GENDER EQUALITY: ALL ABOARD!

A Gender Equality Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Ask people if they believe men and women should be treated equally, and most will say yes. But in nearly every country on Earth, the facts tell a different story – especially in the workplace.[1]

These days, more companies than ever are committing to promote gender equality in their organisations. Still, women continue to make lower average wages than men – even when they have the same qualifications, tasks, education and professional experience as their male colleagues. Women outperform men on leadership skills tests, but continue to remain underrepresented in top management positions.[2] And workplace sexual harassment is still much more likely to target women than men – there's a reason the #MeToo movement struck a chord with so many women around the world![3]

Gender-based discrimination is a persistent global problem that, in its basic contours, is familiar to most women. But the form, degree and impact of this discrimination vary between women in different countries, and even between groups of women in the same country. In particular, women of colour, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ women, elderly women, indigenous women, refugee women and women with limited financial resources are statistically much more likely than others to face gender-based discrimination, harassment and abuse.[4]

Historically, the feminist movement has fallen short of recognising the full spectrum of women's experiences and too often has not found common cause with women in non-majority groups.[5] This failure has only magnified the effects of injustice. Under-valuing any woman's voice harms women – and weakens the power of feminism.

There's no getting around the fact that we, the folks behind this toolkit, approach the topics of feminism and discrimination from a specific perspective, and that this perspective has shaped our experiences. We're an international group – with members from Germany, France, Taiwan, Sweden, the US, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Italy and Spain – and our points of view are in many ways the products of our lives in high-income countries. In fact, it's hard to overstate just how much our backgrounds impact our experiences and the perspectives we bring to this issue.

Still, progress on gender equality is fragile and incomplete in every country. And this is a critical moment: in recent years, societal backlash and changing political currents have threatened advancements in women's rights, including in North America and across the EU.[6] The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls around the world has served as a powerful reminder that the economic and social upheaval caused by global crises magnifies existing disparities.[7] Addressing gender inequality and protecting hard-won rights will require the active participation of everyone, everywhere.

EQT: The Gender Equality Toolkit for Working Women and Friends is intended to shed light on gender-based inequalities and to assist women and their allies in developing effective responses to sexist situations in the workplace. This toolkit features an informative handbook, a role-playing card game and a vibrant, hand-drawn poster. We've also included stickers and pins so you can wear your commitment to gender equality as a badge of honour!

We created our role-playing card game to encourage dialogue on gender bias and inequality. All of the scenarios in the game are based on the experiences of real women. Many scenarios reflect our own experiences, while others are drawn from the stories women shared in the interviews, discussions and workshops we've held over the past few years. The women whose stories are featured in our card game are artists, retail managers, lawyers, army veterinarians and others who live and work in a variety of countries. Despite their different backgrounds, the women we spoke to have at least one thing in common: all of them, without exception, have felt the effects of gender bias and / or sexual harassment on the job.

But the cards you'll find in our game are just the beginning. This toolkit will be most useful if it reflects your experience. That's why, in addition to the existing scenarios and reactions, you'll find blank cards that you can fill in with situations that speak to you. Add these to the deck – and make this toolkit your own.





What does it mean to be a feminist?

Feminists are:

...problem-solvers...
Gender inequality is a problem that affects women and men around the world – and feminists are determined to find solutions. This involves analysing facts and statistics that reveal obstacles to progress, developing strategies to tackle gender discrimination and mobilising proactive campaigns to target existing inequalities.

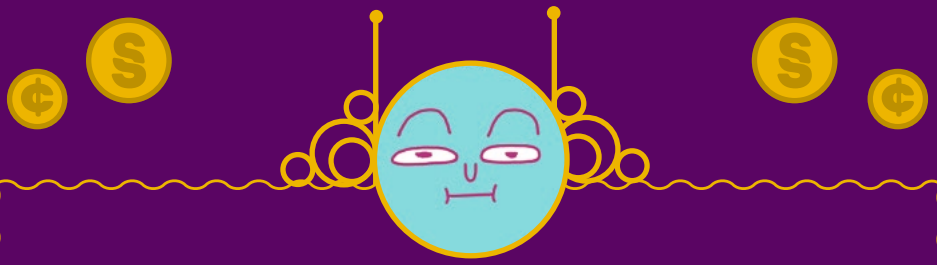
...risk-takers...
Challenging conventional gender norms isn't always easy. In some situations, you may be the only person speaking out for gender equality – or the first woman to do something that has only ever been done by men. But feminists know that taking these risks is the only way to make progress. And every time one feminist stands up for equality, it becomes a little easier for others to do the same!

...and change-makers!
Feminists champion gender equality at all levels, mobilising changes from the subtle (sexism–free office chitchat!) to the sweeping (equal pay, baby!). The objective is to achieve the social, cultural and political changes necessary to give women everywhere a chance to reach their full potential. Sure, it's an ambitious goal, but feminists are up to the challenge!

MYTH-BUSTING



ON THE GENDER PAY GAP



Up against a naysayer? When you're faced with a gender-equality sceptic, research and statistics always come in handy – especially when the topic is as politically charged as the gender pay gap!

The gender pay gap measures the difference between men's and women's average or median earnings. In virtually every country, it captures the fact that women are typically paid less than men – even for the same or similar work.[17] Lower pay impacts women's current and future wages, because employers often use salary history as a reference for negotiations with job candidates.[18] And lost wages add up over the course of a career, leaving women at a financial disadvantage when it comes to buying a house, providing for a family, taking out loans and saving for retirement.[19]

At a less tangible level, the pay gap sends a strong signal to women – and men – about the value of women's contributions to society. It reinforces perceptions of women as less competent and can lead employers to favour men over women for higher-status jobs.[20] Research shows that undervaluing women's work can also affect mental health: when women are paid less than men for the same or similar work, they're far more likely to experience anxiety and depression than when gender-equal pay policies are in place.[21]

Because the gender pay gap represents a quantifiable measure of gender-based economic disparity, it's frequently cited in discussions of workplace inequality. Unfortunately, the gap is often misunderstood or misrepresented, so it can be hard to separate fact from fiction. Let's take a closer look at some of the most common myths!

Women earn less because they leave the workforce to have children.

Many factors, including cultural pressures, make women more likely than men to leave the workforce when they have children.[27] And as the COVID-19 pandemic has made all too clear, sometimes a woman's decision to leave a job is based less on choice than on external circumstances, like the need for child care or the higher risk of layoffs in fields dominated by women.[28]

Regardless of the reason for career interruptions, time spent outside the workforce is associated with lower pay and fewer opportunities for promotion later on. This means that women who leave their jobs or dial back their work hours may be passing up lucrative opportunities for advancement.[29]

Employers also tend to consider women with children to be less competent, regardless of qualifications. Working mothers are less likely than women without children to be hired, promoted or given a raise.[30] The effect is so consistent, there's even a term for it: the 'motherhood penalty'.

Men who become fathers, on the other hand, are typically rewarded with a 'fatherhood bonus' in the form of higher pay or a promotion. The result? The gender pay gap between men and women widens when they become parents,[31] whether or not mothers actually leave their jobs or reduce their hours at work!

Still, the effect of parenthood can't explain the whole gender pay gap. How do we know there's more to the story? For starters, working mothers aren't the only women paid less than men; childless women are paid less as well! In the US, for example, recommended starting salaries for non-mothers are 7.9 % higher than those for mothers, but that's still 8.6 % less than the recommended starting salaries for men.[32]



