

[Skip to Main Content](#)[Skip to Navigation](#)

Creating Inclusive Workplace Climates

A large part of creating and promoting inclusive climates in your department or field site comes from one's understanding of social inequities that are present in our scientific and work communities and in our society as a whole. Addressing issues related to power dynamics, intersectionality, and privilege is critical for promote positive, productive relationships with our colleagues and students, creating a safe and respectful learning and working environments. A culture change is required in the sciences and in academia as a whole in order to transform our current workplaces into equitable and inclusive spaces.

Climate is the atmosphere or ambiance of an organization or institution as perceived by its members. An organization's climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions.

Jump down to: [Intersectionality](#) | [Privilege and Allyship](#) | [Workplace Climate](#) | [What Can You Do?](#) | [References](#) | [For More Reading](#)

Power Dynamics

What are power dynamics?

Power is the degree to which an individual or group of people have control over resources. In academia, these resources can be material, financial, human, or intellectual. Power can be visible, for example, a department chair would visibly have greater decision-making ability than a graduate student, but power can also be more subtle, like a woman having less leverage in a mostly male department. Power dynamics is how different people with different levels of power interact with each other in a group setting. We need to recognize that relationships in academia inherently are built on power imbalances between:

- employer and employee
- supervisor/mentor/advisor and mentee
- professor and student
- postdoc and student
- graduate student and undergraduate student
- chair and faculty
- tenured and untenured faculty
- tenure track and non-tenure track faculty
- faculty and staff
- administrators and faculty
- research and teaching faculty at certain institutions.

Power imbalances lead to conditions that allow for the risk of retaliation, especially in professional environments and can affect whether people will [report incidents of harassment](#) or not.

How can we address power dynamics?

Hidden power can lead to exclusionary behavior that devalues the concerns and representation of less power groups. By preventing important voices and ideas from getting heard, departmental policies and decision-making can be skewed to benefit a few at the expense of others. Allowing everyone's voice to be heard, regardless of their role, is a key first step to addressing power dynamics. Being transparent about what authorities individuals in your department have as well as what procedures are in place for formal decision making will also help break down barriers and increase the level of trust in your department. Reinforcing the code of conduct that your department or workplace sets will also allow everyone to be held accountable as well as promote a culture of respect and inclusion.

Other practical strategies for minimizing the role of power dynamics in creating hostile climates:

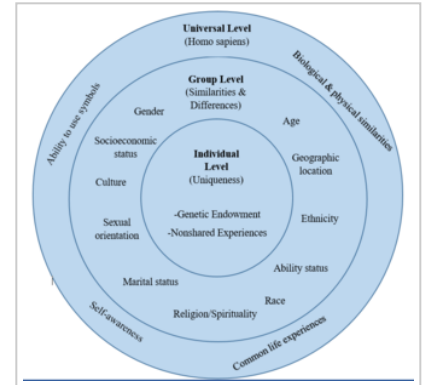
- Many universities actively discourage romantic relationships when there is a power imbalance. In fact, some go as far as stating that power imbalances between faculty and students invalidate the concept of "consensual relationship."
- Establish mentoring teams for students and trainees.
- Isolate [student financial support](#) from the one principal investigator or advisor.

Intersectionality

What is intersectionality?

Everyone has multiple identities that affect their day to day experiences (see image). Some may be privileged identities, such as being able-bodied or cisgendered, others may be more marginalized identities, such as being below the poverty line or a minority race. While it is easy to acknowledge that humans have diverse experiences and perspectives, often we find ourselves ignoring the multiple threats of oppression and discrimination that some individuals face when their identities overlap with a number of marginalized groups. For example, while women in STEM often face discrimination and harassment, women of color face the discrimination and harassment for being a woman *along with* being an underrepresented racial or ethnic group. Queer or undocumented women of color face additional levels of discrimination.

The term 'intersectionality' has been attributed to legal scholar and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) who demonstrated how experiencing multiple forms of social oppression affected women of color disproportionately and builds upon work by other Black feminist scholars (Mattheis and Schneider 2018). Intersectionality provides a useful framework to understand how multiple levels of social injustice and discrimination/oppression interact at the cross section or intersection of different identities (race, gender, ability, immigration status, etc.). The popular #MeToo movement that has raised public awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault across industries and launched Time's Up is currently building upon the Me Too movement founded by Black activist Tarana Burke in support of survivors of sexual abuse and assault.



What does intersectionality look like in science?

Related Links

[Accessible Field](#)

[Inclusive Field](#)

- 40% of women of color surveyed reported feeling unsafe in the workplace because of their gender or sex and 28% reported feeling unsafe because of their race (Clancy et al. 2017).
- 36% of LGBT scientists surveyed and 60% of those who present as gender nonconforming and transgender surveyed said they considered leaving their workplace or school (Gibney 2016). These responses were associated with experiencing and observing hostile behaviors such as harassment, homophobic comments, exclusion, stereotyping and expectations of incompetence.
- Intersectionality provides a useful lens for exploring stereotypes about, for example, the low representation of women of color in science, by recognizing how different forms of social and institutionalized discrimination affect who has access to scientific careers (Ong et al. 2011).

Read this [essay by sociologist C. Shawn McGuffey](#) on how power dynamics and intersectionality affect personal experiences of sexual harassment.

Privilege and Allyship

What is privilege?

Privilege is when a person or group of people have certain rights or advantages that are *only* available to that particular person or group of people. Privilege often results in social inequality, particularly in regard to age, disability, ethnic or racial category, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and/or social class.

