SEXISM IN DANISH HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

UNDERSTANDING, EXPLORING, ACTING

DRAFT

This is a preliminary draft, with only some of the chapters finished.

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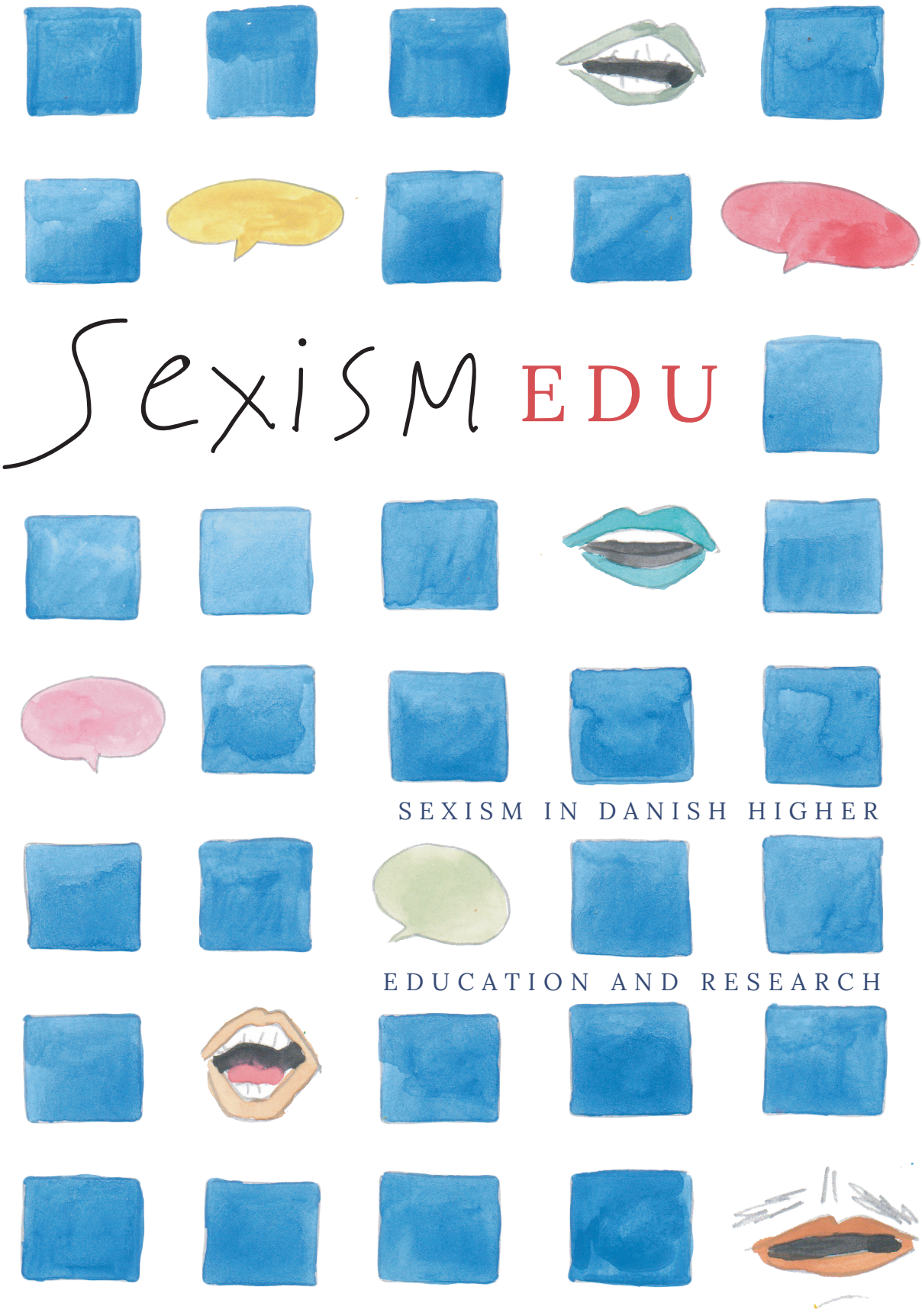
SexismEDU
SEXISM IN DANISH HIGHER
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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Preface

This book is the result of the hundreds of brave employees at Danish Higher Education Institutions – women, men, non-binary – who dared to step forward, either with their names or with their stories of sexual harassment in Danish academia in the fall of 2020. In doing so, they helped us to speak up against and raise awareness and legitimacy to issues of gendered and sexual harassment in Danish universities and research institutes. As the initiator group – sixteen individuals from six different institutions – we are forever grateful for their courage and solidarity with us and each other, and so this book is in honor of them as well as the many others, we know have suffered, but did not dare to step forward.

After our petition and some of the stories were published in Politiken on 9 October 2020, we have been met with respect and interest in taking this matter seriously by many colleagues and by various management levels, and we have also met questions, worries and resistance. 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 both a problem deeply rooted in the structured organizing and culture of Danish academia. No single person, unit or department can fix it alone. We need to all engage in this matter, time and again, collectively and collaboratively, in ongoing respectful efforts, if we are ever to limit and decrease 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 who has taken up this issue as a shared concern, and particularly, we are grateful for the financial support of our work with developing this book and the website SexismEDU.dk that has been granted by Aarhus University, Copenhagen Business School and Syddansk Universitet (alphabetically listed). Without this support, we could not push our work against gendered 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 such issues.

Thank you for engaging in this with us, we hope that we can all use this to move forward in our battle with gendered and sexual harassment in Danish academia.

INTRODUCTION

"Sexism goes so deep that at first it's hard to see; you think it's just reality."

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

This book is in honor of each and every one who shared their personal stories of sexism through the initiative about Sexism in Danish Academia, which we took by launching a petition in early October 2020. And it is in solidarity to all of those who have suffered but did not dare to speak up. It is fulfilling the initiative's promise to give voice to the many that have experienced sexism in Danish academia, so that they may no longer feel alone, unheard, disrespected and silenced. Instead, this book is a revolutionary exposition of the many, the transformation from the 'I have suffered' to 'we have suffered'. The awakening of the *us* is in itself a political action towards change so that we won't forget or hideaway of the suffering which gendered and sexual harassment cost this day today. Our many voices and stories show the multiplicity of sexism, 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.

In 1978 author and activist, Alix Kates Shulman wrote the words that begin this chapter, which nicely sum up a core learning of this book. Schulman reminds us that many people do not notice the existence of sexism because it is deeply integrated into our daily lives, experiences and culture, such as for instance in media, popular culture, politics, family organization, personal relationships, and consequently, also in 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. Thus, sexism remains a cause for concern for all of us.

In the workplace today, extreme, hostile and overt sexist behaviors are rarely tolerated. However, sexist mentality - based on gender stereotypes and social prejudice - remains alive and well and often goes unnoticed. Women, men and non-binary individuals and collectivities reproduce gender stereotypes and with them specific gender expectations that include manifold sexist biases, many of which normalize

the more subtle forms of sexist behavior and can have damaging consequences for the work lives of those affected.

Dealing with sexism, therefore, requires our increased awareness of how it flows and manifests itself. Why? Because sexism hold employees back. Ultimately, sexist behaviors, biases and gendered expectations have been shown to negatively affect employees' performance, sense of belonging, mental health and job satisfaction (Dardenne & Dumont, 2007, Rippon, 2019) and is a waste of human resources. Sexism diminishes the possibilities of flourishing as it hijacks our agency and autonomy, holding back employees, our educational institutions and societies.

