

# GENDER

## in a Changing Society

A Guide for Discussion

Presented By:

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## Foreword

This is not the kind of policy report that will tell you what to think. We developed this discussion guide as a way to open up conversations about how society may approach questions about gender from a diverse array of perspectives. The ideas in this report were developed by a panel of experts and lay people invited to do so by the Interactivity Foundation. We encourage you to explore some of these possible policy approaches, even and especially if you do not agree.

Gender can be a difficult topic to discuss because changing norms may challenge the traditional beliefs that people have grown up with, including their religious faith. To others, gender may feel like a prison that limits their very being.

The following dialogues, scenarios and possibilities are based on real-life events. They are designed for open exploratory discussions among small groups. As you read these possibilities and the accompanying scenarios and questions to consider, we hope you will encounter new perspectives.

## Dialogue: Gender Challenges from the Past

Moderator: It's a great pleasure to welcome four outstanding alumni to this seminar on Changing Views of Gender in our Society. I'm going to ask each of our presenters to share with us an early memory from their career.

Gina: My background is engineering. My first day on the job. I was shown to my work area. It was a desk in the secretarial pool.

Anna: I'll never forget my first business trip. When I showed up at the hotel, I had no room. My boss was standing there, so I asked him what was going on. His response was: "I just assumed that you and I would share a room."

Sarah: When I started my job as a sales engineer, I was given the three worst accounts in our company's portfolio. Well, within a year, those three accounts set records for sales and my commission was much higher than my male colleagues. My reward was being reassigned to the next three worst accounts.

Taylor: I'll never forget my first interview. When I walked in the door, the interviewer was obviously shocked. Based on my name, he was expecting a male candidate for what had traditionally been a male-dominated job. Thankfully, I was able to get the job, but I wonder if I would ever have gotten the interview if my first name had been a more common female name.

Rachel: My experience was more of a pleasant one, but still very surprising. I was in a relationship with my longtime girlfriend. What was surprising was that she and our adopted daughter were immediately treated like family.

Gina: Now that we have all shared an early memory, let me add one thing for the audience. All of us have had very successful careers in spite of the early challenges we faced. I think each of us would agree that much of our early success was due in large part to the guidance and mentoring of one of our male professors. We had no women role models, and he helped guide us through our early careers. The only thing he ever asked of us was to "pay it forward."

Discussion Scenario:  
You Can't Say That

Mary Angelini had just submitted a draft of a book titled: *Diversity in Decision Making*. The book was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The theme of the book was that human diversity leads to better decisions. The theme was told through a series of stories of critical decisions that were made by organizations, and how the diversity of the individuals in the decision-making process led to extraordinary outcomes.

The following is a brief exchange between the author and the editor of the book:

Editor: "I loved how you developed your theme and the way you portrayed the role of the participants in the decision-making process."

Author: "Thank you. These are all real case studies from my own consulting background. I've tried not to sugarcoat the outcome or make the characters overly heroic.

That's just who they were, and what they contributed."

Editor: "I do have a problem with one of your case studies, where the woman portrayed in the decision-making process comes across as being misguided in her thinking in a very stereotypical way."

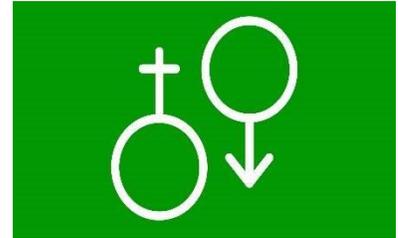
Author: "Well, that's the way it happened. In other case studies, women are portrayed as making good decisions. That wasn't what happened in this case."

Editor: "But we can't have that. We have to edit the case study."



## Possibility A: Tell New Stories – To Achieve Gender Parity and Affirm the Value of All Sexual Identities

The stories we tell are powerful forces for maintaining or changing social norms and expectations. Historical and prevailing images often marginalize women and sexual minorities. Children especially should be presented with diverse role models. People of all ages need to hear stories that affirm their human dignity and that recognize others with sexual and gender identities different than their own. Supporting realistic narratives about diverse gender and sexuality would both counteract prevailing narratives, and lead to an acceptance that there are no limits to anyone based upon sexual or gender identity.



