

Perceptions of Gender Bias in the Utah Workplace

Utah has one of the highest economic growth rates in the nation,¹ and the ability to attract, retain, and provide positive workplace environments for women will be critical for future growth and success. However, Utah ranks as one of the worst states for women's equality in many areas, including wages, education, health, and political empowerment.² For example, Utah is 46th out of 50 states in the disparity between the percentage of full-time working women who hold executive positions (0.8%) and the percentage of full-time working men who hold executive positions (2.1%).³ In actual numbers, 4,500 more men in Utah hold executive positions than women. It is critical to understand what obstacles stand in the way of closing gender gaps such as this so that Utah's workforce and economy can thrive and meet its potential.

One set of obstacles relates to "gender bias," a term used to describe various barriers embedded in workplace cultures that disadvantage women, either overtly (e.g., harassment) or covertly (e.g., policies that inadvertently benefit men more than women).⁴ Biases may be rooted in expectations around gender roles—what behaviors are considered appropriate for men and women in different settings—that developed through societal conditioning.⁵ Unconscious gender bias can be especially difficult to identify, as it is frequently part of organizational systems and processes that developed over time (e.g., performance evaluations that reward stereotypically male criteria).⁶ Additionally, men and women may perceive the same situations or behaviors differently, which makes gender bias difficult to address.

Study Background

To better understand how Utah women and men perceive gender bias in the workplace, an online survey was administered through Qualtrics between October and November 2022.⁷ Study participants were recruited through a variety of ways, with efforts made to collect responses from individuals with diverse views about gender equality. The author reached out via social media and word of mouth to professional contacts; diversity, equity, and inclusion representatives; and human resource representatives in Utah organizations. The author also contacted consultants who reached out through their networks, and the survey link was distributed through Utah Women & Leadership Project networks as well.

All participants completed the same 15 demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, religion, education, years of work). Depending on their response to the gender question, participants were then asked to complete the original Gender Bias Scale (GBS)⁸ developed for women or a modified GBS adapted for men.⁹ Both versions included 47 items, and

participants were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The original version asks women to rate their perceptions and experiences of gender bias in the workplace. The adapted version asks men to rate their observations and perceptions of women experiencing gender bias in the workplace. Two examples of analogous questions for women and men are as follows:

Original GBS for Women:

- I have to work harder than my male colleagues for the same credibility.
- I feel welcome while attending social events with my male colleagues.

Adapted GBS for Men:¹⁰

- In my workplace, women work harder than their male colleagues for the same credibility.
- In my workplace, women feel welcome while attending social events with their male colleagues.

Previous statistical analyses have demonstrated that the 47 items can be grouped into six higher-order factors of gender bias (and 15 lower-order factors):¹¹ 1) *male privilege* (glass cliff, male culture, and two-person career structure), 2) *disproportionate constraints* (constrained communication, constrained career choices, and unequal standards), 3) *insufficient support* (exclusion, lack of mentorship, and lack of sponsorship), 4) *devaluation* (lack of acknowledgement and pay equity), 5) *hostility* (Queen Bee Syndrome and workplace harassment), and 6) *acquiescence* (self-silencing and self-limiting behavior). Definitions are provided in Appendix A. This study investigated the following research questions:

- 1) What are women's experiences and perceptions of gender bias in the Utah workplace?
- 2) How do men perceive women's experiences of gender bias in the Utah workplace?

Characteristics of Survey Participants

The sample included 119 participants: 72.2% were women and 27.8% were men. The higher percent of women respondents is likely a result of the survey being communicated predominantly through women's groups in Utah. The inherent equality of variance issue with the smaller subsample of men was accounted for in the statistical analyses.

Most respondents were White (83.8%), had lived in Utah more than 5 years (78.2%), and were parents (73.1%), with 57.9% having daughters. The majority were managers (73.9%) who worked for international organizations based in Utah (86.5%) that had 500–10,000 employees (67.2%). However, 68.1% had never worked outside of Utah.