Sexism is the social reproduction of a wrongdoing which has long historical roots, an unfair and unethical behavior, and a waste of human potential and resources. Sexism has consequences for you, us and everyone. Sexism, as the stories in this book show, discriminates across and along different gender identifications and by shaping our languages, relationships and collaborations, it affects and diminishes us all. Some speak up and question this, others try to challenge it more subtly, but mostly we all try to just adapt to or avoid the issue of sexism. While sexism touches everyone, the way genders are affected by it depend on the sociocultural and professional context. This book examines sexism in the context of the world of academia and research. As it has been widely documented (e.g. Badruddoja, 2016; Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Finniear et al., 2020; Keashley 2019), in the academic context the overall tendency of sexism results mostly in the exclusion and discrimination of women. When focusing on academia and research, women and other gender minorities are more prone to experience and suffer sexism and need to be prioritized. One can say it in another way, if you do not have to think about your gender in your academic environment or when planning your career, then you probably do not tend to suffer sexism. Not to have to consider your gender, that form of invisibility or being taken for granted, is how privilege manifests itself. Although the initiative against sexism invited everyone to share their experiences, there was an overwhelming majority of academics which identified as women who shared their experiences of sexism. We acknowledge here that women and other minorities are the protagonists of the many stories and initiatives that you will read about in this book. This does not in any way reduces sexism to be a 'women's issue', as it is as much a matter of those that do or witness sexism as does that suffer it. We recognize that sexism will always be shaped by the specificities of the context and that, also in higher education, there will be exceptions to this general tendency of discrimination.

While an increased number of organizations have written diversity policies and described inclusion initiatives, we are far from really having inclusive workplaces. Ultimately, the voices of this book tell us that existing policies and initiatives have not been enough to eradicate problems of sexism. The stories tell us about their works - not on paper, but in practices. These stories reveal stress that it is not good enough, that we have far from made it, that sexism exists here and now, despite all good intentions, strategy and paperwork. Without a deep commitment to organizational change regarding issues of gendered and sexual harassment, with the goal of combatting deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and unconscious biases, these strategic efforts will continue to be undermined.

This book raises awareness and takes action against sexism. It increases the visibility of sexist situations that arise in and may saturate the workplace, especially to those who might not notice it, or are directly affected by it themselves. There are unwritten gendered expectations, rules, practices and beliefs about the role of individuals in our organizations, which are sexist although never stated and never questioned. We must first learn to listen to and see them, if we are to act upon and change them.

Therefore, this book is:

- *Acknowledging* 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 mobilize the human talent in academia, despite gender, race and other minority identity categories.
- *Stating,* that gender equality and equity are not sameness; Gender equality manifests itself as the difference and plurality of being when grounded in equal human rights, dignity and the commitment to equal opportunities. Equality and freedom are deeply interlinked. Positive freedom manifests as our capacities of autonomy and agency to become, 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.
- *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, judgement and retribution appear ineffective or insufficient.
- *Noting* 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 so we are far from done with this.
- *Affirming* 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.
- *Aware* that sexism and sexist behavior are perpetrated at the individual, institutional and societal levels, and experienced with detrimental effect at all three levels.
- *Concerned* that sexism is linked to having a negative impact on employee's psychical 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.
- *Committed* to contribute 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 issues of gendered and sexual harassment in the first part on 'Understanding' with information to help readers understand what sexism is, how it operates and how it is performed. Secondly, this is followed by part two on 'Exploring', which provides an array of vignettes, developed from the witness stories submitted to our petition, which are divided into different categories of sexism. Each story is part of a category and presents questions which invites readers to work with the complexity of sexism. The consecutive part three is about 'Action' and 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. Last, the book offers a collection of knowledge resources and references to learn more about the complexity and action possibilities to deal with sexism.

PART I

UNDERSTANDING

UNDERSTANDING

Uncovering Sexism

Gender discrimination, like any other type of discrimination, seem less and less accepted in Western modern societies. However, even if obvious forms of sexism are often socially condemned, more subtle forms of sexism are not equally denounced. Sexism is expressed in a variety of ways, some more subtle and some more hostile. Some forms of sexism might even appear as a positive or well-meaning appraisal (e.g., positive comments on one's body or appearance). The issue of sexism is complex, which is why we find it important to tackle it in diverse way - diverse in terms of perspectives, methods and in voices.

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 when issues arise people feel at ease to talk about them (Muhr & Plotnikof, 2018; Romani et. al., 2017). As the stories in this book reveal, the reality is sadly different. We have instead ingrained stereotypes and biases which lead to behavior that perceives and treats women, men and non-binary people differently. Discriminatory behavior resulting from such biases is often masqueraded as jokes or compliments. This behavior - so common that we refer to it as 'everyday' sexism – has become an accepted part of navigating workplace dynamics. We need to act on this because speaking out about everyday sexism can have consequences for reputations, relationships and careers. No-one wants to be the person who can't take a joke or risk an accusation of 'political correctness gone mad'.

Our main concern is that formulating an effective response to sexism requires understanding sexism and the precarious nature of its harm. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to heighten awareness of sexism in its many forms and to address the following questions:

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

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). While the term has evolved to encompass a variety of forms of sexism (e.g., subtle versus overt [Swim and Cohen, 1997]; or ambivalent versus benevolent [Glick and Fiske, 1996]), definitions have in common the idea that sexism is "a system of oppression based on gender differences that involves cultural and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 407).

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:[1]

[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
>
> 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.[2]

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

[2]Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender discrimination. Such stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, their educational and professional preferences and experiences, as well as life opportunities in general." (Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, Strategic objective 1)

Interpreting

Firstly, noticing the wording 'purpose or effect' give recognition to the fact that performing sexism can be intentional; an act that is 'on purpose' but it can also be unintentional. In fact, unintentional sexism is very common. The normalization of sexism has made it so integrated in our everyday lives that we often fail to recognize it, and equally we fail to recognize when we are the ones performing sexism.

Furthermore, being mindful that when it is stated 'behavior based upon the idea that a person or group of persons in inferior because of their sex' such an 'idea' does not have to be explicit, thus, we don't have to actually believe that, for example, women are inferior in order for us to be sexist towards women. This 'idea' can also – and most likely will - be implicit and unconscious. We all play a part, albeit unintentionally, to perpetuate the status quo.

Sex and gender

To further make sense of this definition, we need to understand what sex is and how it interlinks and manifests as gender identity and expression. In its narrowest understanding sex refers to the biological identity of any human individual, which is often prescribed at birth by the parents, custodians or medical personnel. This identification relies on one's sexual anatomy (i.e., including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones or genitals), allowing one to be identified by others as *female, male or intersex* (i.e., a sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male and which accounts for 1.7 percent of babies[3]). Later in life we can identify or not with the primary identification that was assigned to us as infants. For example, *cisgender* individuals identify with the sex that they were assigned at birth while *transgender* do not identify with the gender identity or expression which would traditionally fit the biological sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., where identified at birth as biologically/sex male, but do not identify with man/male/masculinity as identity). It is therefore important to consider that sex in its biological sense and gender identity not always coincide.