While gender narratives are largely shaped by media outside of governmental control, there are ways that public policy can support the telling of stories that show gender diversity. Some of these include:

1. Arts and humanities councils and public access programs should commit a percentage of their budget to telling stories reflecting diverse gender roles in our society. These would include governmental funding for films, oral histories, books, television, and web programming.
2. Sex education classes should include lessons that reflect diverse sexual identities and roles.
3. Cultural programming should be encouraged to portray diverse gender identities as commonplace in order to establish a broad acceptance of gender diversity by the general public.

### Discussion Questions

1. How can stories about gender be told in a positive manner that normalizes gender diversity?
2. What role might government play to promote portrayals of gender diversity? What role could or should nongovernmental actors play?
3. What do you think it will take to make gender diversity accepted as normal and valued in our society?

### Personal Reflection

How have stories influenced your thoughts about gender?

What beliefs about gender and gender roles do you have from your own family heritage or from the media?

Discussion Scenario:  
Equal Pay for Equal Impact?

The White House was struggling with the question of whether this report should ever be made public. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) had commissioned a study of federal salaries. The study was initiated by a concern that the federal government was losing a lot of good people to the private sector, given the lure of higher compensation.

OPM commissioned the Maxwell Group, a top salary administration firm. What the Maxwell Group did was remarkable. They developed an analysis that looked at value-added impact of different jobs. Basically, the more downstream value-added impact a job had, the more the job was worth.



The results were unexpected. Nurses employed by the Veterans Administration had a much higher impact score than engineers. School teachers employed on military bases and Indian reservations had higher scores than accountants who worked in the General Accounting Office. Generally, many of the educational and human services positions were found to be deserving of higher pay based on their impact scores.

What made the study so challenging to deal with was the structural change it could have on salaries in the federal government and eventually in the private sector. Many of the undervalued positions were positions traditionally associated with a female workforce. The study brought new light to the issue of gender inequity in compensation. It wasn't hard to imagine a new slogan of "equal pay for equal impact" becoming the next big national campaign issue.

What would be the effect on the federal budget, and on the national economy, if salaries needed to be adjusted across the board? What impact could the report have on the perception of jobs that conventionally have been seen as "women's work"?

What are your reactions to this scenario?

## Possibility B: Prioritize Gender Equality Advocacy

Gender equality issues have been with us ever since the nation was formed. It wasn't until 1920, with the adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that women gained the right to vote. There are advocates for gender equality who have a change agenda that encompasses a broad range of gender equality issues. Others view gender equality as a legitimate issue but are not prepared to accept what they feel are the more radical elements of the advocates' agenda.

This possibility would approach gender equality at a slower pace. Gender equality, under this possibility, would be pursued in stages which a broad cross section of the American public accepts. The priorities under this possibility would be:

- Equality of economic opportunities
- Equality of participation in every facet of society
- Support for the various roles of women as mothers, caregivers, wage earners, etc.

This possibility would include the following elements:

- An expansion of federal legislation guaranteeing income equality and protections for all irrespective of gender or sexual orientation
- An expansion of federal legislation to ensure that "glass ceilings" are no longer acceptable in any organization
- A reduction in the burden of proof in cases of sexual harassment or sexual predatory behavior
- An expansion of support and protections under the federal Family Leave Act to protect women against adverse career impacts when they opt to take time off under the Family Leave Act.

### Personal Reflection

Suppose you were in a job that had an impact on your organization, but you were paid less than average of what many of your colleagues had for less of an impact. How would you feel if your pay was based on something you couldn't control?

### Discussion Questions

1. What role, if any, should government play in ensuring wage equality in light of some fields being traditionally low paying?
2. What do you think of compensation based upon impact to society?
3. Salaries, like many other things, have a history that's hard to overcome. How should we address, or even remediate, the situation of low pay for positions traditionally associated with women?

