

MICROSEXISM: MACRO IMPACT



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Submitted to OCAD University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Design in Strategic
Foresight & Innovation
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2020

A Journey into Microsexism in the Workplace and its Macro Impact, through the Lens of the Ethnographic Experiential Futures Method

“ A male coworker friend of mine and I had a running joke. We often applied for the same job in different parts of the organization, and even though he was junior to me, three out of three times he got the job! The feedback always was that I was a 'strong second choice.'”

—interviewee verbatim

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Topic keywords: microsexism, workplace, labour force, gender bias, women, men, career, advancement, promotion, pay gap, performance reviews, economy

Method keywords: qualitative research, ethnography, phenomenological study, causal layered analysis, three horizons, ethnographic experiential futures, personas, speculative design, critical design

Note: In this report, experiences of women are highlighted. The use of 'women' is intended to mean any person who identifies as a woman, inclusive of cis-women and trans-women, or Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people (paraphrased from Sultana & Ravanera, 2020, in *A Feminist Recovery Plan for Canada* report)

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Table of Contents

- Introduction 6
 - Abstract..... 7
- Research Question 10
 - Target Audience 13
- Phase 1: Context & Importance 15
 - Canada’s Legislative Acts, Effects & Progress 16
 - By the numbers 18
 - Microsexism—Background & Definition..... 21
 - Microsexism & Career Advancement 23
 - Microsexism & the Macroeconomy..... 26
 - In Closing Phase 1 27
- Phase 2: Interviews & Interpretation..... 29
 - Phenomenological Study 30
 - Demographic Data 33
 - Phenomenal Study Interpretation 34
 - Interpretation of Participant Futures..... 40
 - In Closing Phase 2 41
- Phase 3: Analysis & Synthesis 42
 - Causal Layered Analyses 43
 - Three Horizons Synthesis..... 55
 - In Closing Phase 3 60
- Phase 4: Outcome & Significance 61
 - Designing an EXF 62
 - Introducing Kaleidoscope Anima 64
 - Four-step Strategic Plan..... 75

In Closing Phase 4	81
Conclusion.....	84
References	87

Tables & Figures

Table 1	Phenomenological Study Questions	33
Figure 1	Causal Layered Analysis Iceberg	46
Figure 2	Female Perspective CLA	49
Figure 3	Male Perspective CLA	51
Figure 4	Want/Visionary CLA	54
Figure 5	Fear/Challenging CLA	56
Figure 6	Three Horizons Empty Workshop Graph	58
Figure 7	Three Horizons Completed Framework	60
Figure 8	The EXF Cycle	65
Figure 9	Six Personas of the Male Ally Audience	71
Figure 10	Visualization of Installation’s Mirrors	74
Figure 11	Visualization of Installation’s Colours	74
Figure 12	Visualization of Installation’s Spoken Words	75

INTRODUCTION

“ Our union has always negotiated contracts with tenure after three years, but I was turned down at first. Both my then-department chair and my then-supervisor did not support me. I had to investigate on my own to discover why. Conversations with both and with other faculty soon revealed that I did not get tenure basically because I did not ‘smile enough.’ They meant it literally!”

—a boomer mom(Smith, 2016)

Abstract

This Major Research Project (MRP) was a two-part journey more than a destination. Although there was a distinct outcome, much was revealed through the methodological processes that made the particulars of it possible.

Firstly, it dove into the essence of women's experiences of microsexism in the workplace. It studied how subtle bias often unconsciously serves to sideline women's self esteem, careers, and advancement. Then into the heart of Canada's legislative, institutional, and organizational inability to close the gender wage gap, and to achieve balanced representation at senior levels and on boards. All of which ladders up to negatively affect a business's success and the macro economy. A revelation along the way was that male allies are vital to eliminating microsexism in the workplace, that without their belief in its existence and participation to eliminate it, gender equality in the workplace will remain stalled. Most men are willing but may not know how.

Secondly, it was a journey through the Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) method of using ethnographic research to design images of the future as an experience. It was a process of discovering firsthand how ethnographic research data can be analyzed and synthesized to design an experience that resonates with its audience. The outcome is an immersive installation called *Kaleidoscope Anima*. It uses light, sound, mirrors and colour to shower participants with emotional triggers as they move from the present status quo workplace culture toward a preferred future of gender equality and economic stability. It is followed up by a four-point strategic plan, which outlines easy to implement tactics for individuals to use at work. The suggestion is that after experiencing the powerful emotions from the installation, participants may be left with an intent but no means. The four steps—think, speak, act and invest—guide, rather than scold, male allies to recognize the potential of a gender equal workplace to be a win-win for their own careers, business and personal lives.

Context

All my life my father has been a feminist and an ally for women in a sexist world, demonstrating to me that being thoughtful, caring, and concerned about how women are treated did not make him less of a man. As a minister, he saw too closely the damage that gender biased attitudes can wreak. In his allyship, he went so far as to even strip the male pronoun from God in his sermons and prayers, using replacements such as ‘creator’ instead of lord, or ‘parent’ instead of father—all years before anyone remotely considered how everyday words like ‘mankind’ feed into the norms of a patriarchal society. Hence, it was a shock when I entered the workforce and discovered the world was not focused on fairness and embracing differences. Here are two stories of what happened in my career to affect my advancement and professional development.

A handful of years ago I met with a male director about my application for a promotion. After some positive but constructive feedback, he informed me that I would not be promoted. He boiled it down to the fact that I do not smile enough, which affects my likeability, and thus he cannot convince those up the chain that I deserved the promotion I had otherwise earned. He ended our conversation by reassuring me that I have a great smile—when I do.

More recently, I had a different male boss tell me in detail everything wrong with my facial expressions. His list included how I raise my eyebrows when I am listening or mulling things over. It’s intimidating. While he claimed he was okay because he understood me, he cautioned that others are not so open minded. Perhaps, he suggested, I should try smiling while thinking.

I often wondered how these would have played out were I male. I was curious if other women experienced such moments of seemingly tiny significance but with huge implications to their career. Where would my career be if I had gotten that promotion? Where would other women be? Would there be more women in leadership roles? What would that look like? And what impact might all these small instances have on the economy at large?

That is when my research turned to the idea of microsexism. Many sources cite Chester Pierce, a Black psychiatrist in the 1970s, as the originator of the term microaggression, which he coined to reflect the “subtle, automatic and aversive” ways in which Whites gained, maintained, and expressed their superiority over Blacks in everyday interactions (Jones & Rolon-Dow, 2019, p. 32). Over fifty years, microaggression theory has expanded from strained Black-White interactions to a “paradigm for interactions across multiple boundaries of social distinctions, all marked by status difference” (Jones & Rolon-Dow, 2019, p. 32). However, despite the expansion noted, I believe the term is solidly, and rightly, connected to racism and I do not want to co-opt it or dilute its power. Thus, I use the co- or sub-term of microsexism to distinguish from yet hopefully augment each other. It has proven difficult to find the root of the term, but it seems it may be a translation to English from Hispanic America’s ‘micromachismo’, but this is unsubstantiated. With dual ideas in mind of microsexism and the macroeconomy, in a generic not discipline sense, I began to formulate my MRP question with the assumption it was a problem able to be solved through research and design.

RESEARCH QUESTION



I think what bothers me the most is the way men talk to me like I'm an idiot...the men at my workplace treat me like a dingbat. One specifically loves to interrupt me, shoot down my ideas, and just generally reject any sort of intellectual input I have, even though I have 15 years of experience in my field.”

—Tonya (everydaysexism.com)

“Research questions and hypotheses narrow the purpose statement and become major signposts for readers”

(Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 145)

My assertion was that progress toward an equitable macro economy is stalled because while gender legislation and policies were much needed and do make inroads, they treat the symptoms not the cause—or the system not the culture, if you will. I suggest that societal values and culture needs to change, and to achieve such a massive shift, we must first try to identify and understand it. To accomplish this task, there was an “iteration of moving from theory to field, and back to theory once again” (Ladner, 2014, p. 46) with an eye on Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) (Candy & Kornet, 2019) as the overarching goal. Therefore, the research question is written in two parts to reflect the two-pronged approach to the project—a journey into microsexism and a journey toward creating an EXF. The questions are articulated as:

How might microsexism in the workplace
affect the macroeconomy?

And how might we design images of a future
that inspire equity and balance of both?

My two overarching goals were accomplished over four phases, designed to allow enough freedom for answers to the research questions to lead me to what naturally came next.

Phase 1: Context & Importance

This includes a literature review for context, definitions and significance, an examination of equity/diversity legislation in Canada, and how together they affect the economy.

Where are we in terms of legislation and policies making progress toward gender equity in the workplace?

How do you define microsexism? And are there examples?

How rampant is it in the workplace? And to what extent does it affect a woman's career advancement?

How might microaggressions against women in the workplace threaten an equitable future?

Phase 2: Interviews & Interpretation

Inspired overall by Ladner's enthusiasm for ethnography, I turned to Cresswell & Poth (2018) for a specific interview method to help me dig into the essence of the problem today and in the recent past, and which also included a question about the future as proposed by Stanford ethnographer, Robert Textor (Veselsky & Textor, 2007).

What can ethnographic research into microsexism expose?

