GENDER SALIENCE AND RACIAL FRAMES, POTHOLES FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Understanding the Context Before and the Potential Consequences of Sexual Harassment

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OUTLINE

- Sociological Grounding
  - Gender Salience
  - Racial Frames
- Pipeline Assumptions, Introducing the Road
- Sexual/Gender Harassment as a Constraint
- What is Unique to STEM
- Failing to Broaden Participation

Annotation is in orange, at the bottom of pages where needed

GENDER SALIENCE

In any interaction, gender exists as a background identity "that is rarely the ostensible focus of what is going on in the situation."

(Ridgeway and Correll 2004: 516)

- A woman working in her laboratory is thinking about her science, not (usually) pondering her identity as a *woman* scientist (Britton 2016: 9).
- Gender is salient when it moves from the "background into the foreground" becoming central in what is considered a gender-neutral context or conversation.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER SALIENCE

Marie Curie was "an honorary man because she had a [male genitalia] made of science."

- *Sheldon Cooper, Big Bang Theory, Season 9, Episode 1*

GENDER SALIENCE IN THE ARTIC

On a Thursday morning I put on my jacket and walked outside my cabin armed with a pink rubber funnel that claims it "allows you to pee while standing up. It's neat. It's discrete. It's Hygienic." What could go wrong?

- Lily Cohen, Scientific American (2017)

SNOW BIBS AND GENDER SALIENCE

"The following week I would be flying to a remote part of Alaska to characterize peak snow in our study watershed. With forecast highs of 5° Fahrenheit, my best chance of staying warm was to wear overalls (or bibs, as Alaskan's call them). Unfortunately, most bibs are designed with a fly, which is useless when my urinary tract doesn't end in a conveniently directable hose. The alternative is a time-consuming fumble of taking off your parka before pulling down your bibs, squatting, and reversing; all of which means losing a lot of heat."

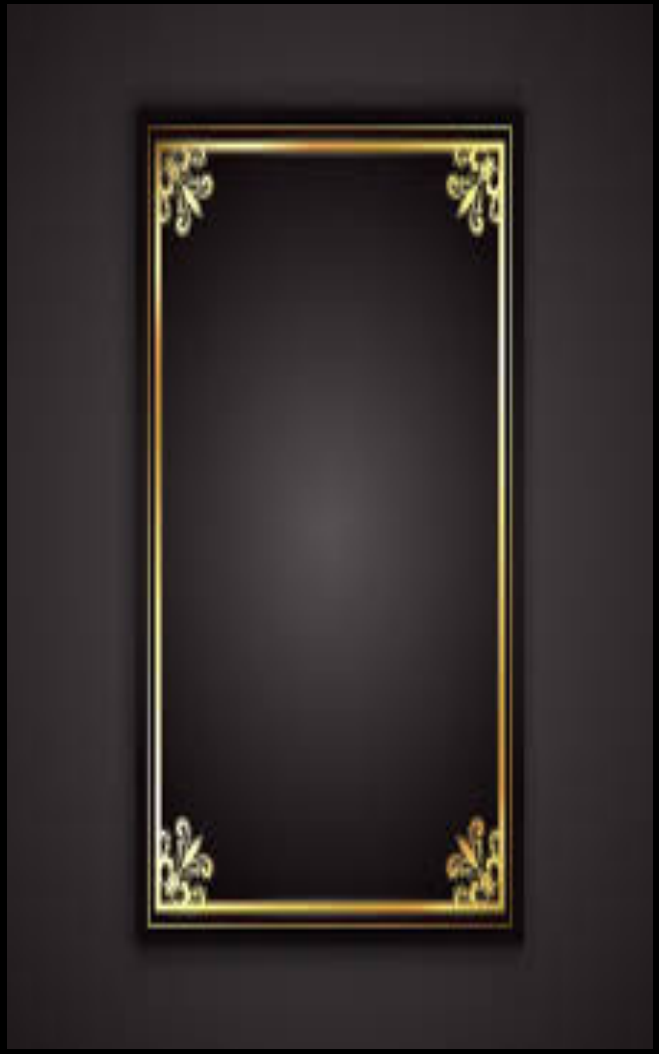
Patagonia, $419, original $599

There are women's bibs with a "butt flap" but they are more expensive than men's bibs and a funding rule prohibits buying field clothes on project money.

