is keeping her potential pregnancy in mind—even if this is not an apparent or outspoken factor. This may well influence that woman’s confidence, and she might think she is not fit for the job (individual level). This is how structural injustice becomes embodied harm.

Part 3: Why do we perform sexism?

In this part, we ask why we perform sexism. We focus on why sexism can happen—even unnoticed. As mentioned, sexism has typically been conceptualized as a reflection of hostility toward women. However, this book views sexism as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping based on (any) gender. To answer the question of *why* we perform sexism, we describe how sexism derives from (often unconscious) biases and gender stereotypes that shape the norms, behavior, and expectations of us all. While sexist behavior can be intentional, the most common forms of sexism are actually rooted in these unconscious biases and gender stereotypes, which we all carry around with us, thus, we all engage in discriminatory and sexist behavior.

In the first section, we define bias and gender stereotypes. Next, we ask where they come from, and we introduce a few examples of how they work to demonstrate their pervasiveness and invite the reader to reflect. Afterwards, we define stereotype threat and further reflect upon the likeability paradox—warmth/competency scale, as well as the “tight rope bias.” Thereby, we add to the question of why we perform sexism and supplement with the question, *and with what consequences?*

Defining bias and stereotypes

In general, biases can manifest as prejudiced perceptions of, attitudes toward, or beliefs about an individual or group, and these biases are powerful in the way that they affect behaviors. Bias is prevalent in every aspect of our lives because our brains are hardwired to categorize the things we encounter in order to make sense of the complicated world around us. Instead of using energy on experiencing the world and the people we meet *each* and *every* day, our brain lets us save that energy, and instead we experience and interpret the world through biases. In this way, bias is actually our brain’s short-cuts, which allow us to navigate the world without being cognitively overwhelmed. Bias comes in many forms; however, in this book, we focus on gender bias.

To provide an example: When walking into a room of people one does not know, the first parameter one categorizes people along is gender. The next one could be race, it could be class, it could be age, and so on. But gender wins pretty much across the board in every culture.

Unconscious bias happens automatically and outside of our control and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations. Unconscious bias describes the associations that we hold when we automatically respond to others, such as men and women or people from different racial or ethnic groups, in different ways (Blair & Lenton, 2001). Our biases have a significant influence on our attitudes and behavior because they are deeply ingrained within our thinking and emotions. The key challenges and consequences of unconscious bias is that these biases can and often do run counter or opposite to the stated values of an individual. In this way, unconscious bias can help explain how people who value and support gender equality can still be involved in biased decisions or actions. While unconscious biases serve a purpose—helping us navigate the world without being overwhelmed by information—they implicate on the downside that gender stereotypes are hard-wired into human cognition and social behavior.

This means that we are all at risk of categorizing people in ways that reproduce discriminatory and sexist behavior (Abrams, 2010; Hardin & Banaji, 2013).

Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are what people think are “appropriate” roles or behaviors for a given gender, which are determined by cultural prejudices, customs, and traditions. Many of us grow up with this idea, and, without even noticing it, we become biased. Hearing the word “stereotyping” can make us feel defensive. Perhaps we want to state, “I don’t judge” or “I know not to use stereotypical language.” Unfortunately, much of this happens unconsciously.

Bias is making assumptions about individuals based on which social groups (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion) they belong to. For instance, rather than assessing a particular individual’s actual skills, one assumes they will be good (or bad) at something simply based on their social group.

Gender bias is favoring a specific individual over another based on assumptions about their gender. For instance, choosing a male employee for a statistics task *because* he is male and therefore assumed to be good at math, or choosing a female employee to take on care tasks *because* she is female and therefore assumed to be good at care tasks.

Unconscious bias is an automatic or implicit assessment—a gut feeling—that is allowed to determine choices or actions.

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about what men and women are good and bad at. The most common gender stereotypes are that men are assumed to be agentic, while women are assumed to be communal. These stereotypical beliefs often lead people to assume that men are better qualified for high-status and well-paid jobs, while women are better qualified for low-status and un/under-paid jobs.

Even when we say that we are open-minded and not prejudiced, these biases may still creep up on us:

Women are more emotional.

Men are more assertive.

Women are natural nurturers.

Men are better at taking risks.

Women with children are less devoted to their jobs.

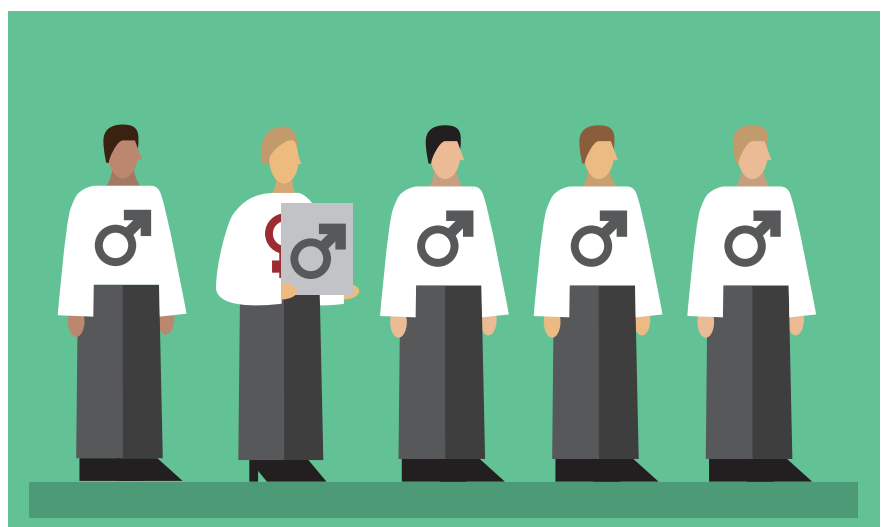
Men who are emotional are “unmanly” and likely gay.

Even if one does not believe these generalized gendered statements or perhaps wants to reject them, these biases plague us all and affect behavior without us consciously realizing it (Muhr, 2019).

Moreover, these generalized statements come in opposing pairs, one of which is tacit. For example, “women are natural nurturers,” therefore, tacitly, “men are not natural nurturers”; and “men are better at taking risks,” so tacitly, “women are worse at taking risks”; “women with children are less devoted to their jobs,” so tacitly, “men with children are more devoted to their jobs,” and so on. It is important to be aware of the tacit underlying assumption in the pair.

Gender beliefs, probably more than most people realize, are incredibly powerful in (re-)producing our culture and organizations, our behavior, and the way that we go about our daily lives. Part of the reason for this is that gender is the dominant basis for categorization, across virtually all social contexts.

What we see represented in our society also implicates how much we buy in to these stereotypes. For example, because our society is filled disproportionately with men in top positions, we are going to associate “male” with “leader” and “competence” and “female” with “home” and “family.”



This is also supported by theoretical models of discrimination, such as *lack of fit* (Heilman, 1993, 2012) and *think manager, think male* (Schein, 1973, 2001), which are among the most well-examined and empirically supported theories of gender bias in the psychology literature. These theoretical explanations argue that there can be a mismatch between what men and women are perceived to be like (i.e., gender stereotypes) and what is thought to predict success in specific occupations (i.e., job stereotypes). This perceived mismatch or incongruity between gender stereotypes and job stereotypes leads to negative performance expectations for both women and men in gender-incongruent domains and, in turn, gives rise to gender discrimination.

Here is an example. If we walk into a job interview assessing a woman, our unconscious bias will likely assign “feminine” characteristics to her, for example, we believe her to be communal, and therefore, tacitly, less aggressive. If that woman is more aggressive than we expected (or we might say what our unconscious bias expects), we will most likely react differently to her. There is a big chance that we are reacting to her in a way that is different than we would react to her if she were a man. This is where stereotyping gets us in trouble because all of this more often than not happens unconsciously.

Where do our biases come from?

We barely even notice them—the insidious terms that are part of the fabric of our daily lives. We often use different language to describe men and women, and, on closer inspection, we see bias is hidden in our language (Muhr, 2019). Consider the term “working mother” or “career woman.” Have you ever heard of a “working father” or a “career man”? Or take the word “bossy,” which is mostly used to refer to women who assert themselves. It’s a term rarely used to describe men as they are more likely to be described as “confident”—the implication being that women should not express strong opinions.

The Danish language consists of many gendered expressions (and Danish is not even the worst language in this respect). Consider these few examples of particular job descriptions: Formand / chairman; Karrierekvinde / career woman; Politimand / police officer; Barnepige / nanny; Flyttemand / mover; Rengøringsdame / cleaning lady. The gendered connotation of these expressions varies from language to language, but for English examples, we could also emphasize examples such as businessman or waitress.

And why do we say “male nurse” or “female contractor”? Language—in this way—expresses that the normative expectation is that a nurse is female, and a contractor is male. In a similar way, when we use the masculine pronouns (he, him, his) to refer to people in general, such as “a professor should be fair to his students,” we are taking for granted that the professor is a “he.”

Language does not just reflect the world; it co-creates the world in which we live and enact on a daily basis. Thus, language shows us two things—not only does it signal and demarcate the presence of sexism in society, but it also reproduces and reinforces sexist behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions. In other words, our language reveals that we do not have gender equality within the labor market; however, language also holds us back from achieving it. Put simply, gendered language is that which promotes (negative or positive) bias toward one gender while simultaneously entrenching such bias further. For example, because we expect the nurse to be female and the contractor to be male, we are more likely to hire/contract a so-gendered person for the job, which reproduces biases and gender inequality at large.

In sum, sexist behavior can be intentional. However, the most common forms of sexism are rooted in these unconscious biases and gender stereotypes, which we all carry around with us; thus, we all engage in discriminatory and sexist behavior. We need to acknowledge that bias and stereotypes are rooted in social consensus, and therefore, they are not random; rather, they are systematic. Within a given society, the likes, dislikes, and beliefs that constrain some and privilege others occur in patterns that systematically oppress subordinates while further ingraining the superiority of the dominants.

Unconscious bias and stereotyping aren’t limited to judgments of others but also affect self-judgment and behavior, especially with regard to intellectual performance. Moreover, they set the boundaries (or ideals) for what is deemed “appropriate” or “normal” for one’s gender, thus, limiting us all. We turn to this now.

Why do we perform sexism? —And with what consequences?

In this section, we add to the question of why we perform sexism and supplement with the question, *and with what consequences?* So far, we have focused on the impact that unconscious biases and gender stereotypes can have on our behavior toward other people, but they can also impact on perceptions of self in relation to stereotypes that we think apply to ourselves, and they set limits and restrict our behaviors in certain ways, which we will explore here.

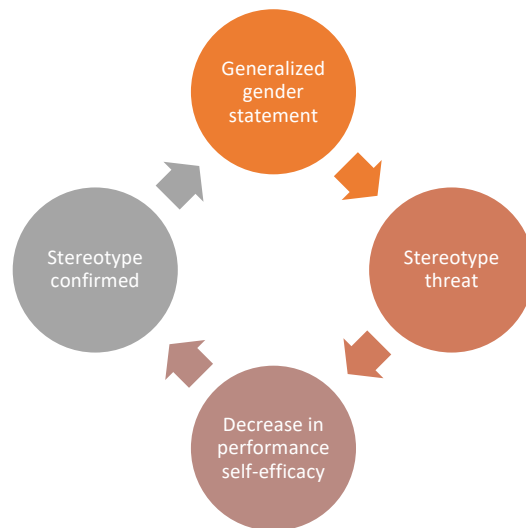
Stereotype threat

In this section, we explain the term stereotype threat and demonstrate by means of a model how gender stereotypes affect behavior so that we come to act according to a given stereotype and, thus, end up confirming the stereotype. Importantly, stereotype threat happens whether the stereotype is positive or negative.

A damaging consequence of unconscious bias and gender stereotypes is stereotype threat. Stereotyping includes “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 1998). Stereotype threat affects members of any group about whom there exists negative stereotypes. When activated, stereotype threat causes people to perform according to the stereotypical bias when they are reminded of this negative bias prior to performing a task. This is due to a neurobiological reaction—the perceived threat stimulates cortisol production in the brain (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010, 2014).

Studies have demonstrated that when participants (in experimental situations) were reminded of belonging to an identity category linked to a negative stereotype, such as by stereotypical pictures in a classroom or on the way to a job interview, the stereotype threat gets activated. For example, causing women to underperform in, for example, math tests (stereotypically masculine skills) and men to underperform in tests designed to measure “social sensitivity” (stereotypically feminine skill). Stereotype threat is likely to occur in workplace settings, and it is important to be aware of because of its potential for harm (Koenig et al., 2011).

As the model (below) illustrates, stereotype threat becomes a kind of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Importantly, whether positive or negative, stereotype threat affects self-perceptions. Furthermore, evidence suggest that stereotype threat is actually more likely to occur when the relevant stereotypes are made salient in subtle ways rather than blatantly (Shih et al., 2002).



The likeability paradox—Warm but incompetent

Despite women’s willingness to negotiate gender boundaries, women have often found that their leadership choices and actions were restricted by others’ expectations based upon stereotypes (Christman & McClellan, 2012). According to the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), women are oftentimes stereotyped as either warm and incompetent or as cold and competent (see also Eckes, 2002). As a result of these ambivalent stereotypes, women face an impression management dilemma: when they display competence, they risk being disliked, but when they display warmth, they risk being disrespected. Thus, even though stereotypes of women contain positive traits, (e.g., caring, nurturing), the positive traits to social-emotional, not agentic dimensions influence how women are portrayed as being “nice” and “warm” but “incompetent.”

Women are often socially and culturally expected to be nurturing and likeable, which in turn restricts their consideration for a leadership position because our understanding of leadership is based on more masculine-associated values/traits. If a woman performs “masculinity,” such as by behaving assertively, dominant, etc., it goes against what our unconscious biases tell us are appropriate ways for a woman to behave. The response to a woman performing “masculinity” is thus often negative because she is acting in contradiction to gendered norms and our unconscious biases, which inform us on what is “acceptable” behavior and what is not. In fact, numerous studies have found that women who display leadership qualities are perceived as less likeable (Heilman, 1993; Eagly & Karau, 1995) This corresponds with more recent studies (Stoker et al., 2012), including a meta-analysis of predominately

student samples (Koenig et al., 2011) that have continued to find a general preference for male managers, strong cultural masculine ideals of leadership (with men more associated with leadership than women), continued association of the “ideal” manager with agentic (i.e., stereotypically masculine) rather than communal qualities and continued assessment of leadership-focused occupations as masculine roles.

Tight rope bias

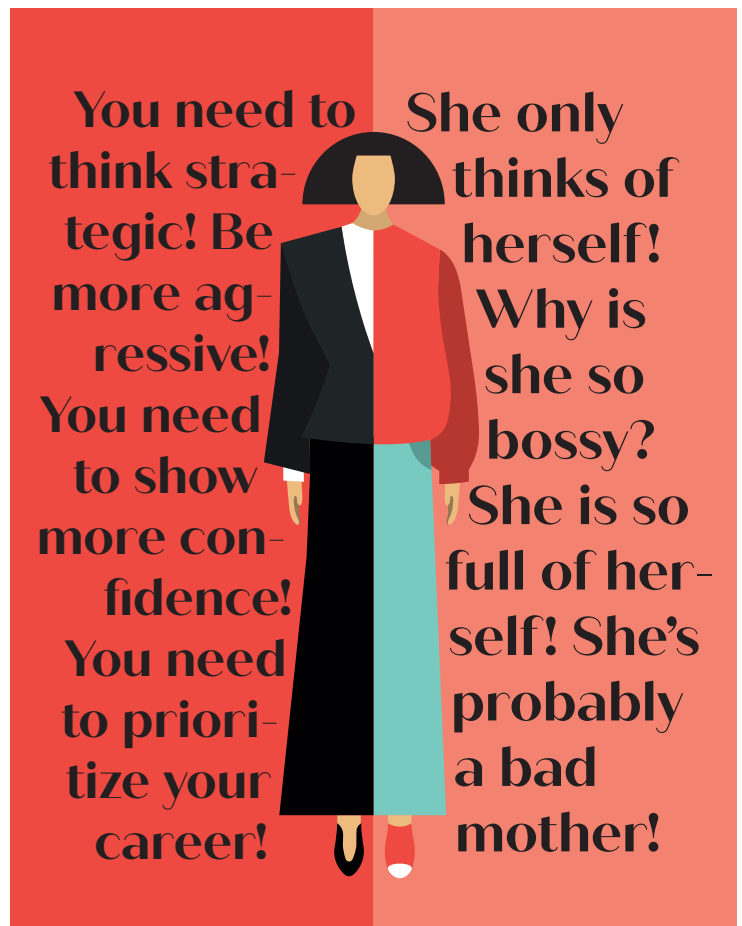
Women face the challenge of achieving an appropriate balance of femininity and masculinity, which is often referred to as the *tight rope bias*. The tight rope bias refers to a difficult balancing act: “women need to act masculine enough, so they are seen as competent at their jobs but feminine enough, so they are seen as competent at being women” (Williams, 2014, p. 295). If women want to succeed, they must act “masculine,” but if they do so, while they may increase their accomplishments, they may also garner dislike and be penalized for lack of femininity, which, in turn, can jeopardize the very success they were trying to reach through their accomplishments (Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Given that promotion decisions depend as much on a person’s likeability as competence, this creates a huge stumbling block for women and is how women pay socially for counter stereotypical behavior (Muhr, 2019).

The *tight rope bias* reflects a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” position and is really a no-win situation, as this illustration demonstrates. Take the generalized gendered statement “Women are natural *nurturers*.” Even if we do not believe in this statement, it still creates a negative impression and makes us uncomfortable if a woman signals that she is not “nurturing” because then she is perceived as “not nice.” A woman may neither be too nurturing and likeable because this will impact negatively on her ability to move up the career-ladder nor too assertive and forthright else she is deemed to be unlikeable and too bossy to be a good leader (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

In *What Works for Women at Work*, Williams and Dempsey (2014) acknowledge that most of the advice that women are given about professional success is “wrong” because it assumes that women are too feminine and should “man up” without considering the social cost of doing so (Williams & Dempsey, 2014, p. 9). Berdahl and colleagues (2018) found that many workplaces are still deeply masculine spaces that value and reward raw ambition, ruthlessness, and domination. This creates organizational cultures that exclude women as well as men who embody non-hegemonic masculinities (Berdahl et al., 2018). Additionally, traditional masculinity norms require men to avoid and devalue characteristics culturally coded as feminine—with acting like a “woman” being one of the worst things a man can do (Berdahl et al., 2018). If men’s masculinity is deemed to be “too passive,” then the

common assumption is that they are homosexual, usually conferred with negative homophobic connotations. Men who display stereotypically feminine characteristics can subsequently face negative consequences in the workplace. Men who ask for help, show empathy, express sadness, or display modesty frequently receive lower status and pay and can be less likely to be hired or promoted (Meyer, 2018), and fathers who apply for part-time jobs or wish to reduce their hours to provide care have also been found to face discrimination (Kelland, 2016).

Therefore, if we act in accordance with gender stereotypes, this contributes to segregation along gender lines, which functions to confirm gender stereotypes. If we live and act in accordance with gender stereotypes and ideals, we barely notice their effects. However, if we display behavior that goes against them, such as men expressing emotions or wishing to take parental leave or women expressing assertiveness or not wishing to have children, there will most likely be certain “costs” to such behavior, such as social exclusion. Thus, even though we wish to negotiate gender stereotypes, norms, and ideals, the act of doing so often has negative consequences.



In sum, it is our contention that locating the problem of sexism in a few “problematic” individuals and designing solutions to the problem around this view is to miss the point. The profound implication of the discovery of unconscious bias and gender stereotypes with the large body of research demonstrating their effects is that anybody is capable of prejudice, whether they know it or not, and of stereotyping, whether they want to or not. Therefore, given the unconscious and implicit operation of bias and stereotyping and its ubiquitous nature, we believe that solutions should focus on identifying the enabling conditions that call out bias and stereotyping across individuals rather than focusing on

identifying a few “rotten apples.” Once identified, we must focus on the enabling conditions that promote a sexist culture. This is what we turn to next.

Part 4: Which factors enable sexism?

In this part, we outline particular factors that enable sexism to manifest itself in our organizations. The overview we propose for understanding the procedures for sexism at work is, of course, limited and not intended to be exhaustive. We give recognition to several organizational-level factors, but in particular, we focus on 1) organizational climate (specifically, we outline in which climates sexism is most likely to occur), 2) “chilly climate,” 3) institutionalized sexist banter, and 4) systemic sexism. How does an organizational culture become prone to enabling sexism to manifest? Of critical importance to answering this question is recognizing that organizational culture does not develop out of “nothing.” Instead, the idiosyncrasies of a given culture develop to meet a functional need of its members. In other words, culture does something for someone. Sexism benefits *some* dominant members.

Organizational climate

An *organizational climate* consists of organizational members’ shared perceptions of the formal and informal organizational practices, procedures, and routines (Schneider et al., 2011). Sexism is more likely to occur in workplaces that create a *permissive climate* (Buchanan et al., 2014). If individuals perceive that the organizational climate tolerates sexism, such as if complaints are not taken seriously, if sexist comments are encouraged to be taken as “compliments,” etc., this creates a permissive climate within the organization and increases the possibility that sexism will occur (Hulin et al., 1996). Many of the people who responded to our petition identified academia as a workplace culture where sexism is allowed to go unchecked and where management often fails to respond to instances of sexism effectively and/or sympathetically.

Additionally, sexism is more likely to occur in cases where the organizational *climate promotes gender conformity* because, as previously mentioned, sexism is often targeted at those who violate gender ideals (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Maass et al., 2003). Moreover, sexism is more likely to occur in workplaces if the climate *advocates masculine values* (Bastian et al., 1996; Fitzgerald et al., 1999, Burke, 2004). Thus, in order to understand, for example, the impact of role incongruence on the current gender imbalance in leadership, it is important to pay attention to how unconscious bias and stereotyping affect our view on women and men, but moreover, to pay attention to how the organization views effective leaders and the degree to which these two profiles match or mismatch. If the organization advocates “masculine” values, there will most likely be a mismatch and thus gender

imbalance in leadership positions. As mentioned previously, many workplaces are still deeply masculine spaces, and this not only excludes women but anybody who embodies non-hegemonic masculinities (Berdahl et al., 2018)—including men and non-binary and transgender people.

Chilly climate

Academically, the term “chilly climate” brings sociological perspectives of how disparities in the workplace can present obstacles for women. Scholar Dr. Bernice Sandler coined the term “chilly climate” in 1982 in hopes that women would come together to combat the frigid climate on campus. According to Sandler, the chilly climate included, for example, 1) male students disproportionately challenging female faculty in their classrooms, 2) harsh student evaluations unfairly judging female faculty based on stereotyped gender expectations, 3) female faculty being more likely to face sex discrimination, and 4) research by female faculty being devalued compared with that of male faculty.