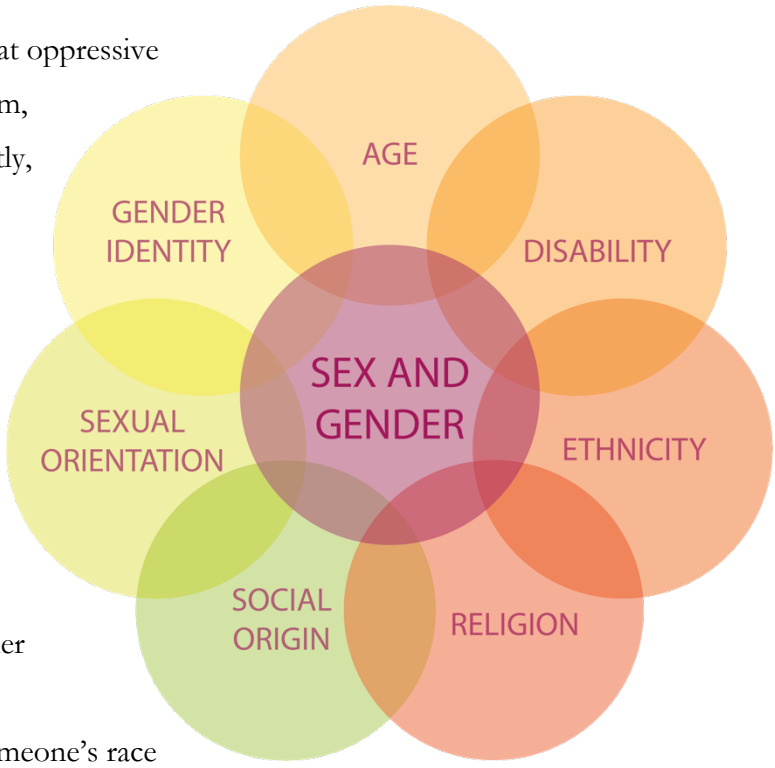
How do we as social beings, identify another person's sex in order to - consciously or not - judge them as equal, superior or inferior? How does identification happen so that sexism can take place?
We (most often) do not go around with a display that shows which are our chromosomes or genitals. Therefore, in social contexts as those of academic institutions, sex manifests itself as gender. It is based on the multiple and complex manifestations of gender that individuals suffer the consequences of sexistic beliefs (e.g., the belief that specific groups and people are inferior if not born with male sex, do

[3] https://www.unfe.org/intersex-awareness/

not show traditional masculinity expressions or are non-man identifying). In and through sexism, sex takes a larger and more expansive meaning than the pure biological characteristics of a body; it reaches out and includes what traditionality is considered gender (i.e., gender expression and identity).

Gender identity corresponds to the personal and intimate feeling of identifying with man/male/masculinity, woman/female/femininity or something else (i.e., individuals who do not feel they belong in either of this binary structure who might e.g., identify as non-binary), due to historical prejudice, repression and even fear of violence and persecution this identification (as it is also the case with sexuality) is not always declared or made public. *Gender expression* refers to how we present ourselves or see others and include aspects such as the appearance, style, body language, tone of voice, physical traits that a specific culture identifies with a gender (e.g., names associated to a specific sex, the use of high heel shoes or make-up as a sign of woman/female gender expression). is also why sexism includes when an applicant is discriminated based on a name that identifies her as female, or when an academic dressed according to masculine aesthetics is expected to be more competent in specific disciplines (e.g., math).

Intersectionality is a theory based on the concept that oppressive institutions within a society, such as racism, ageism, sexism, and homophobia, do not act independently, but are instead interrelated and continuously shaped by one another.



The intersectionality of for example gender inequality and racial discrimination can be interpreted as the relation between these two institutions and how they are influenced by one another. That is to say that discrimination experienced because of gender, for example gender discrimination against women, can be directly related, encouraged, and shaped by someone's race or ethnicity as well (Crenshaw, 1992: 1468). Similarly, there is a relevant interrelation between sexism and discrimination based on sexuality. This is due to the mistaken normative belief that specific forms of sexuality correspond to specific sex and gender identities and expressions (e.g., masculinity

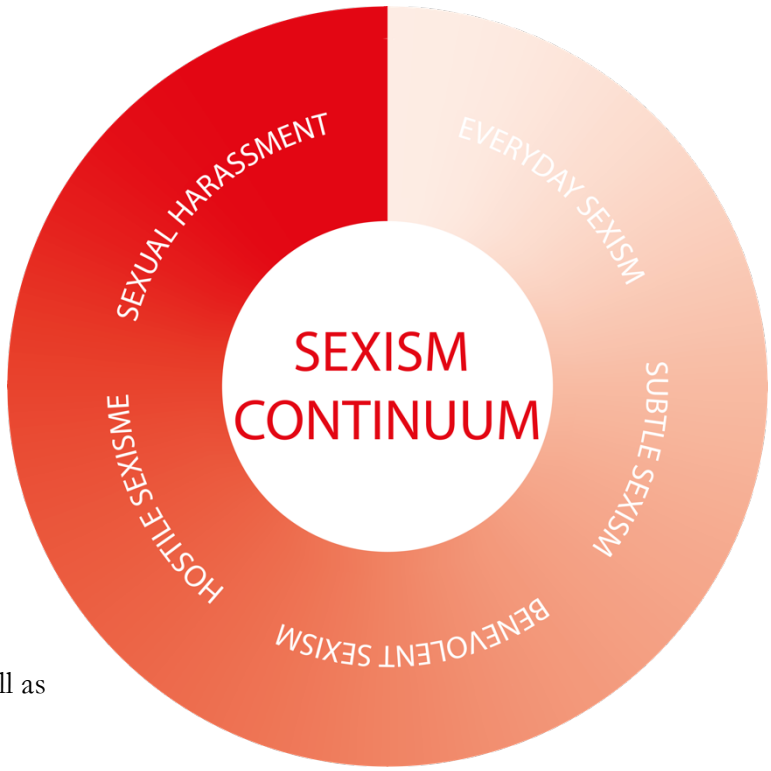
corresponds to heterosexual attraction towards women as norm). It will not be impossible here to cover the full spectrum of identity categories (e.g., religion, class, etc.), however we need to appreciate that the social category of gender is related in complex ways to other social categories such as for example race and heterosexuality as it is relevant to an intersectional understanding of sexism and key to recognize how the experience of sexism including those shared in this book can reflect different identity biases concurrently.

How is sexism performed?

This book is intended to contribute to further understanding and dealing with how sexism remains *active and hidden* in organizational life. Sexism is a complex social phenomenon that creates and shapes social reality. Given the complexity of sexism, we introduce the illustration below to demonstrate how sexism operates in multifaceted ways and as part of a continuum. Subtle sexist behavior is at one end of the continuum and hostile sexism is located at the other end. Hostile sexism is explicit discrimination whereas subtle sexism operates in more invisible ways. This form of sexism might make you go "Is it just me? Am I crazy?" (You are not).

Sexism – a continuum

Sexism is a spectrum. It can be severe, as seen with sexual harassment, but it also exists in more subtle forms that most people don't even notice. Overcoming sexism requires an understanding of the wide variety of the ways in which sexism can appear. Sexism can take the forms of implicit and explicit acts, attitudes, cultures as well as institutional structures. Sexism can be both blatant and subtle, hostile and benevolent (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Furthermore, sexism can be clear as well as open to a range of interpretations.



Everyday sexism is often 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.

Subtle sexism might not seem worthy of notice to many because it is often unconsciously delivered in subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures and tones. Consequently, these exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous (Sue et. al., 2007, p. 273).

Benevolent sexism is often referred to as the subjectively perceived 'positive' and seemingly 'civil' form of sexism as it reflects beliefs that women should be 'protected' or 'admired' for example for their good looks (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism is (often paternalistic, but not necessarily) communicating a more positive attitude toward for instance women that appears favorable but is actually sexist because it portrays women as warm but incompetent or weak individuals in need of men's protection and support. Benevolent sexism can be viewed as a form of 'chivalrous' attitude for instance toward women. However, this is nevertheless sexist because it praises women on characteristics usually associated with subordinates and suggests their dependence on men. Despite the positive feelings benevolent sexism may indicate for the perceiver, its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance (e.g., the man as the provider and woman as his dependent).

Hostile sexism is the obvious attitude toward women who are perceived as less in relation to men, thus, this form of sexism explicitly communicates men's negative view of women.