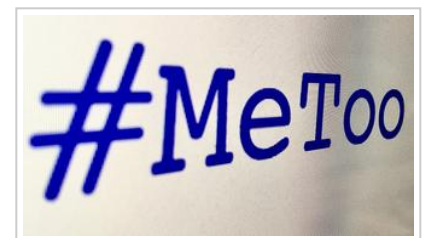
What is an ally and how can I be a good ally?

An ally is someone who chooses to act in ways that help support those in marginalized communities, regardless of their own identity or beliefs. Allies are an important resource that can not only support others, but use their position of privilege to work to reduce harassment and discrimination in their workplace. Important first steps from the [Guide to Allyship](#), include taking on the struggle as your own but not centering the work on you, rather continue to center it on the marginalized communities you aim to support; standing up for others even when you feel scared; transferring the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it; and acknowledging that while you, too, feel pain, the conversation is not about you. Being an ally can mean stepping down and giving someone else power.

How do I talk about privilege?

While having discussions with others about privilege can be uncomfortable and can possibly lead to others (or yourself) feeling guilty or defensive, an important reminder for anyone having these conversations is that having privilege should *not* make you feel blamed for a trait you possess, such as race, that is beyond your control. Instead, discussions about privilege should be in the mindset of challenging the systems of oppression that perpetuate inequality for anybody. Possessing privilege isn't anyone's fault and it does not diminish your accomplishments; however, ignoring or denying the existence of privilege only perpetuates patterns of oppression that can lead to harassment and discrimination in your workplace.

For more information and lessons about privilege, please refer to [Institute of Human Education Videos for Introducing Privilege](#).



What does privilege look like in science?

Privilege in the geosciences, as in any field or experience, can take many forms. For example:

- Did you grow up hiking and camping with your family? If so you are likely comfortable doing those things and therefore the idea of a camping field trip with your geology or environmental science course does not phase you. Do you remember the first time you camped or hiked? Were you worried about anything? Did you have the right shoes? pants? gear? If you have never spent time doing something, it is reasonable to be apprehensive about it. If you are really worried about it you might opt out of the trip (if possible) or the class altogether. If you decided to stick it out, being worried, nervous, or uncomfortable is not a great mindset for learning.
- Privilege as a gender conforming scientist is not having colleagues who fail to respect your gender identity daily by using the wrong name or pronoun and being able to count on access to bathroom facilities that you feel comfortable and safe using in every building on campus (Gibney 2016).

Evaluating Workplace Climate

Your department or program may want to consider conducting a workplace climate survey.

- University of Wisconsin [Women In Science and Engineering Leadership Institute \(WISELI\)](#) has developed surveys for academic institutions and departments to assess and evaluate workplace climate and also runs a workshop for department chairs. The surveys and additional resources are available through the [WISELI website](#).
- [Survey of Organizational Research Climate \(SOURCE\)](#) is administered by the National Center for Professional and Research Ethics. This instrument is designed to measure the climate of research integrity in academic organizations.
- [Does Your Institution Foster a Culture of Sexual Harassment?](#) This essay provides a number of questions from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report on sexual harassment to help gauge your institution's culture (Kumar 2018).

See also Dave Mogk's Geoethics resources on [Building an Inclusive and Diverse Department/Program/Profession](#).

What Can You Do?

We address many strategies that contribute to more inclusive workplaces in our [Responding to hostile behaviors](#) resource page. Here we highlight other efforts:

- Graduate Women In Science (GWIS) [#SafeAtWork campaign](#) The #SafeAtWork campaign is a call to arms that encourages graduate women to center the basic right which we deserve and which Title IX protects: our right to be safe at work. We call out sexual violence as an issue which is deeply entrenched in university culture, and which will demand commitment from everyone in the community to combat. Use hashtags: #brokensilence #cleanupyourdepartment #disrupt
- Establish a research group or lab expectations document. As a Principal Investigator, director or leader of a research group, setting clear expectations with students, mentees and employees on conduct, collaborations, research practice and authorship is key for avoiding misunderstandings and conflict at best and potential academic mispractice at worst. Consider adding elements of [codes of conduct](#) to an expectations document ([view an expectations document sample](#)).

References

- Clancy, K.H. et al. 2017. [Double jeopardy in astronomy and planetary science: Women of color face greater risks of gendered and racial harassment](#). Journal of Geophysical Research: Planets 122: 1610-1623.
- Gibney, E. Excluded, intimidated and harassed: LGBT physicists face discrimination. Nature doi:10.1038/nature.2016.19614 Published March 22, 2016
- Crenshaw, K. 1991. [Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color](#). Stanford Law Review 43: 1241-1299.
- Masters, K.S. and P.K. Kreeger. 2017. [Ten simple rules for developing a mentor-mentee expectations document](#). PLoS Comput Biol 13(9): e1005709.
- Kumar, M. 2018. [Does your college or university foster a culture of sexual harassment?](#), Eos, 99 . Published on 13 June 2018.
- Mattheis, A. and B.B. Schneider. 2018. Intersectional approaches to counter harassment and discrimination in geophysics. Society of Exploration Geophysicists abstract.
- Ong et al. 2011. [Inside the double bind: A Synthesis of empirical research on undergraduate and graduate women of color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics](#). Harvard Educational Review 81: 172-208. (PDF)

For More Reading

- [Decolonising Science Reading List](#) curated by astronomer Chanda Prescod-Weinstein
- [Inclusion and Intersectionality in Science](#) by Dr. Zuleyka Zevallos. Published April 23, 2018
- [Confronting sexual harassment and hostile climates in higher education](#) by C. Stabile. Ms. Magazine blog. Published December 13, 2017
- [Reducing harassment in science: Funding follows trainees](#) by J. Stemwedel. Forbes. Published February 29, 2016