

Menu

English ▼

Interrupting Sexism at Work

What Drives Men to Respond Directly or Do Nothing? (Report)

[Negin Sattari, PhD](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/negin-sattari-phd/) , [Emily Shaffer, PhD](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/emily-shaffer-phd/)
[Sarah DiMuccio, PhD](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/sarah-dimuccio/)
[Dnika J. Travis, PhD](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/dnika-j-travis-phd/)

Download Report

Press Release

<
ht
tp

Infographic

To Interrupt or Not Interrupt: That Is the Question

You and your colleagues are in a meeting to discuss internal applicants for a newly developed role that is critical to managing efficiency in remote team operations. When reviewing a woman’s qualifications, one of your colleagues makes a sexist comment.

What would you do? Would you say something to your colleague, or pull them aside later? Would you try to change the topic? Perhaps you would roll your eyes, or maybe even do nothing. What influences your choice?

We found that men tend to respond to workplace sexism in a variety of ways, and that these responses can be classified into four categories: taking direct action; redirecting the conversation; indirectly reacting by making a joke or eye-rolling; and by doing nothing.¹ This report addresses the two most contrasting reactions: taking direct action and doing nothing. This approach allows us to learn what mobilizes men who choose to interrupt and to better understand what may lead men to do nothing.

Catalyst’s new study of nearly 1,500 men finds that:

Personal agency links to men’s intent to take direct action to interrupt workplace sexism.

Negative organizational climates can stifle men, increasing the likelihood that they do nothing.

Both of these elements—personal agency and organizational climate—predict men’s willingness and ability to intervene.

c./
</w
ht
w
tp.
w.
s:/ca
w
tal
w
ys
w.
t.o
ca
rg
tal
/ys
m
t.o
rg
/r
a-
rel
ea
ea
rc
se
h/
in
ag
te
m
rr
ba
u
tiv
pt
e-
in
cu
tu
re
-
ta
se
xis
re
m
p
-
or
inf
t-
p
gr
>
ap
h
c/
>

Understanding what drives men to interrupt sexism—and what inhibits them—can help organizations and leaders build work environments where employees feel valued, trusted, authentic, and psychologically safe. Our study shows it's not enough for organizations to equip men with strategies to help them directly interrupt sexism. To create an environment that empowers men to interrupt sexism, companies must address their own cultures—within all levels and corners of the organization.

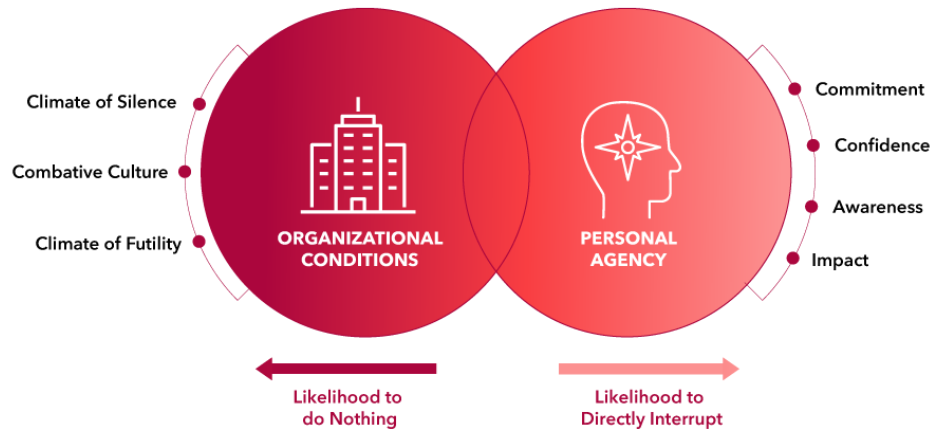
We can't rely on individual agency alone to dismantle sexism; we must also change the fabric of our organizations.

Our findings demonstrate that 44% of men's intent to interrupt a sexist event in their workplace is explained by **four aspects of personal agency**.²

Men more **committed** to dismantling sexism, **confident** in their ability to interrupt, **aware** of the positive benefits of interrupting, and invested in the **impact** on the common good are more likely to directly interrupt sexism.

In addition, 41% of men's intent to do nothing to interrupt a sexist event in their workplace is explained by **three organizational factors**.³

Organizational climates perceived by men to be more **silencing**, **combative**, and **futile** are associated with doing nothing in response to sexism at work.



//

You need an organization that is open to challenge, is open to dissent, is not a 'yes sir, yes ma'am' type [of] organization. So, first of all, you have to value dissent and you have to value disagreement....That's something here that we struggle with...dissent is seen as high heresy. You need an underlying culture that values critique and values conflict.

– Mid-level director in education

//

There might be an individual who...is working on...their identity as a male....But then they go to work, and [the] workplace is a male-dominated, potentially toxic culture, and it's difficult to translate those things into that community organizational change, let alone any sort of systemic change.

– Executive director in nonprofit

Sexism

Sexism is the result of assumptions, misconceptions, and stereotypes that rationalize discrimination, mistreatment, and objectification of people based on their sex, gender, or sexual orientation.⁴

Sexism can take many forms.⁵ **Overt sexism** is intentional, visible, and unambiguous. **Covert sexism**, on the other hand, is subtle, hidden, or invisible because it is built into social and cultural norms.⁶ While overt sexism is less prevalent than it has been in the past, covert sexism is still common. Everyone is vulnerable to thinking and acting in ways that might be sexist—in many cases, unintentionally and unconsciously.⁷

Prevalence of sexist attitudes and practices in the workplace can predict tolerance of more harmful behaviours toward women such as sexual harassment.⁸ While our data is not focused on incidences of sexual harassment, our findings highlight the importance of creating a workplace climate in which sexism, as a potential pathway to sexual harassment, is not tolerated.

Interrupting sexism—addressing degrading and dismissive behaviours that reinforce gender bias and discrimination—is critical in helping create a safe, fair, and inclusive workplace. Men need to be particularly engaged in this work because they hold a majority of leadership positions and thus have a disproportionate amount of power to make decisions—such as promotions, compensation, and company policies and benefits—that impact everyone.⁹ Furthermore, men also greatly influence organizational culture and have the power to role-model appropriate and healthy behaviours.

About This Study

*Interrupting Sexism at Work*¹⁰ is a research initiative exploring organizational conditions that encourage or discourage men from responding when they witness incidences of sexism in the workplace. The initiative includes countries in North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific.

Our first study, *Interrupting Sexism at Work: How Men Respond in a Climate of Silence* <<https://www.catalyst.org/research/interrupting-sexism-silence/>>, drew on insights from Mexico to highlight the negative impacts of a climate of silence in the workplace on men's intention to comment on sexist behaviours. It further showed that men who experience higher levels of silence in their workplace see more costs and fewer benefits in interrupting sexist behaviours in the workplace.¹¹

This second study explores what drives men to do nothing rather than directly interrupt sexism at work. We employ a mixed methodology, combining large-scale survey data with in-depth qualitative interviews.

All the data for this report was gathered in Canada. The 1,493 men who participated in our survey were employed full-time in the Canadian labour market and represent a diverse group, spanning industries, organizational ranks, job tenure, ages, and ethnic backgrounds.

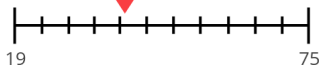
While Canada is ranked second on the Women's Workplace Equality Index,¹² Canadian women still fare worse than their male counterparts:¹³ They make up just 25% of vice presidents and 15% of CEOs in Canadian corporations, and are three times less likely to be promoted than men are.¹⁴