Importantly, the “chilly climate” is not exclusively an academic phenomenon. Rather, the term is used as an explanation for the persistent gender inequality in organizations at large. Overall, the term is used to address women’s systematic exclusion. The chilly climate refers to a climate marked by differential treatment in the everyday atmospheres and environments of our work lives, such as in meetings, in hallways, and in the corridor talk and lunch hours where we socialize with coworkers sometimes only implicitly related to work, other times explicitly work-related. Sexism in these cases can come across as excluding certain actors based on gender identity, joking, or simply ignoring other groups of actors, making them less important. This climate changes from chilly to hostile when such sexist behavior becomes systematic in certain departments, research groups, or physical offices, intensifying the privileges of some while making it almost unbearable and impossible to perform one’s work for those negatively impacted.

Here are some examples of what a chilly climate can look like:

- Calling on and acknowledging men more frequently in meetings;
- Ignoring women and non-binary people in debates and the like while recognizing men, even when others clearly volunteer to participate by, for example, raising their hands;
- Addressing a group as if there were only men present (e.g., “When we were boys...”);
- Interrupting women and non-binary people more than men or allowing peers to interrupt
- Coaching men but not women (e.g., “Tell me more about that”);
- Crediting men’s comments to their owner or “author” (e.g., “As Bill said...”) but not giving authorship or ownership to women;

- Giving women and non-binary people less feedback, less criticism, less help, and less praise;
- Engaging in more informal conversation with men;
- Inviting and including more men than women and non-binary people in impromptu social get-togethers and other socializing initiatives;
- Using language or discussing topics amongst “in-groups” that exclude certain people. For example, sexual comments about women, such as discussing appearance or physical attributes or using sexual humor. Such conversations can be exclusive for other people to be a part of or overhear.

The testimonies from our petition point to some common signs, which include, for example, isolation, bullying, and minimizing. Moreover, this climate of isolation and exclusion is not solely perpetuated and administered by men but also fueled by women in higher academic positions. Thus, there are more sources for aggravating the problem.

Institutionalized sexist banter

Also, the *organizational climate* can promote or prevent sexism and sexual harassment. As for the moment, our institutions both enable and reward sexist behavior (Ahmed, 2015). Sexist banter, for example, is often institutionalized.



It is apparent that sexist humor, which is really a denigration of certain genders through humor, trivializes the unpleasant reality of discrimination behind a smokescreen of harmless banter and implies that when sexist language is presented as humor or in jest, it is to be viewed as acceptable and perhaps even considered as a bonding ritual between colleagues.

We might participate in that banter because it is costly not to participate as we risk becoming the one who disapproves or is “uptight.” We risk being judged as taking something *the wrong way* if we object to something and indeed by taking something said or done *the wrong way*, we risk being judged not only as

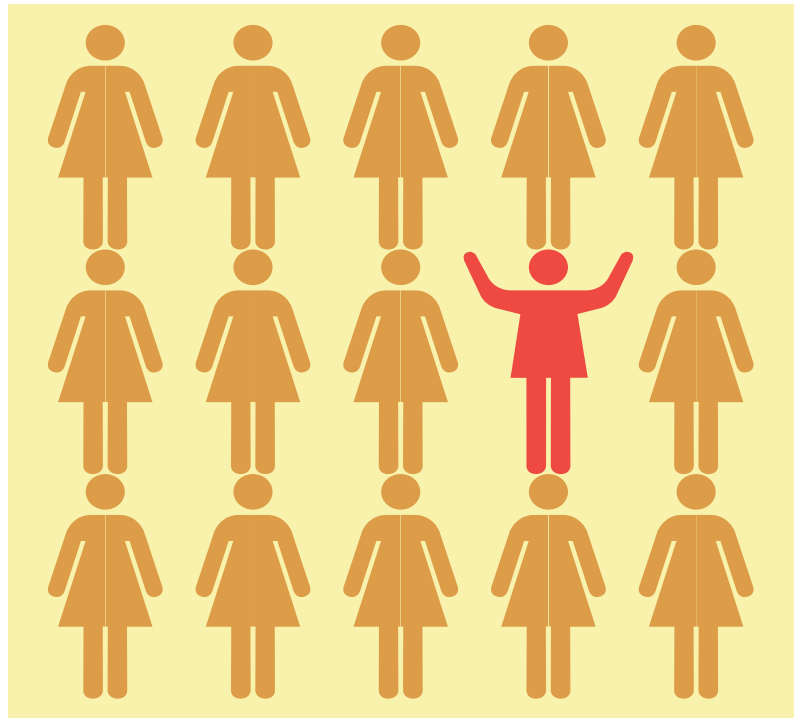
wrong but as wronging someone else (Ahmed, 2015). This is another way in which sexism operates. It holds up a mirror whereby the person to whom the sexist behavior is directed is given the message that their own behavior needs to be recalibrated to better fit the cultural context and expectations of relating.

Here is an example from our petition: Petra joins a group of male colleagues sitting at a table. She tries to ask what they are talking about. One of the colleagues replies: “Cup-sizes on female students, so I am sure you don’t want to be a part of this conversation” and laughs. She feels rejected and is struggling to find an answer with which she can reply. She wants to network and get along, but she knows that she is seen as the “office kill-joy.” Petra knows that many times she has seemed to trouble, worry, and annoy some invisible status quo with which almost everyone else seems comfortable. She decides to say nothing this time, but her face apparently signals aversion because a colleague turns to her and says, “Oh relax, Petra! Can’t you take a joke?” in an annoyed tone.

In this excerpt, we see an example of a chilly climate and how sexist humor contributes to creating this chilly climate, which, ultimately, contributes to social exclusion. Petra is instantly excluded from this group of colleagues as she is believed to not want to join their conversation (perhaps rightly so given the subject of the conversation); thus, this creates a chilly climate. The joking also alienates her from her colleagues because she is seen as someone who can’t take a joke; she is not part of the group as she cannot partake in this “bonding” ritual. Thus, Petra is given the message it is her behavior that needs to be recalibrated to better fit the cultural context and expectations of relating. Put simply, if Petra wants to be part of the group, she must laugh at the sexist joke.

Systemic sexism

Systemic sexism means to take seriously the fact that systems of oppression are built into the procedures and everyday activities of our organizations. Systemic sexism is the perpetuation of discrimination without necessarily any conscious intention. The disparities between men and women are simply taken as givens and are reinforced by practices, rules, policies, and laws that often seem neutral on the surface but in fact disadvantage women (or anyone who does not embody masculinity).



Bias, for example, is buried in recruitment tools, the language of job descriptions and interviewer questions, and job candidate assessments as well as in the perspectives of hiring committees.

Gender bias, if left unchecked, perpetuates sexism in the workplace by keeping women and other people who do not “perform” masculinity from specific roles and male-dominated fields. In the general debate, many reasons are given to explain the low number of women in leadership positions, for example:

There are not enough qualified women who apply.

Leadership positions do not appeal to women.

The female candidates have not been good fits.

Our biases remain hidden in such statements. Why do few women apply? Why do the job postings not attract (more) women? How is a job candidate or a “good fit” identified?

Research has revealed some of these explanations as *myths*: believed by many, but not in fact true, or only partly true. The myth is the belief that gender does not play a role in a world where the allocation of rewards and resources is governed by the normative principles of meritocracy. Mainstream ideas about how individual qualifications and ability should be assessed relate to meritocratic principles that claim objectivity, impartiality, and gender neutrality (Merton, 1973). They lead to a powerful meritocratic *myth*: the belief that selection decisions are based solely on individual qualifications and the ability demonstrated. In this system, talent will prove itself, and “excellence” will merely surface automatically. However, several studies have shown that “excellence” is not gender neutral and that gender does matter (Husu & Koskinen, 2010; Rees, 2011; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014).

Our petition points to gender discrimination, however, this is not easy to validate because of this meritocratic myth, which exists because procedures for promotion are considered objective and without any kind of institutional or gender bias.

In sum, many factors enable sexism to manifest itself in our organizations. While the overview we propose for understanding the procedures for sexism at work is, of course, limited and not intended to be exhaustive, we outline a possible point of departure for initiating measures to counter sexism. As we have seen, sexism manifests itself on different levels, and to counter sexism is to induce behavioral and cultural change at all levels. Individuals can bring about big changes, but ultimately sexism needs to be addressed for the organization as a whole.

Part 5: What makes it difficult to speak up?

Speaking up can make a difference and is important in order to counter sexism; however, there are many reasons why sexism remains hidden in organizational life. This section is dedicated to outlining the many reasons why people might remain silent, but similar to above, this list of reasons is, of course, limited and not intended to be exhaustive.

Firstly, let's begin by mentioning that *silence* can take many forms. We can both be silent when sexism occurs, demonstrating an inability to confront sexism when it happens, and we can be silent when sexism has occurred, such as in cases where victims feel unable to speak up. Several models and explanations have been offered to explain why individuals do not confront sexism and/or remain silent when they experience sexism. In this part, we name a few explanations.

Barriers to confronting sexism

Although we would like to believe we would confront sexism when we are imagining a sexist encounter, in reality, most of us remain silent (Swim & Hyers, 1999; Swim et al., 2010). Research indicates that speaking up is difficult for many, and even bystanders rarely confront discrimination of any kind (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Good et al., 2012). There are a number of obstacles that would-be confronters face. According to classic bystander intervention research, people are unlikely to confront if they do not interpret an incident as discrimination, deem it an emergency, assume personal responsibility for addressing the incident, or identify a response. Thus, everyday sexism, benevolent sexism, and all subtle forms of sexism may not elicit confrontation because they oftentimes are not identified as sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Furthermore, even if people do label an incident as sexist and perceive it as requiring an immediate response, they may not see themselves as personally responsible for acting, such as if other potential confronters are present (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Also, people who have not seen others respond to sexism or who have never practiced their own response may be unsure what to do when faced with a sexist incident. The many obstacles explain why *speaking up* is difficult when sexism occurs.

Speaking up is costly

Major barriers to confronting include social costs to the confronter (Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2004; Swim et al., 2010). Female confronters of sexism as well as black confronters of racism are often perceived as overreacting, whiny, oversensitive troublemakers, interpersonally cold, or fearful of retaliation (e.g.,

Becker et al., 2011; Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dodd et al., 2001; Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003). Furthermore, confrontation has the cost of potentially appearing as an “overreaction,” which can confirm the negative stereotype such as women being overly emotional (e.g., Kaiser et al., 2009). Female confronters are also less liked by men (Dodd et al., 2001), and the confronting target is at risk to be perceived as self-interested and egoistic.

If we say, “that’s sexist,” we are saying that such forms of speech and behavior are not acceptable or permissible. We are asking individuals and our institutions to change. However, as Sara Ahmed (2015) argues, “When we give problems their names, we can become a problem for those who do not want to register that there is a problem. You can become the problem by naming the problem” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 9). Indeed, those who claim to be targets of discrimination are not always supported; more often than not they are labeled as “complainers” or “troublemakers” instead (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2001).



Evidence suggests that confrontations by *nontargets* can be more effective than confrontations by targets (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Research shows that how a message is received is often less about precise wording and more about the in-group identity of the speaker. A confrontation intended to change attitudes and behavior has more impact when it comes from someone perceived to be similar, and the individual who is confronted is likely to feel more guilt and less uneasiness than if confronted by someone from the target group. Following Czopp and Monteith (2003), men can more easily confront sexism and white people can better confront racism. However, challenging every sexist remark and decrying sexist policies is exhausting work. Stamarski and Hing (2015) also noted the paradox that “at an individual level,

people engage in strategies to fight being discriminated against, but these strategies are likely more constrained for those who are most stigmatized,” which leads the authors to conclude that **collective action** is the most effective strategy to change discrimination in the workplace (see also Husu, 2001, 2005 on academic women’s different strategies confronting discrimination).

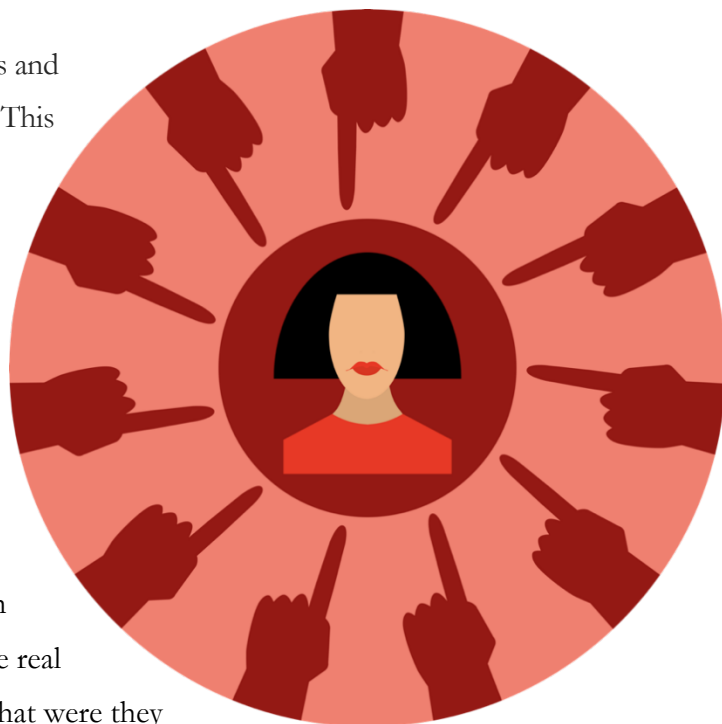
Speaking up holds the victim responsible

Individual victims are positioned as responsible for reporting and acting on behavior that they perceive as sexism. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons why many individuals shy away from making use of these workplace policies inheres in fears about whether it is possible to prove one has been the victim of sexism and the danger that, in naming certain behaviors as sexist, individuals may run the risk of being seen as overly sensitive or improperly motivated (Hinze, 2004).

Practices and activities that can be discursively represented as sexism are subject to multiple interpretations; however, within organizations there tends to be dominant discursive practices. Such practices encourage individuals to make sense of their experiences in particular ways, often in those that act to reproduce and police existing patriarchal relations of power (Bingham, 1994; Clair, 1998; Dougherty, 2006; Wood, 1994). Thus, people may account for their experiences without labeling them or referring to them as instances of sexism because sexism is deeply integrated into our daily lives. When people refuse to label certain instances as sexist, they are being duped by or colluding with dominant discursive practices. Put more simply, discursive practices decide what and how sexism is to be understood; thus, if your own experience with sexism is not in accordance with the “dominant” understanding of sexism, those in a position of power or those who should help you in this situation are unlikely to do so. This in itself tells us something very important—to be aware of and to examine whose representations of events get to be “dominant” in relation to sexism and how employees interact with and orient to this.

Speaking up puts you at risk of victim-blaming

Victim-blaming involves the explicit and implicit behaviors and attitudes that push the issues of sexism back at the victim. This is closely related to what we discussed above about becoming troublemakers if we speak up; victim-blaming quickly turns the problem and the responsibility back on the victim, individualizing it and the effects it may have, such as by indicating guilt, lack of a sense of humor, or misread intentions.



We ask questions about victim's choices: what they're doing, thinking, wearing, etc. Focusing questions only on the victim is keeping the cycle alive by not addressing the real issue of sexism. Importantly, those aspects of actions (what were they doing, wearing, etc.) do not lead to people being harassed—they are *not* the causes but become wrongly assumed to be. Ultimately, the victim is not believed. Instead, the victim is met with justifications of the sexist behavior, such as “I am sure that person did not mean that”; incredulity or mistrust, such as “Really, are you sure this is exactly what happened?”; or identifying and defending the offender, such as “Well, yes, I can see why he would be interested in you; as you are very beautiful.” These are all sophisticated forms of victim-blaming and silencing as the message the person that finally got the courage to express a sexist experience is getting is: you don't have a sound judgment of reality, and you are the cause of the wrongdoing you experience.

While most of us do not wish to blame victims, victim-blaming nonetheless persists. There are a number of reasons why. One psychological phenomenon that contributes to this tendency to lay the blame on the victim is known as the fundamental attribution error (Artino, 2012). This bias involves attributing other people's behaviors to internal, personal characteristics while ignoring external forces and variables that also might have played a role.

Here is one example: If you are late to work, your colleagues will most likely attribute you being late to internal characteristics. For example, your colleagues might believe that you forgot to set your alarm clock or that you are just lazy. However, you might be late due to traffic, which is an external factor, but your colleagues will be biased because of the attribution error and ultimately blame you for being late.

Another issue that contributes to our tendency to blame the victim is known as the hindsight bias (Roese & Vohs, 2012). The hindsight bias functions in this way: when we look at an event that happened in the past, we tend to believe that we should have been able to see the signs and predict the outcome. The hindsight bias is not limited to instances of, for example, sexism or sexual assault; rather, this bias is very common.

Here is one example: If someone becomes ill, we often blame past behaviors for a person's current state of health. Someone tells you that they had a heart attack, and you cannot help but think that they should've started eating healthier, exercising more, etc.

Such cases of blame seem to suggest that people should have simply known or expected such things to happen given their behavior even if there was no way to predict the outcome.

Speaking up produces victimization

Additionally, we can argue that refusing to be named a "victim" of sexism might hold a lot of people back from speaking up. It is difficult being labeled as a victim because this bears with it a form of identification; "I am a victim." We live in a culture that values independence and strength, which wrongly conflates victimhood with weakness. Thus, our culture disaffirms the agency of victims, and instead of focusing on those who victimize, the label "victim" in itself becomes something we shy away from identifying with.

In a study of male professors' experiences of sexual harassment in academe, Scarduzio and Geist-Martin (2008) note how men's reluctance to name certain experiences as sexual harassment may stem from the subject position "victim" in sexual harassment discourse. Scarduzio and Geist-Martin argue that the subject position "victim" is not easily taken up by men, especially high-status men, who may experience high levels of internal conflict and ambiguity in using this term as they attempt to define and make sense of their experiences. Following this, we can only conjecture that men might be afraid to speak up because it brings their masculinity into question.

Being deemed a "victim" is uncomfortable, regardless of gender. There are people—for countless of reasons—who don't want to identify as victims. However, refusing to accept victimization contributes to a culture where sexism remains alive yet hidden. To name the problem is not weakness; it takes strength to tell uncomfortable truths.

Thanks to all who speak up as well as those who could not

We would like to mention and acknowledge that we have all personally been contacted by people who did not dare to share their story and/or sign the petition. This book is also dedicated to those who suffer in silence in fear of damage and backfiring. Working in an environment rife with sexism, inequality, and exclusion can feel isolating; however, all these stories indicate that similar experiences are more common than any one individual might think. As we have seen with both the number and character of these stories, these sexist experiences are not isolated. Rather, they are systematic and ongoing and reinforce discriminatory and oppressive structures. Hopefully, this book represents steps toward sharing experiences, finding allies, and building coalitions that will draw greater attention to how the cards are systematically stacked against some people, paving the way for other forms of strategic interruptions that can lead to action and change.

We hope that this book will lay the groundwork for the change that is needed. Hopefully the acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of sexism across disciplines, from low levels to the highest levels of the organization, from temporary to permanent employment, and stories across gender-identity, race, sexual orientation etc. will help to hurry that process of change.

Part 6: Dictionary

Sex, gender, and sexuality

It is common for people to confuse sex, gender, and sexuality, which is why we find it important to explain the different definitions to help understand how these concepts are different from each other and interlink with sexism in complex ways.

From childhood, we are taught there are two genders, male and female. Think about it, even before giving birth, a pregnant person is often asked what gender their baby is.

When we ask, “Is it a boy or a girl?” we classify the fetus in terms of sex into the biologically binary distinction between female and male (e.g., “without or with ...”), which we then associate with binary gender traits that are feminine and masculine.

This logic is called the *gender binary*. Historically, sex difference was positioned as biologically driven, and bodily difference became absolute. From this perspective, the essence of gender—of being a man or a woman—was tied to bodily differences, for example, one’s reproductive function. The ability to carry a child and the ability to impregnate became the foundation of formulations of what men and women *were*. Central to the formulation of sexed and gendered difference was this binary model wherein male and female were polarized and in an either-or relation. The gender binary sets women and men apart, and not only physically, such as with bodily differences, but it also determines conceived differences in personality traits and characteristics, behavioral characteristics, and social role. This logic still influences our views on gender today; for example, women are still believed to be more “emotional” and men more “rational” and arguments of differences in biology, hormones, etc. are still being used to justify this differential logic within the gender binary (Possing, 2018). Put simply, the gender binary is the idea that there are only two genders and that they are each other’s opposites. However, gender is a broad spectrum.

Sex and gender are often used interchangeably despite having different meanings. Sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans. Typically, one’s sex is prescribed at birth by the parents, custodians, or medical personnel, and it is instantly reflected in Denmark in the assignment of a social security number that has either an even or an odd number.

This identification relies on a baby's sexual anatomy (i.e., including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals), allowing one to be identified by others as *female*, *male* or *intersex*.⁶ For example, a baby boy who is born with male genitalia will be identified as male. Gender, on the other hand, involves how a person identifies (Monro, 2005; Eger et al., 2021). *Gender identity* is each person's internal and individual experience of gender; it's how you perceive yourself and what you identify with. As the baby boy grows older, he may or may not identify with being male. We can identify or not with the primary identification that was assigned to us as infants. *Cisgender* means that the gender you identify with matches the sex assigned to you at birth, and *transgender* is when your gender identity differs from the sex on your birth certificate. Gender identity is also what you call yourself—he, she, they, or neither. *Non-binary people* identify outside the traditional categories of male and female; thus, their gender cannot be defined within the margins of gender binary and can refer to a variety of gender identities. It is important to consider that sex in its biological sense and gender identity do not always coincide as not everyone's sex at birth lines up with their gender identity. Due to historical prejudice, repression, and fear of violence and persecution, this identification (as it is also the case with sexuality) is not always declared or made public.

Gender expression is how a person publicly expresses or presents their gender. One's chosen names and preferred pronouns are two significant ways to express one's gender. We often use pronouns based on a person's appearance or name; however, such assumptions can be wrong and lead to *misgendering*. Misgendering is the result of how we expect people to conform to what gender we believe them to identify with. To avoid misgendering, we can ask: "How do you identify?" or "What pronouns do you use?"

Preferred pronouns, or PGP, is simply the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use in order to reflect that person's gender identity. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are I, you, she, her, he, him, and it. "I," "you," and "it" are what we call "gender neutral" or "all gender," but "she," "her," "he," and "him" are gendered. This can create an issue for transgender and gender nonconforming people because others may not use the pronouns they prefer when speaking to them or about them. There is a long list of pronouns being used in the English language, and it is growing, but most people use "they," "them," and "their(s)" as singular, gender

⁶ A sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male and that accounts for 1.7% of babies; see: <https://www.unfe.org/intersex-awareness/>

inclusive pronouns even though they have been traditionally used as plural pronouns. We should also point out that some people don't want you to use pronouns at all; they simply prefer that you just use their name. One way to make sure that your organization is being *inclusive* and welcoming for transgender or other gender nonconforming people is to incorporate PGPs into your regular intro activities. If you start every meeting by having those present share their names, ask them to share their PGPs as well. For example: "My name is Jennifer, and my PGPs are 'she' and 'her.'" "Hi, I'm Martin, and my preferred gender pronouns are 'he,' 'him,' and 'his.'"