What might a phenomenological study reveal to be the specific microsexist actions and behaviours that affect career advancement?

How are these women affected? What role might intersectionality play?

Phase 3: Analysis & Synthesis

After initial parsing of the interview data to identify themes and trends, I turned to strategic foresight methods for deeper inspection. First, I started with Sohail Inayatullah's (2009) Causal Layered Analysis method, digging into the myths and metaphors propelling microsexism from different angles. Then, the aspirational future, which I synthesized into a Three Horizons view.

What elements allow female advancement in the workplace to proceed amid gender biases?

What worldviews do stakeholders have about gender in the workforce?

What are the myths and metaphors that allow microsexism to continue despite systemic legislation and policies?

And can ethnographic learnings be a catalyst to unlock a preferred future?

Phase 4: Outcome & Significance

My guiding principle for the entire project was Stuart Candy and Kelly Kordnet's (2019) emerging Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) framework, which allowed me to use my ethnographic research as the basis for designing a way for people to deeply experience the future, rather than simply read about it. In this phase, I was also highly influenced by MIT's Dunne and Raby book *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (2013).

Target Audience

Embarking on the research, I was sure the audience would be any company or workplace struggling to promote women beyond first-level management in any significantly representational way, to show them that gender equity means business success. Committed and accountable leaders are crucial to bring about cultural change in the workplace, a change which fosters diversity and inclusiveness, and thus improves employee retention and the bottom line (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). Women with earning power and businesses with strong bottom lines contribute to a stronger economy. A strong economy lifts people out of poverty and allows for a reallocation of social safety net funds to other areas of need. I had initially theorized that the general population could be an audience—we are all perpetrators of microsexism. It is within all of us to recognize in ourselves and each other, and to change the way we devalue women. Much like childhood bullying campaigns, I envisioned rallying society to become allies in the movement against microsexism. However, that audience extremely would be vast and difficult to target with any sort of specificity. Most importantly, that was not the audience my research indicated.

I had initially determined my primary research needed to focus on women with experience of microsexism affecting their careers because men's voices have been too dominant for too long—Canada is a patriarchal society with all the systems in place that favour men and their ongoing success. What I discovered is that men are imperative. Not just any company as above, which is an entity, but instead to specifically target men as *people*. Men in business, men who are leaders, men who make decisions, men who hire and fire. They needed to be the audience because while, yes, studies prove all genders are unconsciously biased against women, the gap between men and women in the workplace may never

close if men are not fully on board. They'll not be convinced simply because it makes better business sense or is morally right. That won't affect them on a personal, human level. What I found out is it seems some men are resistant to equality because, whether factual or not, it *feels* like a sacrifice. There is fear. They fear losing what they had so good, which is probably harder than if you never had it and so women often overlook or do not realize this underlying motive. Fear is powerful. Think of fear and the three Fs—fight, flight or freeze—and you realize that on a subconscious level men are fighting to keep what they *feel* they *earned*. I'm not here to debate whether they did or did not earn their success. It's the perception that's the tough nut to crack. Read on to see how I came to this conclusion through the journey's process.

PHASE 1: CONTEXT & IMPORTANCE

“ I am a computer scientist and work at one half of Oxbridge. I’m in my 30s, have a doctorate, a good number of independent publications and several years’ experience. My male head of department refers to me as a clever girl.

—Ira (everydaysexism.com)

“Although it is encouraging that research ranks Canada in the top ten of 95 countries, it would take over 100 years to reach gender parity at the current rate of progress”
(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019).

To build context, I embarked on secondary research into workplace microsexism affecting career advancement, which unfolded into several key areas. First examining the Canadian legislation and policies in place and their effect, establishing that progress has plateaued and connecting gender-based microaggressions as a plausible contributor to the stalled situation, then describing and defining microsexism, and fourthly revealing how microsexism manifests in the workplace and affects the macroeconomy.

Canada’s Legislative Acts, Effects & Progress

Where are we in terms of legislation and policies making progress toward gender equity in the workplace?

Canada is exemplary. No doubt. Section 15 of its Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides that “every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination” and in fact each is “equally deserving of concern, respect and consideration” (The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Similarly, the *Canadian Bill of Rights* (1960) guarantees basic rights and freedoms, and the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (1977) prohibits discrimination and discriminatory practices in many contexts, including employment (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985). Regulations under this act include the *Equal Wages Guideline*, in which “work performed by employees employed in the same establishment” can trigger investigations into complaints, “alleging a difference in wages” based on sexual bias, among other reasons (Equal Wages Guideline, 1986).

But almost ten years after, and women were still facing, “insurmountable barriers leading to discrimination in employment” (Ng et al, 2015, p. 46). Thus, the *Employment Equity Act* (EEA) was created to respect employment equity, to achieve equality in the workplace, and to correct conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women and other designated groups and minorities

(1995). Further, its definition of employment equity, “means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences” (Employment Equity Act, 1995). This is because equal opportunity alone frequently leads to unequal results with disproportionate success for some groups and disproportionate failure for others (Ng et al, 2015, p. 46). Employers with 100 or more employees self-report their progress, plans, policies and timelines, with only a threat of a monetary penalty for non-compliance levied by the Labour Program as incentive (Ng et al, 2015, p. 50). Among its initiatives, the EEA launched *Workplace opportunities: Removing barriers to equity* in 2014, designed to improve representation and participation in the workplace, and *Pay transparency* in 2018, designating funds to publicly provide “accessible, comparable” data “highlighting the wage gaps that affect women” (Employment Equity Act: Annual Report 2019).

However, digging into the EEA’s Annual Report 2019 measurement of representation a different image emerges. Defined as, “the extent to which the representation of members of designated groups in the employers’ workforce meets their representation in the Canadian workforce” and that a workforce is “considered fully representative when the representation of designated group members is equal to their labour market availability.” However, the report’s findings are that since 2013 there’s been a trend of women leaving the workforce at a higher rate than entering it, which has affected and led to the decline in the representation of women at the overall level. In fact, since data collection began in 1987, the representation of women increased and peaked in 1993 and has gone predominantly downward since the early 2000s. Additionally, the report notes that despite narrowing education and work experience gaps, the gap in wages between men and women persists among workers at the overall national level; on average women earned \$0.89 for every dollar earned by men in 2018, up from \$0.83 in 1997 (Employment Equity Act: Annual Report 2019). That’s only six cents over more than 20 years.

The EEA uses this data to “identify if barriers to employment exist and where appropriate corrective measures would need to be implemented” through such means as the *Symposium on women and the workplace*, a 2-day program in May 2019 (Employment Equity Act: Annual Report 2019). The ensuing report offered best practices centred around the employment cycle: hiring, retention and career advancement (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). For the purposes of narrowing my research scope, I focused on career advancement, and regarding this the Symposium report offered only six bullet points of advice, which were mostly a regurgitation of the purpose of the EEA in the first place, such as pay transparency to reduce wage gaps. Where it got interesting to me was when it described the

presenters' consensus that awareness, challenging widespread myths, changing structures not people, and adopting an intersectional approach to gender equality and diversity are key strategies. It was particularly illuminating that myths, "obscure the structural and systemic roots of gender inequality" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019).

This is augmented by the research of not what the myths are, but why the myths persist, such the male backlash and preference of meritocracy, the admin costs to implement and self report to the EEA, and a debatably perceived decline in productivity or competence due to unqualified workers hired to fill diversity quotas (Leck, 2002, p 91-94). Learning about this backlash idea gave me an early inkling about men, their rationale for resisting equity, and their role in achieving change. A study after Leck's paper echoed both the government's assertion that the issue is systemic and can be fixed through structural changes, stating that equally qualified candidates are more likely to be hired only when there is a basic employment equity statement (Ng & Wiesner, 2007, p. 184), and the notion that when employment equity directives are strengthened, especially if coercive in nature, it provokes a backlash against women (p. 179). Power and success are, "too often seen as a zero-sum game, in which women gain power at the expense of men and at the peril of larger society" (Norris, 2019).

Now this is an interesting space; I wanted to really understand that chicken-and-egg dilemma of how a patriarchal culture bias allowed for systemic discrimination in the first place, then conscious recognition worked to structurally adjust the system to be more fair and balanced, the results of which moved the needle but have not or cannot net out in full equality, with the bias seeming to continue.

By the numbers

My next step was to take a deeper look at the plateau that the EEA's Symposium identified into what the numbers tell us regarding career advancement. While the data collected for this research paper is Canadian, it should be noted that Canada is not an outlier, and in fact other Western societies, such as the U.S., the U.K., Europe and Australia, all produce similar findings (Devillard et al, 2017).

Women **only hold 20%** of corporate board seats, and of these seats **racialized women only hold 6%** (Cukier, 2019).

Particularly, Ng, Haq, and Tremblay’s review of two decades of Canada’s EEA suggests that women were a success story of progressing representation and proportion until recent years, when it’s slowed and even reversed. Both visible minorities and women are stalled at senior management levels and they are disproportionately “ghettoized” in lower-paying fields (Ng et al, 2015, p. 60). We often hear the ‘glass ceiling’ prevents women from reaching senior leadership positions, but the reality is the initial bottleneck for female advancement occurs between entry level and management (Devillard et al, 2017; Measure, 2016). Then again between director and vice-president levels, neither of which are because of lack of ambition nor attrition, because in fact, “women aspire to promotions at a similar rate and actually leave at a lower rate than their male counterparts” (Devillard et al, 2017). In Canada, women earn 52.7% of all university degrees in Canada, yet remain underrepresented in top leadership positions (Hideg & Shen, 2019). Despite greater education and drive, women are not optimistic about their career advancement, with 1 in 4 women believing their gender played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead (Coury, Huang, Kumar, Prince, Krivkovich, & Yee, 2020).