Sexual harassment is a form of victimization rooted in sexism and is considered an illegal form of sex discrimination. Legally, sexual harassment is divided into two categories, *hostile environment* and *quid pro quo*. A *hostile environment* is created when unwanted gender-based comments and behaviors (gender harassment) or unwanted sexual attention (repeated requests for dates and unwanted sexual touch) create a workplace environment that an employee perceives as hostile or interferes with his/her job performance. *Quid pro quo* refers to any attempt to coerce sexual compliance via job-related threats or promises of benefits e.g., promising a promotion or threatening termination (Buchanan, Settles, Hall & O'Connor, 2014).

In sum, sexism comes in various forms and is part of a continuum. A continuum model informs by demonstrating how one form of sexism cannot readily be distinguished from another, rather, each element in the continuum shades into the other elements. As researchers demonstrate, sexual harassment is actually rooted in sexism (Buchanan, Settles, Hall & O'Connor, 2014). Thus, the different forms of sexism at one end of the continuum make way for more hostile forms of sexism. 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. To neglect the more subtle forms or benevolent sexism (i.e., 'seemingly positive' forms) will not successfully eradicate sexism in the workplace.

The drip drip effect

The *drip drip* effect of sexism 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). These acts are insidious; they may seem easy to brush off, and yet their impact can be harmful in the long run. These acts are not prosecutable in court, and they are typically not in violation with company-policy, and yet they impact huge swaths of our working world.

It is apparent that sexist humor, which is really the denigration of women 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. This type of subtle sexism leaves some observers feeling uncomfortable but not entirely sure about what and consequently what to do about it. Various studies reveal that sexist jokes and gender stereotype are some of the main factors in holding women back from thriving at work and that sexist humor helps to maintain a sexist social order. (Kochersberger, & Holden, 2013; Bemiller & Schneider, 2010; Crawford, 2000).

While hostile explicit sexism is inarguably bad and inexcusable, that does not mean subtle sexism isn't damaging – it can be even more dangerous because it is harder to detect and document, and even harder to call out. Thus, it becomes harder to pinpoint and handle. The hard-to-detect comments can have an insidious effect, which over time is profound enough for women to start conforming to these stereotypes. Fundamentally, it is important to be aware that subtle comments, remarks and jokes considered to be innocuous are damaging and help maintain the *drip drip* effect of sexism.

Research demonstrate that experiencing subtle sexism and hostile sexism actually differs in their consequences for performance. When we experience hostile sexism, it generates much less intrusive thought, because hostility is explicitly manifested and external. Because hostile sexism is easily identified as sexism, related statements are more easily blamed on the person expressing them and fewer mental intrusions are experienced (Dardenne et. al., 2007). Whereas 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. Experiencing hostile sexism is likely to make you angry, which can serve as a motivation and can therefore 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 you to develop an 'I'll show them'-attitude. However, anger while a meaningful emotional reaction, it is not the same as having positive freedom, agency or power. In those cases where there is a major power asymmetry between those that experience hostile sexism and those that commit it, victims are both angry and powerless.

To conclude, sexism - in all of its various forms – is harmful, especially because of the *drip drip* effect of sexism. 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). In general, sexism affects employee's physical and mental health (Waldo, 1999), employees' productivity, as well as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Waldo, 1999) increase stress-level (Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996) and negatively affect career as well as organizational culture (Bond et al., 2004; Gutek, 2001).

3 levels of experiencing and perpetuating sexism

Sexism and sexist behavior occur across the full range of human activity. The three levels of experiencing and perpetuating sexism are:

Structural

Institutional/cultural

Individual

Sexism can be experienced individually or collectively by a person or a group of persons. Sexism can be institutional, which refers to gender discrimination reflected in the policies and practices of organizations and work as a cultural phenomenon i.e., a 'social reality' shaping our institutions. Moreover, sexism can be structural, which refers to the societal systems of domination and privilege, for example through societal gender inequalities, social norms and behavior. This book takes every level into account as they influence on each other.

Consider this example for how the three levels interconnect: Society's expectations (structural level) of a woman may still be that she is expected to want to have kids. This woman might be passed over for a promotion (institutional level) because the hiring committee are keeping her pregnancy in mind – even if this is not an apparent factor. This rejection might influence that woman's confidence (individual level), but will she say something? On the individual level sexism is *also* silencing. For example, when individuals and groups fail to report or complain about sexist behavior for fear of not being taken seriously, of being disliked or even held responsible. This is how structural injustice becomes embodied harm.

Why do we perform sexism?

According to researchers, the force that inspires sexism is often social expectations for gender-ideals which stems from bias. Gender stereotypes and unconscious biases shape the norms, behavior and expectations of us all. Gender stereotypes are social constructions of the 'appropriate' roles or behavior for a given gender, which are determined by cultural prejudices, customs, and traditions. We all grow up with this idea, and, without even noticing it, we become biased. Sexism is then often motivated by a desire to punish individuals who do not conform to prescriptive gender-stereotypes or to beliefs about how they should behave (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Fiske & Stevens, 1993).

Stereotyping is actually our brain's short-cuts. 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 stereotypes. Hence, we all carry around unconscious biases. While unconscious biases serve a purpose – they help 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 engaging in discriminatory and sexist behavior. Women, for instance, have been shown to be biased against other women. The so-called 'queen bee syndrome' describes a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are female (Staines, Tavris & Jayaratne, 1974).

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

Women are more emotional.

Men are more assertive.

Women are natural nurturers.

Men are better at taking risks.

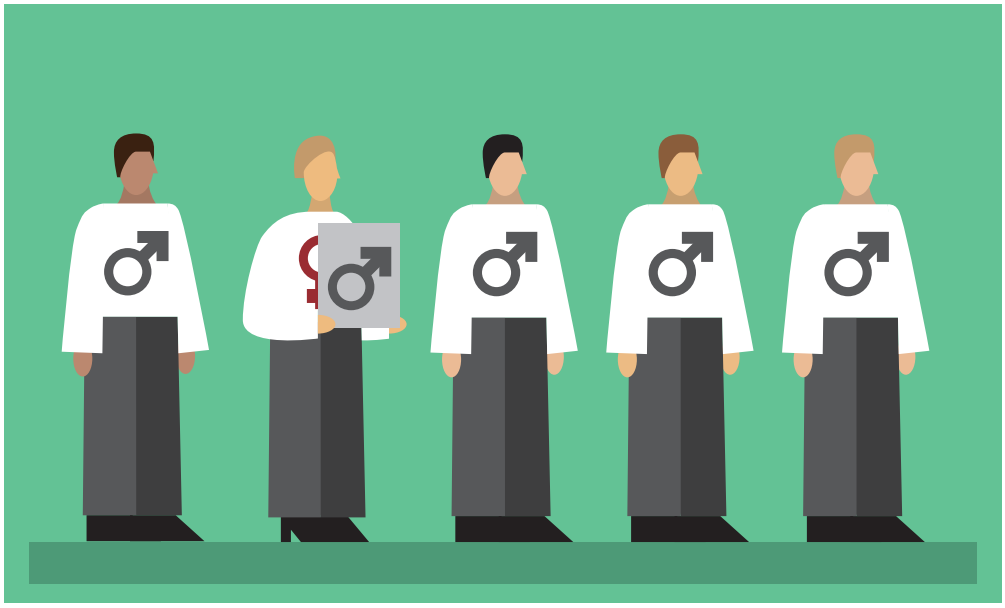
Women with children are less devoted to their jobs.

Men who are emotional are 'unmanly' and likely gay.

Even if you don't believe these generalized gendered statements or perhaps want to reject them, these biases plague us all and affect behavior without us consciously knowing it (Muhr, 2019). 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 that is that gender is the dominant basis for categorization, across virtually all social contexts.

Just to give an example, when you walk into a room of people you don't know, the first thing that you categorize people on 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.