Gender expression also includes expressive activities that can include behavior and outward appearance, such as how one dresses and/or styles their hair, use of make-up, body language, and voice. Someone who identifies as male, for instance, may dress in what's considered "men's clothes" or have a certain kind of haircut, and someone who identifies as female might wear high heels as a sign of female gender expression. However, your gender expression is not dependent on your gender identity. People can express a gender (or gendered attributes) that is different from their gender identity (e.g., a person can present himself in feminine clothing and use make-up while still identify as male). Norms of gender expressions will vary depending on the cultural context, but the most common assumption is that if you are a woman, you are expected to dress and act feminine, and if you are a man, you are expected to dress and act masculine. *Gender nonconforming* refers to people who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth, such as "feminine boys" or "masculine girls." We see how gender is thus also socially assigned to us based on social norms and expectations. These social norms of male and female gender expression reinforce the gender binary, which reinforces gender-based stereotypes as it discourages the crossing and mixing of gender roles. For example, the gender binary logic tells us that men should not wear nail polish because this is seen as feminine. This is where sex and gender interlink with sexism. As mentioned above in the *Interpreting* section, sexism and gender stereotypes are closely related because sexism is a form of discrimination that is often (consciously or unconsciously) rooted in gender stereotypes, and sexism is often targeted at those who violate gender ideals (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Maass et al., 2003).

Sexuality/sexual orientation. A person's gender identity is fundamentally different from and not related to their sexuality. Gender identity is who *you are*, whereas sexuality is about *who you are attracted to*. Sexuality is about who you feel drawn to romantically, emotionally, or sexually. For example, a straight or heterosexual person feels attraction toward people of the opposite sex; straight men find women attractive, while straight women feel attraction toward men. Heterosexuality is considered the norm, but there exist

multiple forms of sexual orientation. Sexual orientation and gender identity mean two different things, but in the face of sexism, they intersect in complex ways. For example, people who are nonconforming to traditional gender role expectations are often exposed to stereotypes regarding sexual orientation, that is, “feminine” men are presumed to be gay, or “masculine” women are presumed to be lesbian. For example, the man wearing nail-polish might be called “feminine” or even “gay,” which is why it is important to be able to distinguish sex, gender, and sexuality and understand that these concepts all interlink with sexism in a complex web. This complexity is also due to the fact that sexism does not operate as a distinctive form of discrimination; rather, sexism is interrelated with other forms of discrimination and oppressive systems. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sexism intersects with other types of oppression, and the term intersectionality pushes us toward a new era of studying inequality, where we are able to consider multiple sources of oppression.

To learn more, visit Gender Spectrum (2021). *Principles of gender-inclusive puberty and health education*. https://gender-spectrum.cdn.prismic.io/gender-spectrum/%2F9ab3b6f1-314f-4c09-89d8-d5d8adc6511a_genderspectrum_2019_report_web_final.pdf

Reflections

How would you describe sexism now?

Are you able to explain what kind of behaviors or organizational practices could be deemed sexist?

Why is it important not to neglect the more subtle forms of sexism?

What characterizes jokes and behaviors that are sexist in tone and content?

Why can it be difficult for people to speak up?

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CHAPTER II: EXPLORING

Introduction

In this chapter, we *explore* the multiple ways in which sexism operates. As mentioned previously, the issue of sexism is complex, which is why we find it important to tackle it in diverse ways. Therefore, we present a “methodological mix” including both qualitative and quantitative data. This opens up the possibility of developing methodological pluralism and research strategies that recognize the potential complementarity of certain quantitative and qualitative techniques in studying sexism.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are still widely considered in the research methods literature to belong to two distinct research traditions. At a basic level, qualitative research commonly refers to the collection and analysis of material that seeks to uncover meaning and to promote an understanding of the experiences of the research subjects. By contrast, quantitative research is about the collection and analysis of numerical data, or social “facts.” Underlying this dual model is the notion that these methods are deeply rooted in different epistemological positions, that is, different conceptions of what knowledge is, what science is, and how we come to know things. From an epistemological point of view, qualitative research is often thought to value subjective and personal meanings and is said to “give voice” to people, whilst quantitative research is constructed in terms of testing theories and making predictions in an objective and “value-free” way. This dual model represents what could be called the “quantitative–qualitative divide” (Metso & Feuvre, 2006), where feminist research tends to be closely associated with qualitative research methods (Maynard & Purvis, 1994), and quantitative methods are generally equated with male/mainstream research design (Cancian, 1992). Instead of criticizing this divide, we take it seriously and acknowledge that the problem of sexism and the questions that arise from studying this problem demand both qualitative and quantitative answers.

This chapter is divided into *two parts*: In part 1, we provide a pedagogical tool which is based on our qualitative study. Out of the 823 stories told by the courageous people who signed our petition, we have written an array of vignettes (Hughes et al., 2004). The vignettes represent different forms of sexism, ranging from everyday to hostile examples, and each vignette includes a series of questions that invites readers to work with the complexity of sexism. In part 2, we present our quantitative study. Following our petition, we employed a survey questionnaire to capture the extent of sexism. Our quantitative analysis lends itself well to describing and generalizing patterns.

The vignettes

To protect the anonymity of our respondents, we have re-written the more than 700 testimonials, and here we present 28 vignettes. The vignettes are inspired by the many stories told by the courageous people who signed our petition. The stories have been re-written to function as a narrative sketch introducing fictional characters while effectively representing the real-life examples. Although we have changed identifiable details such as names, places, nationalities, and other specific characteristics, we have aimed to preserve the emotional essence and cognitive meaning of each story.

The idea is that the vignettes can be read in private to reflect on and explore—and maybe you will read stories that resonate with your own experiences—but also, we propose the vignettes be used as a pedagogical tool in conversations between management and employees, between colleagues, in workshops, etc. The vignettes provide a tool and a method to encourage dialogue, reflexivity, and action on the issue of sexism. Instead of sharing one's own experiences with sexism (which can be extremely difficult and likely create feelings of exposure), these depersonalized fictional characters can be helpful for readers to take up rhetorical positions when examining this sensitive issue (Hughes et al., 2004).

The main aim of this part is to create safe spaces where management and employees can reflect. The vignettes will hopefully help to open up otherwise difficult conversations as participants are able to shift focus onto the fictional characters within the vignettes, using their fictional stories as a starting point. Ultimately, the goal is to allow readers to redefine contexts and interpret the vignettes based on their own experiences, providing a safe space to freely discuss experiences with sexism.

Each vignette's section consists of a narrative followed by questions for the reader to reflect upon, engage with, and discuss with others.

Moreover, each vignette presents several questions that combine *affect with action-mode* according to the following aspects (Munar et al., 2017):

Embodiment and feeling: How did readers feel when listening to the story? Do they recognize these feelings from their personal lives?

Empathy and perspective-taking: How do readers think they would have felt and/or acted in relation to the vignette 1) if they were the protagonist of the story and 2) if they were a colleague who was a witness to the situation?

Thoughts on action-taking: How do readers feel about possible fields of action? What would they suggest should be done? What would make action possible?

In the first part of questions (aspects of embodiment, feeling, and empathy/perspective-taking), readers are encouraged to respond from their own perspectives or from the viewpoint of the fictional characters within the vignettes. This is to encourage readers to reflect personally, to allow empathy, and to identify feelings such as compassion, anger, surprise, sadness, etc. In the second part of the questions, readers are encouraged to imagine and reflect upon possible fields of action in regard to managerial responsibility and support.

Pedagogy—How to use the vignettes

Providing a safe space is essential. It often takes only one judgmental, self-righteous, or defensive person in a group for a negative “halo effect” to kick in and influence what other people might dare to say. This is even more important when there might be differences in power among the persons in the group (e.g., professors versus post-docs or PhDs). For this reason, we encourage conversations that aim at reflection, understanding, and respectful listening and insist that the pedagogics used for the discussion are as important as the content of the vignettes. We must engage in conversations beyond shaming, naming, and blaming. We strongly recommend that the facilitators have read the book and have an overall understanding of sexism. The facilitators can select and adapt the questions to the specific academic context.

The following points outline a recommended pedagogy using an example of a 90-minute workshop that has been developed and tested in academic courses and conferences and among international audiences (Munar et al., 2017).

- 1) Begin with a short presentation about the aims and the pedagogics of the workshop.
- 2) Participants are asked to sit in groups of ideally four to six persons. Each group is led by a facilitator. The facilitator’s role is to chair, monitor the time, and ensure that the ethics of the activity are maintained and to mediate if there is a potential conflict.

3) Each group is assigned two or three vignettes, and participants receive a printed copy of these and the questions related to each vignette, on which they can write their thoughts and observations.

Describing: The vignette is read out loud by the facilitator of the group.

Reflecting: The questions are presented, and participants are then asked to write down their initial thoughts related to the vignette and questions.

Dialogue: Participants should share only what they are comfortable with, and what they share should be based on their individual written answers and reflections. Participants are asked not to disseminate the personal experiences and comments shared during the dialogue outside the group. Most notably, the participants are asked to listen respectfully in silence without interrupting and to abstain from commenting on others' reflections. Participants take turns speaking, one after another. To do this, the facilitator can appoint who is next, or participants can use an item (e.g., a stone or a pencil), which the participant that has just finished speaking gives to the next to have the floor. This continues until the last one in the group has spoken. The different contributions are allowed to stand by themselves as a collage of reflections.

The process of describing-reflecting-sharing is repeated for as many rounds as there are vignettes (e.g., three rounds if there are three vignettes, one for each).

Learning and gratitude: The participants are asked to write in a few sentences what they have learned from listening to and discussing the vignettes and questions and to share this with the group if they wish.

Concluding: Once all participants have spoken, and depending on the time available, the facilitator can introduce one or two further questions for debate.

The session ends with information on the additional resources that are available and prompting participants to share their knowledge on other resources that may benefit the group.

Categories

Category 1: “Everyday” sexism

Sub-category: Sexualized comments

Vignette 1.1. “You know how these things work”

When Karin started her first day as a post-doc, which she had been looking forward to, she was met by a successful and powerful professor who smilingly said to her: “I have been looking forward to you starting here.” Karin smiled back to him and said, “So have I!” and he replied, “You must not forget, I have the right to kiss all the pretty girls in this department.” Karin was stunned by his reply, and she felt rather awkward about it. However, she quickly brushed it off as she didn’t want to make a fuss about anything on her first day. A couple of months went by, and the summer party in the department came along. Karin was standing at the bar as that same professor approached her. He touched her back and moved his hands down to her lower back. She turned around. The professor said: “My wife isn’t home.” Karin was speechless, and she wanted to act as if she hadn’t heard him. The professor just stood there and looked at her, and Karin decided to ask, “Sorry, what did you say?” He smiled at her and said: “You heard me. Don’t act foolish, you know how these things work.”

- Why do you think Karin feels she needs to “brush it off” on her first day? Have you ever had that feeling?
- Do you think it matters that these comments come from a successful and powerful professor? Why/why not?
- Have you experienced comments like this directed to yourself or others?
- How do you see Karin’s possible fields of action here?
- How can colleagues act on such issues?
- What can management do to prevent such behavior?

Sub-category: Subtle sexism

Vignette 1.2. “How about we get to know each other?”

Clara was sitting late hours at the office when she got an email from a fellow colleague. The email was from Tim, saying, “If you are always this efficient and working late hours how about we sit together the next time late so we can get to know each other?” Clara didn’t really know how to respond. She was

alone in the office, and she started actually feeling a bit uncomfortable. She liked Tim, and she wanted to do research together with him. However, something felt a bit “off” in this email. She felt as if he had crossed a line in their professional relationship by suggesting that they should get to “know each other.” Clara didn’t reply to his email and decided to go home. The next day at lunch, Tim approached her and asked if she wanted to sit with him. They sat down, and Tim said: “How are things in your marriage?”

- Clara feels that something is “off.” Have you ever had that feeling?
- Which boundaries do you see between private and professional at stake here, and what to do with such gray zones?
- How can colleagues help each other explore, set, or sense such boundaries without acting entitled to ask such private questions?
- In which ways can management support these kinds of conversations and boundary work?

Sub-category: Looks and likeability versus competence and respect

Vignette 1.3. “The compliment”

Belinda’s colleague Arthur tells her prior to the Christmas party that he has “fiddled with” the seating arrangement so he can sit close to her. He continues to say, “I want perfect view to stare at your breasts. It is too bad that you are getting heavier because of your pregnancy but your breasts are still very sensual.” Belinda is stunned because by the look on his face, he’s smiling as though he’s trying to flatter her. However, she feels this was a “sugar coated” insult in regard to her pregnancy. Belinda tells her colleague about the incident. Her colleague says, “That’s just the way he is. You should take it as a compliment.”

- Have you experienced this type of backhanded compliments before? (e.g., “you look pretty with makeup on,” “your hair looks nicer straight,” etc.). How did it make you feel?
- Why do you think Belinda’s colleague advises her to take it “as a compliment”? Have you ever been asked to take something as a compliment? Have you ever witnessed this being requested of others?
- What fields of actions do you see for the actors involved?

- How can a collegial environment respond to such comments, both in the situation and under other circumstances?
- What cultures might develop from such commenting on each other amongst staff, and how can management take part in discussing this?

Sub-category: Men's competences vs. female looks

Vignette 1.4. **"The best-looking PhD student in town"**

Marie is a PhD student, and she is meeting with her research team. She notices how her male colleagues are being praised for their competences and their research contributions, while instead Marie is being praised for her good looks. The project leader uses phrases such as "strong analytical skills" and "rational argumentation" to describe her male colleagues, whereas she is described as "the best-looking PhD student in town." She appreciates the comment as it's "nice to get a compliment," she thinks. However, she wishes the project-leader would see her for what she is behind her good looks. She wishes he would acknowledge her competences like he does with the rest of the team. She starts contemplating why there is always focus on her looks. However, she cannot quite pinpoint what the reason might be, so she "shakes it off" as she begins her presentation. She feels confident, and the team feels excited. When she is done, the male professor says, "when you present, you are so sexy!"

- Can you understand why Marie feels ambivalent about receiving such compliments? Have you ever had that feeling?
- Have you experienced or witnessed such comments before?
- Which fields of actions are available for the actors involved here—for Maria as well as others in the room?
- How can colleagues and management use such ambivalent comments to collaborate on a more subject-focused and constructive feedback and discussion culture?

Sub-category: Men's competences vs. female kindness

Vignette 1.5. **"You are the best"**

Juliana is asked to arrange a conference by her research team. Actually, she does not feel she has the time to do it, so she asks whether someone else might do it or perhaps share the responsibility of

arranging the conference. A colleague says, “But you are the best.” Juliana feels acknowledged by that compliment. However, she also knows that doing this type of work means not having time to do research. She therefore feels unsure whether this is a genuine compliment. Another colleague says, “Yes we need those good feminine qualities.” Juliana now feels as though “feminine qualities” are being used as an excuse for her to arrange the conference. As this is not the first time her feminine qualities are highlighted as important to an administrative task, she gets a sense that her gender is actually an obstacle from being able to fully dedicate herself to primary job responsibilities that will best position her for advancement in the academy.

- Have you experienced gendered language such as the above? How did it make you feel?
- Do you recall hearing or saying “feminine” or “masculine” linked to competence/qualities? If so, when? And how did it matter to the situation?
- How can we as colleagues discuss the relevant distribution of such “invisible work” tasks (we use the term invisible work to describe work tasks that do not count for promotion but are part of “academic citizenship”)
- What can management do to distribute such work more equally and deal with the risk of gendering such tasks?

Sub-category: Degradation of intellect

Vignette. 1.6. **“Now I know what I have you for”**

Louise a PhD student is having lunch with Martin, another PhD student, and a professor, who is their supervisor. They talk and laugh together. Louise is really pleased to work with both of them, and she is happy that they share such a “loose and free tone” together. At one point the professor looks at his sock and sees a hole in it. He looks at Louise and says: “Now I know what I have you for” and points toward the hole in the sock. Louise now feels a bit awkward. The three of them have always laughed a lot, but there is something about this joke that does not feel right. Why would the professor point to her? Why not Martin? She wonders. Louise now starts feeling a bit self-conscious. She looks to Martin, who nervously laughs at the joke.

- How would you feel if someone made a joke like this to you?
- Why do you think Louise feels self-conscious? Have you ever had that feeling?
- How can we nurture a casual collegial environment and humor culture while still rejecting gender-based and condescending jokes?

- What are the actors' fields of action when comments and jokes cross the line? How can we address such lines without being called "prudish" or "boring"?
- How can colleagues discuss the tone and readdress the local language form with respect for different boundaries?
- What can management do to support this ongoing effort of cultivating a friendly and respectful tone?

Category 2: Reporting

Sub-category: Experiences with reporting

Vignette 2.1. "You have to live with your enemies"

Sophie experienced sexual assault during a Christmas party, and therefore she called in sick from work the following days. She called her doctor, and she got a reference to a psychologist. It was now time for her to tell the department, and she was so nervous. She knew that the person who did this was liked by many, and therefore she feared no one would believe her. When she told her department head, he actually did believe her, and for a moment she felt relieved. She could almost hear herself take a big deep breath out loud. The department head looked at her and said: "I am sorry that this happened to you, but there is nothing we can do about it. You have to live with your enemies" as he smiled nervously and apologetically to her. As if experiencing a sense of unreality, she thought to herself *this can't be happening*. Sophie was unable to respond in the moment. She left the office and took the rest of the day off.

- Why do you think Sophie is unsure whether anyone would believe her? Have you ever had that feeling?
- What are Sophie's fields of actions here? How would you react if you found yourself in a similar situation?
- Which formal and informal channels do you know about that are relevant in this situation at your university?
- How can management deal with this, and what should the department head have done in this case do you think?

Sub-category: Lack of reporting

Vignette 2.2. **“This will hurt your career”**

Pia was a PhD student, and she experienced unwanted sexual attention from her supervisor. She didn't know what to do because this man had such a huge impact on her career. She decided to talk to her colleagues about the episodes. She started with the “small” stories from the beginning of their professional relationship. He had made some remarks about her hair looking good long and saying, “don't ever cut your hair because it is so pretty,” and he always complimented her on her clothing. Before a big presentation for some international researchers, he had told her “it's a good idea if you flirt with *that* researcher.” As she spoke about these incidents to her colleagues, she began to recall all the negative feelings she had pushed aside for way too long. Her stomach began to hurt, and she felt sick. One thing was experiencing these “small” things one at a time, but another was to hear them out loud and all combined. She thought to herself, “I have been so blind all along.” She looked to her colleagues. They all empathized with her; she could see that in their eyes. Perhaps they have experienced the same? She wondered. A fellow colleague looked at her and said: “I feel for you. This is hard, but promise me one thing. Don't say anything because this will hurt your career.”

- Why do you think Pia felt like she did when recalling all the incidents?
- How can we act on micro-aggressions that happen on a daily basis; which strategies can we develop as a collegial body?
- What can the single individual do, and how can witnesses support the situation constructively—without reproducing the legitimacy of gender-based micro-aggressions?
- How can management take active part in counter-acting such behaviors?

Sub-category: Time and reporting

Vignette 2.3. **“Taking care of myself”**

The anxiety of the last months had depleted her completely. Catheryn, a senior researcher with leadership experience, had just moved to her new department after having been bullied and excluded by her previous research boss for over a year. She had reported both orally and in writing to her management, and she expected some form of accountability, but after her transfer, nothing happened. During the first half a year, it was hard enough for her to get used to the new environment, and she was emotionally affected by the bullying; she felt anxiety, and it was difficult to get to trust people again. She had first to take care of herself. Months later, Catheryn decided something had to be done,

but she had mixed feelings—shame that it had taken her so long to feel strong again; disappointment at her institution for doing nothing; doubt: was it worth it to go through the whole experience once again now that she was feeling better?; loneliness and how to explain that time had passed but still the bullying she had experienced continued to be wrong. It wasn't easy, but she decided to talk to HR and finally make a formal legal complaint.

- Can you relate to the mix of feelings Catheryn has in this situation? Have you ever experienced needing to take care of yourself or recover before being able to act?
- What do you think of the relationship between the time of the sexist bullying experience and the time of the reporting?
- What can colleagues do to support someone that is thinking about reporting?
- Can you describe what the processes of reporting available to you are? If not, why not?
- What can the management of a university do to support someone in a situation like Catheryn?

Sub-category: Accountability

Vignette 2.4. **“I do not want revenge but justice”**

Martha, an assistant professor, had talked to her dean, the union representative, HR, and her closest colleague. They all knew she was going to submit her legal complaint of sexual harassment today. All had supported her in filing her complaint, but no one had provided advice about what should be the just request for accountability for the wrongdoing she had experienced. What was she asking for? She did not want the senior professor, a colleague, who had harassed her to be “destroyed,” she did not want revenge; she wanted justice, but what is the right scale and the right demand for accountability for this kind of professional misconduct? A warning, a suspension, a firing? Of course, the process had to be fair. But how was she supposed to know which form of accountability was the right one? Is this completely random and arbitrary, a question of what an academic manager or HR decide case by case? She had doubts.

- How will you feel if you were in Martha's situation?
- What is the difference between justice and revenge?
- Can you describe the methods and/or traditions of assessing/evaluating cases of sexism at your institution? If not, why not?

- What would you have done if you were Martha's union representative or her trusted colleague?
- What can management do to ensure fair processes of reporting and of judgment?

Category 3: Individual strategies of protection

Sub-category: Protecting fellow colleagues

Vignette 3.1. **"Stay away"**

Laura just started her new position as an associate professor. During her first lunch meeting with her team, she is warned about a specific professor at the department. Apparently, this professor has a reputation for "trying his luck" with new female staff. One of her colleagues says, "It is even worse now that Charles just got divorced. You need to stay away from him." Laura now contemplates whether she should even go to the Christmas party. However, these parties are important networking opportunities, where she might be able to develop relationships and form future professional research collaborations. She decides to go to the party because she is new at the institute and cannot miss this networking opportunity, but she decides to stay away from Charles.

- Have you been warned about how to act or how to be in order to avoid sexism?
- Have you warned others?
- Do you think those recommendations help in preventing undesired incidences?
- How can collegial environments prevent such tensions without putting the responsibility on potential victims?
- How can management address such issues in respectful ways toward the potential offender as well as the potential victim?

Sub-category: Protecting oneself

Vignette 3.2. **"I should be able to *call out* this behavior"**

Mia is having lunch with her colleagues, and she is expressing how difficult it is to get the students' attention. A male colleague looks at her and says, "Why don't you take your clothes off? That will get their attention." She feels dumbfounded and says "no," but she doesn't say anything else, and she leaves the table as soon as she can. A week later, Mia is having a discussion and as she gets more into the discussion, another colleague says, "Why are you so hotheaded? You sure need some dick." She

again says nothing. She felt guilty when realizing she had frequently not been able to find a way to respond, to explain why the interaction was not acceptable, and how the person might be able to change their behavior in future. Her guilt was directed at herself because she thought she should have been able to change something about these interactions. Why would a champion for equity in the workplace be so silent in the face of sexism? Her non-response was guilt-inducing upon recalling the events. Mia felt as if she should be able to do something. By not doing or saying something, Mia perceived she allowed this to happen and for the actors in these sexist interactions to get away with it. Still, Mia would be surprised if any of the people in the above scenarios had been intending to be maliciously hurtful. They were saying what came into their mind. Mia did not *call out* the behavior. She liked both of these men, and they were in management roles relative to her position.