Women make up approximately **45%** of all entry-level positions, but only **25%** of vice presidents & **15%** of CEOs (Devillard et al, 2017).

Klettner, Clark and Boersma wrote in the Journal of Business Ethics about this topic, explaining the need for deeper analysis and explanation into the causes of women's continuing lack of presence in senior management ranks, which relate to the unique social and economic role women predominantly occupy in contemporary society (Klettner et al, 2016, p. 395-396). They ask, “Do we simply want more women in leadership or do we want to encourage cultural change within the business sector?” (Klettner et al, 2016, p. 396). Indeed, a poignant question after my own heart of the research matter.

Between director and vice-president levels, **men advance 3x faster** than women (Devillard et al, 2017).

A recent McKinsey study report highlights areas where companies made gender diversity progress over the prior five years: improved, but still low, C-suite representation, and better company commitment. As well where more can be done: representation at the managerial level of women in general and women of colour in particular (Coury et al, 2020). For me, two areas from the study stand out because of their lack of change year over

year, and because it is amazing to me that these seemingly subtle and arguably unimportant factors were even measured in the first place. They are: women feel gender was a barrier to advancement, and that microaggressions toward women continue (Coury et al, 2020).

Another recent study indicates that even if women's representation in a field substantially increases, it cannot be taken to indicate that issues of gender bias have been resolved—that making progress on “the numbers” should not be considered a robust or adequate solution to issues of gender inequality (Begeny, Ryan, Moss-Racusin, & Ravetz, 2020).

Canadian women earned **88.6 cents** for every dollar earned by Canadian men (Zagler & Straznicky, 2019).

Why doesn't addressing systemic issues, legislation, policies and even progress seem to be enough to stem microsexism in the workplace? I posit that until microaggression—or what I call microsexism—is eliminated, barriers to advancement will remain. Again, Klettner and team question the, “pattern of

Female entrepreneurs in Canada only receive **4% of venture capital funding** due to gender biases against women and the types of businesses they start (Sultana. & Ravanera, 2020, p. 14)

regulatory compliance but cultural stasis,” and whether it is possible for policies to regulate cultural change, a challenge at best (Klettner et al, 2016, p. 397). Concordia University research predicts gender equality in the boardroom will not be achieved until 2081, and largely blames societal attitudes for the slow progress (Polak, 2019). Deep seeded bias

manifested in tiny aggressions will continue to create barriers to advancement until our cultural worldview fully and completely accept women as equally valuable in all aspects of business and life. It means that women will continue to struggle to close the pay wage gap, to be promoted into leadership roles, and to have equal representation in the executive suite and on boards. Even when women achieve senior levels, a study suggests it is at companies with inferior performance—women are often hired for risky and precarious roles at times of crises. In other words, they are set up to fail. This idea will be quite important to recall as Canada attempts to move through and then recover from the coronavirus pandemic (Smith Galer, 2017).

62% of women identified gender discrimination as an **obstacle to progressing** into leadership (Randstad, 2019).

Microsexism—Background & Definition

How do you define microsexism? And are there concrete examples?

It appears that government legislation and company policies have made great strides yet have also potentially pushed unconscious gender bias and sexism underground—blatant sexism, harassment and assault are no longer tolerated (Measure, 2016). That’s a good thing. However, belief systems behind discrimination still exist and their manifestation has become micro. Derald Wing Sue (2010) writes in *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* that expressions of sexism have not decreased, but rather “become more ambiguous and nebulous” which are harder to identify and acknowledge (p. 23). Aisha Holder

In majority-male workplaces, almost **40%** of women report being **treated as incompetent & 1/3 report repeated, small slights** at work (Parker, 2018).

(2020) writes in her chapter of *Microaggression theory: Influence and Implications*, that inequalities persist in the workplace because of the tendency to focus on overt discrimination rather than the “subtle, implicit, contemporary manifestations of discrimination” (p. 261-262).

Jana and Baran authored a book called *Subtle Acts of Exclusion. How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions* that explains why the term “subtle acts of exclusion” is more potentially more useful, as outlined below:

Subtle—confusing, hard to identify, and challenging to speak about.

Acts—things that people say and do, regardless of intention.

Serve to **exclude**—the subtle acts propagate exclusion rather than inclusion (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 20 – 21).

I borrowed their description for my explanation of microsexism as subtle acts of excluding women. Now, while I chose to contain my research to the workplace and how these subtle gender-based acts impede opportunities for advancement, I do want to acknowledge that they occur and bombard women from birth through education, onward to first jobs, and from recruitment throughout careers to retirement. It never stops. I used subtle, micro, and implicit frames to create focus and depth. There is also a great parallel with other isms and non-conforming members of society. This work hopes not to detract from

their profound importance, and rather to collectively enhance the awareness of and action to gain equality and diversity.

Laurens Van Sluytman of Morgan State University describes three types of microaggressions and how they play out.

1. **Microassaults** are communications that typically convey insensitivity or rudeness, such as derogatory or racial slurs (Van Sluytman, 2015). An American Psychologist paper augments Van Sluytman's definition by describing microassaults to sometimes be the use of blatant racism but not necessarily in the presence of anyone from that race (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). An example of microassaults in my microsexist realm is posting images demeaning to women in a public area to be seen by all (Van Sluytman, 2015). I interpret microassaults as reinforcing negative attitudes toward marginalized groups among the privileged group who enact them.
2. **Microinsults** are both verbal and behavioural in nature but are not as overtly aggressive as the above. They can often appear as seemingly legitimate questions but in the act of asking them imply an insult (Van Sluytman, 2015). Or, back handed compliments, such as stating that a successful Black person is a credit to their race (Sue et al, 2007.) An example for women in the workplace comes from a story of two lawyers—one male, one female—welcoming a new intern, who then turned to the woman and asked, "Are you Steve's secretary?" (Bates, 2014, p. 28). My take is that microinsults are passive aggressive or back-handed compliments, which can sometimes manifest as benevolent sexism—disguised on the surface as a simple positive remark or situation but is actually a trap (Marcus, 2018; Hideg & Shen, 2019).
3. **Microinvalidation** removes the receiver from her experiences. While they may not be hostile in intent, they still serve to reject the receiving individual's experience and to relieve the sender of responsibility (Van Sluytman, 2015). A prime example is those who claim to be colour blind, that they do not see race and that people of colour are too sensitive about it (Sue et al, 2007). An example for women in the workplace is when men dismiss a woman who speaks up as being

“too hormonal” (Bates, 2014, p. 230). This, to me, serves to make women feel invisible or irrelevant and to “silence or minimize those with less power” (Torino et al, 2019, p. 3).

Those who are at highest risk for perpetrating microsexism in all its forms are those who believe that discrimination against women is no longer an issue in their profession—and it’s that belief itself, not one’s gender, that predicts who is most likely to demonstrate gender bias (Begeny et al, 2020; University of Exeter, 2020).

45% of managers believe discrimination against women is no longer a problem, 66% of whom were men (Begeny et al, 2020).

Microsexism & Career Advancement

How rampant is microsexism in the workplace? And to what extent does it affect a woman's career advancement?

With a definition and understanding of microsexism, it got even more interesting: seeing how things truly play out in the workplace. Much of this perspective I attempted to uncover in my ethnographic research (see Phase 2), but I wanted a baseline of secondary research to set the stage prior to embarking on that path. It would be an interesting point of comparison to see if the way my participants describe their experiences matches the literature.

Hideg and Shen point out that historically, research into sexism has focused on hostile sexism, about which my research above indicates that legislation has successfully moved the needle—to a point. Instead they propose that the effects of benevolent sexism (to my definition, a type of microsexism) on women’s underrepresentation can be profound, subtly eroding gender equality, including in the workplace. Further, it is not easily detected (Hideg & Shen, 2019, p. 295).

Jana and Baran’s work acknowledges that subtle acts of exclusion related to gender, “happen so frequently that we struggled to narrow down the examples we wanted to discuss in this chapter” and that they are particularly common in workplaces (2020, p. 79). Microsexism in modern offices occurs

under the radar because legislation prevents men from overt sexism. Instead, “today’s insidious sexism” means men find other ways to harass women, such as interrupting them in meetings or taking credit for their ideas (Mesure, 2016). “Subtle bias may make it challenging for women to ascend organizational hierarchies even in the absence of overt discrimination” (Diehl et al, 2020).