1,493

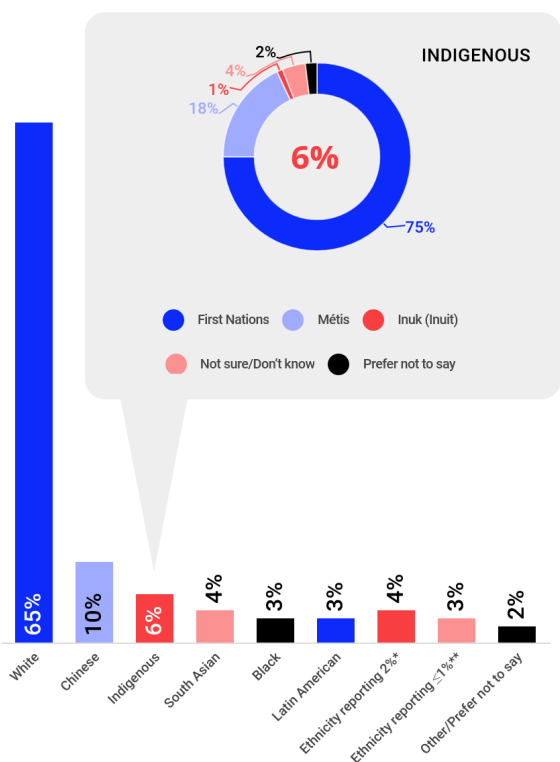
SELF-IDENTIFIED MEN

AGE

41

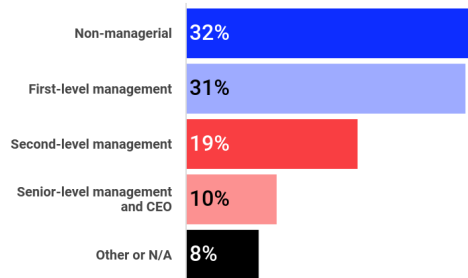


RACE/ETHNICITY

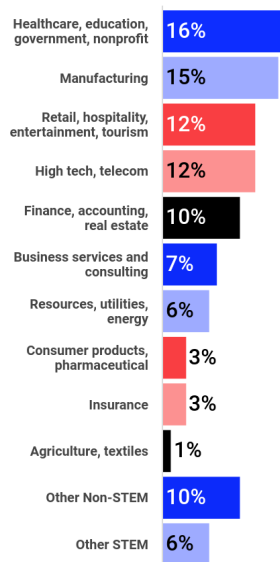


*Filipino, Arab
**Southeast Asian, Japanese, West Asian, Korean

ORGANIZATIONAL RANK



INDUSTRY



7%



SELF-IDENTIFIED GAY, BISEXUAL, QUEER, AND/OR ASEXUAL

We also conducted interviews with 27 men across industries in Canada. These men shared candid, insightful, and sometimes sobering stories about sexism and gender equality, as well as their own views on what it takes to make change. All were engaged in gender-equity causes in their workplaces, had a history of such engagements, and/or expressed a commitment to helping remove gender-based discriminations. Interview questions homed in on interviewees' perceptions of the factors that can promote or hinder men's engagement in interrupting day-to-day sexism and achieving gender equity in the workplace.

At the time of the interviews, over 50% reported being in senior-management levels, 33% were in mid-level positions, and the remaining were either in entry-level or other ranks within their companies. Most interviewees (33%) reported fewer than six years of tenure at their current companies, and 15% reported six to 10 years. Interviewees who self-identified as white comprised more than 70% of the sample, while the remaining interviewees identified as Chinese, South Asian, and Indigenous or other.

How Do Men Respond to Sexism in the Workplace?

There is a large body of research exploring how and why individuals respond to prejudice, including studies that specifically focus on confronting people who make sexist remarks or engage in sexist behaviour.¹⁵ This research has identified several barriers to interrupting sexism. For example, many people don't recognize sexism in the first place or deem it inappropriate, or they don't know how to address the behaviour.¹⁶ Research has also shown that men are worse than women at detecting sexism.¹⁷ And if a man can't see the bias or doesn't feel it should stop—much less know what to do—it's unlikely that he'll step in.

However, there is a shortage of data-based research on how individuals *spontaneously* address sexism, especially in the workplace. Our analyses show four categories of distinct behaviours among men when they're faced with sexism. They include:¹⁸

Directly interrupt—Remark on the inappropriateness of a sexist comment, either in the immediate situation or after it has occurred; attempt to educate the colleague who made the comment; or report the offense.

Example: "A colleague was talking about women not being able to do something and should be in the kitchen. I said [it] is not acceptable to say that, and you should know better."¹⁹

Redirect—Attempt to sidestep the sexist behaviour and keep the conversation focused on the current task or redirect the conversation.

Example: “A number of men were commenting on [the] appearance of women (in their absence)... over drinks. I didn’t say anything and tried to bring up different angles/topics to steer conversation away. But I never said that it wasn’t right to talk in that way.”²⁰

Unassertively react—Show disagreement through non-verbal cues (e.g., rolling eyes), passive-aggressive comments, or humor or sarcasm.

Example: “Derogatory comments were made about an individual who was not present. I expressed my disapproval by jokingly saying...‘You’re gonna get us fired.’ I didn’t want to cause hard feelings with the person involved, but still wanted to express that I didn’t want to continue that conversation.”²¹

Do nothing—Ignore the situation and/or rely on others to address it.

Example: “My boss at the time [made an insensitive comment about a newly hired woman leader]. I was a new employee and did not feel comfortable telling my boss that I thought that his comments were not appropriate.”²²

Our survey asked men how likely they were to engage in each of these behaviours in response to a colleague’s sexist remark.²³ Less than half of respondents felt comfortable directly interrupting, signaling a troubling lack of ability, comfort, or both to take action. Nearly two-thirds of men indicated they would redirect, almost a quarter said they would react unassertively, and 20% said they would do nothing.²⁴

Men’s Responses to Sexist Events

The likelihood of engaging in different types of interrupting behaviour:

46%

Directly interrupt**65%**

Redirect**24%**

Unassertively react**20%**

Do nothing

Organizations should bear in mind that gender advocacy demands a significant commitment from men. While men can and should use their privileges for the advancement of gender equality, the barriers they face in doing so should not be overlooked, as we discuss below.

A recent study of Canadian men engaged in gender advocacy explores the challenges that can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and burnout.²⁵ The men discussed a diverse set of challenges including: limited resources (e.g., funding, trainings, staffing, etc.); lack of interest from their surrounding communities or institutions; failure of gender-equality programs to address men's vulnerabilities; and the difficulty of balancing their paid work, personal life, and this kind of voluntary engagement.²⁶ These findings may offer additional insight into the sobering gap highlighted in our previous study between men's level of commitment to dismantling gender inequalities and their confidence in their ability to actually do so.²⁷

Sexism Masked as Flattery Is Still Sexism

Sexism and sexist behaviour may result from two different types of attitudes: hostile or benevolent.

Hostile sexism refers to explicitly negative attitudes toward a person based on their sex (e.g., the belief that women are incompetent). This is what most people think of when they imagine sexism.

Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, refers to stereotypical attitudes about people based on their sex that may be perceived as positive (e.g., the belief that women are more compassionate).²⁸

Our study found that nearly one-third of men (29%) said they were likely to interrupt a sexist comment by using strategies considered benevolently sexist, such as asking their colleague to think about making the comment about their mother or daughter.²⁹ This type of response goes outside the bounds of the four identified interrupting behaviours because it is still rooted in sexism, even though that may not be the intention.

It is easy to mistake benevolent sexism as flattery because of the seemingly positive nature of the stereotypes. For example, someone may state that our world is fair as it is, and that men and women hold different places in our societies because they have different characteristics and capabilities.³⁰ In this scenario, they might justify the underrepresentation of women in positions of power by saying that women are naturally more gentle than men and lack masculine qualities such as competitiveness or aspiration for power and dominance that are necessary for business success. Yet, these traits deemed necessary for business success or leadership positions are shaped by the societal roles that have been traditionally filled by men or women and are not inherent to an individual on the basis of gender.³¹

Benevolent sexism is particularly insidious because it can make us feel better about the world. Believing that society is fair and justifying the status quo serves as a psychological protection against the negative feelings we might have if we were to recognize the systematic issues that shape gender inequalities.³² Nevertheless, research shows that benevolent sexism is just as harmful as hostile sexism because it normalizes gender inequality and reinforces the inequitable status quo.³³

What Encourages Men to Interrupt Sexism Directly?

Our findings show that 46% of men would try to directly interrupt a sexist event in their workplace, and our analysis reveals that certain personal factors differentiate these men. In particular, 44% of men's intent to directly interrupt a sexist event in their workplace is explained by commitment, confidence, awareness of the personal benefits, and belief in the impact on the common good.³⁴

Factors that influence men's responses to sexism

Commitment³⁵

Demonstrated commitment to fighting gender discrimination.

Sense of obligation to interrupt someone or something that is sexist.

Feeling of personal responsibility to interrupt gender discrimination.

Confidence³⁶

Feeling of skill at directly addressing people who act in biased ways.

Belief in their own appearance of competence when interrupting a sexist behaviour.

Effectiveness when informing others that a behaviour is inappropriate.

Belief that it is important to interrupt gender discrimination.

Self-identification as someone who interrupts sexism.

Feeling of confidence when interrupting biased behaviours.

Awareness of the Personal Benefits³⁷

Feeling that their efforts could make a difference.

Demonstrating to themselves that they are not complicit.