- Have you experienced being silent when encountering sexism? How did it make you feel?
- What are the fields of action for the actors involved? How can we all help prevent condescending comments and silencing in such situations?
- How can we develop environments that are comfortable and respectful for all? Which responsibilities may we each take here?
- What can management do to support this?

Category 4: Exclusion within the academy

Sub-category: Social exclusion

Vignette 4.1. “Can’t you take a joke?”

During her first months at the department, Petra starts noticing how the department head is making different kinds of sexist jokes. During a meeting, he makes a joke about sex workers. Petra feels very uncomfortable with it, so she says, “I don’t appreciate jokes like that.” Everybody looks strangely at her, yet no one says anything. She feels very uncomfortable being the only one who addresses this. A couple of weeks later at a party where she wants to network, so she joins a group of male colleagues sitting at a table. She tries to ask what they are talking about. One of the colleague replies: “Cup-sizes of female students, so I am sure you don’t want to be a part of this conversation” and laughs. She feels rejected and is struggling to find an answer with which she can reply. She wants to network and get along, but she knows that she is seen as the “office kill-joy.” Petra knows that many times she has

seemed to trouble, worry, and annoy some invisible status quo with which almost everyone else seemed comfortable. She decides to say nothing this time. “Oh relax, Petra! Can’t you take a joke?” one of her colleagues asks.

- Why do you think nobody says anything when Petra objects to the joke made by the department head?
- Have you experienced being called a “kill-joy” (or labels like this)? Have you experienced others being called such?
- How can the individual and collective respond to such comments coming from a formal power position?
- What are appropriate jokes and comments in formal settings and how can we address such issues?
- How can management work with such language in professional settings?

Sub-category: Career exclusion

Vignette 4.2. “The meritocratic decision”

Nina is a research assistant on a contract that will soon end, and she is experiencing that feeling of fear in regard to her future career. Will she be able to get a PhD position? She gets along very well with the department head, and she hopes this will benefit her. However, he starts approaching her with comments like, “We should go out sometime and talk about that position for you.” Nina says no because she does not want to send mixed signals or “lead him on.” She wants the position because she deserves it. Nina needs to reject him a couple of times before he stops approaching her. The department head is at the assessment interview, and he is asking her questions along with the rest of the committee. At one point he says, “You would probably fit better in a secretary position. I am unsure whether a PhD will be too much for you.” Nina does not get the position. The assessment committee calls it a “meritocratic decision.” Given that the procedures for promotion were considered objective and without any kind of institutional or gender bias, the facts were therefore the facts; Nina was deemed not competitive against her counterparts.

- Have you experienced something similar?
- How can we address ideals and myths of meritocracy in hiring processes?

- What are the fields of actions for the actors involved, and what can we do if we experience something that we deem biased?
- Do you know about the formal rules in this regard and which procedures to take?
- How can colleagues and management prevent people in formal power positions to take advantage of that in relation to hiring processes and in relation to lower ranked staff?

Sub-category: Threats

Vignette 4.3. “I will close all future doors for you”

Martin is a PhD student working with a female professor, but he wants to change supervisors as he is experiencing unwanted sexual attention from her and he no longer feels safe getting supervision from her. He contacts the head of the department and asks whether this can be arranged. The department head says she will do what she can in order for Martin to change supervisors, and he feels at ease.

However, Martin does not know that the department head in the meantime has contacted his supervisor and tells her about her conversation with Martin. The next day, Martin is in the copy room, and in comes his supervisor. She tells him, “If you do this, I will close all future doors for you.”

- Have you experienced or heard of threats like this—and how did you react?
- Have you ever felt unsafe stating you are unhappy with a professional relationship?
- Which fields of action do you see for a PhD who gets unwanted sexual attention from someone in a formal power position?
- What do you think is the most constructive procedure here? What should the department head do?
- How can management ensure a respectful relationship between supervisors and PhDs?
- What procedures should be developed in such situations?

Category 5: Caretakers at work

Sub-category: Paternalistic sexism

Vignette 5.1. “I am only thinking of you”

Susanne is a top-performing associate professor and part of a research team together with five other people. Susanne has been in the lead writing up a paper that the team has now submitted for a conference. She looks forward to presenting their research. However, when the team gets the message that their paper has been accepted, she is not asked by the project leader to present at the conference. Instead, she is told that Michael has been asked to present. Susanne asks the project leader why she was not asked. After all, she had been doing most of the work, and she has repeatedly expressed to him how much she wanted to join the conference. The project leader answers, “You have young children at home, so I actually just wanted to save you the trouble from attending this conference. I am only trying to think of what’s best for you.” Susanne did appreciate that he was taking her personal situation into consideration, but on the other hand, she knew this conference was an important networking opportunity and thus could be critical to potential career advancements.

- What is the project leader’s assumption, what are the reasons behind this assumption, and how do you feel about this? What implications do you see such assumptions having?
- What would have happened if the project leader had asked Susanne before assuming things?
- Have you experienced others “saving you the trouble”?
- What other actions could have been appropriate for the project leader, and what options does Susanne have?
- How can we create supportive creative environments, where helping each other does not mean excluding each other?

Sub-category: Stereotyping “women as natural **nurturers**”

Vignette 5.2. **“Shouldn’t you be at home with your child?”**

Marianne and Tim are sitting together spending long hours at the department to finish their research funding application. Although they are both tired and a bit stressed about whether they will make the deadline, they are also having a good time together. The clock passes midnight, and Tim looks at her and asks, “Shouldn’t you be home with your child?” Marianne says, “No, my husband is at home.” After the remark Marianne has a feeling of guilt. She wonders “Should I be with my child?” She has been working long hours for a while now. “What kind of mother is she?” she thinks to herself. Marianne only has one child. Tim has three children, so she asks him, “Do you ever feel guilty?” and

Tim answers “Sometimes.” The next day, they celebrate making the deadline, and when they tell their colleagues about having spent long hours in the office all week, a colleague says, “But Marianne, shouldn’t you be home with your child?” and another says, “They are small only for a short period of time, and you should really take advantage of that.” No one asks Tim the same question although he also has a family. Marianne decides to stay home more often, and Tim finds another colleague to work late hours with.

- How do collective comments about our family responsibilities affect the way we think about ourselves as parents and as academics?
- How does it affect our self-perception, behavior, and collaborative patterns?
- Have you had experiences where you had to defend prioritizing your work versus your family?
- Do you believe that these experiences are rooted in gender stereotyping? Why/why not?
- How can the collegial environment help balance worktime without reproducing gendered norms?
- In which ways can we make work pressures a structural problem instead of an individual one with effects on, for example, family responsibilities that often have a gender stereotypical aspect?
- What can management do to challenge gender stereotypes when addressing the work/time balance?

Sub-category: Sexist assumptions

Vignette 5.3. **“Some advice: Don’t have children”**

Trine is post-doc and is applying for an associate professorship at her department. She meets with some colleagues after work to discuss her application. A female colleague says, “If you want to make it in academia, don’t have children” and laughs a little. Another male colleague agrees and says, “Yes, children are the only real obstacle for women’s career progression here.” Trine is a bit thrown off by the comments. She obviously knows that it is a difficult task to balance children and career. However, she had just found out that she was pregnant and although she hadn’t told anyone yet, as it was still very early, she was very happy about it. “Maybe they are just saying this because they don’t have children themselves,” she thinks. She decides to talk to her department head instead in order for her to

get some advice from someone who actually has children and has “made it.” The next day she talks to the head of the department, who tells her: “Some advice: Don’t have children” and laughs. She then states “I mean, of course you *can* have children! But, I mean, this is just me trying to help you. If you do have children, at least consider working while you are on maternity leave. Work on your research because otherwise you will have a huge gap, and then you cannot compete with the men.” Trine is feeling a bit anxious about revealing her pregnancy but also about what will happen to her career now.

Trine does not get the associate professorship. The department head argues that she will be too big of a financial expense. Trine is really upset because she thought she was perfect for the position. She also argues that it is an illegal form of discrimination to turn down a woman because of pregnancy. The department head agrees with her. “It is too bad, but that’s just the way it is,” she says.

- Have you been told to work during parental leave? What expectations do you see for academics on parental leave, and how can we prevent “hidden work pressures” on people on leave?
- How do you see the relationship between pregnancy and being able to “make it” in academia? What is your experience with this?
- Have you feared revealing a pregnancy?
- What lies behind the idea “it’s just the way it is”? What can we do to challenge this?
- How can colleagues support each other during parental leave?
- What are the responsibilities of management formally and informally in this regard?

Sub-category: Comments regarding maternity leave

Vignette 5.4. **“Don’t become brainwashed on your maternity leave”**

Mette, a PhD student, is soon to be going on maternity leave. Before the leave, she was invited to a meeting with head of the PhD school and with the leader of a research group she belonged to. During the meeting, they discussed her progress before her leave. Mette was looking forward to going on leave although she was also stressing about leaving her research for so long and afraid of falling behind. At some point the head of the PhD school looked at her and said: “It’s probably a good idea to take with you some articles from this department so you don’t go nuts and become totally brainwashed from all the breast feeding.”

- Have you experienced gender-stereotypical related to parental leave and family? How did it make you feel?
- How does this comment voice certain views on female scholars taking leave?
- How can we create work environments where people taking leave are not pressured to work during their leave?
- What responsibility does management have in this regard?

Category 6: Psychological assault

Sub-category: Victim-blaming

Vignette 6.1. **“Don’t spread rumors like that”**

After a Christmas party, Rita was raped by a colleague who was in a more powerful position than herself. The assault is traumatizing, but she doesn’t go to the police because she doesn’t know how to explain what happened as her memories are blurred, maybe from the shock, maybe because she did also have something to drink. After the event, the colleague continues to harass her by following her to lunch, stopping her in the hallways, trying to be close to her in meetings. Rita tells him to stay away from her and does what she can to avoid him, but he continues, and after a while she is very distressed and feels unsafe at work. She therefore decides to talk to the head of the department about it. However, the department head just says, “Don’t spread rumors like that.” Rita is completely shocked by that remark. She feels numb. The department head, however, agrees to arrange for them not to have anything to do with each other, but for Rita, that’s not good enough. The problem was rather risking running into or seeing him in the halls of the institute. Later, when Rita discovered that the department head had called it “collaboration difficulties” in a formal report, she left the department, and she is now working at another department of the university. The professor is still in the same department.

- How does this story make you feel?
- What are the fields of action for Rita? And which do you see for the head of department?
- Which formal procedures do you know about at your university in this regard?
- What are the responsibilities for management to deal with such situations?
- What would you do if you knew about this as a colleague, a TR/AMR, or someone in formal power?

Category 7: Public humiliation

Sub-category: Hostile sexism

Vignette 7.1. “A long shot”

Liz, a PhD student, is presenting new research ideas to her team. She knows that her supervisor is not pleased with the theme of her research as she has recently decided to focus on aspects of gender inequality in her data, but she feels pleased about it herself and wishes to convince the team that her ideas are good. When she is done presenting, one of the other senior professors says, “Well, that presentation was what you could have expected from a random stripper from Istedgade.” Her supervisor says nothing. Liz is totally stunned by the professor’s choice of words. She of course knew that the theme was a bit of a “long shot,” but she had never expected anyone to react in that way. Also, this remark was witnessed by the rest of the team. Although several of them afterwards expressed surprise and distanced themselves from the remark, nobody said anything in the meeting itself. Liz not only had to manage her own feelings but afterward also found herself trying to help the others make sense of why someone would speak to her in this way. Liz was hurt by the comment because she actually considered her research team—including her supervisor and the other professor—to be helpful to her in multiple ways. However, she now started feeling differently about them.

- When a colleague/supervisor/etc. is generally supportive and then transgresses this support, in this case by making a sexist remark, how might reparation be possible?
- Have you experienced needing to explain someone’s behavior in the same way as Liz? How did that make you feel?
- Which possible fields of action do you see for Liz and for others who might witness it?
- What can colleagues do to help a problematic supervisor relationship where gendered or sexist issues may be involved?
- How can management support the development of appropriate feedback cultures, including between supervisors, and in so doing prevent sexist behavior?

Category 8: Institutionalized sexism

Sub-category: Certain research fields/disciplines is not labeled/understood as “proper” academic knowledge

Vignette 8.1. **“Your research isn’t objective”**

Tina, an associate professor, has just published a paper on women in STEM, and she is very pleased with the paper. When writing this paper, she met up with fellow feminists (both friends and colleagues) to discuss women in STEM. However, every time she leaves these “feminist communities” and enters the broader academic communities, she quickly has to adjust to another way of discussing her research and even feels she has to defend her research. One time a colleague told her, “Your research isn’t really research, its politics.” She agreed that it was politics in the sense that feminist research is very obvious as to what kind of political change it wants/fights for, but she couldn’t quite figure how her colleague didn’t agree that virtually all knowledge production is in some form “political” because it wants something in some way. For way too long she had to defend her research. At one point, another colleague said, “Your research isn’t objective.” Tina found it very difficult to switch between her feminist communities, which she feels are safe spaces, to the more male-dominated organizational bodies, units, or departments—which employ hostile, dismissive, or sometimes bullying and harassing strategies. Tina is certain that these strategies are deployed as a way to resist change.

- Have you experienced some knowledge production, areas of research, etc. being talked about more negatively others? If yes, why do you think that is?
- How can we prevent a hierarchy of research fields based on gender-stereotypical assumptions?
- How can we engage in conversations that legitimize the different research subjects represented at the department despite individual disagreements?
- Which fields of action do we have when “gender” is invoked as illegitimate in research?
- How can management support a respectful tone toward different research positions, including feminist research?

Category 9: Sexism against men

Sub-category: Gender stereotyping men

Vignette 9.1. **“Big men are not afraid of little girls”**

Charles is teaching a new course of students, and he is excited to get to know them all. In particular, one student is giving him attention. He begins to notice how Laura is always placing herself right next to him, and soon she also begins to join his other classes. Time passes, and the attention from Laura

becomes more and more intensive. Charles is reading her assignment, and as he is checking her references, he gets directly linked to a porn website. He is stunned. He decides the next day to confront Laura about it and to tell her to stop. Laura finds it embarrassing that he doesn't like the attention. Charles tells his colleagues about the incidence. They all laugh. Charles goes to the head of the department, who also laughs and says: "It is funny to see the university's biggest man be afraid of such a little girl." Charles in a sense agrees. He was aware that the situation was a bit untraditional, and he actually was not afraid. He didn't fear Laura. He couldn't explain exactly how, but he felt very uncomfortable. Maybe it was more the comments from his colleagues than what she actually did? Maybe he was afraid that she would turn this against him. If nobody understood how he felt, would they believe him if she was to turn it around? Maybe he should just be capable of ignoring it, but he still wished he could just make her stop.

- Why do you think Charles's colleagues all laugh at him?
- How would you feel if you had been experiencing something similar to Charles?
- What does this tell us about men experiencing unwanted sexual attention?
- How can we respond to unwanted sexual attention from students or external collaborators?
- What do you see as Charles's fields of action when his colleagues respond in gender stereotypical ways to the sexual attention he is getting?
- How can management challenge gender stereotypical reactions to such issues and in what ways can they support Charles?

Category 10: Fear

Sub-category: Psychological effects of sexism

Vignette 10.1. "Running scared"

Mary, a professor at the institute, has gathered her team to discuss the next year in terms of research funds and budget. She sadly must inform her team that they won't have as much money as they were hoping for. An associate professor starts expressing his frustration toward this. He objects during the meeting, and he is getting angrier. Mary therefore decides to call a break and talk with him outside in the hall. The associate professor is now really mad and begins to yell at her. She looks around in the hall, and everybody just stares at them. Nobody says or does anything. Mary feels very uncomfortable.

She tries to calm him down, but he is really upset. She calls the meeting to order again, but she wants to just finish quickly and get home. When she finishes the meeting, she quickly gathers her things and walks out of the department. The associate professor runs after her yelling, “It’s so ridiculous how much you people enjoy your power!” Mary starts to run herself. She is really scared now, and she is afraid he will harm her.

- How would you express what Mary is feeling? Have you ever experienced or witnessed something similar?
- If you were Mary, would you report such a situation to management, or would you try other strategies?
- What can bystanders do in such a situation?
- How can colleagues support an environment where we can share our successes and rejections and vulnerabilities as well as power without fear?
- What can management do if they hear about a situation like this?

Category 11. Life as queer

Sub-category: Intersectionality

Vignette 11.1. “We can correct you”

Tina is new to the faculty. As she is having lunch in the canteen, a male professor asks her: “Are you back already?” Tina asks, “What do you mean?” and the professor says, “Weren’t you the one who was pregnant?” Tina looks at him and says, “No,” and he laughs a bit and says, “Oh well. All you blondes look alike!” Another male sitting across the table says, “No that one is a lesbian!” Tina is stunned and does not know what to say. The male professor laughingly says, “We can correct that about you.”

- How does reading about this experience make you feel? Have you experienced or witnessed something similar?
- What does that joke say about the entitlement to comment—and joke—about various sexualities? How can Tina respond, and what can other bystanders do?
- How can we create work environments that are respectful to all genders and sexualities?
- What responsibilities do you see for staff as well as for management?

Sub-category: Intersectionality

Vignette 11.2. **“I might just turn you straight this evening”**

Martin is going to the annual Christmas party even though he has had his concerns about going. Certainly, one of the biggest culture shocks for Martin has been experiencing how the Danes party; the consumption of alcohol has really taken Martin aback as he is not used to drinking that much. However, Martin is having a great time dancing with a few fellow colleagues all in a good mood and cheerful. By this point, the fact that he identifies as a gay man is well-known among all of his colleagues. Yet, a few moments later, a female colleague comes up to him dancing rather closely. At first, he thinks, oh well, this is probably just one of those “He is a gay man, and I can be a little more extroverted around him” kinds of attitudes. Thus, he goes along to the extent that he feels comfortable. But then she grabbed first his ass and then his crotch, smiling as if to tantalize him and then adding: “I might just turn you straight this evening.” Martin pushes her hands and arms away and says, “No, thank you” and decides to leave the dancefloor. The experience made him feel rather awkward and uncomfortable, and after a short while, he left the Christmas party entirely.

- How would you describe what Martin is feeling? Have you ever felt something similar?
- What does this experience tell us about this female colleague’s view on sexuality?
- Why do you think comments like “we can correct you” or “turn you straight” are common?
- What do you think are appropriate reactions to comments like “turn you straight”?
How can Martin respond, and what can other bystanders do?
- Do you agree with Martin’s view on Danish drinking culture? Why/why not?
- Do you think that events such as a Christmas party better allow sexist situations to unfold? Why/why not?
- How can we create safe spaces at our workplaces even when alcohol is involved?
Whose responsibility is it?

Category 12: Sexist myths

Vignette 12.1. **“She slept her way to the top”**

Anne is a newly appointed professor at her department. She is very excited and happy with her new title. However, she notices how much her colleagues joke about how she must have “slept her way to the top.” Such jokes come from both male and female staff. Anne is saddened by these jokes because even though these comments are only meant as jokes, she still contemplates whether anyone believes this to be true. She feels sad that her competences are invalidated in such a way.

- How would you feel if you were Anne?
- Have you ever heard someone questioning your or someone else’s career progression? How was that?
- How can we respond to sexist comments about others’ career paths even when they are said in informal situations?
- What can management do to prevent such rumors?

Vignette 12.2. **“She got the position because she is a woman”**

Riley was recently hired as an assistant professor. At a team meeting, a male professor said, “Have you seen who they hired in Department X? I think it is so sad to see that the university is now beginning to hire women only because they are women.” Riley felt rather awkward about the comment. “Why would he say something like that? He has no way of knowing if that is true or not,” Riley thought to herself. Another colleague then stated, “It’s those damn quotas! Soon every department will be filled with women, and we all know what that means!” Riley was really uncomfortable now, but she gathered herself and asked, “What does that mean?” They all laughed except for one other male colleague who said: “We shouldn’t say that when we have a lady present.” This comment made the joking stop, and they continued their meeting. A week later, Riley was having a discussion with a colleague about a research grant. He was getting a bit upset with her. He then stated, “Oh well, how do you feel about only getting hired because you are a woman?”

- How would you describe what Riley is feeling? Have you experienced something like this?
- Why do you think the joking stops when her male colleague says, “We shouldn’t say that when we have a lady present”?
- What message does this send? Would that comment be OK if a woman had not been present?
- How can individuals or colleagues challenge such gender-based rumors?

- How can we develop respectful collegial environments where gender-based jokes, assumptions, and rumors are rejected?
- What can management do to prevent such sexist assumptions and rumors?

Developing vignettes based on testimonies: Coding and thematization

The construction of the vignettes is based on a thorough process of coding and a thematization of all the stories collected in the autumn of 2020. The stories used in this book were sent to the email address sexismatdanishuniversities@gmail.com as a response to the call for signatures and testimonies the initiator group had sent out at the beginning of October 2020. Within four days, almost 700 people had signed the petition, and 823 stories had been shared with us. The 823 stories amounted to 427 pages of text, single spaced. All 427 pages were read in their entirety by a team of three coders. Based on this reading, the below codes were identified:

Everyday Sexism

- Sexualized comments
- Sexual offers
- Subtle sexism
- Comments about the body/looks
- Sexualized comments about the body/looks
- Sexualized comments about private life/partner status
- The party as specific context
- Nicknames
- Degrading of intellect

Reporting

- Experience with reporting
- Lack of reporting
- Time and reporting
- What form of accountability should I ask for?

Shadow organization

- Warnings
- Individual strategies of protection
- Protecting fellow colleagues

Exclusion within the academy

- Social exclusion
- Career exclusion
- Threats

Caretakers at work

- Comments about pregnancy/parental leave
- Stereotyping “women as natural **nurturers**”
- Degrading motherhood

Physical assault

Public humiliation

- Collective humiliation

Collective silence

Formal settings: Appraisal interview/salary negotiation

Institutionalized sexism

Ridiculing gendered research fields

Sexism against men

Fear: Physical difference and intimidation

Intersectionality

Homophobic comments

Racialized comments

Two of the coders color coded all the stories, marking each of the 823 stories with the codes that characterized the stories. Several of the stories were marked with more than one code. For each code, one to five stories were chosen to represent the code, and one vignette per code was created based on these. Two additional vignettes were created after the first draft of the book was published in March 2021. These were based on two real experiences of reporting, known to the authors of the book. Out of the 823 testimonies and personal stories about sexism, we identified an unequal power relation in 450 cases, such as a student/supervisor relationship or an employee/manager relationship. In 12 out of the 823 testimonies, a woman was in the powerful position, and a man was being harassed. This tendency is visible in the vignettes below.

A quantitative study

Why is it important to document sexism and sexual harassment?