How did we get here? What are we thinking? Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, renowned feminist author, writes that, “If we keep seeing only men as heads of corporations, it starts to seem 'natural' that only men should be heads of corporations” (2014, p. 13). There is an unsubstantiated notion that wage gaps, ghettoization in low-paying jobs, and low representation in leadership are myths because women freely choose the types of jobs that do not pay as much and are more ‘dead end’ than the types of jobs men choose—but perhaps she never chose such jobs because she’s never seen an example in the field, so it unimaginable (Abushanab Higgins, 2016, p. 37). Over their lifetimes, women absorb thousands of subtle, culture clues discouraging them from certain careers, such as science, because society has labeled them “unemotional, unimaginative, and unfeminine” (Abushanab Higgins, 2016, p. 37). Other research also suggests that women’s presence in the highest-level positions violates societal norms and threatens men (Polak, 2019).

So how do gender roles and societal norms affect advancement in workplace? Two recent studies written up together from the University of Exeter, indicate that the disbelief in gender bias enables the bias to perpetuate; meaning that if you believe it exists you will consciously work to equalize it, but if you do not believe it exists you will continue to allow your unconscious bias to rule the way you evaluate and promote women. Managerial-level subjects in the study who perceived women as less competent were less likely to offer her more responsibilities, and less likely to encourage her to pursue important opportunities, which “shows how managers’ biases not only affect women’s current employment situation (current pay) but can affect the entire trajectory of their career, by discouraging them from pursuing promotions” (2020). These findings were encouraging because it indicated that awareness could be a potential area of exploration during Phase 4’s design of a significant outcome.

Women are particularly shortchanged by performance reviews, which clearly affect their opportunities for advancement (Checchi-Dimeglio, 2017). Again, simply believing that gender discrimination is no longer an issue reveals a pattern of biased evaluations of women, which can translate into double

standards, skewed views of competence, and overall differential treatment (Begeny et al, 2020). An analysis of 248 performance reviews collected from a variety of US-based tech companies found that women receive negative personality criticism whereas men simply do not; women are told to watch their tone, to step back, “they are called bossy, strident, aggressive, emotional and irrational” (Criado Perez, 2019, p. 93). In fact, 76% of references to being 'too aggressive' happened in women’s reviews, versus 24% in men’s—and personality concerns are rarely, if ever, accompanied by specific tactics for improving their abilities to achieve a promotion or raise (Correll & Simard, 2016). Another study published in 2016 found that women negotiating pay rises and promotions were two-thirds more likely than “quiescent” female colleagues to be told they were intimidating, too aggressive, or ‘bossy’ (Mesure, 2016). Sometimes called the ‘double bind’ when women behave femininely, they’re perceived as weak, insecure, and ineffective leaders, but if they act with stereotypical masculine traits, they are perceived as unlikable, abrasive, or too bossy (Kostoula, 2018).

Women take microsexist performance reviews to heart—literally. Current findings suggest that when women are receiving sexist feedback, even if well-intentioned and supportive, they are affected on both a physical and psychological level. Many may feel as though they cannot meet the demands of the field, and thus disengage from activities in which they feel less skilled or competent. Additionally, over time, the build up can be a threat to their cardiovascular health (Lamarche et al, 2020, p. 7-8).

According to Diehl and team’s research, among the gender-based barriers to leadership they identified, two fall into my definition of microsexism as subtle acts of exclusion. They include increased scrutiny—intense or hypercritical examination of women over and above that of men; and unequal standards—holding women to higher performance standards and requiring them to outperform male colleagues simply to keep their positions, never mind get a promotion. The team further describes how subtle bias is multilayered, involving barriers which arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men. It is, “typically unconscious, stemming from cultural assumptions, [and] it can be difficult to pinpoint and particularly pernicious” (Diehl et al, 2020). That’s the aim of this research. I would like to help pinpoint microsexism in the workplace as it pertains to career advancement, to contribute to the discourse, and then create tangible images of the future so that it becomes less pernicious. Now, onto the economic significance.

Microsexism & the Macroeconomy

How might gender-based microaggressions in the workplace threaten an equitable future?

According to the International Monetary Fund, an unevenly distributed workforce between women and men comes at a significant economic cost (Ostry, Alvarez, Espinoza, Papageorgiou, 2018). In this regard, I examined the research at a company level then up through to effects on the macroeconomy—in the generally-accepted vernacular sense not as a formal discipline.

First at the business level, gender diversity and equality are a key to attracting, developing and retaining talent, according to Dr. Toni Schmader and Dr. Tara Dennehy's workshop at the Symposium on Women in the Workplace. They also suggested that increasing women's participation in the workforce may alleviate labour shortages (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). Organizations miss the opportunity to capitalize on the talent and skills of a sizable percentage of their workforce when they do not promote women into senior leadership roles (Hideg & Shen, 2019). Women and men bring different skills and perspectives to the workplace, including different attitudes to risk and collaboration, which may adhere to societal gender norms. However formed, the upshot is that when combined these diverse traits contribute to an overall increase in efficiency and productivity that is not otherwise achieved by men only (Ostry et al, 2018).

When companies recognize and promote talent employee satisfaction and retention rates improve—one can correlate that if women who are overlooked and undervalued may leave. Over time, women may come to feel as though they cannot meet the demands of the field, and then disengage from activities that they feel less skilled or competent at (Lamarche et al, 2020, p. 7-8). The costs of employee attrition can be substantial. According to a report from Dulcimer Labs (n.d.), Canada has the world's fourth highest employee turnover rate, with significant direct and indirect replacement costs. Indirect costs include lost productivity, engagement, and institutional memory. Direct costs are easier to monetize, with estimates of replacing a mid-level employee at 20% of their salary, whereas replacing a high-level employee can cost up to 213% of their salary.

The IMF studies have also shown that the financial performance of firms improves with more gender-equal corporate boards (Ostry et al, 2018). Hideg and Shen's work (2019) echoes that increased female

representation in top leadership roles has been linked to better firm financial performance. A business that does well contributes to the country's financial well being. Indeed, a McKinsey report about the power of parity on the economy found that Canada's GDP could add \$150 billion in incremental GDP by 2026; six percent higher relative to a business as usual scenario (Devillard et al, 2017).

Zagler and Straznicky also spoke about the macroeconomic benefits to closing the wage gap such as stimulating the economy by improving the income of female workers and retirees (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). When women have spent the time and money to be more educated than their male counterparts, but are not fully participating in the workforce or earning as much, it affects their debt levels, poverty rates, dependence on the social safety net, discretionary income and spending, and the amount of taxes they contribute. Additionally, as primarily male White baby boomers retire, they will increasingly depend on underpaid, underemployed and unemployed women and people of colour for their social security and pension plans, which does not bode well for their future security (Sue, 2010, p. 213).

The Canadian Women's Foundation claims that 1.9 million Canadian women are living in poverty for two key reasons, first that they spend more time and energy on the double-duty demands of unpaid work at home and paid work on the job, which sacrifices their long-term economic security; and the second is the persistence of the gender wage gap, which diminishes their earning power. The Foundation works to correct these issues noting that poverty costs taxpayers and the government billions of dollars each year (2018). Per that government cost, Statistics Canada's chapter on *The Economic Well-Being of Women in Canada* from their Women in Canada report concurs that women are more vulnerable to low income than men. Specifically, women's average personal income is approximately \$7,000 lower than men's, with less of it coming from employment earnings than men, and more of it from government transfers than men (Fox & Moyser, 2018). If pay were equitized, those government transfers could potentially be reallocated to other areas of need.

In Closing Phase 1

My secondary research phase identified a substantial but rarely voiced societal issue worthy of rigorous analysis. My line of thinking was confirmed by the literature, and by Laura Bates whose *Everyday Sexism* project, started in 2012, kicked off a firestorm of online contributions from women with stories about

sexism from subtle, unconscious bias to full on sexual assault (everydaysexism.com). I found deep alignment with her research and my assertions that microsexism is pervasive and under reported. She writes in her subsequent book *Everyday Sexism* of how it hides in plain sight, “within a society that has normalized sexism and allowed it to become so ingrained that we no longer notice or object to it. Sexism is a socially acceptable prejudice and everybody is getting in on the act ” (Bates, 2014, p. 17). Bates’ (2014) research is magnificently wide ranging from invisible sexism to sex assault, and demonstrates that ignoring minor offenses ladders up to violence against women and misogyny, which aligned to my notion that workplace microsexism ladders up to grave effects on the economy.

Finally, I want to quote Ng and Wiesner whose seminal work on benevolent sexism—what I claim to be one of the types of microsexisms—describes the need for the type research I have attempted with this research project. They write that, “we encourage future research that examines novel ways by which we may be able to combat these socially accepted, but problematic, gender beliefs” because they conclude that, “its consequences, including for women’s attainment of leadership roles and career success, appear to be wide-ranging and damaging” (2007). Indeed, how might we design a future that fosters equity and balance for women in the workplace?

PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS & INTERPRETATION

“ In my group, even though women dominated, if you had kids you couldn't balance this job, or if you had a baby you wouldn't get promoted. I knew exceptional women stuck at manager or senior manager level simply because they took mat leaves.”

—interviewee verbatim

“Design’s embrace of futures edged foresight away from sterile sorting matrices towards a wider use of qualitative research tools. Some of these are used in allied fields such as ethnographic research, to support better understanding of driving or impending issues, or to surface hidden cultural shifts in people’s behaviours”

(Smith & Ashby, 2020, p. 25).