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

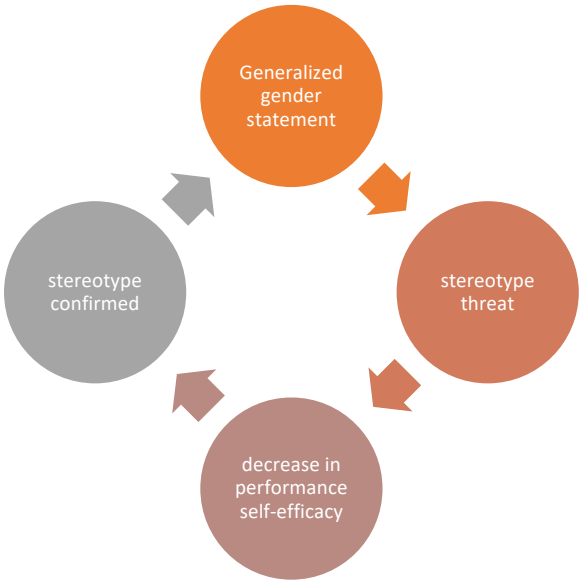


This is supported by the theoretical models of discrimination such as "lack of fit" (Heilman, 1993, 2012) and "think manager, think male" (Schein, 1973, 2001), which are among the most well-examined and empirically supported theories of gender bias in the psychology literature. These theoretical explanations 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 you walk into a meeting assessing a woman, your unconscious bias will immediately associate 'feminine' characteristics to her, for example, as being more communal and less aggressive. If that woman is more aggressive than you expected (or we might say what your unconscious bias expects) you will most likely react differently to her. There is a big chance that you are reacting to her in a way that is different than you 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.

Stereotype threat

A damaging consequence of unconscious bias 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, 1999). 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 how when participants are reminded of belonging to an identity category that is linked to a negative stereotype the stereotype threat gets activated. For example, causing women to underperform in for example math and leadership aspirations (stereotypically masculine skills), and men to underperform in tests designed to measure 'social sensitivity' (stereotypically feminine skill). Stereotype threat is highly likely to occur in workplace settings and it is important to be aware of because of its harm (Koenig & Eagly, 2005).

Warm but incompetent

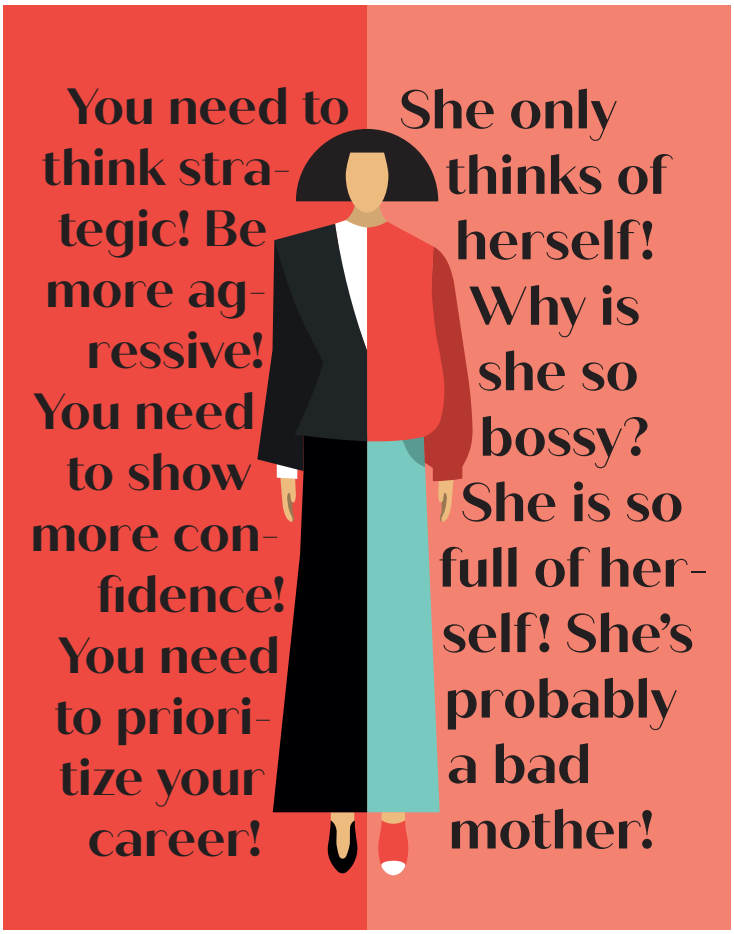
Despite women's willingness to negotiate gender boundaries, women have often found that their leadership choices and actions were restricted by others' expectations based upon stereotypes (Christman & McClellan 2012). According to the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, Xu, 2002), women are 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 etc.) 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 masculine values/traits. If a woman performs 'masculinely' for example by behaving assertively, dominant etc. it goes against how what our unconscious biases tells us that a woman should behave. The response to a woman performing 'masculinity' is oftentimes negative because a woman acts in contradiction to gendered norms and our unconscious biases, which inform us what is 'acceptable' behavior and what is not. In fact, numerous studies have found that women who display leadership qualities are not liked (Heilman, 1993; Eagly and Karau 2002).

Tight rope bias

Women face the challenge of achieving an appropriate balance of femininity and masculinity. This is often referred to as the *tight rope bias*, which refers to a difficult balancing: "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 and Dempsey, 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 and 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).

Take the generalized gendered statement "Women are natural nurtures". 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, on the other hand, if she is too assertive and forthright, she is deemed to be unlikeable and too bossy to be a good leader (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).



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. In What Works for Women at Work, Williams & Dempsey (2014) acknowledge that most of the advice that women are given about professional success is 'wrong' because it is based on the assumption that women are too feminine and should 'man up' without considering the social cost of doing so (Williams & Dempsey, 2014, p. 9).

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).

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 use different language to describe men and women, but, on closer inspection, many of these words have negative (or actually offensive) connotations. 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. Research demonstrates that gendered words and expressions like these subtly undermine primarily women but also men in career/leadership contexts. A recent study examining 25 languages to explore gender stereotypes in language found that Denmark is number one in gender stereotypical language. The Danish language consists of many gendered expressions. Consider these few examples of certain job-descriptions:

- Formand
- Karrierekvinde
- Politimand
- Barnepige
- Flyttemand
- Rengøringsdame

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. Language is a reflection of the world we live in, but language also reflects back upon the world and we experience the world through our language. 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. "Gendered language is understood as language that has a bias towards a particular gender [and] reflects and maintains pre-existing social distinctions," explains Roxana Lupu, an expert in applied linguistics. It shows us two things – not only does it signal the presence of sexism in the society, but it also reinforces those beliefs and perceptions. Put simply: gendered language is that which promotes bias towards 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 the inequalities and biases.

To provide one other example. A study using computer science[4] analyzed 3.5 million books and found that men are described by words that refer to behavior, while adjectives ascribed to women tend to be associated with psychical appearance. The adjective 'beautiful' is one of the most frequently used to describe women whereas 'rational' is a common descriptor for men.[5]

If, sitting on an assessment committee, you heard one candidate described as 'rational' and another candidate described as 'beautiful', which of the two would you promote?

Which factors enable sexism to occur?

In this section we outline particular factors that enable sexism to flow in our organizations. This 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 (a) organizational climate (specifically, we outline in which climates sexism is most likely to occur), (b) chilly climate, (c) institutionalized sexist banter, and (d) systemic sexism.

The phrase 'cultural sexism' (Savigny, 2014) combines the notion that sexism is an everyday, *ordinary*, occurrence, combined with the cultural context which gives rise to it, and its cumulative *drip drip* effects. How does an organizational culture become prone to enable sexism to flow? 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

Several organizational-level factors predict the likelihood that sexism or sexual harassment will occur. For example, the *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).