## Discussion Scenario: Running Equal?

Riley Brown won in the courts, enabling her to win on the track. But would she be able to win, or even compete, internationally?

Brown is a world-class middle-distance runner. Since her late teens, she had been a dominating competitor. Along with her dominance came accusations that she was not really a female athlete. Some opposing racers and their coaches pointed to her well-muscled physique and raised objections that it wasn't fair for female athletes to have to run against a male athlete.

In the previous year, the international governing body for track and field, IAAF, acting out of a concern to "protect the integrity of women's athletics," had established a rule setting an upper-limit for the hormone testosterone for female athletes. Some women naturally produce a higher level of testosterone, yet the IAAF reasoned that this gave them an unfair advantage over other female competitors. Any female athlete over this limit could only compete by taking medication to reduce her level of testosterone.

Brown's natural hormone levels were above this limit. Since the upcoming national championships would have to conform to the rules of the international governing body, Brown was informed that she would have to take hormone suppressing medications, which might have other impacts on her performance and on her health generally. Instead, she went to court to seek the right to compete in her natural state.

In court her lawyers argued that the rules for regulating female bodies were just another extension of the ugly history of "sex tests" for female athletes. The hormone test for deciding who was a "real woman" was a continuation of the bad old days, when female athletes were made to parade in the nude before male physicians to ascertain that the athletes were indeed female. What was most decisive for the court's ruling in her favor: male athletes faced no such tests, despite evidence that differential levels of testosterone could impact male athletic performance. The court's ruling for equal treatment meant that athletes would have the right to compete according to their own self-determined sex or gender identity.

Brown was cleared to run in the national championships, but could she make it to the Olympics, where IAAF rules would apply? Meanwhile, in the US the new legal landscape now meant there would be no scrutiny for athletes' sex or gender identities. Transgender athletes were free to compete openly according to their gender identity rather than the identity they were assigned at birth.

What is your reaction to this scenario?

## Possibility C: Ban the Box

All publicly funded institutions and public spaces should stop recognizing gender and sexuality categories altogether.

Historically, gender and sexuality have been tied to certain hierarchies of power and value. Eliminating these distinctions puts those historically disadvantaged (women and sexual minorities – lesbians, gays, transgender, queer) on an even playing field.



This possibility can be implemented by governmental institutions through the following actions:

1. Limit questions about gender and sexuality much like access to Social Security numbers are limited.
2. Create a federal commission to make recommendations on where gender and sexuality differentiation is appropriate and not appropriate. The commission should develop a set of underlying principles which guide differentiation decisions. The commission should also develop recommendations for enforcement.
3. Governmental policy would generally recognize the freedom of people to live their lives according to their self-determined sex and gender identities.

### Discussion Questions

1. If you were on the federal commission, what criteria would you use to determine the criteria for appropriate gender and sexual differentiation?
2. How might the Gender and Sexuality Freedom Act affect the following?
  - a. Sports organizations
  - b. Religious organizations
  - c. Educational organizations

### Personal Reflection

What if your own career, or that of a loved one, was limited by sexual orientation or gender identity. How would you deal with this?

## Discussion Scenario: Family vs DNA

Jim was essentially abandoned as a child. He was informally adopted by an extended family. The family in this case lived and worked together on a farm. They never made much money, but they lived well. As a young child, Jim would often cook dinner for others while they were working in the fields. Though he was teased at first that cooking was “women’s work,” he didn’t care. He loved it. In fact, Jim became quite good at cooking traditional meals with a special touch. This led him to get a job at a nearby resort.



Over time Jim developed his talent for cooking into a major restaurant and food products line. He still lived with his extended family and never married. Jim died suddenly. Jim had never prepared a will or estate plan because he believed that it wasn’t time. Upon his death, his biological family suddenly appeared and under the laws of the state, they received all of his assets.