First, I will set the stage by describing the lens I used to conduct primary research. Since I experienced microsexism affecting my career path and advancement, as described in the Introduction, this research could have been Emic in nature. I suppose in some ways it was, as that is the nature of bias. However, I planned to consciously take a more Etic approach by observing the phenomenon as neutrally as possible to avoid applying any ‘this feels right to me’ analysis, which could skew results. Thus, I employed an abductive approach in that I used the findings of my secondary research as a foundation for pragmatically deducing the best explanation for the “surprising facts” it revealed (BRM, n.d.). Additionally, I layered a naturalistic approach to my data collection, called an Interpretivist view, to understand the issues as a human-interest story (Ladner, 2014). I wanted to, “focus on meaning and to employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue” (BRM, n.d.). I deduced that ethnographic research was the method of choice to further this desire.

Phenomenological Study

To embrace ethnographic research methodologies, I first turned to Sam Ladner’s (2014) book, *Practical Ethnography*, for guidance. Her work suggested a narrow focus like mine was appropriate for ethnographic research. Interviewing women about their implicit experience of microsexism could lead me to understand how it manifests in the workplace, and then potentially produce actionable, specific results. Ladner’s ideas about reduction and specificity confirmed that non-probability, or non-random, sampling would be best for recruiting participants, allowing me to “zero in on a particular type of person” (p. 140). I wanted to know more about this microsexism ‘phenomenon’ in the workplace.

A variation of interpretivism is phenomenology, in which ideas are generated from a rich amount of data by means of induction and human interest and becomes valuable for exploring human experiences and understanding meanings as explained by people experiencing them (BRM, n.d.). This well aligned to my end goal of achieving an Ethnographic Experiential Futures Phase 4. Hence, I turned to *Qualitative*

Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches authored by John W. Cresswell and Cheryl N. Poth (Fourth Edition, 2018) for the best tactics of conducting interviews with such specificity of topic and participant. The book states that qualitative researchers collect data "in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study" (p. 120) which nicely summed up the empathy-forward way in which I wanted to conduct my primary research.

This Phenomenological Study tactic they described matched my intent to look beyond statistics into an individual's experience of a specific incident. Such a study is, "best suited when the problem is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon...in order to develop practices or policies" (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 194). I wanted interviews to allow the participant to focus on describing their story for my analysis to extrapolate its universal essence (p. 185). Cresswell and Poth call this a hermeneutical approach, meaning one oriented toward a lived experience and interpreting the 'texts' of life; it is an interpretive process (p. 191) which aligns with my interpretivist epistemology.

Per Cresswell and Poth's outlined structure, I planned Phenomenological Study interviews with five to 25 participants (2018), with a sweet spot of 10 to 15 interviewees. I conducted non-random recruitment of only those who identified as women in Canadian workplaces, having not yet switched to the male perspective on microsexism. My strategy had been that with a history of patriarchy, we had listened to and followed male voice for centuries. I wanted to hear the small typical, usually unsaid daily onslaught women experience and how it impacts their career advancement as a way to understand its implications. I posited such implications would lead to strategic intervention: how things go wrong, where they go wrong, what we're up against, and ideas to fix.

According to Cresswell & Poth, phenomenological interviews ask two broad questions. Asking only two questions allows the participant to tell their story in their own words at their own pace and get to the 'essence' of a specific issue. The two questions focused on the participant's past and current experience.

Table 1: Phenomenological Study Questions

Cresswell & Poth’s 2 open-ended questions	Same 2 questions adjusted for microsexism phenomenon
What have you experienced in terms of the phenomena?	What have you experienced in terms of microsexism impacting your career advancement?
What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomena?	What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of microsexism impacting your career?

While I wanted to stay as true to the two-question format as possible, I did not want to waste an opportunity to learn more. Considering my research question proposed designing a future that fosters equity and balance, it seemed only right to ask the interviewees their thoughts and visions for the future. However, people have a cognitive bias against thinking about the future, especially the further out in time the brain is asked to go (McGonigal, 2017). There are also schools of thought that parts of the brain are dedicated to our natural capacity for future consciousness, or “memory of the future” (H3uni, n.d.). Thus, the trick was to tap into this natural awareness of the future yet be cognizant that it may be tougher for some to access than others. To strike that balance, and to also keep the interviews open-ended, I decided to add only one additional question to the phenomenological interviews.

I chose the single question as written by Robert Textor from Stanford, a self-described sociocultural anthropologist and futurist who worked for the great Margaret Mead, in his development of Ethnographic Futures Research to draw out participants’ projections (Candy & Kornet, 2019; Smith & Ashby, 2020). According to Candy and Kornet’s introductory article to Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF), Textor’s question could be used to capture the ethnographic essence of what these women experienced and what they think may or hope could or fear will happen, and was written as follows: *Within the context of overall trends and possibilities as you perceive them, what potential changes in your sociocultural system do you (1) want, (2) fear, and (3) expect?*

As a proponent of natural language, I massaged the question to be more digestible to my interview participants. I rewrote it as: *Thinking about these situations that you and others have been in, as you perceive the future, what changes do you want? Fear? Expect?*

Demographic Data

In the latter half of September 2020, I recruited Canadian residents who identify as women, are age 25 to 54 years, per the StatsCan definition of core working age, and who: A) Currently, or have within the last five years, held a position in the paid workforce that included periodic performance reviews to determine standing, career development, promotion, and/or salary increases, and B) Feel they experienced microsexism in that workplace, which prevented or hampered her promotion, raise and/or career development. During the first few weeks of October 2020, I conducted confidential one-on-one with 12 participants over video call to follow pandemic health protocols.

Of the 12 participants, half were in their 40s, four were in their 30s, and two were in their 20s—none were in their 50s nor 60s. In terms of marital status, two were divorced, four were single, and half were either married, common law or engaged to be married. Only three participants had children.

As far as intersectionality, nine were white, and three described themselves as persons of colour; none were Black nor Indigenous. All, but one, were cis gendered and preferred the she/her pronouns, with the one trans participant preferring they/them. Two identified as part of the LGBTQ2 community. One identified as chronically but episodically disabled. None identified as obese nor any other marginalized or underrepresented group.

Finally, in terms of the workplace, participants were not filtered by industry or hierarchical level achieved. They came from a variety of sectors in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) including finance and insurance; professional, scientific and technical services; education services; and public administration (StatsCan, 2017). From a level perspective, five were individual contributors, five were management, and two were in senior leadership roles (one a director, one a partner)—none were entry level nor executive level.

Phenomenal Study Interpretation

I interpreted the data gathered during my interviews by “further reducing [it], summarizing it, and interpreting it” (Ladner, 2014, p. 140) in a way that “establishes patterns or themes” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 120). Cresswell & Poth (2018) provide three steps to analyze the phenomenological study data. First, I generated themes through what they call Horizontalization—basically a transcript review to highlight significant statements or quotes that provide understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Second, I developed clusters of meaning by using Miro (an online collaborative white board) to organize the groupings and visualize patterns. Finally, I developed textural and structural descriptions (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 194). These descriptions, written below, became a basis for analysis and synthesis in Phase 3, and the ethnographic research for EXF in Phase 4.

Overall interpretation

Prior to each interview, I gave participants a one-pager of how I define microsexism for my research project that included work-related examples. Despite this primer, the general impression from participants was that microsexism is extremely difficult to define and identify. A few interview responses wandered off into stories of explicit sexism and harassment. When it came to microsexism in the workplace affecting their careers, some denied or downplayed it, while others were much more keenly attuned to it—usually those who had been in the workforce longer. It is unclear whether that was due to length of exposure in the workforce or whether the younger colleagues perceive or perpetuate microsexism less. Sometimes they can’t articulate what happened, they just know it happens all the time, and happens to other women even more than to themselves. Many acknowledged had a huge impact on their careers and on the economy but could not necessarily describe why or how. They all felt this was an important topic, although that may be predominantly because they elected to respond to the online recruitment survey.

Almost all for whom intersectionality was not a factor acknowledged their privilege and its contribution to their success. One woman stated “I do have a lot of advantage because of my skin colour, my sexual orientation, my class status, and if I was facing this [microsexism], then it means that two-thirds of my colleagues were just—well, they had no hope.” It would be interesting to compare interviews with white men and whether they would volunteer a similar thought?

Seven Key Themes

From the interviews, seven key themes emerged described below and ordered by the volume of comments per theme.

1. Workplace culture perpetuates microsexist behaviour

Most participants acknowledged progress has been made toward gender equality. When asked about the contexts or situations that influence the microsexism that impacted their careers, participants often replied that leadership sets the tone for an organization and

“It is male dominated. There’s definitely a culture that allows and rewards people who are loud and combative.”

allows gender bias to perpetuate. Stories emerged about particular incidents with men—from jokes about boobs, to calling a participant at the senior manager level a ‘young girl’, to generally assuming less of their capabilities and expressing surprise when they are capable, all the way to full on bullying behaviour to such a degree that three separate participants used the term ‘gas lit’. This research paper is not intended to examine explicit sexism or harassment, but it is important to observe that despite legislation it continues to such a degree and remains unreported.

Many spoke about toxic masculinity, a bro culture, a boys’ club, and how that affected hiring, firing and promotion decisions; “like promotes like” as one participant put it. However, most were adamant that it is not all men. And many were adamant that both men and women enact microsexisms—that is it ingrained in society and so everyone brings that “muscle memory into the workplace.” And while it’s great that it’s not all men, what stood out to me were those ‘good guy’ witnesses did not speak up or provide support.