[4] Using artificial intelligence and computer science allows us to analyze language in a massive scale, which we have never been able to do before meaning that evidence is now indisputable and quantifiable rather than just anecdotal.
[5] https://www.science.ku.dk/english/press/news/2019/women-are-beautiful-men-rational/

Sexism is more likely to occur in workplaces which create a *permissive climate* (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, and O'Connor, 2014). If individuals perceive that the organizational climate tolerate sexism, for example, 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, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996). Additionally, sexism is more likely to occur in cases where the organizational *climate is promotes gender conformity* because 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). For example, Levine (2009) demonstrated how women in a male-dominated field did not expect men to change their sexually explicated behavior. One interviewee formulated it, "I came into their world. I have to respect that"' (Levine, 2009, p. 272). The organizational climate in this sense refers to 'how things are', which is a powerful force.

Chilly climate

The term chilly climate is often used as an explanation for the persistent gender inequality in organizations. The term refers to a climate marked by differential treatment in the everyday atmospheres and environments of our work lives; for example, in meetings, on hallways, as well as in the corridor talk and lunch hours, where we socialize with co-workers 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 to 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 frequent in meetings
- Ignoring women and non-binary people in debates and similar 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")

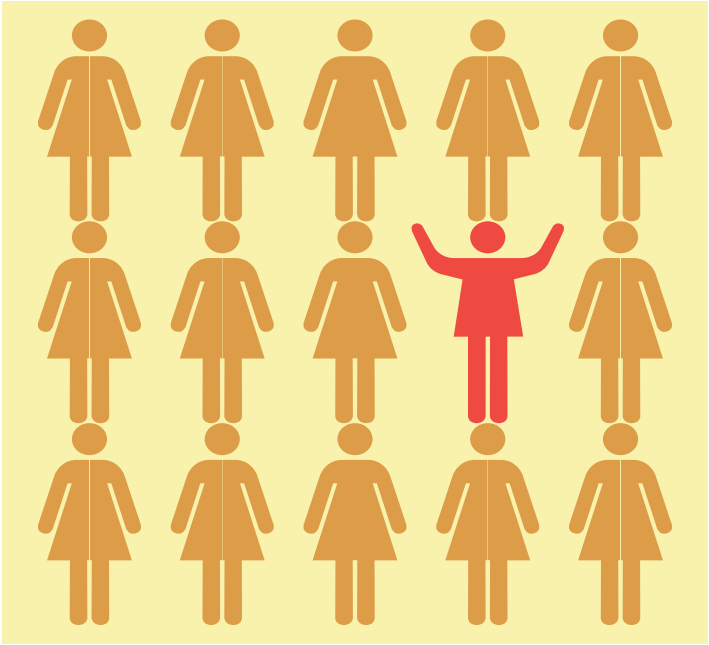
- Crediting men's comments to their owner or 'author' (e.g., "As Bill said...") but not giving authorship or ownership to women.
- Giving women and non-binary people less feedback; less criticism, less help and less praise.
- Engaging in more informal conversation with men
- Inviting and including more men than women and non-binary people in prompt socials get-together 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.

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, 2016). Sexist banter, for example, is often institutionalized.

We might participate in that banter because it is costly not to participate because 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 other 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.

Systemic sexism



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

Gender bias, if left unchecked, perpetuate 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

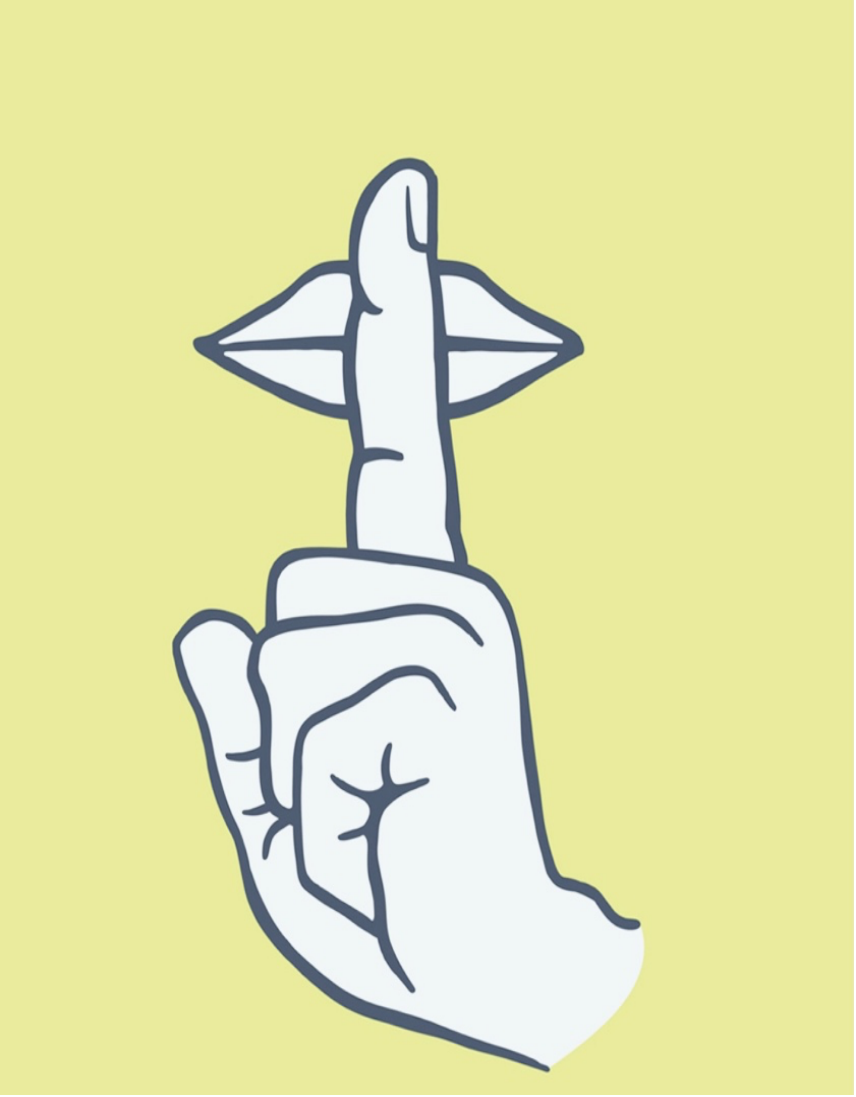
Leadership positions have not appealed to women

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 beliefs 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 which 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 gender does matter (Husu & Koskinen 2010; Rees 2011; Śliwa & Johansson 2014).

What makes it difficult to speak up?



Although we believe we would confront sexism when we are imagine a sexist encounter, in reality most of us remain silent (Swim & Hyers, 1999; Swim, Eyssell, Quinlivan Murdoch, & Ferguson, 2010).

Several models and explanations have been offered to explain why individuals do not confront sexism. Research indicate that speaking out is difficult for many and even bystanders rarely confront discrimination of any kind (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez, 2012).

Speaking up is costly

Major barriers to confronting include social costs to the confronter (Kaiser & Miller, 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, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003). Furthermore, confrontation has the cost of potentially appearing like an 'overreaction', which can confirm the negative stereotype of women as 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 these forms of speech and behavior are not acceptable or permissible. We are asking individuals and our institutions to change. However, as Sara Ahmed argue, "You can become the problem by naming the problem", meaning we can become a problem for those who do not want to register that there is a problem (Ahmed, 2015). 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 show 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.