Impact on the Common Good³⁸

Wishing to help others recognize their biases and change their behaviour.

Conviction that by interrupting sexist behaviours they will help reduce workplace sexism and prejudice.

Believing they can reduce the impact of sexism on women's opportunities.

Understanding the Findings

There are many factors that may influence how men choose to respond to sexism in the workplace. Our goal in this research was not to identify all of these explanatory factors. Rather, it was to understand the way men respond and what factors may play a role in their decision. Specifically, we wanted to examine: 1) the many ways in which men may respond to sexism in their workplace; and 2) how personal agency and organizational conditions may predict their responses.

When studying experiences of sexism and the behaviours that men may or may not take to interrupt it, it is important to keep their complexity in mind. In reality, it would be surprising to identify a single factor (or even a set of factors) that could perfectly predict—i.e., explain 100%—the ways that men interrupt sexism. Indeed, identifying a factor that can explain even 10% of such complex phenomena as these is noteworthy. By that measure, the findings we report here offer significant insights about men’s behaviour and the factors that influence their behaviours.

Commitment

We found that 58% of men had high levels of commitment to interrupting sexism.³⁹ Not surprisingly, our findings show that these men report a greater likelihood of directly interrupting a colleague who made a sexist remark. Specifically, 65% of highly committed men said they would directly interrupt a colleague, compared to 19% of men who were less committed.⁴⁰

65%

of highly committed men would directly interrupt a colleague

19%

of men who were less committed would directly interrupt a colleague

//

So I mean I grew up with that, and I think as I've evolved I've been very lucky to end up in an organization like Company A where that... is a value that we hold dear. And so for me to be true to who I am—as I'll call it an 'equity-seeking male'—I feel very comfortable here.

– Senior leader in professional services

//

I see that as a problem, I see that as a challenge. And...I'm an immigrant, so there's a little bit of a personal... interest in this. So I got a bit more and more involved. So I do have quite a bit of... ability to influence the outcome, right? Not entirely changing it, but I can do my piece to help.

– Senior director in utility

//

When I hear things that marginalize other people, it triggers me. So I think that's why I'm more inclined to stick my neck out.

– Mid-level manager in energy

//

I think for me it—it's values-driven first....I'm a big 'Do the right thing' kind of [guy]. If for no other reason, just for that.

– Executive director in government

Confidence

Men's level of confidence in their ability to interrupt sexism also plays a significant role in their willingness to directly interrupt sexist events. About a third (31%) of survey participants reported high levels of confidence in their ability to interrupt sexism.⁴¹ Of these, 72% said that they would directly do so, whereas just 34% of men who reported being less confident said they would interrupt directly.⁴²

Our interview participants frequently emphasized men's lack of confidence—in some cases caused by fear or discomfort—as a barrier to their engagement:

72%

of highly confident men said they would directly interrupt sexism

34%

of less confident men said they would directly interrupt sexism

//

I think the one thing is, they're afraid....When I speak up and talk about the need to include men in the discussion, to have a really good open discussion that is a safe discussion for men to have, I will have men come up and say, 'Thank you for saying that. I didn't know how to say it.'

– Senior leader in professional services

//

I think it's just a mob mentality. They're afraid to speak up because they don't want to be the outlier. And if everybody else is doing it, well, just be quiet and go along.

– Mid-level leader in energy transmission

Belief in the Benefits of Interrupting

When employees believe that interrupting sexism will have a beneficial impact, they report an increased likelihood of doing so. Of our survey respondents, 64% reported high levels of seeing benefits to interrupting sexism that accrue to them directly, as in a feeling that they are making a difference and not being complicit.⁴³ Meanwhile, 61% had high levels of understanding how interrupting sexism impacts the common good.⁴⁴

We found that men who saw personal benefits to interrupting sexism were more likely to directly interrupt a colleague who makes a sexist remark. Specifically, 59% of men who were aware of the personal benefits of interrupting were likely to directly interrupt. However, of those who saw less of a personal benefit, only 22% said they were likely to directly interrupt.⁴⁵

Similarly, 62% of men who believed their actions would have an impact on the common good were likely to directly interrupt, while only 20% of men who saw less of an impact on the common good said they would.⁴⁶

59%

**aware of the personal
benefits would directly
interrupt sexism**

22%

**less aware of these benefits
would directly interrupt
sexism**

62%

**who see an impact on the
common good would directly
interrupt sexism**

20%

**who see less of an impact
would directly interrupt
sexism**

//


I'm not trying to fix someone that's broken, I'm trying to raise awareness...And it's very rewarding when you have a conversation with someone and they say, 'Okay, well I get it, I'm going to try to change that.' So I think the motivation...really has to be around opening people's eyes that we're really better if we have a workplace that works for everybody.

– Senior director in energy

While some previous research has shown that interrupting sexism may sometimes have negative consequences for the person who intervenes, other research has demonstrated tangible benefits as well. For example, women who confronted sexism felt more confident, more empowered, and had higher self-esteem than those who did not.⁴⁷ Our study suggests that when men see the potential benefits of interrupting, they are more likely to do so.



Actions Individuals Can Take



We asked our interviewees to share their learnings from their experiences with interrupting sexism. Here are a few insights that can help people successfully interrupt.

Scale your response and avoid making assumptions

Don't assume ill intentions—they can come from lack of exposure and awareness about sexism. When you respond, scale your response to the person engaged in the behaviour.

“ I think intention is very important. And I think it's always about, is this somebody who made a mistake? Because we'll make mistakes, all of us. And that'll happen. If it's a really bad mistake that's one thing, but if it's a mistake that people make, then it's really about education and understanding whether somebody can be educated in a way that they understand that their behaviours are sexist.

– Senior leader in professional services

Don't call out, call in

Rather than pointing fingers and causing shame or embarrassment, create an opportunity for personal growth in the person you are interrupting.

“ Calling out would be, ‘Hey...quit being such an idiot. You’re such a—whatever—for doing that.’ And it’s very confrontational....If the person in the social structure is then looked at as doing something wrong, then it triggers shame and fear and guilt in them. And it’s not an opportunity to grow. But if you can create a ‘call-in conversation’ where it’s more curiosity-based and it’s like either you take them aside after the fact, or you ask a question, or—‘Why did you say that?’ or, ‘Can you explain that?’—it’s a different place to work from.

– Executive director in nonprofit

When you witness sexist behaviour, be intentional in your response

Be thoughtful in your actions and use your knowledge of the people involved as you decide how to respond.

“ I try [to] evaluate my perception of the individuals experiencing the behaviours to see if I believe they’re the type of person who can and would want to self-advocate, or if they’re maybe someone seeking an ally.

– Mid-level director in education

What Prevents Men From Interrupting Sexism?

When organizations take steps to create an inclusive workplace, they often focus on developing training programs to teach employees which behaviours are appropriate and what to do if they witness sexist remarks or attitudes. In other words, they emphasize actions by individuals.

But even companies dedicated to giving employees the tools and confidence to interrupt sexism at work may find that many employees choose to do nothing when confronted with instances of bias. Indeed, research shows that a combination of factors, including fear, can stamp out or derail a person's intention to speak out or do something to make a difference.⁴⁸

Our study demonstrates that larger organizational conditions are crucial. Specifically, three factors—a climate of silence, a combative culture, and a sense of futility—explain 41% of the likelihood

Organizational Factors

Climate of Silence:⁴⁹

An environment where employees feel restrained from constructively speaking up about organizational or work-related problems, concerns, or challenges.

Combative Culture:⁵⁰

A hyper-competitive workplace culture in which value is attributed to a quest to dominate others and compete over power, authority, and status.

Climate of Futility:⁵¹

The sense that efforts to make change will not matter or have desired impact.

of men's doing nothing, showing that negative organizational climates stifle men.

A Climate of Silence: Fear Dominates

Our survey found that 44% of men reported high levels of silence in their workplaces.⁵² In a climate of silence, employees believe speaking up will bring negative repercussions, or fear their voice won't be heard, and are therefore afraid to take actions that will likely backfire.

It's therefore no surprise that in a climate of silence—where speaking up appears fraught with risk—men report a greater likelihood of doing nothing to interrupt sexism: 39% of men working in organizations with high levels of silence report doing nothing, compared to 5% of men in organizations with lower levels of silence.⁵³

Silence is multifaceted; it is determined by both the estimated risk involved in speaking up, and how much time employees believe they have to decide whether to speak up or not. These decision points can be unconscious, automatic, deliberate, or purposeful.⁵⁴

On an individual level, employees don't always make a calculated decision to remain silent. When they unexpectedly find themselves in a high-pressure situation, they may simply "freeze."⁵⁵ In other instances, they may consciously decide not to respond in the moment and take some time to consider what to do.