Table 1 summarizes other demographic data. Most respondents (83.3%) were under the age of 50. As expected, 56.3% of respondents were members of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints, the predominant religion in Utah; 25.2% indicated they were not religious.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Category	%
Age	
20–30	26.1%
31–40	26.1%
41–50	31.1%
51–65	15.1%
65+	1.6%
Religion	
Latter-day Saint	56.3%
Catholic	5.0%
Other	10.9%
Non-Religious	25.2%
Did Not Say	2.5%
Education	
High School	12.6%
Associate Degree	5.8%
Bachelor’s Degree	42.8%
Master’s Degree (BA)	32.7%
Doctorate Degree	5.8%
Employment Length	
2 Years or Less	32.7%
3–5 Years	21.8%
6–10 Years	21.0%
More Than 10 Years	24.3%

The GBS results are reported as follows, in four major sections: 1) differences by gender, 2) differences by age, 3) differences by religious affiliation, and 4) comparison of Utah findings to other data.

Differences by Gender

Gender differences were analyzed for each GBS item.¹² The data is summarized in Figures 1a and 1b by presenting the mean ratings for the 15 lower-order factors. Specific item findings are discussed in the narrative that follows. Higher means indicated greater recognition, perception, or awareness of a particular aspect of gender bias.¹³ Typically, men’s mean ratings were lower than women’s mean ratings for the same factor. Women’s overall GBS mean was 3.0, and men’s overall GBS mean was 2.4. Item standard deviations for women’s ratings ranged from 0.9 to 1.6; item standard deviations for men’s ratings were similar and ranged from 0.8 to 1.5. There were several areas where men’s and women’s mean responses notably differed. Items under *male privilege* showed the largest gender differences, followed by *devaluation* and *disproportionate constraints*.

Figure 1a: Perception of Gender Bias by Utah Women and Men

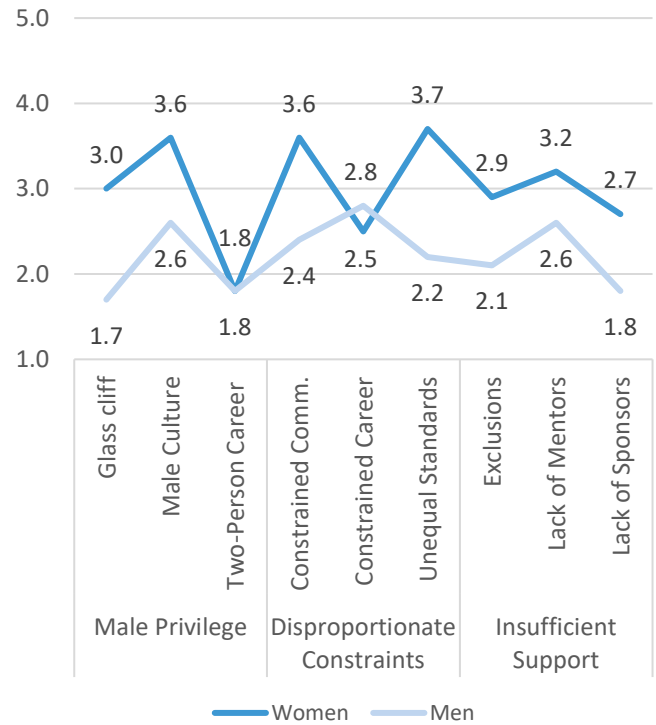
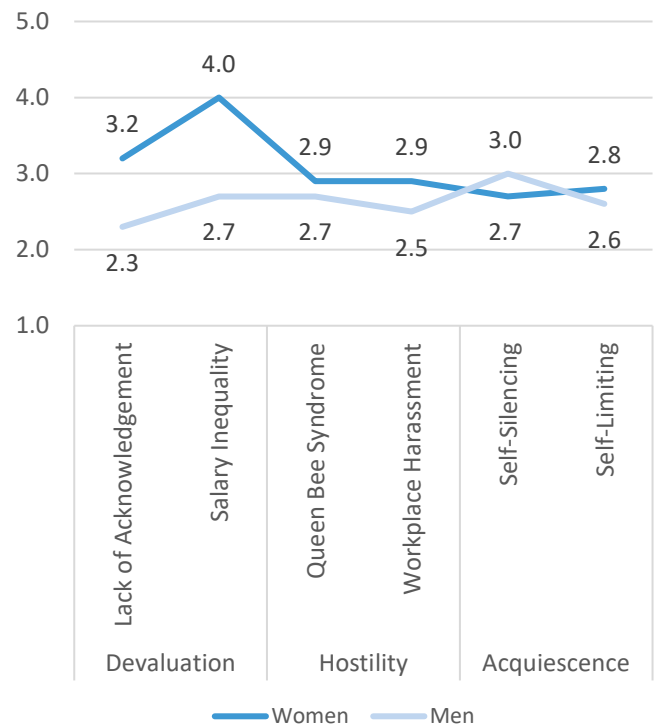