Qualitative reports of sexism and sexual harassment have the advantage of capturing the victims' perspectives and the nuances around the power dynamics at play in a concrete hostile work situation. Therefore, it is an extremely useful tool in any interventions against sexism and sexual harassment *if* these reports are already considered credible and legitimate by the majority of employees—and in particular by the management who need to implement the interventional measures. However, many Danish academics still struggle to hear the voices addressing challenges regarding gender equality (Skewes et al., 2019; Høg Utoft, 2020), sexism, and sexual harassment (Skewes et al., 2021).

Why might sexual harassment be a problem in academia? —Risk factors

If an organization wishes to minimize the risk of sexism and sexual harassment, it is important to aim to minimize asymmetrical power relations between employees overall because sexism and sexual harassment feed off of power imbalances. But what might be particularly important to pay attention to in a university setting? One key risk factor for sexism and sexual harassment is asymmetrical power relations between genders. In organizations where men are either over-represented and/or hold positions of greater status than women, sexism and sexual harassment are more likely to occur (Easteal & Judd, 2008; Illies et al., 2003; McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Willness et al., 2007). Another risk factor prevalent in academia is precarious employment contracts (FRA, 2014; McDonald, 2012; Takao, 2001). Concretely, this means that if one employee on a precarious contract is dependent on a higher-ranking person with tenure, this places the precariously employed person at risk. These two risk factors are at the heart of academia. Therefore, it is urgent that organizational leadership in universities aim to counter these risk factors by being explicit and adamant that sexism and sexual harassment are *not* acceptable behaviors in their organizations. Borchorst and Agustín's (2017) study of sexual harassment in the workplace concludes the following:

Consistently, the message [from experts working with sexual harassment] is that it is important for an organization to have a clear and visible policy; that the leaders clearly signal that there is a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and bullying; that it has been made clear where one can direct any complaints under the protection of anonymity; and that there is a procedure for how cases are tackled if they are taken to court. (p. 163, author's translation from Danish)

If leaders tolerate sexual harassment, people who are exposed to it will not report (Pryor et al., 1993), and the sexual harassment will continue. In contrast, active leadership has been documented to function as a protective factor for these types of gendered degradations (Borchorst & Agustín, 2017; Lee, 2018; Offerman et al., 2002; Settles et al., 2006).

Why might some employees not recognize the problem?

The reason for questioning the “reality” of sexism and sexual harassment might be entangled with some of the reasons the problems arise in the first place. That is, the typical target of this type of harassment is minority groups. The minority is often women (particularly in male-dominated fields such as in academia), but it can also be men (primarily in female-dominated fields), LGBTQ+ people, or people belonging to minority ethnicities or races. Belonging to intersecting marginalized social categories has been shown to increase the risk of being exposed to sexual harassment (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Konik & Cortina, 2008; Settles, 2006). Unfortunately, belonging to any (or multiple) minority/ies in a work environment also means that your perspective or work life experiences are likely to be underrepresented—or not represented at all—in the minds of other employees. So, while the majority perspective and experiences are seen and understood by almost everyone—exactly because they represent the organizational norm—the minority’s perspectives and experiences are often only understood or noticed by the minority itself. This organizational challenge often leaves sexism and sexual harassment as an unheard or unnoticed challenge by the people in power. Simply put, if it is not a problem for oneself, one might not notice that it is a problem for others in the organization.

Another complication that contributes to these voices not being heard is asymmetrical power relations between majority and minority voices. Unfortunately, majority voices more often than not get to define what took place *and* how it ought to be interpreted by bystanders and the organization itself (McDonald et al., 2010). *That is, the perpetrator is typically the person who gets to define what happened and whether it ought to be perceived as a harmful act or not, which leaves the victims unheard.*

The unique challenges that arise exactly because the perpetrator and the victim are in an asymmetrical power relation have been captured by Scott and Martin (2006) under the label of *outrage management techniques*. These are techniques aimed at silencing both victims and bystanders. Outrage management

techniques are used by powerful people to deny the harmful effects of unjust behavior, such as sexism or sexual harassment. McDonald and colleges (2010) draw out several sub-categories of the outrage management techniques from court cases on sexual harassment showing that the *reinterpretation of events* (e.g., by denying it occurred or claiming that the victim misunderstood or is even to blame for the action) and *devaluing the target* (e.g., by using derogatory labels, writing victims off as dishonest or unprofessional, or questioning their motivation to report) are common techniques that build on and cement the asymmetrical power relations when we strive to address the problem. However, in sexism and sexual harassment, the power relations between the victims and perpetrators are not always asymmetrical (peer to peer harassment among students and colleagues, etc.).

How best to intervene against sexism and sexual harassment?

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) recommends that “Administrative data and existing surveys on work and education should be enhanced to include regular and detailed questions about sexual harassment, so that the data from these sources can be used to inform policy and action to address abuse” (FRA, 2014, p. 118). The agency goes on to explain why this is important: “reliable indicators to monitor progress with respect to increased reporting of harassment and responses to these reports, from the standpoint of the victims, should be developed and assessed with respect to cross-country comparisons” (FRA, 2014, p. 118). Simply put, if we want to prevent sexual harassment, we have to start by documenting it systematically—and, importantly, we have to start seeing the problem from the perspective of the person who is being harassed.

Exactly because the victims of sexism and sexual harassment are typically silenced by the perpetrators and/or the organization, a key step in any intervention will need to ensure that formerly silenced voices are heard and legitimized at all levels in the organization. The victims that come forward need to know that their organization has their back and is willing to listen to their side of the story—even when these conflict with the powerful perpetrator’s interpretation of events. Skewes et al. (2019) show that this is likely to be a challenge in academia because the average employee ranks high on a modern sexism score (Swim et al., 1995), which means that they are unable to spot gender inequality challenges and are hostile toward interventions aimed at improving gender inequality problems. Skewes et al. (2021) further document that silencing techniques are at play at the university when employees are asked about their opinion of the #MeToo movement. This finding is alarming because the #MeToo movement aims to offer victims of sexism and sexual harassment a voice *independent of the power hierarchies* in an

organization. The need to allow room for the victims' voices is only made more urgent by the fact that Borchorst and Agustín (2017) reveal that Danish universities have almost no court cases addressing sexual harassment—so even judicially these voices are currently not being heard.

Powerful voices need to speak up for marginalized and silenced voices (Borchorst & Agustín, 2017; Lee 2018; Offerman et al., 2002; Settles et al., 2006). University leadership needs to spearhead the cultural and structural changes by being attentive to the marginalized voice and respecting them as valid voices within the organization—thereby modeling the kind of behavior they want to see in all their employees.

Why do this study?

Exactly because of the systematic suppression of the voices addressing the problem with sexism and sexual harassment in academia, it is key that the extent of the problem is thoroughly documented. Currently, 35% of victims never talk about their worst experience with sexual harassment to anyone, and only 4% report it to their employer or boss (FRA, 2014, p. 116), which indicates that we have only seen the tip of the iceberg of this problem until now. In other words, it is essential in interventions against sexism and sexual harassment that we start by showing all employees there actually *is* a problem. The most straightforward way of documenting this is by carrying out anonymous quantitative prevalence studies. A quantitative study is optimally suited for uncovering whether sexism and sexual harassment is a systemic problem.

Questionnaire tool: The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ)

How might we go about documenting the challenges with sexism and sexual harassment in Danish academia? We chose to use the standardized SEQ. This questionnaire was developed by Fitzgerald et al. to capture sexual harassment challenges in American higher education (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991). However, the SEQ has also recently been brought into the European and Danish cultural context. In an EU-wide survey carried out by the EU FRA, 11 SEQ questions were employed to document the prevalence of gender-based violence. This survey was the first of its kind to document the scope and nature of violence against women in all 28 EU Member States using the SEQ (FRA, 2014, p. 15). This study found that 80% of Danish women had experienced sexual harassment since they turned 15 years of age and that 37% reported having experienced it within the previous 12 months (FRA, 2014, pp. 99-100). Furthermore, it documented

that women with tertiary education reported higher rates of sexual harassment compared to people with lower educational levels (FRA, 2014, p. 109) as did women in general or top manager positions and directors (FRA, 2014, p. 11). Adding to the study by the EU FRA, another SEQ-based study was carried out in the Danish military. Øhrstrøm et al. (2003) documented that 50–60% of the females in the Danish military had experienced some sort of sexism or sexual harassment in the workplace. This suggests that we have a challenge in Denmark that needs to be addressed, and that the SEQ is successful in capturing issues regarding sexism and sexual harassment in the Danish context. Therefore, we chose to bring the questionnaire into Danish academia.

What can the SEQ do? The survey is useful for exploring questions such as the following: How many people experience sexism or sexual harassment in their workplace? What kind of experiences are the most common? How severe are the assaults people are exposed to? All three types of information are useful if one intends to intervene on sexism and sexual harassment in any organization. And Danish law does require organizations to intervene against sexual harassment: “employers are required (...) to stop all occurrences of sexual harassment that they are or should reasonably be aware of” (NIKK, 2018, p. 3).

Choosing a standardized questionnaire such as the SEQ also has the advantage that one can compare the findings to other organizations, countries, or cultures. That is, one can get a sense of the extent of the problem in a particular organization, country, or culture relative to others. Perhaps the problem is less prevalent in certain types of organizations (which can give an indication of which risk factor might contribute to sexism or sexual harassment), or maybe a particular country has a greater problem with a sub-category of sexism or sexual harassment due to culturally different discourses or approaches. The down side of this approach is of course that one cannot fine-tune the individual questions to every unique context or culture (without losing the ability to compare the results to other studies or samples).

What are the strengths of the SEQ? It used to be relatively common practice to ask people general questions about sexism and sexual harassment, such as “Have you been exposed to sexual harassment in the workplace?” In fact, this is still often the type of questions used in workplace assessments at Danish universities. Unfortunately, this approach has been shown to lead to an under-reporting of the problem (Borchorst & Agustín, 2017, pp. 68-73). Fortunately, the SEQ gets around this problem of under-reporting by asking very concrete questions, leaving less room for interpretation. That is, the SEQ questions do not require that a person be willing to label what one has experienced as “sexism” or

“sexual harassment.” For instance, we ask: “Has your gender generally been spoken about in a demeaning manner [in your workplace]?” The question does require some degree of interpretation of what has taken place in the concrete situation, but it does not require each participant to independently assess what sexism means or how it ought to be defined (that is left up to the researchers). The participants simply have to report on concrete experiences—not taking a stance on whether those experiences constitute sexism or sexual harassment. This is important because victims of sexual harassment are often not willing to label their experiences as such (Fietzgerald et al., 1988).

Another strength of the questionnaire is that it divides sexism and sexual harassment into four sub-categories that can be analyzed individually dependent on organizations’ concrete focus areas. The four categories (with a few examples to illustrate) are as follows:

Types of harassment	Examples of questions from the SEQ
Sexist hostility	That someone has expressed the opinion that women are less qualified for science than men?
	That you were treated in a patronizing manner because of your gender?
Sexual hostility	That you have been drawn into conversations about sex against your will?
	That there have been activities with sexual undertones at parties (e.g., strippers)?
Unwanted sexual attention	That you repeatedly have been invited out by the same person even though you have explicitly said no?
	That someone has tried to have sex with you without your consent but been unsuccessful?

Sexual coercion	That someone has treated you badly after you have refused to have sex with them?
	That you have been encouraged to have sex with someone in exchange for favors?

Table 1

Common to all of these categories is that they capture a breach of the principle of equal treatment between men and women and therefore are recognized as discrimination on the grounds of sex (FRA, 2014, p. 96). Within American law, the four sub-categories are understood as belonging to two different types of gender harassment: 1) sexist hostility, 2) sexual hostility, and 3) unwanted sexual attention together are classified as *hostile work environment harassment*, while sub-category 4) sexual coercion is classified as *quid pro quo* (Rotundo et al., 2001).

Demographics

Who participated in the survey? It was sent out via email to all the 689 Danish-based academics who had chosen to sign or offer stories to the public petition about sexism in academia in the fall of 2020. That is, every participant in this study had already acknowledge that they perceived Danish academia to have challenges with sexism or sexual harassment. Therefore, this study is not representative of *all* Danish academics. Instead, this study aims to capture this particular sub-group's experiences with sexism and sexual harassment in their workplaces.

Out of the 689 people who were invited to participate, 300 (43.5%) chose to answer the questionnaire.

Gender

Women	Men	Other	Blank
261	34	2	3

Table 2

Rank

Position	
Professor	39
Associate Professor	80
Assistant Professor	39
Post-doc	32
PhD	65
Research assistant/student assistant	6
Administrator with leadership responsibility	2
Administrator without leadership responsibility	15
Other	17
Blank	5

Table 3

Nationality

Danish	Non-Danish	Blank
222	72	6

Table 4

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual	Not Heterosexual	Do not wish to answer	Blank
246	36	14	4

Table 5

Materials

We chose to combine the original SEQ-Department of Defense (DoD) questionnaire with the Danish adapted version of the SEQ from the more recent military study (Øhrstrøm et al., 2003). This was done because the military study had developed additional questions tailored specifically to the Danish context.

Results

Frequency of sexist hostility

Sexist hostility captures demeaning language about a social group as well as lowered expectations of performance based on gender. That is, this type of harassment marks individual employees as less valuable people in general and less qualified employees based purely on gender. Obviously, these types of assessments of employees are degrading and create a hostile work environment. However, these types of experiences also make explicit that these employees are not assessed on individual merits but rather assessed on gender. This means that any experience with this type of attitude stands in the way of a meritocratic organization. A meritocracy only works if people are measured on individual qualifications *independent* of which social groups they might belong to.

Unfortunately, this type of experience is common amongst the people in our sample:

Type of harassment	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
Sexist hostility	182 people have experienced at least one type (60.7%)	179 people have experienced at least one type (59.7%)	128 people have experienced at least one type (42.7%)

Table 6

In fact, sexist hostility is the most commonly reported amongst our participants. Zooming in on the concrete types of sexist hostility people reported being exposed to, we find that around one-third of our sample has experience with being 1) spoken about in a demeaning manner, 2) noticed for one's gender, and 3) assumed identical to all people of their gender (within the last 2 years). One in five people reported having been assessed as 1) less qualified at a work task or 2) less qualified for science-related tasks, 3) having been overlooked, or 4) having been treated in a patronizing manner because of their gender. Finally, one in 10 reported experience with 1) being belittled, 2) having doubts cast about their capabilities, or 3) being excluded because of their gender.

Type of sexism	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
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That you gender was spoken about in a demeaning manner	107	104	64
That you were noticed (for better or worse) because of your gender	102	89	69
That all people of your gender were spoken about as if they are the same (e.g., all women lack knowledge about technology)	95	84	57
That some people expressed the opinion that people of your gender were less qualified for certain types of work tasks due to their gender	62	83	51
That you were treated in a patronizing manner because of your gender	66	72	52
That you have been overlooked because of your gender	69	69	47
That someone has expressed the opinion that women	56	64	43

are less qualified for science than men			
That your performance has been belittled because of your gender	43	45	37
That people have expressed doubts about whether you would be capable of carrying out a work task because of your gender	39	48	37
That you were excluded from social activities because of your gender	34	49	41

Table 7

Frequency of sexual hostility

In contrast to flirtation (which is expressed mutual sexual attraction between people), sexual hostility captures an asymmetrical or one-sided sexualizing of the workspace and/or a concrete coworker. It is an action (verbal or physical) that degrades a coworker by sexualizing them. This effect is achieved because the employee is cast as a sex object rather than coworker. In this sense, it is a way of indicating that an employee does not belong or should not be treated as a valuable and equal employee but rather be reduced to a sex object in the work context. Therefore, any experience with these types of attitudes or actions also stands in the way of a meritocratic organization by othering certain employees and casting them as “less than” based on their gender.

Although this type of harassment is not quite as common as sexist hostility, it is still so common that around one-third of the sample reported this type of experience:

Type of harassment	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
Sexual hostility	90 people have experienced at least one type (30%)	124 people have experienced at least one type (41.3%)	97 people have experienced at least one type (32.3%)

Table 8

Sexual hostility is the second most common form of harassment experienced by our participants. Zooming in on the concrete experiences with sexual hostility within the previous two years, we see that around every 10th person reported having been exposed to 1) sexist jokes, 2) sexual stories, 3) comments on their body, or 4) stares or flirting glances. This number rises to almost every fifth person if we look at the number before the COVID-19 lock down (that is the time frame of “2–5 years ago”). A similar difference between before and during the COVID lock down can be found for experiences with (a) offensive sexual comments, 2) being drawn into conversations about sex, and 3) sexual movements made toward a coworker. While only around 8–13 people (out of 300) reported these types of experiences within the previous two years, nearly one in 10 reported this type of experience prior to the COVID lock down. However, experiences with 1) unsolicited questions about one’s sex life, 2) sexual comments within large group contexts, and 3) catcalling remain relatively stable both before and during the COVID lock down (with 9–11 people reporting it during COVID and 12–16 people reporting it in the 2–5-year time frame). Finally, very few reported experiences with 1) activities with sexual undertones at parties, 2) fake sexualized rumors started about them, or 3) a coworker exposing themselves to them. However, even though it is a rare occurrence, it is worth noting that it does occur. Nine people did report experiencing a coworker having exposed themselves to them.

Type of sexualization	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
That jokes (e.g., blonde jokes) were told about your gender	48	62	53
That your body was commented on	43	57	61

That you received stares or flirting glances with sexual undertones	26	64	49
That people told sexual stories about your gender	30	41	47
That someone directed offensive sexual comments toward you while you were alone together	10	26	25
That you have been drawn into conversations about sex against your will	13	22	24
That someone has made movements with sexual undertones directed at you	8	24	27
That you have received unsolicited questions about your sex life	11	16	19
That you have received sexual comments while in larger groups or gatherings	9	16	16
That you were catcalled or	10	12	18

commented on in a sexually provocative manner			
That fake sexualized rumors have been started about you (for instance that you have had sex with a coworker)	3	7	15
That there have been activities with sexual undertones at parties (e.g., strippers)	1	6	9
That someone has exposed themselves to you	3	3	9

Table 9

Frequency of unwanted sexual attention

Unwanted sexual attention is a more extreme version of sexual hostility. Here, sexual hostility is escalated into actions taken out on coworkers against their will. The most severe action captured under the label of “unwanted attention” is the attempted rape or completed rape of a fellow employee. But the factor common to all the examples of “unwanted attention” is that the perpetrator is indifferent to their fellow employee as a person and instead reduces them to a sex object that they act on as they see fit. In this sense, this category moves beyond marking an employee as less valuable and less qualified and instead (particularly in the case of attempted rape and completed rape) marks the victim as less than human. It is therefore a much more brutal attack on an employees’ wellbeing and safety.

Unwanted sexual attention is reported by one in five people in the past (more than 5 years ago), but during COVID this drops drastically:

Type of harassment	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
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Unwanted sexual attention	15 people have experienced at least one type (5.0%)	39 people have experienced at least one type (13%)	58 people have experienced at least one type (19.3%)
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Table 10

Zooming in on the difference between the reports before and during COVID: 3–11 people (out of 300) reported experiences of 1) repeatedly being invited out in spite of rejections, 2) being shown pornographic material, and 3) being touched in a sexual manner during COVID, while 7–31 people (out of 300) reported these experiences within the two-to-five-year bracket before COVID.

Furthermore, no one reported attempted rape or rape by a coworker within the previous two years. This might be because there has been very limited physical contact with any coworkers during lock down. However, it might also be because rape victims would not risk re-traumatizing themselves by participating in this type of study when the introduction text contained trigger warnings about what type of questions would be coming up in the questionnaire. However, three people did report attempted rapes in a workplace setting within the two-to-five-year period, and six people did report attempted rape by a coworker more than five years previous. Finally, two people reported completed rape within the two-to-five-year time frame, and three reported completed rape more than five years previous. Even though this number is low, it is still shocking that any people are raped when carrying out their job. One of these people even reported rapes in plural, indicating that more than one rape had occurred.

Type of unwanted sexual attention	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
That you repeatedly have been invited out by the same person even though you have explicitly said no	3	8	19
That you have been touched in a manner which had sexual undertones	11	31	46

That pornographic material has been shown, used or distributed (on screen, pictures, posters, movies)	5	7	14
That someone has tried to have sex with you without your consent but been unsuccessful	0	3	6
That someone has had sex with you without your consent or against your will	0	2	3*

Table 11 *One person reports being raped multiple times

Frequency of sexual coercion

Sexual coercion includes dehumanization, which we also see in the “unwanted sexual attention” category, but here it is combined with explicit power manipulation. That is, the victim is either threatened with punishments or promised rewards for submitting their bodies to the perpetrator’s sexual gratification. These are punishments or rewards that can only be granted (or perceived likely to be granted) because of the extreme power differential between the perpetrator and the victim. This extreme power asymmetry makes it possible for the perpetrator to coerce a coworker to submit to their own humiliation and dehumanization in exchange for the chance at a future career.

In spite of the severity of these assaults, some employees do report these types of experiences:

Type of harassment	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
Sexual coercion	6 people have experienced at least one type (2.0%)	10 people have experienced at least one type (3.3%)	24 people have experienced at least one type (8.0%)

Table 12

Zooming in on the concrete types of sexual coercion people have been exposed to, we find that people reported having experienced during the previous two years 1) that someone treated them badly after they refused to have sex with them, 2) that they had been encouraged to have sex with someone in exchange for favors, 3) that someone had implied faster promotions or better treatment if they were sexually cooperative, and 4) that someone had made them afraid that they were going to be treated poorly if they did not cooperate sexually. This number nearly doubled in the time before COVID, with eight people reporting being treated badly after refusing to have sex with a coworker and four people having experienced being encouraged to have sex with someone in exchange for favors or someone implied that faster promotions might be possible if they were sexually compliant. Six people reported being made afraid that they would be treated poorly if they did not cooperate sexually. Finally, three people reported being explicitly threatened if they were not sexually compliant.

Type of sexual coercion	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
That someone has treated you badly after you have refused to have sex with them	3	8	16
That you have been encouraged to have sex with someone in exchange for favors	2	4	4
That someone has threatened you with	0	3	7

some kind of punishment if you were not sexually compliant			
That someone has implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative	2	4	8
That someone has made you afraid you would be treated poorly if you did not cooperate sexually	3	6	13

Table 13

Summary

All four categories of harassment documented above—sexist hostility, sexual hostility, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion—consist of breaches of equal treatment between men and women. That is, all four categories constitute gender harassment and therefore should not be tolerated in any organization that strives to achieve meritocratic assessments of its employees.