39%

of men working in organizations with high levels of silence report doing nothing

5%

of men in organizations with lower levels of silence report doing nothing

But at some organizations, keeping quiet is a behaviour that employees have learned over time.⁵⁶ This kind of learned silence is challenging for organizations to overcome. In these cases, acknowledging and then changing the norms and behaviours that support a climate of silence is essential.

Such cultural norms and values can especially make a difference when it comes to people speaking up when power dynamics are at play. Cultures shaped around respect for authorities and hierarchy are more likely to discourage workers from using their voice, especially when they might be critical of superiors. That means senior managers are particularly influential in either reinforcing silence⁵⁷ or inviting employees to speak and be heard.

Role-modeling is key to opening the door to communication. When managers reinforce the notion that they “know best” or imply that everyone should fall in line—or when they’re resistant to hearing negative feedback, whether about themselves or about a business matter—they can close that door and lose opportunities to enact change and shift a climate of silence.⁵⁸

Some of our interviewees described a climate of silence, recognizing how it can discourage individuals from speaking up or suggesting changes to the status quo, thus making the work environment vulnerable to sexism.



The people may take their cues from the leader, but if you have a culture where there is fear of reprisal for speaking up or fear of reprisal for challenging the status quo, I think that creates that environment, I would say beyond just sexism, I mean choose an ism. And it creates an environment where those isms may be possible....I think it takes courage to shift a culture, and so if you don't have a culture that encourages courage to challenge the status quo to speak up, then you normalize certain behaviours.

– Senior director in financial services

Combative Cultures Make Interrupting Sexism More Challenging

According to our survey, 46% of men work in organizations with a high level of “combative culture.”⁵⁹ In this type of workplace, employees are systematically encouraged to not only engage in stereotypically masculine practices and behaviours but to outdo others in these performances as a pathway to professional success.⁶⁰ A combative culture is shaped by the quest to dominate others and compete for power, authority, and status.

A combative culture includes four defining dimensions:⁶¹

Show no weakness

The perception that showing emotion, raising doubts, or asking for advice is a sign of weakness and will not be respected.

// But I think there's a little bit of, 'Oh, that's kind of'—like, just to be frank—'sissy stuff,' right? 'That's not my macho way of doing things.'

– Senior vice president in engineering design

Strength and stamina

The notion that characteristics such as physical size, athleticism, or ability to work long hours are tied to admiration and respect in the workplace.

// I was told that there was a female electrician, she did a job, and she was offered to go torque the nut down properly. After she was done another guy went out to re-torque it because they did not trust that she had the strength to torque it down properly.

– Senior director in utility

Put work first

The belief that work must always come first, even before personal life and family.

“ If you’re working in a very high-stress workplace...sometimes those kinds of things come out. Part of that can be...the expectations around hours and workload and stuff like that.

– Executive director in government

Dog eat dog

A survival-of-the-fittest mindset; The belief that everyone should advocate only for themselves and not trust others.

“ They came from a culture of, ‘If you don’t agree with us, we’ll fire you.’ And I eventually was laid off from that company. Actually, [it was] a week after doing a presentation for women and equality on National Women’s Day.

– Mid-level manager in energy

Previous studies show that this type of culture correlates with negative organizational dynamics such as poor workplace culture and toxic leadership; dominating coworker behaviours such as bullying and harassment; negative work attitudes among individuals such as burnout and greater intention to leave; and poor personal well-being including anxiety and depression.⁶²

Our own findings reveal a direct link between a combative culture and the propensity to do nothing to interrupt sexism.

When confronted by a sexist behaviour, **36% of men in more-combative cultures report doing nothing, compared to 6% of men in less-combative cultures.**⁶³

Men Describe the Disrupting Impact of Masculine Values, Norms, and Practices

In our interviews, we asked men about their views on general organizational conditions that can perpetuate sexism and inhibit men from confronting it. We were struck by how often interviewees shared stories that described the institutionalization of stereotypically masculine values, norms, and practices in their day-to-day workplace experiences. More than 70% of interviewees suggested that this type of culture was the root cause of institutionalized sexism or viewed it as an obstacle to engaging employees in removing sexism. Their stories illustrated many facets of these stereotypically masculine behaviours.⁶⁴

Sensitivity to loss of status

This sensitivity is shaped by a zero-sum mindset among some men. This mindset is fed by an incorrect assumption that women's advancement is a threat to men's status.⁶⁵ Some evidence suggests that these beliefs are reinforced in combative workplace cultures and serve as a mechanism for workplace sexism to persist.⁶⁶

“ I think there is almost an expectation that are you promoting gender equity at the expense of men....Which team are you actually on?....I think the expectation of how you're going to be viewed by other men can play into that.

– Senior director in financial services

“ The culture was more typical of how some people might stereotype male culture. So lots of drinking, lots of going to events, sporting events or whatever else. And it was very much about who you know and that sort of thing.... I didn't have the same interest in those things. And so at times you kind of feel, well, what am I missing out on?

– Senior manager in professional services

Stereotypically male practices

These values and practices are aligned with cultural constructions of masculinity. They are prevalent in some workplaces and, if rewarded, can be a path to excluding and othering women and some men.

Normalization of traditional men's lifestyle

Work norms and expectations that reflect the lifestyle of married heterosexual men can lead to systematic discrimination against people who don't have that lifestyle.

// The things you can do to be successful I believe are predicated on a system that... A...would assume that you're male in the workplace, and B... would assume that you have a full-time spouse at home. ... So I think we apply very paternalistic, a very traditional, family model into our work environment and what we expect. ... I have heard more than once that, oh, everyone needs a work wife.

– Mid-level director in education

“ When an organization values results more than...the ‘how,’ you’ll see those bad behaviours forgiven, looked the other way...which then allows those to continue, potentially multiply, potentially get worse....If someone’s successful, we’ll let them get away with this: ‘Well, they didn’t really mean that.’ And there’s a lot of excuses that can be attributed to that.

– Senior partner in consulting

Aggressive and intense work conditions

Insensitive behaviours such as sexism often emerge in intense environments that require long work hours and complete dedication. These workplaces promote a competitive, goal-oriented culture, as opposed to one that’s communal and ethics-oriented.

“Boys’ Club” cultures

Predominantly male institutions can challenge men’s engagement in interrupting sexism because masculine work cultures can make it difficult for men to break out and stand up to sexism.

“ The last company I was at, it was a construction company...and in a lot of the internal meetings, there was a lot of talk about cheerleaders and secretaries and sort of objectifying women....A lot of that came from senior leadership, and [it] created this... locker room culture. And so, I would say at that company, I was far less comfortable sticking my neck out.

– Mid-level manager in energy

A Climate of Futility: When Men Believe They Can’t Make a Difference

In our survey, 45% of men indicated high levels of a climate of futility related to speaking up against sexism.⁶⁷ Furthermore, we found a direct link between participants’ perception of futility and their likelihood of doing nothing to interrupt sexism: 36% of men who reported higher perceptions that their actions wouldn’t make a difference said they would do nothing, whereas only 7% of men who didn’t share that sense of futility reported doing nothing.⁶⁸ As noted in the *Harvard Business Review*, “The desire to speak up is fundamentally about the wish to change something and make a difference. But, if you continue to cement employees’ belief that speaking up is a waste of time, they’ll save their breath.”⁶⁹

36%

of men who perceived high levels of futility said they would do nothing

7%

of men who perceived less futility would do nothing

Employees may feel that speaking up is futile for any number of reasons, including workplace hierarchies that lead them to doubt that managers will even be receptive to the information they have to share; the feeling that people in positions of power don't want to hear employee complaints or opinions; and the shared belief that they cannot effectively change status quo.⁷⁰

External factors may also play a role. In times of uncertainty and turbulence, employees may choose to suppress their ideas, feeling that no one will be open to hearing anything that could be viewed as inessential to keeping the organization strong.⁷¹

A few interviewees shed light on how power dynamics and a sense of futility can discourage men from acting when faced with sexism:

//

In that organization...I didn't feel safe, and I didn't feel like there was any point....It felt like no matter what I did, nothing was going to change.

– Senior leader in mining

//

[I felt] you know, frustration, disappointment...in people and in...the organization sometimes that in the year 2020...people still think and talk that way. [And]...a little bit helpless where that individual being more senior, et cetera...[so] I didn't do anything about it.