2. Women’s career progress is slower

“I felt type cast as a woman in a male dominated industry, and it ruined any traction for me to move out of the department or move up in the organization.”

For many women, microsexism contributed to eroding their confidence, which affected when or even whether they would make a career move.

One participant stayed in her position for three extra years because she began to worry that, ‘uh

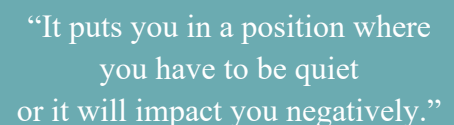
oh, I can't get something else’ despite her skills and experience. A few commented, “I felt stuck”

because there was a double edge sword of wanting to leave an uncomfortably gender-biased company, but yet they consciously did not build networks, focus on advancement, or even bother applying for roles within the organization because, “I knew it would be an uphill battle” against male candidates. In fact, one turned down a VP role because of the work environment was toxic toward females. These stories appeared to be most pervasive for women in male dominated fields, but not always. A couple participants left male-dominated roles, and noted that they often see women quit such jobs for a better gender balance and work-life flexibility, but they end up with less pay—and with men still dominating senior leadership.

Both mothers and non-mothers spoke about how motherhood slowed pay and progress even further. Overall, a majority compared their progress to that of men and how many times over their careers that they observed male colleagues promoted sooner and faster regardless of talent or experience, and also that they knew for a fact that many men were being paid more at the same level. One commented that at every turn of her career she was made to feel that women simply do not contribute to the extent men do. Another wondered what her life would be like if she had been able to follow the path she’d chosen for her career.

3. Silence thwarts awareness

Calling microsexism out in the moment or telling anyone after was seen as risky to their career, and would be fruitless anyway. One woman observed that it’s so subtle you never have enough to make an official complaint, and even then,



“It puts you in a position where you have to be quiet or it will impact you negatively.”

another said they did not trust that institutional processes would change anything. Most worried that if they spoke up, they would be negatively labeled as “difficult” for the rest of their career. Many in male-dominated fields described how they had to keep quiet, with phrases such as, “I shut myself down.” And eventually they get so used to it that they hardly notice anymore, and if they do notice they just let it go.

Of the very few who tried to speak up, responses centred around it being her problem, she was “hormonal”, she should “suck it up” or “get a sense of humour” and basically “don’t borrow trouble”. This led some to feel it was part of paying their dues. Many felt that they simply did not have the day to day energy to find their voice, with one saying, “You’re like, I’m not going to fight this today, I’ve got

work to do.” And the other side of that was questioning why the onus always felt like it was on the one bearing the microsexism and not the one committing it. As one woman said, “Why do I have to say something? Why can’t Bob say it?” In the end, the majority felt they did not have a voice, or it did not count, or they weren’t even at the table anyway. It was interesting to note one woman who is at the table feels responsible for her sole female voice to count for so much more because she represents an enormous and diverse quantity of people not present—and she does not feel fully capable to represent everyone well or accurately. Overall, when so few men or women ever speak up, it could be interpreted as consent of the microsexist behaviour and thus awareness will remain an issue.

4. Emotional fallout unresolved

“I left the meeting feeling really down and disregarded; it was very confusing.”

Emotions surfaced frequently. In fact, a few participants cried relaying their experiences and needed to take a breath and get a tissue. There was a lot of residual anger and sadness about how incidents made them feel invalidated, gas lit, and less confident.

The outcome of their diminished confidence was very evident in the first theme of slowed career progress, and again in the second theme of not having a voice so why bother to speak up. In fact, the emotions surfaced during interviews were just as the literature predicted. Van Sluytman wrote that, “Recounting the repeated onslaught of micro[sexism] and the effort to resolve the resulting emotions can lead to negative results, such as psychological distress” (2015). The cumulative effects of microsexism over time can be traumatic and severe including anger, avoidance, anxiety, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, decreased self-esteem, depression, fear, confusion, and distrust (Bryant-Davis, 2019, p. 97). Most participants discussed emotional outcomes with partners at home or with other women at work with whom they felt safe. One considered her work’s employee assistance program (EAP) but did not trust it and so sought private therapy. Otherwise, feelings remained unresolved, with the fallout of that continuing to impact their career advancement.

5. Policies, systems & society drive bias deeper

Policies were seen to be too general with little accountability, that their existence did not necessarily affect day to day microsexism from occurring. It was felt policies are not and will not be embraced unless leadership treat it like a value, or it

“It feels like actively working against sexism just drives it underground in a certain way.”

were to become an accountability on performance reviews. The thought was that changing behaviours over time might change beliefs eventually as well. However, a few wondered how closely behaviour and belief were intertwined, questioning whether policies simply promote lip service while driving the underlying biases deeper. One cannot explicitly say, “Oh she’s a woman so she can’t negotiate, so don’t promote her” anymore and so, consciously or not, find other ways to achieve the same outcome.

Most readily caveated that these beliefs in gender roles and values were ingrained in all genders, not just men, with messages such as “you’re just a girl” normalized from childhood. This is echoed by neuroscientist Gina Rippon when she says, “Subtle cues about ‘manly’ and ‘ladylike’ behaviours, from the moment of birth, mould our behaviours and abilities, which other scientists have then read as inherent, innate differences.” She calls this ‘neurosexism’ in which tenuous conclusions from weak data become self-fulfilling prophecies (Robson, 2019). Since it’s the norm, “our systems support these things” one woman said. Another interviewee also commented, “capitalist structures are supporting the patriarchy,” and she cannot wait for Capitalism 2.0.

6. Diametrically opposed personality feedback

“You get the sense that the problem is you’re not a man but they can’t say that’s the problem—so instead they say your voice is too high, you don’t speak up enough, or your behaviours are wrong.”

Many recounted how they are ‘too’ this or that—too aggressive/nice, too directive/accommodating. They felt they devote more effort than they would like to decipher the messages in order to fix, change or conform. This aligns to the literature about the cognitive load of constant navigation, the energy and efforts that could be put to more effective use (Diehl et al, 2020). It also correlates to studies that describe the double bind women face, such as the too weak/bossy, too assertive/insecure conundrum (Kostoula, 2018). Another double bind is how unacceptable it is for women take credit for their workplace achievements, or risk censure from colleagues as “unfeminine, pushy, domineering and aggressive” (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, p. 571).

Participant stories directly reflect reports and studies indicating that women’s performance reviews focus more on their personality than do men’s, providing more vague advice than men are given. According to Dr. Paola Cecchi Dimeglio (2017) a data and behavioural scientist, women are 1.4 times

more likely to receive critical and subjective feedback in performance reviews, which she says opens the door to gender bias and double standards when deciding opportunities, raises or promotions.

7. Implicit expectations of femininity & capability

This theme included stories of the implicit expectations of how women should look and act at work. There were descriptions of an unspoken expectation that you could not be yourself if you did not embody societal standards of femininity—did not like heels, did not smile enough, did not wear tight enough clothing—or you were treated as an “odd duck.” Yet on the other side of that coin, one participant of colour told of trying to act like a man and to “speak golf and hockey talk” to get the attention of white male partners, who were incapable of engaging on any other level than their own. Samantha spoke about shortening her name to Sam when emailing male clients in order to reduce the frequency of requests to speak with her manager--requests her male colleagues rarely received [name altered to protect privacy].

A few women brought up expectations of emotional labour at work, touching on examples like arranging client dinners, buying birthday cards, and planning team activities that were never recognized or mentioned in performance reviews, but which took time and effort away from their actual jobs.

Finally, a picture emerged of how woman’s personal lives comes into play in the workplace dynamic in ways that men’s do not—with stories that ranged from a young woman’s concern if the ring on her finger is a liability, to another’s fear that she would be outed at the office. A single mother felt an unconscious need to apologize for picking up her kid after school, promising to be back online after dinner—something, she noted, which men never apologize for and yet garner more respect. This is an interesting aspect that I did not specifically find in the literature, however it is surely an aspect of the volumes written about how motherhood and unpaid labour affect career advancement.

Interpretation of Participant Futures

Clem Bezold (2009) proclaims his aspirational futures method will “help to better understand and to better create the future” (p. 84). With Textor’s ethnographic interview question about the future, I pivoted the conversation with participants in my Phenomenological Study away from their past and present reality of

microsexism in the workplace. I moved the discourse toward ideas of empowerment for change by asking them to describe the future that they want, fear and expect. Textor’s three-pronged construct of the futures aligns to Bezold’s (2009) *Aspirational Futures*, in which, “scenarios differentiate most likely, challenging, and visionary as three ‘archetypal’ pathways.” Expect aligns to Bezold’s most likely scenario; fear aligns to challenging scenarios; and want aligns to visionary scenarios. It was in this way that the interviews revealed emerging issues and trends, which I extrapolated and implicated into robust descriptions of three distinctly alternative futures. Below are the resulting descriptions, built out of clustering their verbatim into themes.

Textor’s adapted interview question:

Thinking about these situations that you and others have been in, as you perceive the future, what changes do you want? Fear? Expect?