Speaking up within a dominant discourse

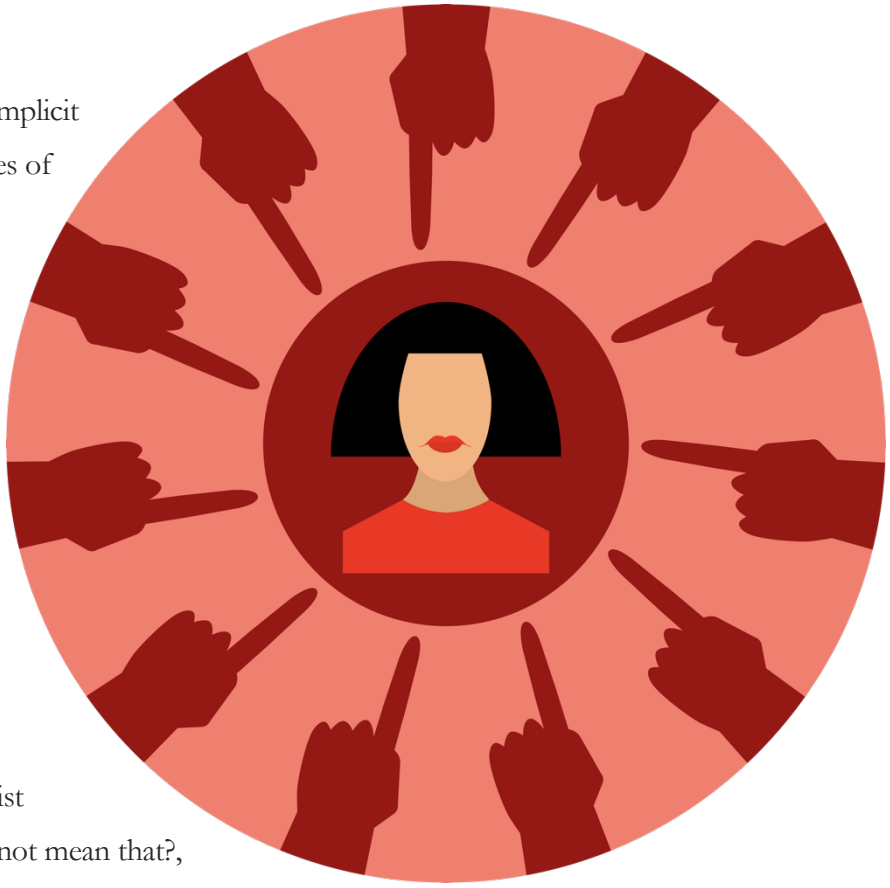
Practices and activities that can be discursively represented as sexism are subject to multiple interpretations, however, within organizations there tend to be dominant discursive practices. Such practices encourage individuals to make sense of their experiences in particular ways, often in those that act to reproduce existing patriarchal relations of power (Bingham, 1994; Clair, 1998; Dougherty, 2006; Wood, 1994). Thus, people may account for their experiences without labelling them or orienting to them as instances of sexism due to the constraining influence of implicit bias and because sexism is deeply integrated into our daily lives.

When people refuse to label certain instances as sexist they are being duped by 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 the 'dominant' in relation to sexism and how employees interact and orient to this.

Speaking up holds the victim responsible

Making an account of sexism as either an objective fact or a subjective perception is rendered dilemmatic because social facts, like sexism, are inherently dualistic – they can be understood *simultaneously* as both objective and subjective. In many organizations, this dilemmatic or dualistic aspect of sexism is often glossed by tactility privileging the subjective interpretation in workplace policy on sexism. This is illustrated in the fact that it is individual victims who are positioned as responsible for reporting and acting on behavior that they perceive as offensive (Clair, 1993). Undoubtedly, one of the reasons why many individuals shy away from making use of these policies inheres in the dualistic nature of sexism (or harassment) i.e., 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).

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, for example by indicating guilt, lack of humor, misread intentions.

Ultimately, the victim is not believed. The victim is met with justifications of the sexist behavior, e.g., "I am sure that person did not mean that?, incredulity or mistrust, e.g., "Really, are you sure this is exactly what happened?, identifying and defending the offender, e.g. "Well, yes, I can see why he would be interested in you, as you are very beautiful." These are all sophisticated forms of silencing as the message the person that finally got the courage to express a sexistic experience is getting is: you don't have a sound judgement of reality and you are the cause of the wrongdoing you experience.

Speaking up produces victimization

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.

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".

The influential works by feminist linguist Julia Penelope give an example of how victimization works. In her book "Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues" she explains how grammatical shifts create a passive voice that blames the victim, and simply pushes the perpetrator out of the equation by dispensing with the active voice altogether. Her example for this was the line: *"John Beat Mary"*.

This is an exercise that illustrates on the sentence-structure level how the way we think and literally how we use language conspires to keep our attention off of perpetuators and instead focus on the victim. This is specifically about domestic and sexual violence, but you can plug in other analogues such as for example sexism.

It starts with a very basic sentence:

"John beat Mary"

In grammatical terms, John is the subject, and Mary, the object, while beat is the verb. Now we are going to move to the second sentence which says the same thing but in a passive voice turning around the subject and object, then becoming:

"Mary was beaten by John".

Now a whole lot has happened in one sentence. We've shifted our focus in one sentence from John to Mary. Now John is very close to the end of the sentence, thus, close to dropping off the map of our 'mental plain'. Then, the third shift comes in, where John is given the slip, and the sentence becomes:

"Mary was beaten"

John is not even part of the conversation any longer, and now it is all about Mary. And the final sentence in this sequence flowing from the others is:

"Mary is a beaten woman"

With this, John is absolutely nowhere in the picture and now Mary's very identity is tied to the violence she has faced. Mary *is* a beaten woman for what was done to her by John in the first instance. However, John has long gone left the conversation and there is nothing to be said about who put her in this situation.

What Julia Penelope intended to demonstrate with this grammatical shift is the very nature of victimization as well as the victim-blaming that comes along with it. Victim-blaming is pervasive in this realm, which is to say, blaming the person to whom something was done instead of the person who did it. This again links back to the outlined problematic of becoming the problem by naming the problem.

There are a number of reasons why victim-blaming persist, but one explanation is that our cognitive structure is set up to blame victims. This also happens on an *unconscious* level. Most of us do not wish to blame victims. However, our whole cognitive structure is set up to ask questions about victim's choices; what they're doing, thinking, wearing etc. It is a legitimate thing to ask questions but in the case of sexism, focusing questions only on the victim is keeping the cycle alive by not addressing the real issue of sexism. And also, those aspects of actions (what were they doing, wearing, …) do not lead to people being harassed – they are *not* the causes but become wrongly assumed so. Victim blaming, shaming, naming does not solve the problem of sexism.

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 of 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, 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 hurry that process of change.

Reflections

Did this chapter provide you with a new understanding of sexism?

How would you describe sexism now?

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

Do you understand why it is important not to neglect the more subtle forms of sexism?

Are you aware when jokes and behavior are sexist in tone and content?

Do you understand why it can be difficult for people to speak up?

PART II

EXPLORING

EXPLORING

Introduction

This chapter presents a tool and a method to encourage dialogue, reflexivity and action on the issue of sexism. The main aim of this chapter is to create safe spaces where management and employees can reflect.

26 vignettes are presented. 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.

These depersonalized fictional characters can be helpful for participants to reflect freely upon their own experiences, arriving at their own understanding and allow readers to take up rhetorical positions when examining this sensitive issue (Hughes & Huby, 2004). 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:

1. A narrative
2. Questions for the reader to reflect upon, engage with and discuss with others

Each vignette presents several questions. The questions combine *affect with action-mode.* In the first part of questions 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 mentalize and elicit feelings of understanding, empathy, compassion etc. In the section part of questions readers are encouraged to imagine possible fields of actions in regard to managerial responsibility and support.