Figure 1b: Perception of Gender Bias by Utah Women and Men



Devaluation included items about lack of acknowledgement and salary inequality. Women were significantly more likely to agree with statements about “being interrupted by men when speaking” (56.0% of women agreed; 57.0% of men disagreed), “finding it difficult to gain support for ideas” (41.0% of women agreed; 51.0% of men disagreed), and “being taken for granted that women would help male colleagues” (57.0% of women agreed; 67.0% of men disagreed). On items about salary inequality, women were significantly more likely than men to perceive that women made less than male counterparts (72.0% of women agreed, 51.0% of men neither agreed nor disagreed), and that women made less than a male predecessor (62.0% of women agreed; 45.0% of men neither agreed nor disagreed).

Women also perceived *disproportionate constraints* existing in the workplace. Women were significantly more likely to perceive that unequal standards existed, such as being more scrutinized than their male counterparts, being expected to work harder for the same credibility, and being expected to be more nurturing. Additionally, women and men perceived communication differently, with women feeling constrained in their communication. Women felt like they needed to be mindful of their communication style, such as when they were exercising authority: 86.0% of women agreed with this item and 60.0% of men disagreed. Women also felt their ideas were taken more seriously when repeated by men: 77.0% of women agreed with this item, while 54.0% of men disagreed. Among women, 70.0% agreed that they downplayed their accomplishments at work, while 45.0% of men disagreed that this was the case. Interestingly, women were significantly less likely to indicate that their career choices were constrained by gender norms. Men rated items about this subfactor higher.

Utah women and men were more similar in some ratings of *insufficient support*. Men and women similarly rated items about whether women lack mentoring and lack female mentors. Women had significantly higher ratings than men on items asking whether women lacked sponsorship for promotion or recommendations for advancement; however, the means for both men and women were below the midpoint of the scale. Utah women reported exclusion from events and social activities, but men did not concur with this assessment: for example, 56.0% of women agreed with the statement that “men socialized without women,” while 51.0% of men disagreed that this was the case.

Results of the *acquiescence* and *hostility* factors also showed some common perceptions between men and women. Men’s and women’s ratings indicated that Utah women did not see themselves as self-silenced or self-limited; 54.0% of women and 45.0% of men agreed that women speak up about challenges. Additionally, 59.0% of women and 45.0% of men disagreed that “women turned down opportunities if they felt unqualified,” suggesting a certain level of empowerment among Utah women. There were no significant differences between men and women on the GBS survey items about the hostility subcategories of Queen Bee and Harassment.

Differences by Age

The data were split into age groups to compare perceptions of gender bias across the adult lifespan. Groups comprised both men and women as follows: 20–30 years old ($n = 31$), 31–40 years ($n = 31$), 41–50 years old ($n = 37$) and 51 years or older ($n = 20$). The biggest trend observed was that individuals in the youngest age group had significantly lower scores compared to individuals in the middle age group. The 20–30-year-old age group did not perceive as much gender bias in the workplace as the 41–50-year-old group did. This may suggest that because younger individuals more recently joined the workforce, they have not observed or experienced all aspects of gender bias, they have perceived the same experiences differently from the older group, or they have experienced less bias. Two exceptions to this trend appeared: compared to the middle age group, the younger age group had significantly higher ratings about lacking a leader who sponsored them for promotion and about not advocating for women’s rights at work.