– Senior director in food manufacturing



When new ideas come in, sometimes people will say, 'Oh, we've tried that before.' ...The other thing is that you have to dress up the proposal in such a way that the other person...sees a benefit to them. ...You need to be very careful not to put them on the defensive because in an environment where it's hyper-conservative and not a lot changes, or change happens ridiculously slow, you have to slowly... lead them.

– Entry-level engineer in energy transmission

Costs Increase in More Negative Climates

Men are much more likely to do nothing in the face of a sexist event when the perceived costs of interrupting are high. The impact of a climate of silence, combative culture, and a climate of futility on the tendency to do nothing is exacerbated when men perceive higher potential costs, such as being passed over for an important assignment or damaging their relationships with peers.⁷²

//

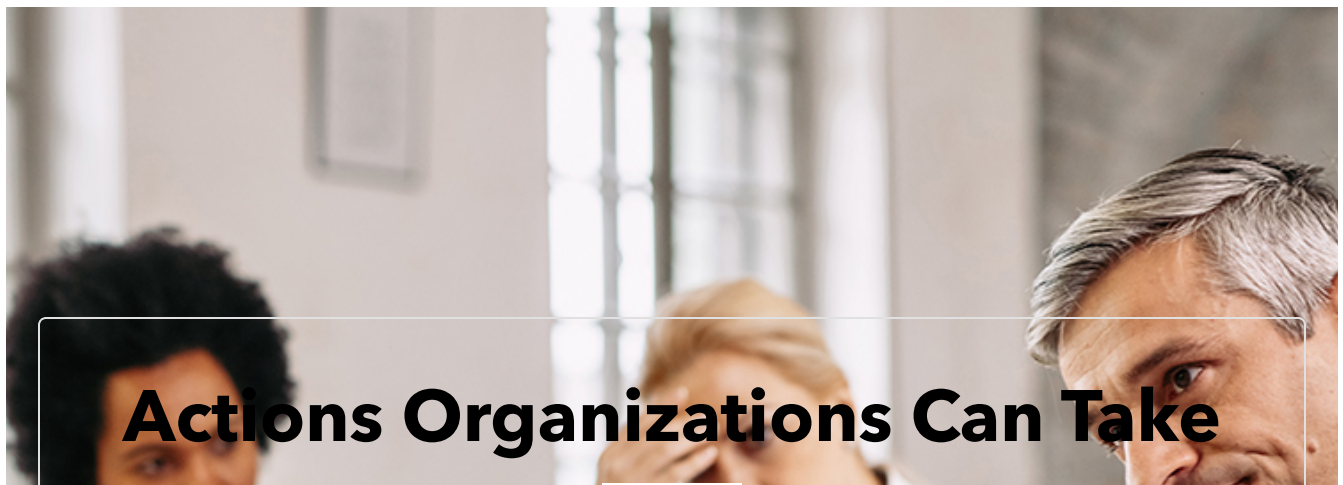
It's about finding yourself in situations where you know that you should say something, but there's that little voice in your head that tells you not to rock the boat. It tells you to ignore it, to move on... [that] it's easier just to get past this, let them finish what they're doing and then keep moving on. And that I think comes from fear. Whether it's fear of embarrassment, whether it's fear of ostracization, fear of disrupting the status quo, fear of conflict, fear of not having the right words.

– Senior director in financial services

//

I think the biggest thing that people fear is job security and whether they're appearing to be too liberal or too annoying or...too righteous, if you will, by sticking our neck out and standing up for other people.

– Mid-level manager in energy





//

I think the final piece is some broader understanding that everybody has got accountability in this. It's not one versus the other, it's everybody. And how do you make that a systematic piece that you understand the value of why we would do this work, the impact of not doing it, and your role as a leader, as an individual contributor, in supporting that.

– Mid-level manager in telecommunications

Look Inward

Leaders: Challenge yourselves to have the courage, curiosity, and humility⁷³ to reflect on your role in suppressing or encouraging employee voices, and notice when personal barriers hold you back from listening to employees with less social or institutional clout.⁷⁴

Ask yourself: Who gets your full attention and who are you more prone to tune out, hurry along, or half-listen to while you multitask? Whom do you trust, and who has to work harder to prove a point to you? Who elicits sympathy, and who triggers frustration?

Examine the metrics from employee surveys or roundtables to fully understand what is going on, and why. Don't assume your organization lacks a combative culture. Talk with employees to elicit their viewpoints.

Challenge yourself to look inward and examine which of your own perspectives and behaviours make you susceptible to toxic leadership behaviours, even if unintentionally. Ask yourself: How do the attributes I value in myself and other leaders support or challenge inclusive leadership? To what extent do my beliefs and values as a leader potentially promote and reinforce a problematic climate?

Use Your Power to Amplify Inclusion

Leaders have the power to create an atmosphere that either encourages or suppresses employees' voices.

Foster an environment of collective voice by building an empowering culture where employees—especially those from underrepresented or marginalized groups—can build meaningful networks inside the workplace.⁷⁵

Show employees that their voices lead to change. Listen to their challenges, ideas, and views without becoming defensive. Take them seriously, and make an effort to respond to the insights they have shared with you. Sponsor their creative ideas that can help with organizational growth.

Make sure to create an environment where women are given agency and feel heard, and where men don't feel pressure to conform to traditional ideals.

Create Structures That Support the Culture You Want

Employees' vision and creativity are among the unique resources that cannot be easily substituted with technology.⁷⁶ To fully benefit from their talent, organizations must ensure that all employees can share their ideas and feel heard.

Create mechanisms for employees to safely share ideas, dissatisfactions, and concerns. Examples include online forums, anonymous grievance hotlines, and safe places for employee networking.

Look deeply into organizational structures that normalize "ruthless competition" among employees and a "winner-takes-all" culture. Consider team-based rewards systems—compensation plans based on team performance and outcomes—which have been shown to promote a culture of cooperation and trust.⁷⁷

Create and sustain policies such as paternity leave and flexible working arrangements that encourage work-life effectiveness among all employees regardless of gender. When used, these policies dispel beliefs that career advancement must come at the expense of personal and family life—one of the hallmarks of a combative culture.

Serve as a Role Model

Organizations in which employees are afraid to ask questions or be candid about their mistakes may be promoting a combative culture in which employees strive to be at the top of the pecking order. To free men from these limiting norms and expectations, leaders must act as role models.

Promote humility by admitting that you don't have all the answers. Ask lots of questions and don't make assumptions—especially that everything is okay.

Set the tone by promoting organizational values centered on safety, respect, humanity, growth, and work-life flexibility rather than physical strength (such as high-risk sports) and stamina (for example, the ability to work long hours).

Small things matter. On a daily basis—whether in meetings or during casual conversations—do you encourage employees, or shut them down? Take five minutes during a meeting to ask, "Any contrasting opinions?" Look around the room and see who's speaking up and who's not, and follow up appropriately. When talking about challenges at work, make sure you fully understand what people are experiencing through active listening.

Extended Methodology

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using two methods:

Survey

Recruitment and Data Collection:

An online survey about experiences with sexism in the workplace was completed by 1,493 Canadian men who were compensated for their participation via a third-party company that recruited them. Participants were eligible to participate in the survey if they lived in Canada, identified as male, and were employed on a full-time basis. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. All survey data was collected between December 2019 and January 2020.

Sample: The online survey sample consisted of 1,493 men working in Canada. The average age of participants was 41 years old. Six percent of the sample identified as being Indigenous, with the large majority identifying as First Nations. Of those who did not identify as Indigenous, 70% identified as white, 11% Chinese, and other racial/ethnic groups were each represented by 5% of the sample or less.

Survey Content: Survey questions examined men's (1) perceptions of their organizational climate and their work experiences; (2) perceptions of the consequences of interrupting sexism in their workplaces; (3) behavioural intentions in response to incidences of sexism in the workplace; and (4) gender ideology beliefs and level of commitment to removing gender inequity. In combination, these questions

allowed us to examine the impacts of personal agency, combined with organizational conditions that encourage or discourage men's engagement in interrupting day-to-day sexism in the workplace.

Analysis of Survey Data: We developed a comprehensive measure of interrupting behaviours and then employed an exploratory factor analysis to examine the different types of behaviours that men engage in after hearing a sexist remark. Four factors were identified. After identification of the factors, individual items constituting each factor were averaged to represent a composite for each of the four factors.

We analyzed the data using exploratory factor analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, and linear and logistic regression. Where relevant, all results presented were significant at $p < .01$ unless otherwise noted.