Providing a safe space is essential. It often only takes one person in a group to be judgmental or defensive in order for a halo-effect to kick in and influence what other people might dare to say. For this reason, we encourage conversations that aims at reflection, understanding and respectful listening.

Making the vignettes: Coding and thematization

The construction of the vignettes is based on a thorough process of coding and thematization of all the stories collected in the autumn of 2020. All the stories used in this book were send to the email address sexismatdanishuniversities@gmail.com as a response to the call for signatures and testimonies the initiator group had sent out in the beginning of October 2020. In 4 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 its entirety by a team of three coders. Based on this reading the below xx codes were identified:

1. **Everyday Sexism**
   - 1.1. Sexualized comments
   - 1.2. Sexual offers
   - 1.3. Subtle sexism
   - 1.4. Comments about the body/looks
   - 1.5. Sexualized comments about the body/looks
   - 1.6. Sexualized comments about private life/partner status
   - 1.7. The party as specific context
   - 1.8. Nicknames
   - 1.9. Degrading of intellect

2. **Reporting**
   - 2.1. Experience with reporting
   - 2.2. Lack of reporting

3. **Shadow organization**
   - 3.1. Warnings
   - 3.2. Individual strategies of protection
   - 3.3. Protecting fellow colleagues

4. **Exclusion within the academy**
   - 4.1. Social exclusion
   - 4.2. Career exclusion
   - 4.3. Threats

5. **Caretakers at work**
   - 5.1. Comments about pregnancy/parental leave
   - 5.2. Stereotyping 'women as natural nurtures'
   - 5.3. Degrading motherhood

6. **Physical assault**

7. **Public humiliation**
   7.1. Collective humiliation
   7.2. Collective silence
   7.3. Formal settings: appraisal interview/salary negotiation

8. **Institutionalized sexism**
   8.1. Ridiculing gendered research fields

9. **Sexism against men**

10. **Fear: physical difference and intimidation**

11. **Intersectionality**
   11.1. Homophobic comments
   11.2. Racialized comments

Two of the coders now 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. 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.

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 to 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?
- 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 crossed a line in their professional relationship by suggesting that they could 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 grey 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 looks of his face he smiles as though he tried 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 make-up on, your hair looks nicer straight" etc.) How did it make you feel?
- Why do you think Belinda's colleague advices her to take it 'as a compliment'? Have you ever been asked to take something as a compliment?
- 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 by her good looks. The project-leader uses phrases such as "strong analytical skills", and "rational argumentation" used 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 receiving such compliments? Why/why not?
- Have you experienced or witnessed such comments before?
- Which fields of actions are available for the actors involved here - 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?
- 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 is 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 begins to feel self-conscious? Would you? Why/why not?
- How can we nurture a casual collegial environment and humorist culture, while still rejecting gender-based and condescending jokes?
- What are the actor's fields of action when comments and jokes cross the thin line how can we address such lines without being called out as '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 turned 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 the Head smiled nervously and apologetically to her. Swung off from her body as experiencing a sense of unreality – *this can't be happening* – she thought to herself. 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?
- What are Sophie's field 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 HoD 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?

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 say, "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 helps preventing unwished incidences?
- How can collegial environments prevent such tensions without putting the responsibility on potential victims?
- How can management address such issues in respectful ways towards 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 student's attention. A male colleague looks at her and says, "Why don't you take your clothes off? That will get their attention". She feels stumbled and expresses "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 said 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 on recall of 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 were 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 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 Head of Department 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 she wants to network, so she joins a group of male colleagues who is sitting at a table. She tries to ask what they are talking about. One of the colleague 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 she many times have 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 Head of Department?
- Have you experienced being called a 'kill-joy' (or labels like this) Have you experienced others be called this?
- 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

Head of Department 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 Head of Department 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 assessments 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 not competitive against her counterparts.

- 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 supervisor as he is experiencing unwanted sexual attention from her and he does not feel safe getting supervision anymore. He contacts the Head of Department and asks whether this can be arranged. The Head of Department says she will do what she can in order for Martin to change supervisor and he feels at ease. However, Martin does not know that the Head of Department in the meantime contacts 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 telling 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 HoD 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, which the team has have 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 assumption, what is the reasons behind this assumption and how do you feel about this? Which implications do you see such assumptions having?
- What would have happened if the project-leader asked Susanne before assuming things?
- Have you experienced others 'save you the trouble'?
- Which 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 nurtures'

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 spending long hours in the office all week, a colleague says, "But Marianne, shouldn't you be home with your child?" and another one 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 e.g., family responsibilities that often have a gender stereotypical aspect?
- What can management do to challenge gender stereotypes when addressing 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 Head of Department 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 her Head of 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 have children at least consider working while you are on maternity leave. Work on your research because otherwise you have a huge gap and then you cannot compete with the men". Trine is feeling a bit anxious about revealing her pregnancy but also what will happen to her career now?

Trine does not get the associate professorship. The Head of Department 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 Head of Department 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? Which 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 brain-washed 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?
- Which responsibility does management have in this regard?

Category 6: Psychical 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 get 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 decided to talk to the Head of Department about it. However, the Head of Department just said, “Don’t spread rumors like that”. Rita was completely shocked by that remark. She felt numb. The Head of Department, however, agrees to arrange for them not to have anything to do with each other, but for Rita that was 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 Head of Department 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 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 was 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 afterwards 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, which they think have gendered or sexist issues involved?
- How can management support the development of appropriate feedback cultures, also between supervisors and in so doing prevent sexist behavior?

Category 8: Institutionalized sexism

Sub-category: Certain research fields/disciplines does not constitute 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 has met up with her fellow feminists (both friends and colleagues) to discuss women in STEM. However, every time she leaves these "feminist communities" and enter the broader academic communities she quickly has to adjust to another way of discussing her research, rather she 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 than another? 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 towards 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 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. Laura found it embarrassing that he didn't like the attention. Charles told his colleagues about the incidence. They all laughed. Charles went to the Head of Department who also laughed and said: "It is funny to see the University's biggest man be afraid of such a little girl". Charles in a sense agreed. 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' colleagues all laugh at him?
- 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' 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 which 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 towards this. He objects during the meeting and he is getting angrier. Mary therefore decides to call a break and talk with him outside on 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 in the meeting 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 can we avoid making such issues an individualized matter of gender?
- What can bystanders do in such a situation?
- How can colleagues support an environment where we can share our successes and rejections (we all get them), and vulnerabilities as well as power, without gender stereotypical comments?

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".

- 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?
- Which 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 consummation of alcohol has really studdled Martin 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. At this point, the fact that he identifies as a gay man was 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 thought, oh well, this is probably only one of those "He is a gay man, and I can be a little more extrovert around him" kind of attitude. Thus, he went along to the extent that he felt 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 pushed her hands and arms away and said "No, thank you" and he decided to leave the dancefloor. The experience made him feel rather awkward and uncomfortable and after a short while he left the Christmas party entirely.

- What does these comments tell us about how we view sexuality?
- Why do you think comments like "we can correct you" or "turn you straight" are common?
- What do you think is 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.

- Have you ever heard someone questioning someone's career progression? Perhaps insinuating that that person didn't really earn his/her promotion?
- 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's 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 that 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 could continue 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?"

- Have you experienced remarks 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? Is that comment OK if a woman was not 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?

Reflections

The vignettes demonstrate that sexism in the workplace includes, among others, comments, objectification, sexist humor or jokes, silencing or ignoring people, gratuitous comments about dress and physical appearance, sexist body language, lack of respect and masculine practices which intimidate or exclude women as well as other people who do not comply with standards of masculinity. The vignettes also reveal that rather than one big event as evidence of the destructiveness of sexism, multiple smaller events can pile up on each other over time.