

2.3: Gender Diversity

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the benefits and challenges of gender diversity in the workplace



What's in a chromosome (or two)? The difference in the pair of sex chromosomes determines whether a child is female (XX) or male (XY) at birth has a significant impact on the individual's personal and professional development. It is not biology that affects our experience and expectations in the workplace (as some who would justify gender inequality would propose), but socialization, an accumulation of cultural, historical, and legal precedent that has created the gender divide in our society.

According to the Brookings Institution, women's labor force participation has reversed since 2000 and "large gaps remain between men and women in employment rates, the jobs they hold, the wages they earn, and their overall economic security." This is not just a women's issue. In a publication from the Hamilton Project at Brookings, the authors conclude that "barriers to workforce participation for women are stifling the growth of the U.S. economy, and that future economic success hinges on improving career prospects and working environments for all women."^[1]

Over the years, gendered terms (for example, "men") have come to be interpreted more broadly; that is, as referring to both men and women, but the language is hardly inclusive. Indeed, the concept of gender as binary—that is, either female or male—may itself be an anachronism. As the traditional ideas of gender and gender identity are evolving and in order to adapt to a changing reality, the language and operating framework must change accordingly.

Are There Differences in Gender Communication?

Starting in childhood, girls and boys are generally socialized to belong to distinct cultures based on their gender and thus speak in ways particular to their own gender's rules and norms (Fivush; Hohnson; Tannen). This pattern of gendered socialization continues throughout our lives. As a result, men and women often interpret the same conversation differently. Culturally diverse ways of speaking based on gender can cause miscommunication between members of each culture or speech community. These cultural differences are seen in the simple purpose of communication.

Although gender roles are changing, and gender itself is becoming a more fluid concept, traditional roles still influence our communication behaviors. For those socialized to traditional female gender norms, an important purpose of communication is to create and foster relational connections with other people (Johnson; Stamou). In contrast, the goal of men's communication is primarily to establish identity. This is accomplished by demonstrating independence and control and entertaining or performing for others.

Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics and the author of multiple books on gender and language, provides the following examples of differences in men's and women's communication:^[2]

- "Men engage in report talk, women in rapport talk."
 - Report talk is used to demonstrate one's knowledge and expertise.
 - Rapport talk is used to share and cultivate relationships.
- Women request; men direct.
 - For example, in communicating a request, a female manager might say: "Could you do this by 5 PM?" A male manager would typically phrase it: "This needs to be done by 5 PM."
- Women are information focused; men are image focused.

- For example, women are willing to ask questions to clarify understanding. Men tend to avoid asking clarifying questions in order to preserve their reputation.
- Empathy is not apology.
 - Women often use the phrase “I’m sorry” to express concern or empathy. Men tend to interpret this phrase as an acceptance of responsibility for the situation, which it is not.
- Women are judged by their appearance; men are judged by what they say and do.

As in all things, it’s important to remember that while these differences exist between groups, all individuals will fall somewhere along a spectrum of these tendencies. Additionally, you may run into men who demonstrate more “feminine” tendencies in their speech or vice versa.

JAMES DAMORE

We see this struggle playing out at Google, where efforts to include more women in technical roles are meeting with some resistance. The conflict surfaced when James Damore, a white male engineer, posted a ten page critique of Google’s diversity efforts titled “[Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber](#)” on an internal discussion board. One of the most inflammatory points made was that “biological differences between men and women might explain why we don’t see equal representation of women in tech and leadership.” In his memo, Damore states his belief that women are better attuned to aesthetics and people rather than ideas and that this, as well as their “higher agreeableness” (versus aggressiveness) and “neuroticism,” rather than sexism accounts for gender gaps. The “manifesto,” as some call it, resulted in Damore being fired for violating Google’s code of conduct by “advancing harmful gender stereotypes in our workplace.”

Google CEO Sundar Pichai responded to the memo in a [note to employees](#), which includes this excerpt: “To suggest a group of our colleagues have traits that make them less biologically suited to that work is offensive and not OK. It is contrary to our basic values and our Code of Conduct, which expects ‘each Googler to do their utmost to create a workplace culture that is free of harassment, intimidation, bias and unlawful discrimination.’”

In a development that reflects the nation’s sociopolitical polarization, it appears Damore’s firing, rather than ending the issue, has turned him into what a *USA Today* writer terms a “hero of a resurgent conservative movement.” Damore has since [filed a lawsuit against Google](#), claiming the search giant discriminates against white, conservative men. In a development worth watching, Damore and David Gudeman, another former Google engineer, are being represented by Harmeet Dhillon, the Republican National Committee’s committeewoman for California. Her law firm is seeking class action status for the plaintiffs.

PRactice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.com/assessments/13916>

1. Burke, Alison. “[10 facts about American women in the workforce](#).” *Brookings*, 05 Dec 2017. Web. 26 June 2018. ↵
2. Bucher, Richard D. *Diversity Consciousness Opening Our Minds to People, Cultures, and Opportunities*. Pearson, 2015, p 130. ↵

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