
Gender Equality and Sexual Harassment Issue

The age of information has exposed most, if not all secrets to the world that would've otherwise been swept under the rug not more than 10 years ago. Very recently, a larger conversation about harassment has taken over media; exposing some very powerful men across a range of industries, the President of the United States among them, as well as touching upon the topics of bias and lack of diversity in the workplace.

The sad truth is, most workplaces still operate with a predominantly male workforce; although womankind has made a significant leap from the time when they were not considered 'fit' for certain jobs or the job itself was termed a "man's" job, today things are a little more balanced to everyone's relief. However, since men still represent a larger percentage at most firms, the only apparent way to create a culture of openness and fairness seems to be for those men to listen to what women have to say; a bit of empathy goes a long, long way. Needless to say, that's easier said than done. In the famous words of Kendrick Lamar "Love's going to get you killed, but pride's going to be the death of you and me"

From the viewpoint of males, the problem lies in the understanding of the term bias; being aware of how one perceives female employees and how that differs from their perception of male employees is what is essentially required. When questioned about bias, immediately claiming that you see both men and women as equal may not be true for any of us; whether you're a man or a woman, avoiding bias is virtually impossible due to the fact that cultural subtleties ingrain gender bias in us.

A woman will tell you that the solution to harassment is quite simple; stop it. One cannot be accused of harassing women if one is truly not engaged in the act. When there is a difference in the workspace's power dynamic, there is absolutely no room for flirtation. Many a times, the male in the situation may complain for being accused of sexual harassment, claiming that being flirtatious was taken as harassment. Well, hard as it may be to comprehend for the man in question, what's flirting for you may be harassment for her.

I believe this misogyny stems from our culture; the harassment continues in and outside the workplace. The insults range anywhere from staring at her in an improper manner, putting labels on a her character, questioning her judgment on work related matters or even the extent of social media stalking which leads to pictures being distributed and photo-shopped into pornographic images. Needless to say, men would not be the victim of such harassment.

Ever since the #MeToo movement has taken off, men claim they no longer know what consent

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is any more. But as a man myself, it is quite clear when you know you have it versus when you don't - sexual harassment is no different; one knows their intentions and being called out for a malicious act always invokes denial. But the fact doesn't change; there is a fine line between flirting and harassment - maybe we ought to put ourselves in the shoes of the ones we attempt to 'court' to understand their position in the situation.

A rather simple approach is to simply ask oneself if they would act the same if the person in question was a man; being aware is always the first step to any resolution. Nine out of ten women will tell you, if asked, that they do not feel they are treated equally.

Or could the problem be that men do not expect much from women, that they hold them to much lower standards than themselves. Reactions like "Oh Really?", "Didn't think you could do it" or "Damn, I underestimated your ability" are used quite frequently. While most women would appreciate the honesty, expectations in the minds of men need to be raised. Giving a woman a role that she is fully qualified for doesn't cut it, expectations of great things need to follow. Statements such as "My wife was a great resource at her firm but then she decided to focus on our most important assets, the kids" demean women and limit their growth on an individual and societal level.

It's true that certain men who are married to career oriented women are supportive, but unfortunately that percentage isn't enough for the matter to rest.

As a son, a brother, a cousin, a boyfriend and a friend to the respective females in my life, the current state of affairs worries me. Some of the top employers in the country may have gender equality agendas that are in place, but the day to day violations, even if on a minor scale, continue to exist.

I myself work in a leading company in the media industry, and although there is a good balance of male and female employees in the office, complemented by a very open culture, the mentality divide despite similar educational levels and family backgrounds astounds me in a new manner every single day.

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