This group of academics reported extremely high exposure to gender harassment overall. Particularly, the first two types, “sexist hostility” and “sexual hostility,” were very common—with up to 60% reporting sexist hostility and 41% reporting exposure to sexual hostility. Both these types of harassment mark individual employees as less valuable people or less qualified employees purely based on gender. Even the more extreme types of harassment labeled “unwanted sexual attention” were reported by up to 19% of our participants. The three categories of “sexist hostility,” “sexual hostility,” and “unwanted sexual attention” together are what defines a hostile work environment. There is no doubt that our participants are exposed to a hostile work environment. They are marked as less qualified employees and many of them are addressed and approached as sex objects rather than employees. We also find that some of our participants reported experiences that fall in the “quid pro quo” category of harassment; up to 8% reported being exposed to sexual coercion where employees are bribed or forced into sexual relations. See further details in the summary below:

Type of harassment	Definition	Frequency across time
Sexist hostility	Demeaning language about a gender group as well as lowered expectations of performance based on belong to a particular gender. This type of discrimination marks individuals as less valuable people in general and less qualified employees based purely on which gender they belong to.	42.7–60.7%
Sexual hostility	An asymmetrical/one-sided sexualizing of a coworker that degrades them. The effect is achieved because the employee is cast as a sex object rather than coworker.	30–41.3%
Unwanted sexual attention	A more extreme version of sexual hostility which escalates into actions taken out on coworkers against their will. The common factor is that the perpetrator is indifferent to the victim as a person and instead reduces them to a sex object that they act on as they see fit.	5–19.3%
Sexual coercion	A combination of dehumanization (which we also see in the “unwanted sexual attention” category) combined with power manipulation. The victim is either threatened with punishments or promised rewards for submitting their bodies to the perpetrator’s sexual gratification.	2–8%

Table 14

For a more detailed overview of how many employees experienced which type of gender harassment within which time frame, see below:

Type of harassment	Within the last 2 years	Between 2–5 years	More than 5 years ago
Sexist hostility	182 people have experienced at least one type (60.7%)	179 people have experienced at least one type (59.7%)	128 people have experienced at least one type (42.7%)
Sexual hostility	90 people have experienced at least one type (30%)	124 people have experienced at least one type (41.3%)	97 people have experienced at least one type (32.3%)
Unwanted sexual attention	15 people have experienced at least one type (5.0%)	39 people have experienced at least one type (13%)	58 people have experienced at least one type (19.3%)
Sexual coercion	6 people have experienced at least one type (2.0%)	10 people have experienced at least one type (3.3%)	24 people have experienced at least one type (8.0%)

Table 15

This book is dedicated to the people who were brave enough to come forward and openly state that we have a problem with sexism and sexual harassment in Danish academia. Elsewhere in this book, these people have offered their rich qualitative experiences with harassment. In this chapter, we have documented how pervasive the problem is quantitatively. Our findings underscore how important it is that we start listening to these voices, which until now have been left unheard. Let us start validating these voices throughout our organizations. Let us start listening and following the recommendations of the EU FRA by systematically collecting data on sexism and sexual harassment in higher education, so we can “monitor the progress with respect to increased reporting of harassment and responses to these reports, from the standpoint of the victim” (FRA, 2014, p. 118).

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CHAPTER III: ACTING

Introduction

Recognizing the existence and extent of the problem of sexism is a first step toward change. The next, crucial, step is to act in the form of different kinds of transformative responses. This chapter provides examples, support, and pathways for addressing, handling, and preventing sexism at different levels and interactions. This includes realizing that fighting sexism is a collective responsibility.

Dealing with sexism is not merely a question of avoiding lawsuits. Rather, sexism is a culturally embedded and complex issue, which is deeply bound up with organizational traditions, norms, ideals, and collective and individual ambitions, resulting in entangled and structurally reinforced dynamics. Therefore, a singular response, such as merely seeing sexism in terms of sexual harassment complaints, can only ever at best constitute an inadequate approach. Thus, effective countering of sexism requires qualified analyses and multifaceted approaches and responses. It is essential to see the countering of sexism as a deeply embedded premise for a working environment characterized by psychological safety [1]. Indeed, sexism and psychological safety cannot coexist, and to fully realize this is crucial for bringing about the kind of cultural change that this book calls for.

Defining sexism, let alone establishing its reality, has not been (and in many ways is still not) a straightforward endeavor. This is, in itself, problematic for ensuring adequate policies and for knowing how to act efficiently and with integrity in remedying the consequences of sexism, including the handling of victims. Hence, this book does not advocate a “zero-tolerance” policy as such policies often result in empty slogans without the more fundamental ethical considerations and cultural transformations needed. Instead, this book offers insight, examples, and ideas for how to move toward effectively preventing, addressing, and handling sexism—at institutional as well as individual and collective levels. This book is thus a **call to action**. The general proposals presented here can and should be implemented and adapted to local contexts through processes of dialogue and personnel involvement. Although not exhaustive, we hope the proposals presented can be indicative of some steps that you can take, now.

This chapter is structured in two parts: **part 1, A plan for institutional responses against sexism, and part 2, Victim responses, which we dedicate to victims**. We begin this chapter with a plan for institutional responses against sexism (at national and institutional levels), the legal framework (in Denmark), and recommendations for management and other actors in key functions within the organization. This first section is called **Structural initiatives at national and organizational levels**. The

second section, **Management and institutional responses**, is a call to action for management. Here, we present tips and tools for management to start tackling sexism in their organization. In section 3, we finish with recommendations for **collegial responses**, which provide general tips for how to dismantle sexism—for all employees. Concrete actionable steps will prepare (all) employees to respond to situations in which they experience sexism—in order to recognize, name, and counter it.

The knowledge in part 1 aims at effectively countering the individualized protection strategies that, as our petition reveals, still prevail. The many testimonies point to the fact that the awareness and experience of sexism have led to intentions among staff to engage in protective action with each other. Thus, employees give each other well-intended advice as a means to build up strategies to *protect* oneself against sexism, such as “avoid this person” or “don’t speak up against sexism as this will likely hurt your career.” Individualized protection strategies, while well intended, are both dysfunctional and normatively wrong. They regularly reinforce the message that it is only or mainly the employee’s responsibility to keep themselves safe. In this part, we ask management to share this responsibility and create workspaces wherein employees can feel safe.

Part 2 is dedicated to victims. In this part, **Victim responses**, we address the challenge of the identity tag of “victim” and give concrete tips for how to file a complaint, on reporting processes, and on self-care, while we list what to expect if you are a victim and are considering reporting. This part is also important for managers to read in order to get a sense of what is at stake for those that suffer sexism.

Part 1. A plan for institutional responses against sexism

Combatting sexism requires concerted efforts and measures at different structural levels. This is demanded of the Danish higher education and research sector, which has to live up to Danish legislation, the initiatives from the Minister for Gender Equality, and international initiatives such as the Istanbul Convention [2], UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 [3], and the requirement from the European Commission (framework program Horizon Europe, Gender Equality Plans [GEPs]). We begin by presenting ideas and solutions at this institutional level.

National level

Sexism needs to be addressed at the national level across academia. If organizations are to succeed in breaking the taboo around the systemic and structural problem of sexism, it is essential that the extent of the problems and the opportunities for reactive and preventive intervention become visible and be continuously supported through a sustainable and effective infrastructure, which can ensure validity, thoroughness, and quality. Solid international research and evidence points to two crucial aspects of such an infrastructure: 1) thorough and continuously updated **data and knowledge**, which can form the basis for continuous monitoring, create national coherence, and allow for comparison with other countries (e.g., Nordic countries) as well as ensure the development of effective interventions and b) **national bodies and procedures** that can systematically coordinate, address, and handle structural aspects of sexism and support institutional infrastructure and initiatives. In Denmark, only scattered pieces of what is required are in place, and the following therefore outlines a number of measures. Some of them have partially been realized at the time of writing, and others are suggestions for future action and development.

Data and knowledge

Multimedia online sites for knowledge sharing and resources: A number of useful websites and resources can be found internationally, such as communication and dissemination project deliverables (see the reference section for examples of such resources). Also, Danish web resources are beginning to emerge. SexismEDU.dk—the online sister to this book—is a website for knowledge sharing and awareness, established as a follow-up to the “Sexism in Danish Academia” initiative. SexismEDU.dk has the aim of gathering and distributing knowledge to organizations, the media, and the general public as well as providing visibility to data, research, and resources.

Sexismedu.dk is driven and hosted on a voluntary basis, and while this is a testimony of great dedication, it is not sustainable over the long term. Counteracting sexism needs to be understood as an ongoing professional, sector-wide obligation, not something to be undertaken merely by those who donate their free time, or during a project's lifetime.

Even if such resources are great and may function as portals to information and resources as well as provide good practice for countering sexism in higher education and research, in order to reach their full potential, they (and their target audience) would benefit from continual hosting and updating by recognized expert bodies. This could be realized through the establishment of *a national sexism support unit for all higher education* (explained in the section below). This unit will collaborate with institutions such as the national knowledge hub KVINFO (Danish Center for Research on Women and Gender) but still efficiently target the specific complexity of sexism in academia.

Establishing a firm knowledge base through national surveys and research studies: There is a need to establish a common and institutionalized practice of gender-disaggregated data gathering and monitoring of sexism in academia. While it is a beginning, it is not enough to rely upon individual or collective activist initiatives to map the phenomena of sexism and gender inequality in academic environments. This is not only a question for a single “research project” but the very basis of a decent work environment in academic organizations. Again, it is important to emphasize that there is a pressing need to understand sexism in academia as a professional concern—which requires professional, institutional action. This could be realized through (large-scale) studies to map the prevalence and specific characteristics and aspects of sexism in Danish academia and thereby establish a firm and valid knowledge base. Such studies could further benefit from being initiated (and funded) by the Danish university sector and from drawing on and collaborating with international expertise on sexism in academia, such as the Swedish national collaborative study on gender-based violence and sexual harassment in academia (<https://ki.se/en/collaboration/national-study-on-gender-based-violence-in-academia>) collaboration between the Karolinska Institutet, Gothenburg University, and the Royal School of Technology and Malmö University as well as the Horizon 2020-funded large European UniSAFE study, <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>, thus ensuring national anchoring and international collaboration to legitimize and qualify the studies.

Expanding the knowledge base: Support for research into and national networks to prevent and stop sexism, including studies on gender equality, precarity, and intersectionality, both nationally and internationally, are important for a wider understanding of sexism and its consequences as well as

how to counter it effectively. There is a momentum internationally at the time of writing this book, with increased attention and funding calls from major funding bodies, including the EU framework programs, which provide opportunities for third-party funding for these areas of research. However, research on sexism and/or gender equality are also often a target of populist antifeminist prejudice and stereotyping and therefore need explicit backing by institutions and management.

Organization and structural implementation: A growing body of knowledge and resources for implementing effective measures to ensure diversity, inclusion, and equality in academic institutions form the foundation for the growing demand for national models for quality assurance and minimum standards. A game changer in this direction is the EU's Horizon Europe requirement that gender equality, including the countering of sexism, be considered in all aspects of academic life: from the very method and subject of research and teaching to the mainstreaming of organizational procedures, decision making processes and bodies, academic recruitment, and career opportunities. This requirement is being introduced as an eligibility criterion for obtaining funding in (almost) all disciplines. To both ensure that the Danish university sector lives up to these requirements and to harness and expand the available knowledge and resources, coordination and expanded cross-institutional and sector collaboration and networking are essential and could further be made visible, valued, and encouraged through institutionalized incentives and events. Besides providing the necessary basis to meet the EU's Horizon Europe requirements, this is not only a utilitarian demand but a just one—aiming at gender equality is simply the just and right thing to do; it is aiming at justice and fairness in our academic endeavors.

National bodies and procedures

We recommend establishing three national bodies that together may address complementary aspects and needs arising from a sexist culture in academia, as follows:

Academic Ombudsfunction: The Ombudsfunction is a well-known and respected Danish institution. As an independent public authority, an ombudsfunction can supervise academic institutions concerning compliance with Danish law regarding equality and workplace harassment. It can also constitute an independent body that may receive reports and take wider systemic issues into account (such as precarity or international mobility) with the power to raise complex, cross-cutting issues to attention and action at different organizational and political levels.

A national committee on academic integrity and ethical conduct: A growing body of evidence shows that sexism entails great risks for the quality of research and education and for higher education as a democratic institution. Following recommendations by the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (ERAC 1205/1/20), we propose the establishment of a national committee equivalent in structure, organizational embedding (e.g., at the Ministry of Higher Education and Science), scope, and jurisdiction to the existing Danish Committee on Research Misconduct.

A national sexism support unit for all higher education institutions: Promoting and supporting an effective push to improve Danish academia by countering sexism and other forms of harassment requires expert resources and coordination at the national level. The proposed unit could support annual strategic activities, measures, and monitoring at the organizational level and can ensure the necessary establishment and updating of national tools, resources, and standards. A national unit can function as a knowledge hub for the academic sector, provide strategic support as well as preventive tools, inform and support emergency work at the local level, and ensure coordination with other important national actors and experts on sexism.

Institutional level

To ensure expertise and efficiency, each university and higher education institution should implement measures that correspond and collaborate with the national infrastructure described above. This can ensure the protection of those involved as well as thoroughness in follow-up and investigation: procedures that include investigations into severity, frequency, duration, possibility of intervention, and consequences. Prevention measures should include specific support for the victim and the organization as well as broader organizational equality work that can carry out systematic, structured measures. The following figure gives an overview of the suggested initiatives at the institutional level, where the three boxes on the right can be realized in different ways but should have a strong central position in the organization. Below is a brief elaboration of the five different entities.

Institutional level

Whistleblower scheme	Committee on integrity and ethical conduct*	Case handling Policies and procedures	MeToo-coordinator / support unit	GEP** unit/ DEI-team
Cp. Whistleblower Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament Which enters into force December 2021	Corresponds to the national committee for academic integrity and ethical conduct*	Case handling Policies and procedures for: Reporting Follow-up	Corresponds to the national sexism support unit Legal counselling Psychological support (voluntary) Conflict mediation (victim centred, non-violent) Communication and dissemination	Support for the DEI organization Strategic DEI quality assurance (Gender Equality Plans (GEP – according to the Horizon Europe Requirement Targeted organizational interventions, e.g. bystander-programme Ongoing support for victim and organization

* Suggested name

** GEP: Gender Equality Plans: EU's framework for quality assurance of Gender Equality / Diversity and Inclusion measures at universities – that they are systematic, structured, monitored and sustained.

Whistleblower scheme: This scheme is mandatory under Danish law and implements EU Directive 2019/1037. It enters into force December 17th, 2021, in Denmark, and all organizations with more than 250 employees must have a scheme in place. The scheme allows employees to report infringements and serious offences, or suspicion thereof, to the organization (both anonymously and non-anonymously)—of all types of misconduct, including sexual harassment. An important feature of the whistleblower scheme is that communication as a default must be completely anonymous.

Since this infrastructure is already being implemented, we recommend that the individual university's scheme be designed to be explicitly able to (also) handle sexual harassment and instances of sexism and that it can serve as a single point of contact for both students and employees. To handle incoming cases adequately and professionally, we recommend that clear procedures and organizational preparation—for who does what in which cases—be defined and in place and communicated clearly (e.g., on the homepage, in information material for new employees and students). We also recommend that **the whistleblower organizations are seen as institutional parallels to a national ombudsfunction**—where both institutions could benefit from coordination and collaboration.

An example of a whistleblower scheme has been established at Copenhagen Business School and can be seen here: <https://www.cbs.dk/en/about-cbs/contact/whistleblower-scheme-cbs>. An

example of the detailed procedure of such scheme and the legal regulations can be seen here:

https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/description_of_procedure_0.pdf

Institutional committee for academic integrity and ethical conduct: It is proposed that such a committee be equivalent in structure, scope, and jurisdiction to the existing Committees on Practice at Danish universities and other higher education institutions with the purpose of evaluating complaints concerning questionable or illegal professional behavior or conduct, such as sexual harassment and sexist bullying and their common spillover effects on academic harassment. We recommend that the university's diversity officer and/or MeToo coordinator (see below) is/are member(s) of the committee.

Case handling: Internal administrative processes, systems of reporting, and follow-up. Universities should implement and develop transparent policies and systems. There is a growing body of evidence that institutions with clear and visible policies and infrastructure regarding sexism and what stands instead (e.g., decency and integrity at work) and that act consistently in correspondence with these have a lower incidence of sexism and harassment and are assessed as better workplaces in general.

Policies and systems counteracting sexism need to *both* be embedded in existing policies (such as staff policy guidelines) and systems/organizational procedures (such as working and study environment monitoring/assessment and quality assurance) as a matter of course *and* be specifically highlighted, identified, and communicated from official communication platforms and at formal occasions.

For cases of sexism that are not hostile (paternalistic or benevolent sexism), it should be made transparent how employees can communicate experiences of sexism to leaders, union representatives, and working environment groups at the local level or to diversity officers or similar. This can also be supported through already-established and regular workplace assessments [7] and attendant follow-up meetings and interventions. Our recommendation is that the topic of sexism be a regular agenda item and regularly addressed at department/unit level as a normal matter of course. It is crucial here to frame questions so that general concepts such as sexism or bullying are not used (ensuring that respondents are not asked to *define* experiences, e.g., "have you experienced sexism?") but rather that questions concern whether specific situations have *occurred* (e.g., "Have you experienced comments regarding your looks that had sexual undertones?", "Have you experienced

gendered remarks?”). See chapter four in this book and the reference section on recent research and evidence-based practice recommendations on how to frame questions for surveys.

The many cases of paternalistic/benevolent sexism (see vignettes) are the grounds upon which sexist cultures thrive. It is important to make sure that it is possible to talk about this openly at all organizational levels in order to break a culture of silencing or shaming, which invariably results in feelings in those affected by it of being alone, singled out, or humiliated, and which therefore also all too often results in them turning to non-institutional channels to express their hurt, confusion, frustration, or anger.

A regular and structured framework and occasions for addressing the topic of sexism may contribute to an open, inclusive work environment where sexism and other exclusionary and bullying practices can be regulated, and it is legitimate to bring in all perspectives. *The second part of this book with the vignettes and recommended pedagogics* might be used for opening up conversations and dialogue on sexism at the local level. For local academic leaders and union representatives at the level of departments or research centers to be able to handle this kind of interaction and to act and advise in cases of sexism, we further recommend that *diversity training* is offered in a coordinated way, such as workshops and norm critical exercises. See below in the section on informal measures for effective training approaches—ways to end a silencing culture, build internal capacity, and dismantle a sexist culture—as well as in the reference section for further examples.

Reporting can take many forms, both orally and in written form, both anonymously and openly. It is important that this is taken seriously as many cases of sexism would not be reported as legal cases but as cases of exclusion or prejudice in the work environment.

Cases of sexism, particularly hostile sexism (unwanted sexual invitations and coercion, bullying, etc.—see vignettes), will benefit from the institutional measures described above: whistleblowers, a committee on academic integrity and ethical conduct, the embedding of sexism in already-established workplace assessments, etc. In addition to these, universities and academic institutions can benefit from ensuring *transparent and reliable systems regarding procedures for counseling, mediation services, and assistance with reporting* at the central organizational level. These will be elaborated below.

Common to these, however, is the importance of ensuring clear communication and accessibility of information through official university communication channels and platforms for employees and

students. Such information should cover what to do, whom to contact, and what to expect (in terms of process, handling, and accountability)—for instance, easy-to-follow, step-by-step guidelines and direct contact information. Furthermore, it should be easy from public as well as internal university (web-) resources and information to identify types of sexism through examples (e.g., vignettes)—this will, for victims, facilitate how to categorize wrongdoing and give a clear idea of what to expect in relation to possible institutional responses for accountability.

Finally, a thorough coordination across actors and organizational functions (leaders, union and working environment representatives, administrators) may ensure that important knowledge, data, and information is not lost—and at the same time ensure that collective and structural solutions to persistent and systemic complex issues may be adequately addressed.

The complaints process should be:

- Legitimate
 - Relevant academic stakeholders (e.g., staff at all levels, postgraduate and undergraduate students) have been involved in the co-design of the process
 - Process will ensure actual and effective accountability
- Accessible
 - Process is promoted/awareness-raising
 - Multiple languages, e.g., where the university has a parallel language policy
 - Available through various channels, e.g., online, telephone, written
 - Ensuring no reprisals for use of mechanism
- Predictable
 - Clear process set out (who, what, where, when, and how)
 - Clear outcomes set out
 - BUT flexibility should be built into the process
- Equitable
 - Independent process that recognizes potential power imbalances
 - Access to information
 - Representation facilitated, e.g., union rep, friend, or even a lawyer
 - Non-discriminatory
- Transparent
 - Regular updates on progress
 - Inform complainants about outcome(s)
 - Balance needs for ensuring transparency with respect for complainant's right to confidentiality
- A source for continuous learning
 - The institution needs to learn from the process by gathering data, e.g., types of cases, contexts, outcomes, positions of involved parties, etc.
 - Obtain feedback from complainants
 - Observe and understand trends and patterns
 - Evaluate effectiveness

MeToo coordinator/sexism support unit at the university level: We propose that universities establish a central unit or function with specific expertise in handling cases of sexism and harassment. This unit would correspond to a national sexism support unit and could serve as the institutional contact point as well as draw on the expertise at the national level.

The unit could coordinate and ensure adequate HR, legal and psychological counseling and support, for people involved in instances of sexism (both victims and offenders). A central task of this unit could be to coordinate and/or offer victim-centered, voluntary conflict mediation (examples of such conflict mediation models can be found in the reference section). Another task could be to ensure clear and adequate university-wide communication and dissemination specifically about sexism mitigation measures.

And finally, this unit could be responsible for coordinating the institutional research/data collection on sexism, and the activities and initiatives by different organizational bodies that deal with various related aspects involved in handling and preventing sexism, as well as providing strategic support and expert advice for the committee for integrity and ethical conduct as well as management.

Gender equality unit/Diversity, equality, inclusion team: Preventing sexism can be seen as part of a larger set of actions and procedural and structural infrastructure to ensure diverse, equal, and inclusive work and study environments. This is increasingly recognized as integral to achieving excellence in academia. Thus, as of 2021, the EU requires the existence of coordinated, structural, and systematic models for the quality assessment of gender equality at all levels of academic organizations and output in terms of research and teaching as an eligibility criterion for obtaining Horizon Europe funding (see [the Horizon Europe Working Programme 2021–2022](#)).

We recommend that universities establish an expert unit or team dedicated to coordinating and strategically driving such structural and procedural initiatives. Such a team can be established as part of the HR unit or as part of a strategic unit (one example is [SDU's Gender Equality Team](#)). A central overall task of such a team could be to ensure that efforts toward equality, diversity, and inclusion are sufficiently systematic, consistent, and informed. One way to do this is to follow the EU's recommendations for quality-assured equality work, namely the framework **GEPs** (see also [EIGE's GEAR toolbox](#)), which also count measures to mitigate sexism as a cornerstone of any effort toward equality, diversity, and inclusion.