Differences by Religion

Utah is in the top quarter of most religious US states.¹⁴ To see if religious affiliation affected perceptions of gender bias, men and women who reported being affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Catholic Church ($n = 72$; religious group) were compared to men and women who reported no affiliation ($n = 30$, non-religious group). The biggest trend was that the religious group had significantly lower mean scores, reflecting more disagreement with the statements compared to the non-religious group. In other words, the religious group was less likely to recognize or express awareness of workplace gender bias than the non-religious group was.

Comparison of Utah Findings to Other Data

One limitation of the present study was the small sample size, particularly the subsample of men. A comparison was conducted to assess whether the present results were consistent with findings from two previous studies.¹⁵ Data from men in the present study were compared to data from a global study that included more than 300 men in diverse industries.¹⁶ The Utah study findings were similar to the global study findings: Utah men’s overall mean scores on the adapted GBS were slightly lower than the mean scores for global men (2.4 vs. 2.6). Table 2 (on the next page) shows whether Utah men’s ratings were slightly lower, the same, or slightly higher in all subcategories.

Data from women in this study were also compared to published data for women leaders.¹⁷ Overall, Utah women’s scores coincided with the data for women leaders (see Figures 2a and 2b on the next page), providing some evidence that perceptions and experiences of gender bias are similar across contexts and geographical locations. The overall mean survey score from the published data for women leaders and this research was 3.0.

Table 2: Mean Ratings for Utah Men Versus Global Men¹⁸

Subcategory	Utah Men	Global Men
Male Privilege		
Glass Cliff	1.7 <	1.9
Male Culture	2.6 =	2.6
Two-Person Career Structure	1.8 >	1.4
Disproportionate Constraints		
Constrained Communication	2.4 <	2.7
Constrained Career	2.8 <	2.9
Unequal Standards	2.2 <	2.7
Insufficient Support		
Exclusion	2.1 <	2.4
Lack of Mentorship	2.6 <	2.7
Lack of Sponsoring	1.8 =	1.8
Devaluation		
Lack of Acknowledgement	2.3 <	2.5
Salary Inequality	2.7 <	2.8
Hostility		
Queen Bee Syndrome	2.7 >	2.6
Workplace Harassment	2.5 <	2.8
Acquiescence		
Self-Silencing	3.0 >	2.6
Self-Limiting	2.6 <	2.9