In-depth interviews

Format: A trained facilitator conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 27 men in the Canadian labour market who were involved in gender advocacy in their workplace currently or in the past or expressed personal passion for being part of the solution to address sexism at work. These interviews took place between December 2019 and January 2020; the interviewer relied on facilitation techniques to create a safe space for men to make their voices heard. Except for one face-to-face interview, the rest of the interviews were conducted via video conference.

Recruitment and Sample: We used snowballing sampling to recruit the participants. Those who worked in upper- and senior-level management positions represented 59% of the sample, with 33% mid-level managers and 4% in non-managerial positions. The average age of participants was 46 years old. Of the group, 74% identified as white, 7% South Asian, 4% Chinese, 4% Indigenous, and 11% as other racial or ethnic groups. Participants with less than six years of tenure at their current organizations comprised 33%, and 19% had more than 20 years of tenure. Interviewees came from diverse industries, with 37% from resources, utilities, and energy; 26% from healthcare, education, government, and nonprofit; and the rest from other industries such as business services and consulting, high-tech and telecom, finance and accounting, and manufacturing.

Interview Content: Our interview questions were purposefully designed to encourage participants to reflect on contextual factors in organizations that can have either enabling or disempowering implications for men's ability to actively interrupt sexism.

Interview topics included: (1) a discussion of participants' backgrounds and engagement in gender advocacy both inside and outside the workplace; (2) perceptions of workplace conditions that can promote sexism; (3) experiences with interrupting sexism and organizational factors impacting those experiences; and (4) suggestions for how organizations can encourage men to advocate for gender equity as well as ideas for effectively interrupting sexism.

Analysis of Interview Data: All the interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Audio files were permanently deleted after transcription was completed. Any identifying information including participants' real names and their current or previous workplaces was removed from all the transcripts.

Two team members manually coded two of the interviews independently, wrote detailed memos, and then compared codes. A codebook was developed based on this initial coding and imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package.

Three team members then coded the remaining interviews in NVivo and explored the major themes emerging from the data. The analysis provided an in-depth understanding of how managers and leaders perceive causes of sexism in the workplace, barriers to men's engagement, and organizations' role in alleviating those challenges.

Acknowledgments

We extend our immense gratitude to the participants of this study for sharing their invaluable insights and perspectives.

This project has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/status-women/news/2019/03/department-for-women-and-gender-equality-womens-program.html>.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada

How to cite this product: [Negin Sattari <https://www.catalyst.org/bio/negin-sattari-phd/>](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/negin-sattari-phd/), [Emily Shaffer <https://www.catalyst.org/bio/emily-shaffer-phd/>](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/emily-shaffer-phd/), [Sarah DiMuccio <https://www.catalyst.org/bio/sarah-dimuccio/>](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/sarah-dimuccio/), and [Dnika J. Travis <https://www.catalyst.org/bio/dnika-j-travis-phd/>](https://www.catalyst.org/bio/dnika-j-travis-phd/), *Interrupting Sexism at Work: What Drives Men to Respond Directly or Do Nothing?* (Catalyst, June 25, 2020).

Endnotes

¹ Twenty-five items relating to the ways that men may interrupt sexism were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with promax rotation. KMO and Bartlett's test indicated that the items were sufficiently related to proceed with the factor analysis. The analysis yielded four factors that explained 58.56% of the variance for the set of variables. Factor 1 was labeled "direct interrupting" with the following items loading strongly: I would report what happened, I would tell my colleague that what happened is a reportable offense, I would pursue a conversation with my colleague about what happened, I would try to educate my colleague about the implications of what happened, I would question my colleague about what happened, I would tell my colleague in the moment that what happened was inappropriate, I would make a note of what happened, I would tell my colleague later that I don't think what happened was okay, I would give the candidate career advice later. Factor 2 was labeled "unassertively react" with the following items loading strongly: I would use sarcasm to indicate my concern, I would try to express my concern non-verbally, I would use humor to express my concern, I would sigh and comment under my breath, I would show signs of disgust, I would show signs of surprise. Factor 3 was labeled "redirect" with the following items loading strongly: I would redirect the conversation to the candidate's qualifications, I would keep the conversation focused on the task at hand, I would remind my colleague that the candidate is qualified. Factor 4 was labeled "do nothing" with the following items loading strongly: I wouldn't say a thing, I would do nothing, I would hide my emotions, I would consider it inappropriate for me to do or say something, I would ignore my colleague in the moment, I would expect someone else to take responsibility for doing something. One item did not load strongly on any factor and was dropped.

² Multiple regression was carried out to investigate the impact of individual factors on men's endorsement of directly interrupting in response to a sexist comment. Results indicated that the model explained 44% of the variance after controlling for race and organizational rank and that the model was a significant predictor of directly interrupting, $F(6, 1315) = 199.04, p < .001$. Commitment ($b = .28, t = 11.04, p < .001$), confidence ($b = .25, t = 8.23, p < .001$), awareness ($b = .14, t = 5.44, p < .001$), and impact ($b = .22, t = 5.96, p < .001$) significantly contributed to the model.

³ Multiple regression was carried out to investigate the impact of organizational factors on men's likelihood of doing

nothing in response to a sexist comment. Results indicated that the model explained 41% of the variance after controlling for race and organizational rank and that the model was a significant predictor of doing nothing, $F(5, 1316) = 213.77, p < .001$. Silencing ($b = .40, t = 9.67, p < .001$), combativeness ($b = .19, t = 4.23, p < .001$), and futility ($b = .23, t = 10.86, p < .001$) significantly contributed to the model.

⁴ Emily Shaffer, Negin Sattari, and Alixandra Pollack, *Interrupting Sexism at Work: How Men Respond in a Climate of Silence* <<https://www.catalyst.org/research/interrupting-sexism-silence/>> (Catalyst, 2020).

⁵ Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism," <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1996-03014-006>>" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 70, no. 3 (1996): p. 491-512; Janet K. Swim and Laurie L. Cohen, "Overt, Covert, and Subtle Sexism: A Comparison Between the Attitudes Toward Women and Modern Sexism Scales," <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00103.x#articlecitationdownloadcontainer>>" *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1997): p. 103-118.

⁶ Lilia M. Cortina, "Unseen Injustice: Incivility as Modern Discrimination in Organizations," <<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/amr.2008.27745097>>" *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2008): p. 55-75; Swim and Cohen.

⁷ Note that sexism intersects with other axes of inequalities and discriminations such as racism, ageism, and classism in shaping individual experiences and underprivileges. Anthony G. Greenwald and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes," *Psychological Review*, vol. 102, no. 1 (1995): p. 4-27; Catalyst, *What Is Unconscious Bias?* <<https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-what-is-unconscious-bias/>> (December 11, 2014).

⁸ Brenda L. Russell and Kristin Y. Trigg, "Tolerance of Sexual Harassment: An Examination of Gender Differences, Ambivalent Sexism, Social Dominance, and Gender Roles," <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/b:sers.0000023075.32252.fd>>" *Sex Roles*, vol. 50, nos. 7/8 (2004): p. 565-573.

⁹ Business Fights Poverty, "Gender Equality is Everyone's Business: Engaging Men As Allies to Advance Gender Equality Across The Value Chain," <<https://businessfightspoverty.org/articles/gender-equality-is-everyones-business-engaging-men-as-allies-to-advance-gender-equality-across-the-value-chain/>>" (February 2020); Sandrine Devillard, Tiffany Vogel, Andrew Pickersgill, Anu Madgavkar, Tracy Nowski, Mekala Krishnan, Tina Pan, and Dania Kechrid, *The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Canada* <<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-canada>>, (McKinsey Global Institute, June 2017).

¹⁰ This study builds on Catalyst's research <<https://www.catalyst.org/research/engaging-men-in-gender-initiatives-what-change-agents-need-to-know/>> series, initiated in 2009 on engaging men in gender initiatives, which gave birth to Catalyst's MARC <<https://www.catalyst.org/marc/>> (Men Advocating Real Change) program for engaging men across industries in efforts to remove gender inequities in the workplace.

¹¹ Shaffer, Sattari, and Pollack.

¹² Council on Foreign Relations, *Women's Workplace Equality Index* <<https://www.cfr.org/interactive/legal-barriers/country-rankings>> (2018).

¹³ Melissa Moyser, *Women and Paid Work* <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>>, (Statistics Canada, 2017).

¹⁴ Devillard et al.