GEPs include the following elements, which are highly relevant for any coordinated effort to counter sexism:

- **Formal and public policies and statements regarding gender equality, diversity and inclusion:** Relevant policies are (in addition to existing policies, such as staff policy guidelines, work and study environment policies, etc., described above) diversity initiative policies, family-friendly HR policies, etc.
- **Dedicated expert resources:** Such as the MeToo coordinator and DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) team proposed in this section.
- **Data, monitoring and transparency:**
 - In addition to the general relevance of gender disaggregated data on staff and the student body, recruitment and advancement processes, and other relevant equality aspects, it is important to make it a formulated priority to **investigate your organization** 1) through specific mappings of the prevalence of sexism (see also above) and 2) by collecting data on more contentious aspects, which are important to ensure transparency and openness, such as data on salaries, including bonuses; resource and task allocation; and the constellation of decision making bodies and other representative and career recruitment/promoting activities.
 - It is also necessary to establish regular and embedded monitoring practices based on clear objectives and milestones that are anchored firmly with management, coordinated by expert resources, and involving relevant organizational stakeholders. It is a good idea here to let already established and well-known quality assurance models in the institution inspire the design and implementation of GE/DEI monitoring practices.
 - Additional measures could include open accountability, for example, through providing incentives and instituting reward mechanisms for meeting assigned objectives (such as assigned KPIs, gender balance in shortlists for open positions, promotions, recognition) or for driving initiatives that successfully diminish sexism—driven by employees or academic and administrative services (for examples, see section on manager responses).
- **Systematic embedding and integration of GE/DEI perspectives into organizational and administrative core practices:** This includes HR procedures and practices (e.g.,

recruitment, onboarding, promotions, salary negotiations, performance reviews, professional training, etc.), communication, business intelligence management, strategic and financial decision processes, student and educational management, and research funding application support. Furthermore, it is important to implement bias interrupters in relevant procedures (e.g., recruitment and promotion and decisions regarding resource and task allocation)—which may also contribute to identifying and eliminating sexism and other exclusionary practices. (See section on management responses and references for different useful examples and resources.)

- **Capacity building, training, and systematic awareness-raising:** This is elaborated below in the section on training, and it is an absolutely essential aspect of organizational capacity building and constitutes the everyday interventions and interactions with all organizational stakeholders. These interventions can address different crucial perspectives for ensuring workplaces free of sexism and harassment and characterized by openness, inclusivity, and respect. Special attention must be paid to capacity building and the collegial and institutional support of leaders and managers—in their everyday tasks and communications, both internal and public.

The proposed initiatives should be seen as different but interlinked and mutually dependent aspects of a coordinated effort. Formal structures and measures provide a *framework and foundation* for a necessary transformation of the current sexist culture. But this will only be achieved through a combination of efforts in everyday formal *as well as* informal interactions, strategies, and constellations.

Managerial responses

This section presents tips and tools for management and leadership to start tackling sexism in their organization. What can you expect to find in this section? Firstly, an overview of important areas of everyday working life enabling sexism. Secondly, **tips and tools** for how to transform these areas through awareness-raising, capacity building, and training.

Areas of everyday working life enabling sexism

Below, we focus on six aspects of working life that enable sexism to manifest itself or to be covered up within the organization: **bias, gray zones, chilly climate, victim-blaming, individual strategies of protection, and reporting**. This overview is not intended to be exhaustive; however, these aspects represent points of departure to initiate the work in tackling sexism.

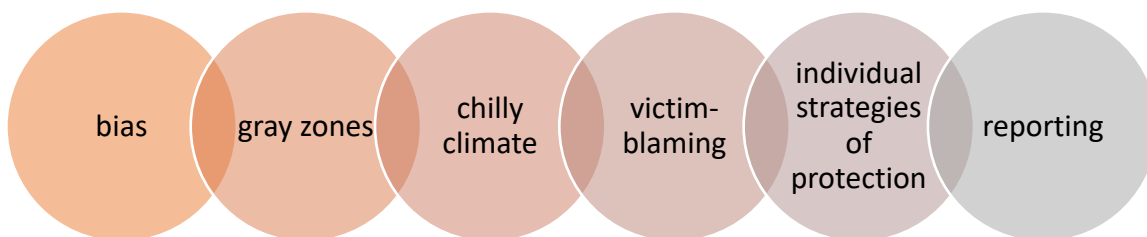


Figure 12: Areas of managerial action and responsibility for transforming sexism practices

This section provides concrete suggestions for how managers can address the following:

- Dismantling bias

- Dismantling the chilly climate
- Dismantling victim-blaming
- Navigating gray zones
- Dismantling individual strategies of protection
- Dismantling the challenges of reporting

Dismantling bias

Become aware: Make an effort to understand how bias works in our daily lives; you can get help in doing this by reading Chapter 1. Bias forms part of our cognitive and ideological mapping of reality, our categorizations and world views. In the case of sexism, and also when combined with other identity categories that suffer negative stereotyping, such bias might have profound negative consequences. It is essential that managers become aware of ways to identify, block, and counter bias. As Banaji (1993) mentions, we all want to be good people; however, due to the existence of bias we might still engage in social stereotyping and prejudice, which is (vastly) often unconscious and embedded in taken-for-granted cultures and practices. As a manager, a way to check the workings of your own biases is to take [The Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#) [4]. There is extensive research on the area of how unconscious bias works as well as different strategies that can counteract bias and stereotyping (see the references to learn more).

Get training: Nowadays, there is no excuse for not knowing about bias. Information and knowledge about this are readily available for managers in the form of books and other materials, and there are experts that can provide tailored courses and workshops (see Chapter 4 for a list of resources). Although our biases can never be fully eliminated, we can learn—collectively and individually—to identify, reduce, and challenge them. It is important that this kind of intervention be widely accessible and offered in and targeted to relevant contexts, such as for people engaged in recruitment and/or the supervision of junior colleagues, to ensure objective performance appraisal and informal feedback. These are crucial activities that have an enormous impact on people’s career opportunities and professional development, and there is therefore an obligation to be especially systematic and informed through a meticulous countering of bias. We **encourage especially leaders and managers to receive targeted bias training** in how to act overtly to counter sexist behavior. Managers must watch out for unconscious bias in all key aspects of their talent and recruitment activities and also on a daily-life basis when encountering employees who behave in a way that goes against gender stereotypes (see Chapter 1).

Universities should employ and consult with experts on diversity and inclusion training to provide this competence lift. Such tasks could also be coordinated by the MeToo coordinator or the sexist support/gender equality units. There are many useful resources and tools to inform how to design and conduct diversity and bias training (see reference section below). One such example, [Genderlab](#)[6], applies a combination of design thinking and norm criticism to develop innovative tools for cultural change in companies and organizations.

Implement strategies against bias: To gain knowledge and develop possible strategies, academic managers will benefit from relying on diversity/equality experts. Although it is an arduous task, research has proven that it is possible to establish procedures and strategic actions that help to diminish implicit biases (Devine et al., 2012; Muhr, 2019). Strategies include (among others):

- **Stereotype replacement:** This strategy involves recognizing that our responses are based on stereotypes and then reflecting upon why the response happened, and how it could be avoided in the future. The activity finishes by expressing what a non-bias response could be.
- **Counter a stereotypic imagining:** This strategy entails imagining in a very specific and detailed way someone who counters a typical stereotype. What this strategy achieves is that it provides positive examples that challenge the validity of a stereotype (for example, Angela Merkel as a leader challenging the idea that top world leaders have to be men).
- **Individuation:** This strategy aims at preventing or breaking the stereotype by obtaining very specific and detailed information about group members, thereby achieving another way of evaluating people that is personal and not based on the prejudices we might have about the whole group identity, that is, the stereotypes of this group
- **Perspective taking:** This strategy involves identifying oneself with a member of a stereotype group. In this case, the manager uses the first person to explain what the person who belongs to a different gender or a stigmatized group has been experiencing, for example, a person that has been the target of sexist humor. The manager speaks as if they were the person who had experienced sexism. This strategy provides the manager with psychological closeness, which aims at diminishing group stereotyping.
- **Increasing opportunity for contact:** This strategy enhances opportunities to encounter and engage in positive social interactions with people of an identity categories different from your own—in the case of sexism, people of different gender identity, sexuality, or gender expression.

- **Bias blocking** measures include systematizing all the different aspects of recruitment or promotion processes to avoid or minimize bias (Bohnet & Morse, 2016; Muhr, 2019; Soll et al., 2015).
- **Making sexism explicit:** Levels of benevolent sexism are reduced when individuals are explicitly informed about the harmful implications of benevolent sexism (Becker & Swim, 2012) (see “Become aware” recommendation). Managers can help with making it explicit.
- **Other workshop-based interventions:** Research provides different views on the use of workshops. Some studies note that while it might be effective at reducing levels of hostile sexism, workshops could have inconsistent effects on benevolent sexism (Case, 2007; de Lemus et al., 2014). The subtle and seemingly positive nature of benevolent sexism makes it difficult to confront and reduce using such interventions.

Dismantling the chilly climate

The prevailing metaphor “chilly climate” is one way of describing the persistence of sexism, which refers to the everyday atmosphere and working/study environments that exclude certain people professionally and socially (see Chapter 1). A chilly climate stands in the way of creative, collaborative, and productive working environments characterized by psychological safety, respectful and open interactions, and high-quality output. We present here a few concrete strategies to disrupt a chilly climate:

- Consider representation and strive for diversity and inclusion in all activities and at different levels from speakers to taskforces to social events (e.g., who gets invited to social occasions and after work activities, etc.). Be mindful that some activities can appear to be gendered, such as participating in specific types of sports. While this is not a problem if there are many other inclusive activities, this may become a problem if it is the only way people in the organization get to be social together. Therefore, diversify and open up your ways of being together as a community.
- Avoid tokenism—the practice of making only an “obligatory” or “symbolic” effort to be inclusive of (underrepresented) members, such as having only one woman on panels with many speakers. Tokenism contributes to attributional ambiguity, which is the feeling of not knowing if one has been selected because of one’s talents or because of one’s identity, thereby contributing to undermining the self-confidence and self-worth of minority groups. This can be avoided by expanding the diversity of who is invited and making explicit the reasons behind the selection. Another harmful element in tokenism is that it fosters sexist

jokes about being the “only woman” in the room, “something nice to look at,” etc. (see vignettes).

- Apply approaches that ensure everyone can and feel called on to participate in conversations, discussions, exchanges, and the sharing of ideas. Notice, for example, if collective meetings and conversations are dominated by only a few. Find new creative ways of entering into dialogue (e.g., move away from always using large meetings and the raising of hands).
- Be aware of interruptions, and make sure that everyone has a say.
- Notice and counteract the phenomenon of “mansplaining.” Mansplaining is a form of sexism behavior. It happens when a male colleague repeats what a woman academic just said as if only in this manner can the idea be considered seriously by the group, if he appropriates the idea that a woman has shared earlier as his own without giving proper credit, or if he explains to her in a patronizing manner topics and issues that are the core of her area of expertise or responsibility.
- Consider what you talk about in more informal conversations; for example, if you always talk about a couple of topics, such as one single sport or children, and that becomes a primary way for people to engage and socialize in common spaces, it can be problematic. While conversations on specific topics are not in themselves offensive, they can be excluding. Singular and one-sided collective habits can also have a tendency to become exclusionary and may make people uncomfortable and can spill over and become outright offensive, such as when the psychical appearance of some of the people present becomes a topic for conversation. Here it must be considered that this may affect individuals who are identified with marginalized and underrepresented groups more adversely than individuals who belong to the majority and the norm. Therefore, make sure you don’t always discuss the same topics, and be aware of how everyone is invited into and has possibility for taking part in informal conversations.

Dismantling victim-blaming

Victim-blaming not only holds employees back from speaking up but also permits a climate for the tolerance of sexism—of destructive conduct. To eradicate victim-blaming is therefore crucial. Victim-blaming involves explicit and implicit behaviors and attitudes that push issues of sexism back at the victim. This is closely related to what we discussed in the *Understanding* chapter about becoming troublemakers if we speak up; victim-blaming quickly turns the problem and the responsibility back on

the victim, individualizing it. Victim-blaming appears in the form of 1) indicating guilt, 2) telling the victim they lack a sense of humor, 3) indicating that they misread intentions, or 4) mentioning their actions or looks as provocative. In short, it tells the person who has suffered discrimination that they had it coming for being who they are. Then what to do?

When victims speak up, believe them! We need to ensure a climate where victims of sexism can come forward to share and report their experiences. Listen carefully to the person who claims to have been harassed. When a person shares an experience of sexism, believe that this person is speaking from the truth of their experience, that it is honest, and that they are competent to relate to and judge what they have experienced. This is to say that they are speaking in good faith. As their manager, do not treat them as children (paternalist sexism) or as incompetent (hostile sexism). This is not at odds with ensuring a diligent and professional process of investigation into and confrontation of the related experiences and just and fair treatment of both the victim and the accused. Different options are available here: a series of meetings simply to talk, asking for and receiving advice by the university experts on sexism or gender equality, voluntary mediation, individual interviews with both parties and others, etc. (see previous section on institutional structure and processes of reporting).

We do not have the same power: Be mindful of your own and others power and privilege—often, when people do not speak up this is linked to their restrained agency in that situation. Following are a couple of the possible scenarios that you can expect as a leader:

Late reporting: Be open to the possibility that some sexist experiences can lead to abuse, exclusion, bullying, retaliation, or fear of retaliation and for personal safety and can be traumatizing. Victims might come forward or report later (not immediately after the event happened), once they feel psychologically stronger.

Reporting to others: Respect that victims might report or share their experience through non-official channels. This happens often and is due first and foremost to the need of a person who has suffered sexism to turn to someone they perceive as “safe” to talk to, someone he/she expects will not shame them further (this is not always the appointed “official” person for such matters) (see section below). If this happens, do not see this as “the victim’s failure” to report properly. Do not blame them. Instead, once you are notified, provide advice and support about what can be done from that point forward.

Navigating gray zones

What is a gray zone? Gray zones are situations where it is more difficult to determine what is acceptable and what is not. Here are some examples of gray zone areas to be aware of:

- Mixed professional and social interactions
- Power and hierarchy
- Precarity
- Insecurity and unclear expectations
- Jargon and jokes

Mixed professional and social interactions include, for example, networking events, office parties, etc. A contributing blurring factor is alcohol intake and working outside “office” hours. These blurred and unclear situations enable the emergence of exclusionary practices that in more professional contexts puts us all at risk for experiencing sexism. Therefore, it is pivotal that we all make an extra effort in such situations to assure that our behavior is not discriminatory and that we critically consider our own privileges and the ethical responsibility that follows. This includes paying attention to colleagues who are in a more vulnerable position than ourselves.

Power and hierarchy: When there is a power differential, the pressure is on those who are lower in the hierarchy. In academia, contacts and networks are crucial for career advancement. This results in pressure to “become friends” with or allow one’s boundaries to be overstepped because of perceived or real negative impacts of speaking up against colleagues who are more powerful (e.g., research leaders, professors, etc.). Power is relational, which means that it is not just “fixed” in a hierarchical relationship between two people: one person can be more powerful because of their influence, access to networks, etc. And even if it is not always easy to understand the power one wields over others, it is crucial to be reflective about one’s power position and stay open to indications that one is indeed powerful and influential. This makes it necessary to be mindful of *managing power ethics*. This includes the following examples (for this and others, please refer to the vignettes):

- Understanding power dynamics
- Understanding “the silencing effect” (even if you do not want to abuse your power, power still has a silencing effect)
- Understanding and accepting that less powerful or dependent persons might not go to you to talk about instances of sexism, or even call out your behavior if you are the one behaving in

sexist ways. Don't be hurt about this decision. There can be many reasons for this, and one of those reasons might be the differential power dynamics or the fear of retaliation.

- Understanding that the victim does not need to hear that you as a manager lack confidence or competence to handle sexism cases. This blames the victim for speaking up, and it appears as if they have created a managing problem for you. If you need advice, look for that in other experts or ask the leadership of your organization.

Precarity: Given the particular vulnerability of especially women on casual contracts highlighted by our petition, employers should aim to employ staff on permanent, secure contracts or pay particular attention to employees in precarious and non-tenured employment. Employers should ensure that everyone working within their organizations can use grievance procedures to raise concerns about discrimination and harassment at work, including those on casual contracts and contractors who may be employed by another organization.

Insecurity and unclear expectations can lead to employees allowing behavior they would not normally allow because they are afraid of jeopardizing their reputation or opportunities when they are the “new one,” or they don't know the rules of the organization. Clear communication of values is necessary.

Jokes and jargon are indicative of the culture, prevailing norms, and stereotypes. Therefore, some important questions are: Which stereotypes and prejudices are embedded in informal comments and humor? Who are the beneficiaries and who are the targets of sexist jokes and jargon? Sexist humor is damaging because people are hesitant to confront this form of sexism. Research demonstrates that sexist jokes are more difficult to confront than more explicit expressions of sexism because humor disguises the biased nature of the remark (see Chapter 1 for references). Research and many of the testimonies received in this initiative show how sexist jokes offer portrayals of misogyny that serve many functions, some of which include the sexual objectification of women, devaluation of their personal and professional abilities, and support of violence against women. Given this, any organization must work toward challenging and eliminating sexist jokes.

Dismantling individual strategies of protection

As mentioned in our introduction to this chapter, our petition reveals that employees engage in protective action with each other to avoid, deal with, and minimize the negative effects of sexism. Thus, employees give each other well-intended advice as a means to build up strategies needed to *protect* oneself against sexism, such as “avoid this person” or “don’t speak up against sexism as this will likely hurt your career.” Such strategies reinforce the message that it is the employee’s responsibility to keep themselves safe. While such strategies are well intended, they are harmful. At the core of this protective behavior is the built-in idea that the problem of sexism is to be handled at the individual level.

Robin Clair’s (1993) work on how victims frame sexual harassment illustrates well this paradox—when intentions of resisting actually reinforce the social structures that allow sexual harassment to exist in the first place. Clair demonstrated that when they encountered instances of sexual harassment, women used the strategy of privatizing these experiences, and by doing so, the women actually decreased the likelihood that the behavior would be scrutinized in the public domain. Thus, the harassing behavior was viewed as private and therefore not an organizational issue (Clair, 1993).

Therefore, managers need to engage in a conscious effort to dismantle these individual strategies of protection. **How can you as a manager counteract the privatization of sexism experiences and help take collective responsibility?** Here we present ideas on how to do that:

- **Lead by example** and make public commitments.
- Be clear that all complaints will be treated **seriously**.
- **Be attentive** to language.
- **Monitor backlash**. Many managers fear resistance when they propose initiatives to tackle sexism. Being aware about your own values as a leader and your reasons against sexism will help you to better cope with opposition. Additionally, resistance is information, and any pushback provides excellent data to help you understand what the barriers are to establishing a non-sexist work environment. Note where resistance is coming from and why.
- Intervene if you witness sexist behavior publicly (at meetings, social occasions, etc.). Such interventions serve two goals: to change organizational culture and to assure all staff that avoiding sexism is a management priority. (See examples of how to practice this in the section on collegial responses.)

- Know how to engage in conversations about sexism and gain the necessary competences and skills to be able to have these types of conversations in an adequate and respectful manner.
- Make the effort to understand the reporting of sexism (this includes managers with personnel responsibility and union representatives). Get to know what sexism is and be able to identify all types of sexist situations from the more subtle forms to the hostile type in your work environments and in the experiences shared with you by employees, such as not only during a specific reporting but also during the “performance development conversation.”
- Take responsibility. It is a leadership responsibility to know how to begin and guide 1) conflict solving and in more difficult cases 2) a process of reporting first at their level (departmental/research groups or centers) and also at the university level (through HR and legal); 3) make sure that the different possibilities of conflict resolution and of reporting are well known among employees.
- Encourage a work environment where it is possible to talk about wellbeing and inclusion, and these also includes safe spaces where it is possible to have conversations about sexism.
- Consider ways in which people can report anonymously (this might not help in a particular case but can instead help to identify serial offenders) and the possibility of making use of independent mechanisms, including the involvement of a third party if necessary.

A reflexive exercise for academic managers: As the previous recommendations show, to gain competences and knowledge in this area is key. Therefore, in what follows, you will find a series of questions that can help you to reflect on your role as a leader and to evaluate your work environment. As a leader, ask yourself:

- How is my communication with my employees? Do we know how to talk about difficult questions? Which processes can my employees utilize if they want to tell me about their experiences?
- Do I understand the impact that sexism is having on my employees and on the organizational at large?
- Can I articulate why it is important for us to address sexism?
- Do all my employees understand why it is important to tackle sexism?

- Reflect upon where responsibility lies in a complex organization: what is my role as the manager if I am to ensure a non-sexist work environment for my employees?
- Can I explain which processes are available to my employees if they experience sexism?
- Do I feel I have the competences and skills to advise and lead in a conflict of sexism? And if not, do I know where to ask for advice?
- How good am I at calling out sexism when it occurs? What do I say if I witness it?
- What are my values as a leader? In what ways do equality and inclusion, the fight against sexism, relate to my values?
- Do I understand how sexism can intersect with other forms of discrimination and harassment (e.g., racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism)?

Dismantling the challenges of reporting

Given the findings of our petition in relation to management's failing to act when sexism and sexual harassment are reported—or indeed, the harassment worsening after reporting—management should pay particular attention to grievance procedures and how complaints of sexism and sexual harassment are dealt with.

Tips for handling complaints and improving the reporting process

- The testimonies show that reporting is experienced as a “do-it-yourself” process because the victim often must teach her/himself the policies and write the documents. This needs to be addressed and improved. Therefore, when the person comes to you, **expect that the person does not know how to report, and provide your help in this process.**
- Acknowledge how vulnerable the writing of a complaint is. Handle with care. Handle with responsibility.
- Encourage the victim to seek **support** (see our references) and to practice **self-care** (see our tips in the section “victim response”).
- **Avoid** warnings even if they are be well-intended. The victim does not need to be warned about the imaginary damaging effects a complaint might have. This reproduces a silencing culture and contributes to continuous under-reporting.
- **Avoid** victim-blaming (go to part 1 to see what victim-blaming looks like).

- **Don't ask** what the right level of “punishment” should be. Most higher education institutions do not have yet a “best practice” procedure on how to handle cases of sexism and an extensive jurisprudence (many are handling these cases on a case-by-case basis with different responses and demands of accountability given by middle managers), which makes this difficult, but victims are not equipped to answer such a question and shouldn't have to be.
- **Try to adopt a victim-centered approach:** This kind of approach takes its point of departure in the following questions: What is the experience according to the victim? What are their arguments in relation to the wrong-doing? What are their wishes and their expectations if this is to be solved or improved?
- **Ensure protection** from reprisals, such as in relation to appointments, promotions, and references. The petition provided many examples of inadequate management responses, from moving the complainant to a different department, to disbelieving or even victim-blaming. Therefore, manager responses and policies should make specific provision to ensure that employees are protected from experiencing adverse outcomes after reporting workplace sexual harassment.
- **Consider timeline:** Some things are so humiliating or devastating that it takes time to process them. Victims of sexism report negative psychological consequences of the experience that impact many aspects of their daily life at work and spill over negatively into their personal lives. Therefore, consider timeline on complaints. Complaints supposed to be formed in a certain way within a certain time frame risk being “disqualified” because they do not live up to formal requirements. Examine the formal requirements and reconsider them if necessary.
- **Fight inefficiency:** Inefficiency is discriminatory because it leads to exhaustion; employees are too tired to speak up against what makes them tired in the first place. Therefore, examine how much time it (on average) takes until the “case is closed”—from when a complaint is first filed to when an agreed-upon arrangement is achieved. Consider whether this timeline is appropriate for and respectful of employees.