Figure 2b: Perception of Gender Bias: Utah Women vs. Women Leaders²⁰

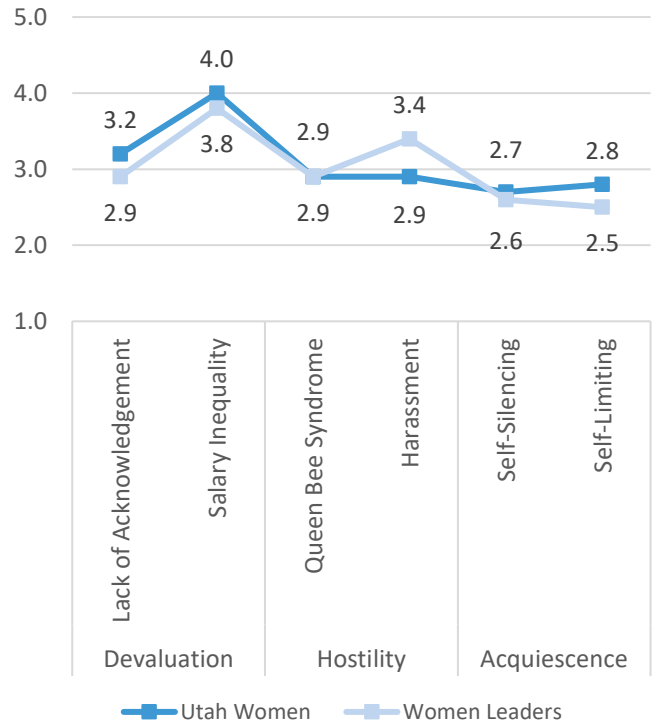
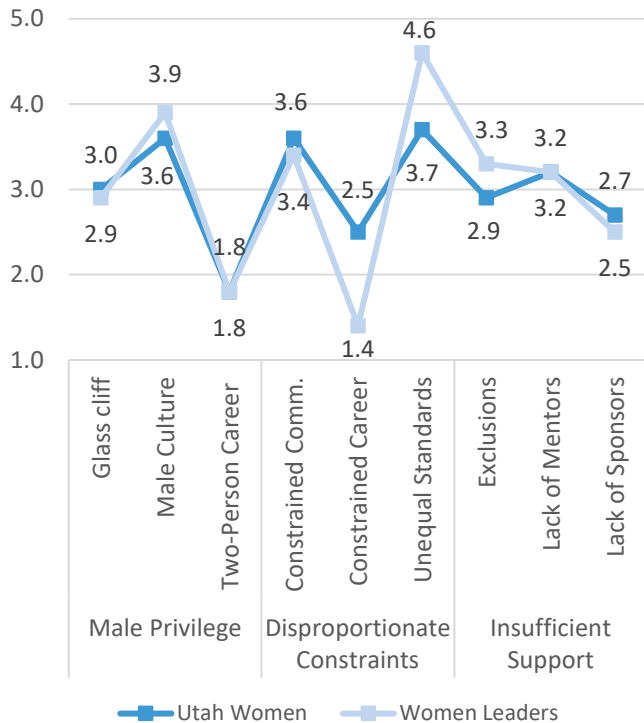


Figure 2a: Perception of Gender Bias: Utah Women vs. Women Leaders¹⁹



Summary & Recommendations

The study findings confirm that women and men in Utah’s workplaces perceive gender bias differently: women perceive it to a larger degree. This gap in perception is troubling since men make up a large proportion of Utah leadership,²¹ and thus have significant influence over workplace experiences, systems, processes, and culture. If Utah men do not perceive or understand the issues that women say are impacting them, change is unlikely to be driven from the top down, and it may not be supported if it is started from the grassroots within organizations.

Male privilege was the gender bias factor with the largest differences in perception between men and women, consistent with literature reporting that male privilege may be invisible to those who benefit from it.²² Male privilege is defined as a culture controlled by men that reinforces the male hierarchy and subordinates the female voice;²³ it can be especially evident if women make choices that do not align with what men want.²⁴ Although male leaders should work to shift attitudes, data consistently show men lack awareness of their privilege.²⁵ Researchers have also noted that in some cases where men recognize their privileged position, they use discourse to justify and reframe this privilege.²⁶

It is important to recognize that perceptions of workplace male privilege by women can lead to negative consequences,

such as job dissatisfaction and intent to leave within a year.²⁷ Women's choosing to leave the workforce may further compound current gender inequity issues. Conversely, addressing issues regarding male privilege could lead to more workplace satisfaction for Utah women, increase retention rates, and help improve Utah's ranking for women's equality.

These findings can be used to start conversations in Utah businesses and organizations about perceptions of gender bias, engaging both women and men in discussions around finding solutions. It is likely that there are areas where women do not fully understand men's experiences. Thus, men and women need to learn more about each other's perceptions of the workplace and engage in active listening.

The data does show that men and women have similar perceptions about some elements of gender bias, namely, acquiescence and hostility. This might be the result of HR practices raising awareness around issues such as workplace harassment. Supporting education efforts around other aspects of gender bias may also diminish bias. On the whole, raising awareness and education have been shown to reduce bias.²⁸ However, one-off interventions are often insufficient to create long-lasting workplace equality, especially among those who are, in general, less supportive of women.²⁹

The implicit assumption is that if men become aware of and comprehend how women perceive their workplace, it may help change occur. However, this study did not investigate men's willingness or openness to change. Change can be challenging no matter the issue being addressed. Some suggest that men need to be granted psychological standing (i.e., legitimizing the importance of men's role in improving gender equity), ensuring that they know their voices are essential and that their efforts have valid and significant impact.³⁰ Research also shows the importance of engaging both men and

women in change efforts; when men are involved in gender inclusion programs, 96.0% of organizations report progress; in the absence of men, only 30.0% report progress.³¹