¹⁵ See, for example, Cheryl R. Kaiser and Carol T. Miller, "A Stress and Coping Perspective on Confronting Sexism" <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00133.x>>," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (June 2004): p. 168-178; J. Nicole Shelton, Jennifer A. Richeson, Jessica Salvatore, and Diana M. Hill, "Silence Is Not Golden: The Intrapersonal Consequences of Not Confronting Prejudice" <<https://www.scholars.northwestern.edu/en/publications/silence-is-not-golden-the-intrapersonal-consequences-of-not-confr-2/>>," in *Stigma and Group Inequality: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Shana

Levin and Colette van Laar (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers); Janet K. Swim and Lauri L. Hyers, "Excuse me—What Did You Just Say?!: Women's Public and Private Responses to Sexist Remarks <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103198913701>>," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1999): p. 68-88.

¹⁶ Leslie Ashburn-Nardo, Kathryn A. Morris, and Stephanie A. Goodwin, "The Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) Model: Applying CPR in Organizations <<https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/amle.2008.34251671>>," *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, vol. 7, no. 3 (September 2008): p. 332-342.

¹⁷ Benjamin J. Drury and Cheryl R. Kaiser, "Allies Against Sexism: The Role of Men in Confronting Sexism <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-55023-003>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 70, no. 4 (2014): p. 637-652.

¹⁸ The quotes presented in this table come from a separate online survey conducted by Catalyst to learn about men's and women's on-the-ground encounters with sexist incidences in the workplace and their reactions to such situations. A sample of 150 men and women in the US, Canada, UK, and other countries completed the survey. The quotes are not specific to Canada and are only used to provide real examples for the four categories of behaviours that emerged from our analysis of survey data in Canada.

¹⁹ Non-management (including entry-level) employee in resources, utilities, and energy working in Australia.

²⁰ First-level manager in resources, utilities, and energy working in Ireland.

²¹ Second-level manager in manufacturing working in the United States.

²² First-level manager in manufacturing working in the United States.

²³ This scale was composed of 24 items assessing the behaviours that men would likely engage in when hearing a colleague making a sexist remark. These 24 items were divided into four subscales: Directly interrupt, redirect, unassertively interrupt, and do nothing. Participants responded to each item on a 1 ("not at all likely") to 6 ("extremely likely") scale.

²⁴ Interrupting sexism behaviours were measured on a 1 ("not at all likely") to 6 ("extremely likely") scale. Participants whose average on each subscale was 4 or higher were categorized as having a high likelihood of their behaviours falling within that subscale category.

²⁵ Sarah Fotheringham and Lana Wells, Tomorrow's Men Today: Canadian Men's Insights on Engaging Men and Boys in Creating a More Gender Equal Future <<https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/111183>> (University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence, 2019).

²⁶ Fotheringham and Wells.

²⁷ Shaffer, Sattari, and Pollack.

²⁸ Glick and Fiske.

²⁹ Four items measured the likelihood that men would interrupt sexism in a way that is consistent with benevolent sexist beliefs. Example items include: "I would tell my colleagues to think about if this were their mother or daughter" and "I would ask my colleague to be more protective toward women." Scale responses ranged from 1 ("not at all likely") to 6 ("extremely likely"). An average of these 4 items was created for each participant and scores 4 or higher were considered as having a high likelihood to engage in the behaviour.

³⁰ Kathleen Connelly and Martin Heesacker, "Why is Benevolent Sexism Appealing?: Associations with System Justification and Life Satisfaction <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0361684312456369>>," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol 36, no. 4 (August 2012): p. 432-443.

³¹ Alice H. Eagly and Steven J. Karau, "Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders," *Psychological Review*, vol. 109, no. 3 (2002): p. 573-598.

³² Connelly and Heesacker.

³³ Matthew D. Hammond, Chris G. Sibley, and Nickola C. Overall. "The Allure of Sexism: Psychological Entitlement Fosters Women's Endorsement of Benevolent Sexism Over Time," *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, vol. 5, no. 4 (September 2013): p. 422-29.

³⁴ Multiple regression was carried out to investigate the impact of individual factors on men's endorsement of directly interrupting in response to a sexist comment. Results indicated that the model explained 44% of the variance after controlling for race and organizational rank and that the model was a significant predictor of directly

interrupting, $F(6, 1315) = 199.04, p < .001$. Commitment ($b = .28, t = 11.04, p < .001$), confidence ($b = .25, t = 8.23, p < .001$), awareness ($b = .14, t = 5.44, p < .001$), and impact ($b = .22, t = 5.96, p < .001$) significantly contributed to the model.

³⁵ The commitment to confronting scale was developed by J. Nicole Shelton, Jennifer A. Richeson, Jessica Salvatore, and Diana M. Hill, "Silence Is Not Golden: The Intrapersonal Consequences of Not Confronting Prejudice" <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-15958-004>>," *Stigma and Group Inequality*, (2006): p. 79-96.

³⁶ This scale was developed by Cheryl R. Kaiser and Carol T. Miller, "A Stress and Coping Perspective on Confronting Sexism" <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00133.x>>," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (June 2004): p. 168-178.

³⁷ To assess the personal benefits one may receive from interrupting sexism, we created a three-item measure. The scale has good internal consistency, $\alpha = .812$.

³⁸ Adapted from Kaiser and Miller.

³⁹ Commitment to confronting sexism was measured by 5 items, which were averaged to create a composite and then dichotomized. Scale responses ranged from 1 ("not at all") to 6 ("very much"). The percentage presented here reflects scores averaging a 4 or higher.

⁴⁰ Commitment significantly predicted directly interrupting, $b = .54, t(1491) = 30.25, p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 311.02, p < .001$.

⁴¹ Confidence was measured on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 6 ("Strongly Agree") scale. Six items were averaged to create a composite score and then dichotomized. To dichotomize confidence in confronting sexism, scores averaging 4 or higher were considered as indicating "high confidence".

⁴² Confidence significantly predicted directly interrupting, $b = .64, t(1491) = 23.15, p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 187.09, p < .001$.

⁴³ The personal benefits scale was measured on a 1 ("Not at all") to 6 ("Very much") scale. Three items were averaged to create a composite score and then dichotomized. Scores averaging higher than 4 were considered to be high.

⁴⁴ Thirteen items measured the perceived benefits to the common good. Responses to the scale ranged from 1 ("Not at all") to 6 ("Very much"). A composite score was created by computing an average of all items and then dichotomized. Scores averaging 4 or higher were considered to indicate a high belief in the benefits to the common good.

⁴⁵ Personal benefits significantly predicted directly interrupting, $b = .51, t(1491) = 24.28, p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 186.51, p < .001$.

⁴⁶ Belief in the common good significantly predicted directly interrupting, $b = .73, t(1491) = 24.10, p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 244.71, p < .001$.

⁴⁷ Sarah J. Gervais, Amy L. Hillard, and Theresa K. Vescio, "Confronting Sexism: The Role of Relationship Orientation and Gender" <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9838-7>>," *Sex Roles*, vol. 63 (2010): p. 463-474.

⁴⁸ Jennifer J. Kish-Gephart, James R. Detert, Linda Klebe Treviño, and Amy C. Edmondson, "Silenced by Fear: The Nature, Sources, and Consequences of Fear at Work," *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, vol. 29 (2009): p. 163-193; Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison and Frances J. Miliken, "Speaking Up, Remaining Silent: The Dynamics of Voice and Silence in Organizations" <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-6486.00383>>," *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 40, no. 6 (August 2003): p. 1353-1358; James R. Detert, Ethan R. Burris, and David A. Harrison, "Do Your Employees Think Speaking up Is Pointless?" <<https://hbr.org/2010/05/do-your-employees-think-speaki>>" *Harvard Business Review*, May 26, 2010.

⁴⁹ Eight items measured perceived organizational silence. Responses to this scale ranged from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). A composite score was created by computing an average of all items and then

dichotomized. Scores averaging 3 or higher were considered to indicate high organizational silence. Scale adapted from Elif Daşcı and Necati Cemaloğlu, "The Development of the Organizational Silence Scale: Validity-Reliability Study," *Journal of Human Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2016): p. 33-45.

⁵⁰ Combative culture was measured using the Masculinity Contest Culture scale. Peter Glick, Jennifer L. Berdahl, and Natalya M. Alonso, "Development and Validation of the Masculinity Contest Culture Scale <<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12280>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September, 2018): p. 449-476; Natalya M. Alonso, "Playing to Win: Male-Male Sex-Based Harassment and the Masculinity Contest <<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12283>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September 2018): p. 477-499.

⁵¹ Perception of futility was measured by participants' endorsement that their efforts "wouldn't make a difference anyway." This item was adapted from Kaiser and Miller.