Want:

Almost every participant phrased their want as a hope. These hopes ranged from small individual acts, to large macroeconomic changes. There were suggestions that subtle inclusions could be an antidote to subtle acts of exclusion, such as a request for men to self edit, to stop interrupting, and to save that joke for later. Sweeping pipe dreams to “topple the system” and to create the “Coca-Cola version of humanity!” emerged. Somewhere in between visions of a preferred future shone through, and it often centred around awareness, understanding, and being allies. Allies to them meant standing up and calling each other out for microsexism in the workplace—but they were quick to point out that it should be kind, or it may seed resentment and push it further. Most women felt that if men only knew the consequences of microsexism they would think twice and point it out in others, too.

Fear:

Most participants feared the status quo. They worried that things would not change. One spoke outright that she fears, “that men won’t be allies in the conversation and will continue to think that women are

taking their jobs.” Many fear retribution and backlash of any efforts to move things forward. Quite a number expressed the backlash may already be happening, with setbacks due to the coronavirus pandemic creating the ‘she-session’ and obliging many women to leave the labour force. They described a bleak future in which the next generation experiences microsexism, sexism and harassment at levels worse than they experience now.

Expect:

There was a lot of hope expressed regarding the participants’ expectations as well. Interviewees predominantly expect change, they feel emboldened by the anti-Black racism movement, and believe there will be an overall ripple effect toward diversity and acceptance—but that it will be slow. In fact, a couple women expect changes will not be felt for at least a generation; “There's at least 20 years of this stuff left” one said. Just because faces are in places does not necessarily result in progress if their voices remain silenced, another stated.

In Closing Phase 2

It was through conducting the Phenomenological Study interviews and methodically interpreting the data that I began to connect the dots between my secondary research and what the participants were telling me. Those dots drew a distinct line between the facts and numbers I collected—representation, advancement, pay gap—and the subtle acts of exclusion perpetrated by both men, and women too, but mostly men. What began to emerge was a picture of men and their fear losing what they had, while having fewer means at their disposal of stopping the decline. Explicit discrimination is very rarely ever tolerated in the workplace anymore thanks to legislation, but the devaluing of women and societal expectations remain, and so the retribution for infringing into male territory is manifesting in different ways. The more gains women make the more fear men may have, and so the more insidious the mostly unconscious reaction—particularly among those who do not believe that gender discrimination is a problem that exists anymore. It’s what in the dog training world is called resource guarding. The idea for my MRP was to feed these male-focused thought starters into my analysis and synthesis methods—see Phase 3 next.

PHASE 3: ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS

“ My male boss would take credit for my work—I’d write the entire report and then he’d send it out as if he did it. I could see the email thread and people would compliment the report, and he would take them as if he fully did it. I think it was insecurities; him trying to prove himself.”

—interviewee verbatim

“The obvious upside of any of these metaphors, however, is that they highlight social phenomena that might otherwise remain invisible and therefore impossible to resolve.

But in order to address the circumstances that lead to women being held back, and men rising seamlessly, it shouldn't be forgotten that metaphors simplify complexity... these words can subtly influence how we choose to act...[and] the reality is that there are countless deeper-rooted problems and pressures that hamper women's progression in workplaces where male privilege is the norm”

(Smith Galer, 2017).

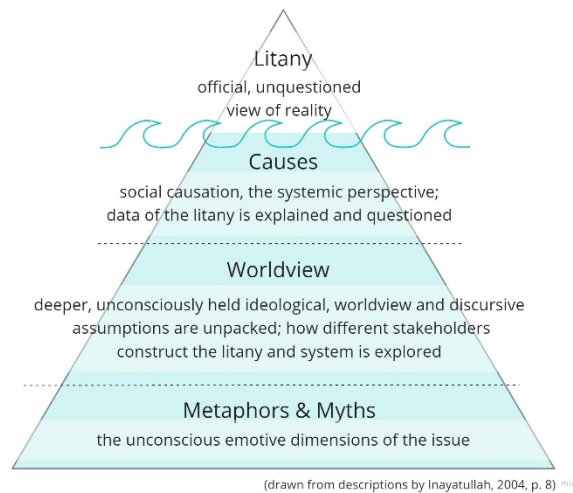
At this phase, the research questions turned analytical, ripe for strategic scrutiny. Given the large nature of data collected, I decided to first diverge widely using Causal Layer Analysis and then converge the information with a Three Horizons approach. Both methods were populated with ideas and theories from Phase 1 research, and the data generated from primary research interviews conducted in Phase 2. The results of Phase 3 were structured to bring Phase 4 to fruition.

Causal Layered Analyses

I used Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to inquire into the themes and ideas from the participants, and created two sets of two CLAs, described below. The deep rootedness of the method into myths and metaphors seemed well suited to answer the research's sub question of: What are the myths and metaphors that allow microsexism to continue despite systemic legislation and policies?

Inayatullah (2004) writes that a CLA's utility is not necessarily in predicting the future but in questioning it, opening up the present and past to create alternative futures. It seeks to “move beyond the superficiality of conventional social science research and forecasting methods insofar as these methods are often unable to unpack discourses—worldviews and ideologies —not to mention archetypes, myths, and metaphors (p. 8). In practice, a quick Google search showed that the layers Inayatullah invented are often displayed in its own metaphorical iceberg, with the public litany layer placed above the water, and the rest of layered below the water to indicate a deepening subconsciousness to them.

Figure 1: Inayatullah's Causal Layers illustrated as an iceberg (2004, p. 8)



CLA Approach

I tackled CLAs in two parts. In part one, I created two present-state perspectives of the workplace, one for women and one for men. Examined side by side, the differences between their worldviews and myths and metaphors were ripe for analytical comparison.

Then for part two, I created two future focused CLAs, one for the Wanted Future and one for the Feared Future. The reason was to create unconscious visions of the future that are otherwise difficult to articulate but which must be understood to be overcome. How do we ensure the Want happens while being cognizant of the potential setbacks or issues articulated in the Feared?

I concluded with two complementary and related gaps to bridge. The first gap is between the deeply held myths and metaphors underpinning the way men and women navigate microsexism in the workplace. The second gap is between the reality now and the vision of the future. This created the investigative areas I needed to focus my synthesis into action—how do we get men and women to understand and value each others' worldviews? And how do we then take that shared view and create the “best case” future for all? Finally, with this analysis I conducted a unique twist on a Three Horizons exercise to generate the strategic pathway to transitions. More on that after the CLA analysis below.

A note about STEEP-V:

Originally PEST (acronym for political, economic, socio-cultural and technological) and introduced by Harvard professor Francis Aguilar's 1967 book, *Scanning the Business Environment*, it was used to examine big picture factors that influence business decisions (Mind Tools Content Team, n.d.). Over the years, the term has seemingly been adopted by, evolved and expanded within foresight and futures studies circles (Smith & Ashby, 2020, p. 96). STEEP-V stands for social, technological, environmental, economic, political and values, and I employed it as a mental framework to aid a thorough investigation of the Causes level of the CLAs.

I should further note that for the Environmental category, I did not interpret that through an ecological lens, but rather as the workplace environment. I used the label as a prompt to consider what may be going on, and what it may be like to work, at that future state or from that point of view.

CLAs Part One: Present Day Gender Comparison

The litany layers were the same for both genders, sourced from secondary research in this report plus an additional scan of popular and social media. This is because everyone experiences the same messages about microsexism and career advancement, however it's reactions to and perspectives about that same litany that differs between the two. We live in a gendered world which produces a gendered brain, in which we are "tiny social sponges absorbing social information", and adopting gendered behaviours that rewire our neural circuits (Robson, 2019). The litany indicates that what we hear in the media is what we are taught to believe, such as that women are better suited for certain roles than men. When they succeed where men are meant to, as a society we demonstrate a degree of trepidation and surprise about women taking the reins of power, because it's still a novel concept. Women who become Deputy Prime Ministers or Vice Presidents of the United States, let alone business owners or senior leaders, are not just hailed as mavericks, they are also portrayed as unicorns. Again, studies find that men often are hired for 'potential,' while women with the same experience are deemed underqualified (Norris, 2019).

Female Perspective CLA

The 'under water' portion of the female CLA was generated with data from the interviews' Expected future responses and secondary research in this report. My research participants' expectable—or best guess—scenarios were informed by their core assumptions and modeled on their personal experiences, which I augmented with environmental scans and existing forecasts gleaned out of the secondary research of Phase 1 (Bezold, 2009).

Figure 2: Female Perspective CLA

Litany

It's newsworthy when a woman achieves success in a traditionally male role, or is promoted into the C-suite. Women gravitate to soft skill jobs because that's what they're best at, the flexibility lets them juggle family responsibilities & allows them to have it all. Men are better suited to the sciences and the dog-eat-dog business world.