Finally, the data also show where organizations could provide more assistance for women, such as providing more opportunities for mentorship and sponsorship, addressing gender pay gaps, and ensuring that women are being offered developmental opportunities. Utah companies should implement policies and approaches that improve diversity, equity, and inclusion and institutionalize gender equity practices. Other forms of bias must also be prioritized in change efforts. For instance, future research should consider how men and women perceive racial or age bias and how each interacts with perceptions of gender bias.

Conclusion

This research highlights that Utah women experience elements of gender bias in the workplace that are not perceived to the same degree by Utah men. The findings align with other published data about men's and women's perceptions of gender bias, indicating that these gender differences are not limited to Utah. However, Utah men have slightly lower awareness of gender bias compared to global men.

As employers, employees, and other stakeholders consider these data and use it to start conversations about gender bias in Utah workplaces, women and men can better understand each other's perspectives and experiences. From these conversations, businesses can implement education and training, promote organizational change, and create innovative, targeted approaches that address gender biases identified in this work. Doing so will help women thrive and will boost overall workplace culture.

¹ Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity. (n.d.). *Accolades & rankings*. <https://business.utah.gov/accolades/>

² Frohlich, T. C. (2014, October 16). *The 10 worst states for women*. 24/7 Wall St. <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2014/10/16/the-10-worst-states-for-women-2/4/>; McCann, A. (2022, August 22). *2022's best & worst states for women's equality*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/%20best-and-worst-states-for-women-equality/5835>

³ Madsen, S. R., & Madsen, G. P. (2021, December 2). *Women's equality in Utah: Why Utah is ranked as the worst state, and what can be done*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/wp/no-4.pdf>

⁴ Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016). Making the invisible visible: A cross-sector analysis of gender-based leadership barriers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 27(2), 181–206. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21248>

⁵ Diehl, A. B., Stephenson, A. L., Dzubinski, L. M., & Wang, D. C. (2020). Measuring the invisible: Development and multi-industry validation of the Gender Bias Scale for Women Leaders. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 31(3), 249–280. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21389>; Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474–493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/aml.2010.0046>; Jones, K. P., Peddie, C. I., Gilrane, V. L., King, E. B., & Gray, A. L. (2016). Not so subtle: A meta-analytic investigation of the correlates of subtle and

overt discrimination. *Journal of Management*, 42(6), 1588–1613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313506466>

⁶ International Labour Organization. (2017, August). *Breaking barriers: Unconscious gender bias in the workplace*. ACT/EMP Research Note. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_601276.pdf

⁷ The author received approval from the ethics and human studies compliance committee to conduct this study for her master's thesis project at the Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, UK.

⁸ Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020).

⁹ Madsen, G. P. (2021). *Male allies' perception of gender bias and the relationship between psychological standing and willingness to engage* (Publication No. 28772026) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana Institute of Technology]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

¹⁰ It should be noted that some questions differed in how they were framed. In the original Gender Bias Scale, the women are typically asked about their personal experience, but in the adaptation, men are typically asked about the general experience of women in their current workplace.

¹¹ Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020).

¹² A mixed-model analysis was conducted using a MANOVA assessment for differences by gender. Normality assessments were performed and subsequent pairwise comparison of gender variables used a Wilcoxon test to ascertain mean differences between men and women for each gender bias question. Probability values of 0.05 or

lower were taken as evidence of a significant difference between the groups. MANOVAs were conducted to analyze age and religion differences as well.

¹³ Several GBS items were reverse scored to ensure higher scores reflected higher perceptions of bias.

¹⁴ World Population Review. (2023, April). *Most religious states*. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/most-religious-states>

¹⁵ Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016).; Madsen, G. P. (2021).

¹⁶ Madsen, G. P. (2021).

¹⁷ Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020).

¹⁸ Data derived from Madsen, G. P. (2021).

¹⁹ Data derived from Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020).

²⁰ Data derived from Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020).

