

Prompt

Imagined Context: Please choose any set of questions to answer as if you are communicating with a colleague at work with whom you **will be** working on equity, diversity and inclusion organizational change efforts. Your colleague says, *“Thank you for signing up for the change-making work group. As our work group lead, I hope to learn how workgroup members understand relevant topics at this juncture. Please be candid and express yourself as fully as you can, as it will help me to facilitate our group efforts better.”* Consider an aspect of your identity that is targeted. How has this dynamic shaped your educational and/or professional experiences? How might connecting with others who share this identity improve your professional work-life in the future? How else can you see yourself undoing the structures that perpetuate that identity being targeted? What ally behaviors would you ideally like to observe in colleagues for whom this identity area is an area of privilege?

Identity Reflection

Word count: 1,183

Consider an aspect of your identity that is targeted. How has this dynamic shaped your educational and/or professional experiences?

Ever since I was a little girl, I have been made aware of my existence as a female. Being young, I did not understand the beauty and repercussions that that title would have. As I grew up, I was able to identify the ugly cycle of stereotypes and discrimination against me for being a female. More specifically, I have been made aware of my female status in my place of work.

I am confident in myself and my abilities in life. When I noticed a male coworker having trouble on a case at work a few weeks ago, I did not hesitate to ask if he needed help. I pulled up my chair beside him and walked him through the steps as he questioned every answer I gave him. I knew I was right. I knew that I knew what I was doing. However, I had to convince a man that had been at my company for less time than me, that I was positive in the information I was relaying to him. At the end of it all, his original issue was solved. Unfortunately, that was not good enough for him. As I went back to my desk, I overheard him inquiring about the same issue with a male colleague. In this instance, I was indirectly told by his words and actions, that I did not know what I was talking about and that my answers were not good enough for him. He assumed that I had led him to the wrong answer, that I could not possibly know how to solve his issue. I wish I could say that this is the only instance of discrimination at a workplace. Unfortunately, the feeling of not being worthy in my job, is all too familiar.

In a different job, I worked the front desk of a hotel. My boss had been harping on the employees to bring in more staff. Many applications had been turned in, yet no one had been hired. When he asked me for an update on potential candidates, I proceeded to inform him about a couple male candidates who had dropped off their applications and were well qualified. At this point, he began to tell me that he did not want to hire males because no one wanted to see a male at the front desk. Not only was that illegal, but it also made me feel like my sole purpose was to stand at the front desk like an object and look good for incoming customers.

How might connecting with others who share this identity improve your professional work-life in the future?

There is strength in numbers. One thing I have noticed between women who have been targeted for their gender, is that they come back full force and as strong as ever when there are others they can relate to. By connecting with other women in the workplace who have experienced these same types of issues, I believe that I can feel empowered enough to either address them myself or bring them up to a superior to address them. With that being said though, I am unsure of how to approach the topic myself, for fear of calling others out. I do not have malicious intentions and I feel that by addressing the issue in my small work cohort, I could unintentionally alienate certain individuals.

How else can you see yourself undoing the structures that perpetuate that identity being targeted?

I believe that the topic of discrimination of women in the workplace comes down to awareness. There is no doubt that women are discriminated against in the workplace. That is not an opinion, it is a fact. From talking with men, the issue seems to be downplayed for a couple reasons. First, I do not think that most men believe that discrimination against women in the workplace is a major issue. It is out of sight and out of mind. Since they do not see it happening, or at least do not realize that it is happening when it is, they are quick to pin the problem on something else. While not all men participate in the discrimination of women in the workplace, by not calling it out or actively working to fix the issue, men are being compliant and that is not good enough for them, women, and society.

Second, men feel that it is not their issue to deal with. From experience, I know that it can be difficult to understand and empathize with individuals when an issue pertaining to them, does not pertain to you. However, the idea that you do not have to deal with an issue because it does not impact you, is a privileged way of thinking and living. The issue needs to be humanized. It needs to be more than statistics. Men need to realize that these issues do not just impact their female coworkers. These issues also impact their mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends. By making the issue relatable to men, I think it will be more impactful for them.

What ally behaviors would you ideally like to observe in colleagues for whom this identity area is an area of privilege?

Since this behavior is mostly perpetrated by men in the workplace, I would love for men to be the ones to address it head-on. Having tried to address it in the past, I am often overlooked and not taken seriously. It gets tiring as a female, to address bias and discrimination being committed against me. Knowing that my work, efforts, and ideas are worth less than my male counterparts sitting next to me, is a dreadful feeling to deal with five days a week. It is time for men to step up and own their discriminatory bias'.

Ideally, I would love for men to start trusting women. It is easy to double check an answer that a woman has given you, but if your issue is solved, why seek the same answer from

another source? I would love for my male colleagues to get to know my strengths and weaknesses better as well. By doing this, they can use their privilege to direct male colleague's questions to female colleagues in the future. Thinking about this particular solution though, I can imagine it causing issues if male colleagues are quick to push questions towards females to avoid having to deal with the questions themselves.

While thinking about a way for men to assist in dealing with this issue, I thought about the paradigm article, *Three Paradigms for Diversity Change Leaders* by Judith Palmer. I was brought back to the idea that different paradigms will handle conflicts differently. I realized that as someone who identifies as paradigm two, I need to be okay with men helping out in different ways than I would normally help out. This is not to say that women are responsible for solving this issue, but rather than women need to actively be working with men to take on the issue of discrimination.

Overall, I would like to be treated as an equal in the workplace rather than a second-class employee. While I can work on empowering myself to face the discriminatory issues I face in the workplace, I need men to support and empower women in the workplace as well. Until this happens, women will continue to be belittled and overlooked in all aspects of the workplace.