- **Search for best practice:** Handling complaints often take place behind closed doors. Also, some complaints end in a confidentiality agreement. This can have damaging effects for the victim, who can easily feel alone. Furthermore, it becomes difficult for organizations to share experiences on how to handle sexism, and the outcomes can be very different from case to case.
- **Consider organizational (contradictory) norms:** A complaint can be considered to be the victim's failure to resolve the situation in more "neutral" or "informal" ways. According to Guschke and Sløk-Andersen (2021) contradictory organizational norms inhibit the use of formal channels to report sexual harassment but also implicitly discourage people from speaking up in the moment due to a fear that it will cause a rupture in the social cohesion and eventually delegitimize their own position in the organization. Formality and informality are tangled up in ways that lead to problematic contradictions. Filing a formal case of sexual harassment will be experienced as a breach of norms of informality, for example, the expectation that the victim of sexism should talk to the person and "sort it out" in an informal way. This contradictory reality leaves employees caught between contradictory norms for how to tackle experiences of sexual harassment.

Collegial responses

As outlined, there are persistent challenges to the act of calling out sexist behavior, which is why besides management responsibility, we encourage collegial resistance.

Key points for employees

- It is important that we feel able to deal with sexist behavior when it occurs. Ask your manager how the organization can provide employees tools to tackle sexism.
- We are more likely to speak up if we are supported by others. Practice bystander interventions with each other. Ask each other, "What would you do if...?" to prepare each other and talk about issues of sexism.
- Be mindful of power and privilege: if you are in a powerful/privileged position, use that as a possibility to practice change.

While consciously interrupting and intervening in everyday practices of exclusion is necessary and important work, we must first acknowledge and recognize that the agency that is needed to be able to

“call out” sexism is inextricable from power and privilege. Agency is not something to be harnessed or attributed to any one individual; rather, it is socially located, shifting, and relational. Therefore, it makes a major difference if we face “calling out” sexism individually or collectively. A crucial determinant of our decision to confront or not to confront sexism is the extent to which we expect to be **supported by others** (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). Major barriers to confronting include **social costs** to the confronter (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Swim et al., 2010). Female confronters of sexism are often perceived as overreacting, whiny, oversensitive troublemakers, interpersonally cold, or fearful of retaliation (e.g., Becker et al., 2011; Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dodd et al., 2001; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003) and are less liked by men (Dodd et al., 2001), and the confronting target is at risk to be perceived as self-interested and egoistic (Becker et al., 2014). Racialized and LGBTQ+ people face additional negative consequences when confronters. Evidence suggests that **confrontations by nontargets** can be more effective than confrontations by targets (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Drury and Kaiser (2014) found that **when men speak up** about sexism and confront it, they are taken more seriously than women, are less likely to experience social costs (e.g., derogatory remarks), and are more persuasive in convincing others (particularly other men) that sexism exists.

Strategies for calling out sexism

Below, we dive into some of those steps we may all engage with when we meet sexism in our daily lives—no matter if we are part of a management group, tenured staff, HR/TR/AMR, or short-term contracted. These are not A-to-Z guides or easy fixes but instead draw up sexist challenges and ways of dealing with them for each of us to consider—individually as well as in groups of coworkers.

Overcoming the bystander effect

When we are faced with a sexist situation, behaviors, remarks, comments, etc., we often react passively. We are dumbfounded and oftentimes asking ourselves “*Did that just happen?*” Feeling paralyzed is a well-documented psychological response, and the well-documented bystander effect helps us to understand how and why bystanders can also be paralyzed in a sexist situation. To combat the paralysis that sets in within mere seconds after someone delivers a sexist comment or demeaning joke, the Harvard Business Review recommends “the ouch” technique: Simply say “**Ouch!**” This buys you a few extra seconds to formulate a clear statement about why the comment didn’t land well with you.

Bystander interventions are important to create a culture where sexist behavior is flagged up as unacceptable. Support colleagues who you might feel are targets. Challenge the situation and focus on

why you are uncomfortable rather than the person who is the target. For example, you might say: “I feel uncomfortable when you comment on Marie’s appearance in meetings.”

Avoid saying: “Don’t comment on Marie’s appearance in meetings; it makes her feel uncomfortable.” This makes Marie a target twice.

Examples of responses to a sexist situation could be:

- Did you really mean to say that?
- We don’t do that here.
- That wasn’t funny, but actually rather offensive.
- Actually, that’s an outdated stereotype.
- Can you clarify what you mean when you say I am too “emotional?”
- What makes you think that?
- What particular incident(s) brought you to that conclusion?

Don’t: Too often we hear half-hearted confrontations such as “Come on, Bob. There are women in the room.” This implies that Bob’s sexist comment would be acceptable if no women were in sight.

Use humor now and then

Particularly when you have an existing relationship with that person, try a short humorous observation as an intervention. For instance, when a male scholar calls a female colleague “sweetheart,” try, “Do you call all your colleagues ‘sweetheart?’” Of course, jokes are to be thoroughly thought through because they can easily be biased and create hostility, thus contradict the intention.

Care-frontation or calling in

Confronting people about their missteps can be very difficult; people need to learn that this can be done without provoking humiliation, shaming, or angry altercations. At times, a private conversation after the incident will get a more positive result, especially if the perpetrator is a close colleague, open to feedback, and well-meaning but is out of step with changing attitudes and expectations. Make the person aware that their behavior is hurting others, sabotaging their credibility, and why you care.

Public confrontation or calling out

At other times, it is essential to confront in public, especially if the comment or behavior was egregious and likely to dispirit coworkers and damage the relational environment, or if the perpetrator is a serial offender, rigid in his attitudes toward women, and unlikely to respond to private corrective feedback.

Although we can all do something all the time to reduce sexism in our organizations, as mentioned before, both in cases of care-frontations and public confrontations, the responsibility lies first and foremost not on those that suffer sexism (which empirical data show is more often junior staff or those with non-permanent positions) but first and foremost on leaders and managers, and on those that are more secure in status and position, such as those further up in the hierarchy, who have a responsibility to use their privilege and aim at ethical leadership.

Part 2: Victim responses

Being a victim

It is not easy or flattering to define oneself as a victim. Although we might have been suffering a sexist act or behavior, that experience does not define who we are as persons or as academics. It is fully understandable that we might have conflicting feelings over the use of the word victim. On one side, proper naming is necessary when we have to express that we have suffered discrimination or exclusion and that the consequences of sexism are real and negative in our working and personal lives. On the other side, what we mostly need in the face of sexism is to feel empowered, to regain a sense of agency and purpose, and to feel that we are able to stand our ground and keep our dignity—for this latter part the word victim might feel less appropriate. Is there the possibility to be empowered victims, victims with agency? We believe there is. A first step is reclaiming what a victim of sexism is. We can be strong and courageous victims. We aim at acknowledging that as victims we did not lose any of our competences or capabilities because we have suffered sexism; we are still as intellectually bright, inquisitive, or resilient as before being harassed or bullied due to our gender. We use the word victim with responsibility and care as well as to honor the many others who have suffered similar experiences. If you are a victim of sexism and you are reading these pages, we want you to know that this section is for you, to help you feel empowered, and to reassure you that knowledge about sexism and what can be done about it will hopefully transform the consequences of the wrongdoing that put you in the position of victim to start with. Here you will find examples and tips about what to expect when having suffered sexism and when reporting. We acknowledge that what you can expect can feel overwhelming and

difficult and hope that you will take to heart our recommendations for self-care. Also, we want to acknowledge that each reporting is individual and collective; it is the result of a personal fight and of personal courage, but it is also collective activism for change; it is an act of solidarity with others so that sexism will not continue to be repeated. It is our hope that, if implemented, the many policies and managerial initiatives suggested in the other sections of this chapter will help to ameliorate and diminish many of the difficulties that we mention here.

Empowerment and action

Action tips for people reporting sexism:

- Don't do it alone. Talk to someone and ask for help.
- If you are not able to report yourself, you can have someone do it for you. Go talk to your union or your TR or to a trusted colleague.
- It's OK not to report immediately. Take care of yourself first. Allow yourself time and space for your self-recovery before you consider reporting.

What and how to report?

The difficulty in reporting is what to report. Said in another way, do you report the more subtle instances or hostile behavior? It is a common misconception that we should only report the “really bad” instances. Due to this misconception, we present the sexism continuum in Chapter 1. The continuum is a storytelling that demonstrates how sexism can take various forms and move from subtle behaviors and into more hostile territory, such as a sexual approach that moves into assault.

See if your story is also a continuum and write down your whole story from start to finish. Take your time. This process is difficult because you will be reminded of something that your brain potentially wishes to forget, so don't rush this. Talk to someone and take breaks in between writing if it becomes tough.

The process of reporting

The process of reporting depends on the institution or organization you are in (see our first section on institutional responses). Here are some possible suggestions of how to begin and what to consider.

If the reporting process does not function far from providing comfort, certainty, or reassurance that some action will be taken to address these serious issues, victims often feel even more harassed by the very procedures put in place to address their harassment (Ahmed, 2020). The process of reporting is often confusing and unhelpful and can be even traumatic. Hopefully, if institutions follow the procedures and actions recommended here, this will change, but until then here are some tangible tips on what to expect and how to take care of yourself when you report.

Be mindful: It can be a do-it-yourself process

The reporting process can be described as “do-it-yourself” because you must teach yourself the policies and write the documents. Furthermore, you often need to ensure that your organization and the people who are handling your case keep moving because otherwise the process can risk stalling. As Ahmed (2018) writes, “to stall or to slow can be to stop.” Sometimes you have push to make an organization comply with its own procedures after submitting an official complaint.

You need to think about how you have to do this work in addition to your everyday work. Reporting requires time and effort. So, in this period, you pick up more work whilst also having to deal with the emotional damage that surrounds reporting. This administrative labor can also be understood as emotional labor: *what you have to pick up on top of everything else* (Ahmed, 2018). Be mindful of yourself in this period. *Acknowledge that this will require time and effort and can be emotional.* Consider sharing with coworkers whom you trust what you are going through.

Normalized responses

Below we list normalized responses to reporting. We wish to highlight that reporting can be paradoxical with positive and negative aspects to it, thus, this list is not meant to represent any “truth” as to what “normal” responses look like; rather, we wish to provide a list of a variety of responses.

If the process of reporting goes well, the positive aspects of reporting are: emotional empowerment, a regained sense of integrity—being true to yourself and your own experience, finding consolation and compassion in colleagues and friends, getting a sense of pride while fighting for your own rights, dignity and self-worth, taking stand not only for yourself but for others (so that actions like this will not be repeated or suffered by others), a sense of being courageous, and living up to your own values. But also, there can be emotional damage and the positive feelings can be mixed with confusion, exhaustion, loneliness, and self-doubt.

What to expect?

From your surroundings

Positive responses will include empathy, compassion, and support from colleagues and other experts in your institutions (e.g., in HR). Negative responses are typically discouragement and victim-blaming.

Confusion

The reporting process can entail a messy, tangled web of paperwork. If the process is not well structured, far from providing transparency and an easily accessible overview of the process, the many steps of reporting are likely to be confusing, difficult to grasp, and frustrating. Thus, the institution's response to reporting can oftentimes be confusing. In a best-case scenario, you will receive advice and support by experts that will guide you and explain in detail the different steps and provide qualified knowledge and administrative support. In a worst-case scenario, you will most likely be met with confusing answers to the expected process and what will happen. Instead of providing you with a "yes, this will happen," the institution's answers are often more confusing. A "yes" might be more like a "yes, we'll see." This gives the feeling that something might happen, and this false, illusory "yes" can actually stop the complaint from moving forward (Ahmed, 2020). Other times, the leaders and others you might report to will be the ones to declare that they do not know what to do; their ignorance feels discouraging and poses a further obstacle to your complaint. If this happens to you, recognize this limit and move upward: ask for a confidential meeting with HR or any other expert in your organization, and take it from there. As part of their duties, they would also have to provide advice to your manager on how to deal with the case.

Additionally, you are often asked what you wish for in this process. As for the moment it seems to be the victim who is asked what kind of accountability should be in place. This is a frustrating question because how will you know what kind of reparation is most suitable? This obviously puts you in a difficult position: "What am I asking for? Am I asking for that person to lose their job? What is reasonable?" Therefore, organizations need to think about consequences (in the next section we provide tangible tips for the organization).

Exhaustion

It is normal to experience exhaustion. The process of reporting is often inefficient and can drag on and on. If you report, you are often left waiting. You are waiting for a conclusion, for an outcome. More

importantly, you are waiting for someone else to make a decision. As Ahmed (2020) explains, a common word for describing this time of waiting is “dragging”—a complaint keeps dragging on, taking up more and more time. Ahmed uses the metaphor of a heavy bag to explain this time of waiting: the longer it takes, the heavier the bag becomes’ what you have to carry around, what you can barely carry becomes heavier with time.

Complaints often take much longer than they are supposed to take. Ahmed (2018) calls this “strategic inefficiency.” This term suggests that inefficiency is beneficial to an organization whether or not the inefficiency is intentional (guidelines for organizations to dismantle this type of inefficacy are provided in the management-level section). What you need to know is that inefficiency is discriminatory because it leads to exhaustion: you become too tired to speak up against what makes you tired in the first place.

There is often a gap between what is supposed to happen and what happens. You need persistence because reporting is putting people to work. By reporting you are asking your institution to handle information that would be easier for them just to ignore.

Keep going, but remember to take care of yourself in this process.

Loneliness

Reporting can lead to feelings of loneliness. Many people face isolation or even social exclusion because of reporting. The one who brings up the problem is seen as embodying the problem. As Ahmed famously states, “you become the problem by naming the problem.” This can feel isolating and lonely.

We recommend that you talk to someone close to you or seek out a collective with people who share your experiences (see the next section on support).

You can also ask your organization, your union, or TR for support (guidelines for organizations to provide employees with such support is provided in the management-level section).

Self-doubt

If you are doubting yourself, then “welcome to the club,” we might say. In the process of experiencing sexism as well as reporting, you are likely to come across feelings of self-doubt. Both institutionally and in social relations we are keen to blame the victim, which is why questioning yourself and your experiences is very common.

It can feel like a constant battle with yourself. In her book *What's the Use: On the Uses of Use* (Ahmed, 2019), Ahmed interviews an academic describing how she feels after reporting a case of sexual harassment: “If you make a complaint, then you are the woman who complains (...) And you don’t like to hear yourself talking like that, but you end up being in that situation, again. And you think, ‘It’s me’ and then you think ‘No it’s not: it’s systematic,’ and you think, ‘It’s me.’ That conversation you have with yourself—it’s me, it’s the system. No, it’s me, no it’s the system—takes time.”

If you are doubting yourself, read the vignettes. Listen to the stories once again, because these stories assure you that you are not alone and that you do not have to doubt yourself.

As we have seen with both the number and character of these stories, these sexist experiences are not isolated. Rather, they are systematic and ongoing and reinforce discriminatory and oppressive structures. IT is not just you; it is the system. Importantly, having close colleagues and allies (of all genders) can play an important role in supporting you when you experience self-doubt but also in being “witnesses” to the effects the incident has.

Between courage and discouragement

Reporting cases of sexism takes courage. Be proud of that courage. Like in other difficult life situations, experiencing a case of sexism might demand of you to take a stand and to face moments of profound courage. Telling your story can feel humiliating, having to explain yourself again and again, waiting for an understanding, and fearing misunderstanding or judgment are difficult moments. Reporting might be successful or not. Your values and beliefs matter for your ability to be courageous in such difficult situations. Be aware that each one of your acts against sexism are part of a much larger movement that is fighting a deep historical injustice. There is consolation to be gained in our sense of community and in taking a stand for equity and justice. The many testimonies of the initiative against sexism show us how we do not need to feel alone in our own singular experience and that your individual courage contributes to justice for many.

Sometimes you will feel that you do not know what to do. Ask yourself, what would I recommend my best friend to do if she were in this situation? How and what would I say if this other colleague that I appreciate and admire were in a situation such as mine? Sometimes it is easier for us to determine a course of action or show more compassion when the “victim” is a person we love or care for, whereas we may be harder on ourselves. Or try this other question—what would this person that loves me deeply recommend that I do? To see ourselves through the eyes and care of those that love us can be very helpful in moments of distress.

Expect that you will be met with discouragement. People will most likely discourage you from “rocking the boat,” for example, with warnings about the effects that reporting might have on your career. This only makes it more difficult and discouraging for you to find the courage to speak up or fully go through with the reporting process. Such warnings can be well-intended and represent a sad truth—that the victim is the one hurting the most in these cases. However, we hope this book will pave the way for the needed change. We are speaking out and breaking the silence collectively. You are not alone.

You can even be made to feel like you are the one inflicting damage—on yourself, on the one who is doing this to you, or on your institution. You can be accused of damaging the reputation of others: of the individual being complained about, the department, or even the reputation of the institution as a whole (Ahmed, 2020). This is a powerful combination of victim-blaming (see next section) and accusations of self-sabotage, which is described by Ahmed (2020) as “a complaint framed as self-damage...as closing the door on yourself and your career.”

According to an EU report (2020), the under-reporting of sexism is a global issue. The reasons given for not reporting included:

- Fear that relationships at work would be negatively affected
- Fear that the report would not be believed or taken seriously
- Embarrassment
- Fear of a negative impact on one’s career

We include this overview to again let you know that you are not alone. Discouragement, victim-blaming, and accusations of self-sabotage are common. Under-reporting constitutes a global problem, but let's make the change. Right here, right now.

Victim-blaming

One of the main factors producing self-doubt stems from victim-blaming. Victim-blaming works in explicit and more subtle forms. Victim-blaming isn't just saying, "What happened to you is your own fault"; it is oftentimes much more subtle in its operation and is also coded into social interactions designed so as to make you doubt yourself and your own interpretation of the situation. This is what Ahmed describes as "harassment in an effort to stop you from identifying harassment as harassment" (Ahmed, 2020).

Actions for support

- Create collectives
- Form support groups

Creating collectives—safe little pockets or alternative spaces—are important because one finds solidarity in the similarity of situations. Everyone who has been or are in the same situation as you may be facing similar problems or coming up against the same kinds of walls even though your individual situations vary. You cannot do everything by yourself, which is why it is important to find your "people."

Forming support groups means supporting each other; community helps us to stand by each other in public, not just behind closed doors. Support can also entail giving people information or not pressuring them to report or talk about their problems; it can involve standing by them and not letting them face institutions alone. Or even just listening.

A collective is different from an institution; it should be a safe space, a space for uniting and taking care of each other.

The failure to support those who are reporting is an institutional failure—a failure to support that gets passed around, and passed on. Until we have organizations that are capable of providing safe spaces for its employees, we need to take care of each other.

Actions for self-care

- Build ally-ship with others, such as by joining specific networks and asking colleagues for support.
- Read knowledge-based literature about sexism. This will help you understand what has happened to you and that you are not alone.
- Recognize and allow the feelings that arise during this process, including the negative ones such as sadness, fear, and anger. They are completely normal and part of such a process. Your emotional reactions are *normal* reactions to hurtful events.
- Find time for self-reflection, ask family and colleagues if necessary, so you can get time to reflect on, meditate on, write about, or communicate your thoughts and feelings.
- Do not isolate and blame yourself; make sure there are caring people around you. You do not need to talk about sexism or what happened to you if you do not feel like it; what is needed is to feel connected and engaged with others. This can be people outside work or spaces where you can make new friends.
- Engage in activities that make you happy—make that a priority.
- Your body matters. Traumatic and difficult events disrupt the equilibrium of your body. Include some exercise or moving if possible (walking, swimming, dancing). Get plenty of sleep; sleep helps to regain emotional balance after or during a difficult experience.
- If the negative psychological effect of the sexism is severe (e.g., high levels of anxiety, insomnia, you have difficulties functioning at work or at home), find professional help; there are many different types of therapeutic counseling that can be good and have very good results with treating stress, conflict, or trauma (e.g., meditation and mindfulness, psychological treatment, etc.) as well as healing treatments that target the body (e.g., yoga, bodily focused therapies).

[1] As defined by Amy C. Edmondson, see for instance Edmondson's (2019) *The Fearless Organization. Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*.

[2] UN Security Council, S /RES/1325 (2000), October 31, 2000

[3] <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

[4] <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

[5] <https://hbr.org/2020/11/be-a-better-ally>

[6] Created by KVINFO and Copenhagen Business School: https://kvinfo.dk/genderlab-trivsel-og-bedre-bundlinje/?fbclid=IwAR0KPNwzvSiCpX1hGqW-bveHcW0vyVOv_VEnstVY7rTLHOJHZGlnw89ySQk

[7] Fx Arbejdspladsvurderinger (fysisk/psykisk arbejdsmiljø) og/eller trivselsmålinger

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- Columbia University: <https://sexualrespect.columbia.edu/>
- New Zealand: Project Restore—Restorative justice for sexual violence
- Ireland: Higher Education Authority National Policy and framework: Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive
- EU-project: Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education (ESHTE)
- ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation: Sexual Harassment in the Research and Higher Education Sector: National Policies and Measures in EU Member States and Associated Countries
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CHAPTER IV: REFERENCES & KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

References

Uncovering sexism in the workplace:

According to KVINFO, organizations should initiate:

- Surveys or questionnaires
- Individual interviews
- Focus group interviews
- A walk through of procedures and policies

See more: <https://kvinfo.dk/bekaemp-sexisme-og-seksuel-chikane-paa-arbejdspladser/>

Ask the right questions:

KVINFO's suggestions on how to ask questions regarding sexism in the workplace, a questioning technique based on the latest research and recognized methods to uncover the extent, nature, and consequences of sexual harassment and sexism:

https://kvinfo.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Notat-Bekaempelse-af-seksue-chikane_KVINFO.pdf

<https://kvinfo.dk/bekaemp-sexisme-og-seksuel-chikane-paa-arbejdspladser/>

https://kvinfo.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Notat-Bekaempelse-af-seksue-chikane_KVINFO.pdf

Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ)—Ståle Einersen

<https://nfa.dk/da/Forskning/Projekt?docId=96c10231-6e56-4471-897a-78563ddc6005>

Changing a sexist culture:

GenderLab: CBS's and KVINFO's collaboration "GenderLab"—a workshop working with design thinking:

<https://www.cbs.dk/viden-samfundet/strategiske-indsatsomraader/business-in-society-platforme/diversity-and-difference-platform/forskning-aktiviteter/netvaerk-projekter/learn-engage-create-with-genderlab-a-research-based-tool>

<https://kvinfo.dk/genderlab/>

www.biasinterrupters.org/#tools

www.inclusion-nudges.org/

Other gender equality, diversity, and inclusion resources and inspiration:

<http://www.genderportal.eu/gender-and-science-taxonomy/equality-and-diversity-units>

www.eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits

www.gender-spear.eu

<https://danwise.org/>

<https://everydaysexismproject.dk/>