²¹ Frohlich, T. C. (2014, October 16).; McCann, A. (2022, August 22).

²² Madsen, G. P. (2021).; McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*, 49, 10–12.

<https://psychology.umbc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2016/10/White-Privilege-McIntosh-1989.pdf>; Peretz, T. (2020). Seeing the invisible knapsack: Feminist men’s strategic responses to the continuation of male privilege in feminist spaces. *Men and Masculinities*, 23(3–4), 447–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18784990>

²³ Davis, T. L., & Wagner, R. (2005). Increasing men’s development of social justice attitudes and actions. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2005(110), 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.163>

²⁴ Manne, K. (2020). *Entitled: How male privilege hurts women*. Crown.

²⁵ Schwiter, K., Nentwich, J., & Keller, M. (2021). Male privilege revisited: How men in female-dominated occupations notice and actively reframe privilege. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(6), 2199–2215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12731>

²⁶ Schwiter, K., et al. (2021).

²⁷ Diehl, A. B., et al. (2020); Stephenson, A. L., Diehl, A. B., Dzubinski, L. M., McErlean, M., Huppertz, J., & Sidhu, M. (2021). An exploration of gender bias affecting women in medicine. In J. L. Hefner and I. M. Nembhard (Eds.), *The contributions of health care management to grand health care challenges* (pp. 77–95). Emerald Publishing Limited.

²⁸ Carnes, M., Devine, P. G., Manwell L. B., Byars-Winston, A., Fine, E., Ford C. E., Forscher, P., Isaac, C., Kaatz, A., Magua, W., Palta, M., & Sheridan, J. (2015). Effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution. A cluster randomized, controlled trial. *Academic Medicine*, 90(2), 221–230. <https://doi.org/10.1097%2FACM.0000000000000552>; Girod, S., Fassiotto, M., Grewal, D., Ku, M. C., Sriram, N., Nosek, B. A., & Valantine, H. (2016). Reducing implicit gender leadership bias in academic medicine with an educational intervention. *Academic Medicine*, 91(8), 1143–1150.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000001099>

²⁹ Chang, E. H., Milkman, K. L., Gromet, D. M., Rebele, R. W., Massey, C., Duckworth, A. L., & Grant, A. M. (2019). The mixed effects of online diversity training. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(16), 7778–7783. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1816076116>

³⁰ Madsen, G. P. (2021).

³¹ Johnson, W. B., & Smith, D. G. (2018, October 12). How men can become better allies to women. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-men-can-become-better-allies-to-women>; Krentz, M., Wierzba, O., Abouzahr, K., Garcia-Alonso, J., & Taplett, F. B. (2017, October 10). *Five ways men can improve gender diversity at work*. Boston Consulting Group. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2017/people-organization-behavior-culture-five-ways-men-improve-gender-diversity-work>

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APPENDIX A Gender Bias Scale

Participants rated their agreement with 47 statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were categorized under six higher-order factors and 15 lower-order factors.

Scale Categories & Definitions	
Male Privilege	
Glass Cliff	Women being placed in a high-risk role
Male Culture	Male-dominated organizational norms
Two-Person Career Structure	Institutional demands placed on both partners when only one is formally employed by the organization
Disproportionate Constraints	
Constrained Communication	Restrictions on how and when to communicate
Constrained Career Choices	Societal constraints on women’s career choices
Unequal Standards	Women being held to higher performance standards than male counterparts
Insufficient support	
Exclusion	Being left out of formal and informal networks and events
Lack of Mentoring	Lack of significant mentoring relationships
Lack of Sponsorship	Lack of advocate for advancement
Devaluation	
Lack of Acknowledgement	Lack of recognition for accomplishments
Salary Inequality	Being underpaid compared to male counterparts
Hostility	
Queen Bee Syndrome	Women leaders neglecting to help or blocking opportunities for other women
Workplace Harassment	Behaviors that threaten, intimidate, or make women uncomfortable
Acquiescence	
Self-Silencing	Reluctance to speak up on women’s rights
Self-Limited Aspirations	Reluctance to pursue promotion or other opportunities