RACIAL FRAMES

The white racial frame affects most Americans and is becoming "the country's dominant 'frame of mind' and 'frame of reference' in regard to racial matters. It is a "worldview that encompasses a broad and persistent set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies…"

- Joe Feagin (2009)



In the social sciences frames are interpretive schemes that simplify and condense the world.

CONTROLLING IMAGES

"As a generalized ideology of domination, stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning…These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life."

- Patricia Hill Collins (2000:69)

Controlling images hypersexualize women of color making them more vulnerable to harassment.

BLACK WOMEN IN COMPUTING – POLICING BELONGING

When I was a grad student at Greene and I went to a lab that only graduate students could go to, to do some work. I walk into the lab and there's a lab assistant there, who's also a grad student. He looked at me come in and I sit down and I start working. He comes up to me and he says, "I believe you're in the wrong place." And I looked at him and I said, "No, I'm not." And I kept working, right? So then I'm all right. He's getting a little agitated and he says to me again, "I believe you're in the wrong place." And I'm not upset because I'm thinking, "Okay, there's no one who looked like me who's ever been in this lab before who's ever attended this university before." So he really believed. And he's never seen me before so he really believed I'm in the wrong place. I'm trying to make him look at it from his perspective. But I say to him again, "No, I'm not." And I kept working. So then he gets a little frustrated. He gets a little bit head and starts spewing a few things to me. And then he says, "Who's your advisor?" And I told him who my advisor was, who by the way is very powerful on that campus. Then he began to get nervous. And then he apologized to me, "I'm so sorry. I just didn't know." I said to him, "That's all right." I said, "The next time someone who looks like me comes in here or you see them, don't be so sure of yourself."

- Mariah (Branch, Manuscript in Progress)

Racial frames influence what people think a scientist looks like and who we expect to see where.

WHY FOCUS ON THE INTERSECTIONS?

- Illuminates challenges shared by women and minorities.
- Exposes the inequality endemic to the culture of science by highlighting how race exacerbates difference.
- Illustrates clearly the role of constraints in shaping the choice to leave or stay science.
- **Challenges the pipeline assumption**

- The pipeline is the most commonly used metaphor to understand underrepresentation in science.
- But women and minorities are passive, Assumes that if we could find a way to better carry women along from one stage to the next the problem of underrepresentation and steep attrition would be solved (Branch 2016).

INTRODUCING THE ROAD

- The pipeline metaphor **doesn't ask who leaks and why?**
- Choices individuals make to remain in or leave science are not "free"
- Need to better articulate ideas of agency and constraint (Branch 2016)
- Imagine a road with exits, pathways, and potholes
  - Some people leave
  - Some journey on
  - Some get stuck

While some are free to exercise their choice to leave science as a result of disinterest, career options, family preferences. Some leave in response to conditions that are often not favorable that influence "perceived choice", such as discrimination, gender harassment, hostile work environments, chilly climates, and isolation.

GENDER HARASSMENT AS CONSTRAINT

Gender harassment: "disparaging conduct not intended to elicit sexual cooperation; rather, these are verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviors that convey hostile or offensive attitudes about" members of one gender."

(Konik & Cortina, 2008)

Gender harassment creates work conditions that are unfavorable.

GENDER HARASSMENT

- Gender harassment can meet the legal bar for hostile work environment.
  - Being "severe or pervasive" enough to adversely alter conditions of employment.
  - Creating an environment that a "reasonable" person would find, and the victim finds, hostile/abusive.
- Even when it does not, it is almost certainly likely to create a climate that may impacts a women's choice to persist in science.

WHAT IS UNIQUE TO STEM?

- Severe Underrepresentation of Women
- Male-dominated Culture of Science
  - Perceived meritocracy alongside pervasive inequality
  - Ex: Differences in valuing of co-authorship
- Lab dynamics condition and constrain expectations, experiences, and consequences of gender harassment.
  - Lab activities after hours to promote cohesion can provide opportunities for unwanted attention.
  - Imposed isolation can be perceived as not being a team player.
  - Consent is blurry due to dependence and power differentials.
  - Difficulty transferring labs due to funding.
  - Harassers are often "known" in departments.
  - Lack of consequences leads to a cost benefit analysis, for those who are vulnerable (ex: students and junior faculty).

GENDER SALIENCE AND HARASSMENT

"There are no clear interaction rules about how to manage gender when it does appear. Actors can outwardly ignore its appearance or they can respond. For women in male-dominated occupations like STEM, there are strong pressures to do the former."