⁵² A climate of silence was measured by eight items on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") scale. The items were averaged to create a composite and then dichotomized. Scores averaging 3 or higher were considered as indicating "high silence."

⁵³ Organizational silence significantly predicted doing nothing in response to sexism, $b = .68$, $t(1491) = 28.48$, $p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 258.13$, $p < .001$.

⁵⁴ Kish-Gephart et al.

⁵⁵ Kish-Gephart et al.

⁵⁶ Maria Vakola and Dimitris Bouradas, "Antecedents and Consequences of Organizational Silence: An Empirical Investigation," *Employee Relations*, vol. 27, no. 5 (October 2005): p. 441-458.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison and Frances J. Milliken, "Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World," <<https://journals.aom.org/toc/amr/25/4>> " *Academy of Management Review*, vol 25, no. 4 (October 2000): p. 706-725.

⁵⁸ Sonya Fontenot Premeaux and Arthur G. Bedeian, "Breaking the Silence: The Moderating Effects of Self-Monitoring in Predicting Speaking Up in the Workplace," *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 40, no. 6 (September 2003): p. 1537-1562.

⁵⁹ Combative culture was measured using 12 items on a 1 ("Not at all true of my organization") to 5 ("Entirely true of my organization") scale. An average was calculated to create a composite score and then dichotomized. Scores averaging a 3 or higher were considered to be indicative of a highly combative culture.

⁶⁰ Robin J. Ely and Michael Kimmel, "Thoughts on the Workplace as a Masculinity Contest <<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.12290>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September 2018): p. 628-634.

⁶¹ Jennifer L. Berdahl, Marianne Cooper, Peter Glick, Robert W. Livingston, and Joan C. Williams, "Work as a Masculinity Contest <<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12289>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September 2018): p. 422-448.

⁶² Glick, Berdahl, and Alonso; Alonso.

⁶³ Combative culture significantly predicted doing nothing in response to sexism, $b = .70$, $t(1491) = 25.88$, $p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 210.35$, $p < .001$.

⁶⁴ Please note that the aspects of masculine norms, values, and practices presented in this table were derived based on our analysis of qualitative data gathered from our 27 interviews.

⁶⁵ Jeanine Prime and Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, *Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need to Know* <<https://www.catalyst.org/research/engaging-men-in-gender-initiatives-what-change-agents-need-to-know/>> (Catalyst, 2009).

⁶⁶ Sophie L. Kuchynka, Jennifer K. Bosson, Joseph A. Vandello, and Curtis Puryear, "Zero-Sum Thinking and the Masculinity Contest: Perceived Intergroup Competition and Workplace Gender Bias <<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12281>>," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 74, no. 3

(September 2018); p. 529-550.

⁶⁷ Perceptions of futility were measured using one item on a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 6 ("Strongly Agree") scale. Responses were then dichotomized with scores 4 or higher indicating a high perception of futility.

⁶⁸ Perception of futility significantly predicted doing nothing in response to sexism, $b = .44$, $t(1491) = 22.84$, $p < .001$. A chi-squared analysis was conducted to test the difference in percentages. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1, 1493) = 182.97$, $p < .001$.

⁶⁹ James R. Detert, Ethan R. Burris, and David A. Harrison, "[Do Your Employees Think Speaking up Is Pointless?](https://hbr.org/2010/05/do-your-employees-think-speaking-up-is-pointless)" *Harvard Business Review*, May 26, 2010.

⁷⁰ Detert et al; Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison, Sarah L. Wheeler-Smith, and Dishan Kamdar, "[Speaking Up in Groups: A Cross-Level Study of Group Voice Climate and Voice](https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-17087-001)" *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 96, no. 1 (2011): p. 183-191.

⁷¹ Detert et al.

⁷² A moderation analysis was performed to examine the impact of a combative culture, work costs, and their interaction on doing nothing. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .43$, $F(3, 1489) = 375.24$, $p < .001$. The main effect of combative culture was significant, $b = .38$, $t(1489) = 11.65$, $p < .001$. The main effect of work costs was also significant, $b = .32$, $t(1489) = 13.22$, $p < .001$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $b = .16$, $t(1489) = 8.89$, $p < .001$. Simple slopes indicated that where work costs are high, the link between combative climates and doing nothing is exacerbated - when work costs are high, $b = .59$, $t(1489) = 14.37$, $p < .001$; but when work costs are low, $b = .18$, $t(1489) = 4.47$, $p < .001$. The relationship between organizational silence and doing nothing was also moderated by work costs. The model was significant, $R^2 = .44$, $F(3, 1489) = 388.22$, $p < .001$. The main effect of organizational silence was significant, $b = .42$, $t(1489) = 13.98$, $p < .001$. The main effect of work costs on doing nothing was also significant, $b = .29$, $t(1489) = 11.51$, $p < .001$. The main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $b = .12$, $t(1489) = 7.04$, $p < .001$. Tests of simple slopes indicated that where work costs are high, the link between organizational silence and doing nothing is exacerbated - when work costs are high, $b = .57$, $t(1489) = 14.96$, $p < .001$; but when work costs are low, $b = .27$, $t(1489) = 7.60$, $p < .001$. We also investigated whether work costs moderated the relationship between the perception of futility and doing nothing. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .41$, $F(3, 1489) = 343.06$, $p < .001$. The main effect of a sense of futility was significant, $b = .23$, $t(1489) = 11.19$, $p < .001$. The main effect of work costs was also significant, $b = .39$, $t(1489) = 17.10$, $p < .001$. The main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $b = .05$, $t(1489) = 4.68$, $p < .001$. Simple slopes tests revealed that in organizations where work costs are high, the link between a sense of futility and doing nothing is exacerbated - when work costs are high, $b = .30$, $t(1489) = 11.64$, $p < .001$; but when work costs are low, $b = .16$, $t(1489) = 6.46$, $p < .001$.

⁷³ Catalyst's model of inclusive leadership identifies curiosity, humility, and courage as main elements of leading inward. For more details, see Dnika J. Travis, Emily Shaffer, and Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon, "[Getting Real About Inclusive Leadership: Why Change Starts With You](https://www.catalyst.org/research/inclusive-leadership-report/)" (Catalyst, 2019).

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison and Frances J. Milliken, "[Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World](#)," *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 25, no. 4 (October 2000): p. 706-725.; Maria Vakola and Dimitris Bouradas, "[Antecedents and Consequences of Organizational Silence: An Empirical Investigation](#)," *Employee Relations*, vol. 27, no. 5 (October 2005): p. 441-458.

⁷⁵ Myrtle P. Bell, Mustafa F. Özbilgin, T. Alexandra Beauregard, and Olca Sürgevil, "[Voice, Silence, and Diversity in 21st Century Organizations: Strategies for Inclusion of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Employees](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/hrm.20401)," *Human Resource Management*, vol. 50, no. 1 (February 2011): p. 131-46.

⁷⁶ Andrew Arnold, "[Why Robots Will Not Take Over Human Jobs](https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewarnold/2018/03/27/why-robots-will-not-take-over-human-jobs/)," *Forbes*, March 27, 2018; Lauren Pasquarella Daley, "[Women and the Future of Work](https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-future-work-report)" (Catalyst, 2019).

⁷⁷ Northwestern School of Education and Social Policy, "[Team-Based Rewards Structures and Their Impact on Team Trust.](https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/masters-learning-and-organizational-change/knowledge-lens/stories/2011/team-based-rewards.html)" <<https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/masters-learning-and-organizational-change/knowledge-lens/stories/2011/team-based-rewards.html>>

About Catalyst

Catalyst is a global nonprofit working with some of the world's most powerful CEOs and leading companies to help build workplaces that work for women. Founded in 1962, Catalyst drives change with pioneering research, practical tools, and proven solutions to accelerate and advance women into leadership—because progress for women is progress for everyone.

The findings, views, and recommendations expressed in Catalyst reports are not prepared by, are not the responsibility of, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding organizations.



<<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>> This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>>. The foregoing license extends solely to the report used in its entirety. The individual photographs, images, and icons are owned by iStock. Downloading, extracting or using any individual photographs, images or icons separate from the report as a whole is prohibited.

<<https://www.catalyst.org>>

Founded in 1962, Catalyst drives change with preeminent thought leadership, actionable solutions and a galvanized community of multinational corporations to accelerate and advance women into leadership—because progress for women is progress for everyone.

SIGN UP FOR THE LATEST CATALYST NEWS <<https://www.catalyst.org/subscribe>>

© 2024 Catalyst Inc.