What do you think about this scenario?

## Policy Possibility D: Embrace a Diversity of Families

American society has evolved in a way that the traditional concept of a family as a biological unit has changed. Blended family units evolving from divorces are very common. But now other family units are also evolving. In some cases, these family units no longer have a romantic connection but form a family unit based upon other reasons (e.g. economics, security).

Governmental policies need to evolve as the concept of families change. Some noted examples include the declarations for financial aid for college (FAFSA), privacy rules in healthcare (HIPPA), and estate transfer practices. This possibility would expand the concept of family through notions such as:



- Development of an approach for individuals to declare their own selfdefined family unit
- Uniform treatment of family units in all federal/state legislation and rule-making

□ Separation of the concept of family unit from any biological, legal, or religious aspects.

### Discussion Questions

1. What should be the default position when it comes to determining family?
2. What do you think should qualify a group of people to be a family unit?
3. What other procedures or policies might we need to accommodate new forms of families? What about when a family unit wants to dissolve?

### Personal Reflection

Do you have someone who you consider “family” but to whom you have no biological or marital connection? How would you like that person taken care of should something bad happen to you, or them, and only “legal” family members have assigned duties of care?

## Discussion Scenario: Limits of Leadership

“Shana the Fixer,” that was the name that senior executives used whenever a troublesome part of the organization needed fixing. Shana was a tough but very capable turnaround professional. She had an uncanny ability to see what needed to be done to correct an underperforming part of the organization. She was also known for getting rid of these who weren’t doing their job.

Some said she was abrasive. Others worshipped her determination to “right the ship.” You either loved her or hated her.

Her contributions were well known throughout the executive suite and board room. Major shareholders also were aware of her contributions.

When the chief executive officer announced his retirement, Shana was strongly considered for the CEO position. But she faced a lot of opposition from the “old guard.” “Shana doesn’t play nice” was the most frequently expressed concern about her. “She will want to shake up the organization and that will spook everyone,” was another concern. “We need a calming influence not a flame thrower” was another expression of concern for candidacy. “She is just too valuable in her current role,” said one of the board members.

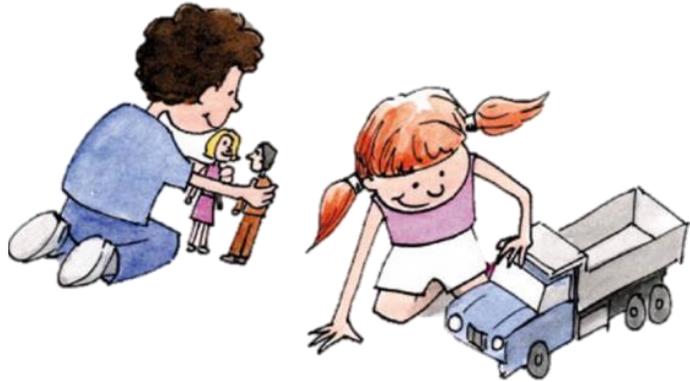
The man they hired to be CEO was called a “natural leader,” but had made a career of taking credit for the accomplishments of others.

What do you think about this scenario?

## Policy Possibility E: Remove the Glass Ceiling

Society has generally become more accepting of removing barriers to gender identity or sexual orientation consideration in promotions to positions of power. While the barriers have been lessened, they still exist when a person's gender identity or sexual orientation doesn't fit the stereotype of a person in a specific role. Often these stereotypes are simply a way to reinstall the glass ceiling.

This policy possibility would revise federal equal rights policies to ensure that persons not be closed out of opportunities simply because they don't conform to stereotypes.



### Discussion Questions

1. How can equality of opportunity be assessed without creating the possibility of a law suit whenever a personal decision is made?
2. How should organizations weigh a person's approach in doing a job fairly without considering gender or sexual orientation?

### Personal Reflection

Have you ever felt that you didn't fit the stereotype for a career position that was largely based upon personal factors rather than your own achievements? How did you accept that decision?