- Dana Britton (2016: 9)

PROMOTES GENDER SILENCE

- "Though women faculty may have experiences that are somehow connected to their gender, many tend to see attention to gender, rather than gender inequalities per se, as barriers to their success." (Britton 2016, 6-7)

"I tend to avoid the women on campus in the STEM fields who are really big about promoting women. I know that sounds horrible. But I feel like if you don't make a big deal of it and you don't waste a lot of energy on it, you can just be successful doing what you're doing."

(Rhoton 2011, 708 cited in Britton 2016)

NORMALIZING HARASSMENT

"We had one junior woman . . . she would have been Full by now. *She left?* A couple of years ago. There was no reason from our view for her to leave. Although I did have to talk to her about a very weird thing. Guys in our department . . . young guys. (laughs). They didn't like how she dressed. The secretary asked me to talk to her. *How did she dress?* Somebody claimed they could tell she wasn't wearing a bra. And I had this woman come in . . . I said, "I have to talk to you because you have to know that this is happening. I feel terrible saying this to you because I don't really care. But I think you ought to know that there are people that are behaving this way." And so I told her. And she was stunned. So, but . . . I don't think that's why she left."(Britton 2016:16-17)

BLACK WOMEN IN COMPUTING – JUST LIKE ONE OF THE GUYS

…There's weren't a lot of black people and Latino people. Weren't a lot of females and I was like why are they not staying? I'm like you gotta just stick it out you know. You can't be worried about what they think or what they say or how they treat you. You gotta just do the work. Because your work will stand for it's self. So no one would believe me so they just kind of left. And I was like well I'm sticking it out. I don't care what you guys are doing but I'm going to stick this out. I know I can stick this out. So it was more or less like a challenge to myself to finish every class you know. Became friends with some students in college and we would form like little groups every now and then and we'd be in the lab you know working on some type of project or code or whatever. So yeah I was able to tell dirtier jokes than the guys so you know, it was an experience. It was an experience…

- Rhonda (Branch, Manuscript in Progress)

Persistence in science for some women requires adapting to and participating in a culture of gender harassment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BROADENING PARTICIPATION

HEY SILICON VALLEY! IF YOU CAN'T RETAIN WOMEN, DON'T RECRUIT THEM, *WIRED MAGAZINE (*May 25, *2017)*

"If companies look at this from a business perspective, they are literally flushing resources down the toilet if the person they recruited, interviewed, hired, on-boarded, and employed for two years quits because the environment is (at best) not a fit or (at worst) blatantly sexist."

– Kate Buckholz

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Zero tolerance is aspirational. Acknowledge the role of funders but recognize their limitations.
   - What does zero tolerance mean in practice?
   - What is the bar and how is it assessed?
   - On whose back does the responsibility to prevent and deal with harassment rest?
   - Are the consequences for the alleged harasser solely or the institution more broadly?
   - Does is effect current funding only or can it shape eligibility for future funding.
   - Consider a recommendation that encourages funders to define these terms specifically so the implications of zero tolerance are clear.
2. Encourage transparency of institutional process related to sexual harassment complaints, which can be at odds with confidentiality of personnel procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. When presented with a complaint of harassment, failure to meet the legal bar for sexual harassment should not be the end. Creative solutions can be used to attend to the issues raised and can aid in retention and improve climate.
   - Remedies for all departments where there are less than 10% women, for example, as opposed to targeting the department where the alleged harasser is can enable intervention aimed at improving a working environment.
4. Universities should act to early, responding to the rumor mill and "secret" but "known" harassers through whole department interventions that do not target an individual but heighten awareness and call on others to intervene.
   - The goal should be to shape the department climate creating shared expectations of workplace conduct giving others a basis to intervene. This can shift the environment for the harasser, greatly reducing harassment, without requiring an individual to pursue a claim.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Cultivate models and celebrate examples of departments, labs, and/or advisors that nurture women.
   - While gender harassment is a known problem, there are places and advisors that have a much better track record.
   - Look to these departments, labs, and advisors to help offer recommendations to others about what they do to foster a culture that enables women's success.

The metaphorical view, of a road with exits, pathways, and potholes with drivers in different vehicles, encourages you to always seek out the multiple ways in which people can experience science differently while clearly articulating the role of agency and constraint.

Thank You