Causes

Social

- Women praised for their abilities until they surpass that of a man's
- Women bear brunt of work to navigate & eliminate microsexism
- Women feel silenced

Technological

- Enabling work from home
- Everydaysexism.com project

Environmental (workplace)

- Companies vary with flexible work options
- Reviews are too personality focused
- Leadership does not prioritize gender bias discrimination
- Awareness mid-level

Economic

- Female-dominated industries pay less & tend to be service roles
- Coronavirus shesession
- Women perform majority of unpaid work and emotional labour

Political

- NAC on Status of Women dissolved 2007
- EEA: Self-reporting is not valued enough to be mandatory

Values

- Equality
- Empathy
- Efficiency
- Multifaceted success

Worldview "Because it's 2015"

We work in a man's world and must pay our dues to survive, let alone thrive

It's up to women to "Lean In" if we want career progression

Men can be mediocre & succeed; we have to be superwoman

I need to conform to fit in the workplace; my authentic self is not good enough

Metaphors & Myths

Myth: Success comes in one size

Metaphor: Women in leadership are unicorns

Myth: Men are natural born leaders

Metaphor: Superwoman Syndrome

Myth: Emotions have no place at work

miro

Worldviews emerged of women believing they need to put up with microsexism, and to speak up about it would be to 'borrow trouble'. It means their experiences do not matter. To speak up could mean being labeled as a troublemaker which they fear could affect their career trajectory. The constant underlying indicators that their voices and experiences are not important contribute to their sense of self confidence, which in turn creates a reinforcing loop of lower self-worth that manifests as not bothering to apply, not negotiating their true salaried value, or not trying for that promotion. This in turn conflicts with the media messages that if only women would 'lean in' then they would be successful (Fitzsimons et al, 2018). Women are left wondering how to lean in when they know they are not wanted and will be rejected anyway. Some can manage it, but they are rare, which then reinforces the myth that only super women can make it.

To perform at the super woman level not realistic for the vast majority. Women who cannot perform are left to conform, which ties into the research that women often cannot be their true selves at work, and are continually spending cognitive energy on the double bind of how to be masculine but not mannish, look feminine but not sexy (Kostoula, 2018). "Women are the effect to be explained," says Michelle Ryan, a psychology professor at the University of Exeter. "We never talk about men being overconfident, we always talk about women being underconfident. And we never talk about men having privilege or finding it easy; we always talk about women finding it difficult" (Smith Galer, 2017).

Male Perspective CLA

The male perspective CLA was generated with data from secondary research in this report and augmented with an additional scan of popular and social media. What emerged was a picture of division and doubt.

Figure 3: Male Perspective CLA

Litany

Its a celebration when a woman achieves success in a traditionally male role, or is promoted into the C-suite. Women can do anything, be anything & have it all. Women are best at soft skill jobs that let them juggle family responsibilities. Men are well suited to the sciences & the tough business world.

Causes

Social

- Boys clubs, bro culture allowed to continue unchecked
- Women do not speak up for what they need
- Men feel blamed

Technological

- Enabling work from home
- Rise in dark web movements such as incel and male supremacy groups

Environmental (workplace)

- Companies try to be flexible
- Reviews are based on performance
- Leadership inconsistently model expected behaviour
- Awareness low

Economic

- Male-dominated industries pay more & tend to be professional or STEM roles
- Coronavirus recession
- Majority of men's earnings from employment pay

Political

- Women can vote, take mat leave & have lots of extra rights
- EEA: Self-reporting is showing progress

Values

- Status quo
- Meritocracy
- Productivity
- Monetary success

Worldview "I'm entitled to my entitlements"

We're post-feminist now--workplace sexual harassment & assault are solved

It's up to women to "Lean In" if they want career progression

If a man defends a woman against sexism, he is perceived as unmanly

A woman's cycle makes her an emotional liability in the boardroom

Masculine traits are better for business

Promoting women is a zero sum game

Metaphors & Myths

Myth: Meritocracy works

Metaphor: Resource guarding (dog training)

Myth: Men are from mars; women are from venus

Metaphor: Tug of war

miro

Status quo worldviews emerged. Ideas that we are now postfeminist, that sexism is solved, and if a woman is dissatisfied with her career then she needs to stop blaming men and take responsibility. This notion is reinforced by books like *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg which inadvertently hold women responsible both for causing inequality and for fixing it (Fitzsimons et al, 2018). Those invested in the status quo look for people who can be made to feel inferior; it's the "wobbly floor" they stand on (Norris, 2019). Forty percent of working Canadians believe men in leadership roles should help women advance professionally, and the number rises to 70% among those 18 to 34 years old (Randstad, 2019).

Neuroscientist Nina Rippon presents studies to combat 'neurosexism' such as proof that yes, there are cognitive fluctuations through the menstrual cycle, but they include heightened sensory responsiveness and improved reaction time at ovulation. However, she notes few scientists—let alone regular people—focus on anything but the negative side of a woman's cycle. For example, even the standard tool to measure PMS is called the Menstrual *Distress* Questionnaire, using a loaded adjective in what should be a neutral scientific test. We buy into these neurosexist studies built on weak data, she says, believing there are profound and fundamental differences in skills, temperament and personality between genders, which affect how we think about potential in ourselves and in others (Robson, 2019). As for what success means from the male perspective, cultural and biological aspects of masculinity encourage men to prioritize measurable status, like job titles or salaries (Arthrell et al, 2018), whereas women may prioritize other aspects of success. It's this kind of thinking that contributes to the men from Mars, women from Venus metaphor, magnifying the differences, and no doubt affecting decisions about who to promote and pay more, with the reasons seemingly rationalized by science.

Other worldviews include that of masculine traits being better for business. Both men and women believe men are more likely to possess the greater share of leadership skills (Kostoula, 2018).

Power is often associated with strength, which in turn is linked to physical or financial prowess. The assumption is that all of society benefits when men are raised to become powerful—their families, their communities, their places of work and worship. Assumptions change when women gain power, and it's often interpreted as a zero-sum game at the expense of men and the peril of society (Norris, 2019). If a man were to defend a woman against sexism or claim to be a feminist, society labels him as unmanly. A recent report indicates that men earn less, get fewer promotions, have worse reviews and are implicitly punished if they do not adhere to masculine norms in the workplace (Arthall et al, 2019). That would certainly explain the resource guarding metaphor in a dog-eat-dog business world.

CLAs Part Two: Wanted & Feared Futures

In part two, I sought to uncover the drivers of change—or inertia—from the Feared alternative so that pitfalls and issues could be examined in relation to uncovering the strategic pathway toward the preferred future. As Bezold points out, “to stimulate the exploration of both dangers to be avoided and positive possibilities that can be used in constructing a vision of the preferred future” (p. 82).

Interview participants were asked to think about these situations that they and others have been in, and then, in any way that they perceive the future, to describe the changes they would want, changes they fear, and changes they expect. I chose the divergent want and fear descriptions as catalysts for crafting the litany for each CLA, which invited the layered analysis via STEEP-V and deeper. As noted above, the expected future is the essentially a steady state, and so was put to better use to populate the female perspective in part one, rather than examining it as a future, leaving the Want and Fear dichotomies as clean points of comparison.

Based on a couple of comments from the participants, I chose a loosely generational, 20-year timeframe as a parameter for the future scope. Although, according to the Three Horizons University, “qualitative or structural change is more significant for strategy than span of time” (3Huni, n.d.).

Want/Visionary CLA

For the Want/Visionary future, the resulting litany indicated that within a generation awareness of how microsexism in the workplace stalls a woman’s career would be high. A societal focus on allyship will positively affect behaviour and outcomes in the workplace, and thus reinvigorate progress, close the gender pay gap, and balance gender representation at all levels of organizations. Businesses flourish and the economy is strong.

Figure 4: Want/Visionary CLA

Litany

Awareness of microsexism in the workplace closes gender pay gaps and increases balanced representation at all levels of organizations; renewed focus of allyship in workforce good for business and the economy

Causes

Social

- Increased empathy & accommodation for colleagues of all stripes
- Allyship focus
- Freedom to call each other on microsexism in workplace

Technological

- Inspiration & momentum from social media movements #meToo, #BLM, etc
- Digital communications allow flexible work options incl WFH

Environmental (workplace)

- Redesigned workplaces that work for women
- Structured, objective performance reviews become the norm
- Increase in immigrants

Economic

- Feminist economy embraced
- Capitalism 2.0 on target

Political

- Embraced a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan post pandemic
- Leg & policies that hold businesses accountable for diversity
- Structures that modify behaviours until mindset follows

Values

- Feminine qualities valued as equally as masculine traits in the workplace--regardless of gender who embodies them
- Feminism is needed & important

Worldview

Shift from individualism toward collectivism

Embracing 4th wave feminism

Femininity & masculinity are constructs

Metaphors & Myths

Myth: If you win, we all win.

Metaphor: Barrier free

Myth: We can relearn together.

Metaphor: Kaleidoscope career model

Myth: A hand up not a hand out

To facilitate such change in workplace culture, several worldviews would have to shift greatly. These include Western ideals of individualism becoming surpassed by collectivism, in which there is an understanding that personal relationships and group goals outweigh individual pursuits (Purdue University, n.d.). Could this be aided by increased immigration from collectivist-leaning countries? Another shift is awareness of microsexism would need to be accompanied by the 4th wave of feminism, which is all the things the 3rd wave of the 1990s was—that we are not postfeminist, that equality has not been achieved—but with expanded definitions of intersectionality so that truly, “feminism is for everybody” (Polak, 2019). Finally, embracing 4th wave feminism would aid a cultural mind shift to recognize that femininity and masculinity are constructs of a patriarchal society.

New myths would need to reinforce the ‘if you win, we all win’ ideas behind collectivism. Research demonstrated that, “corporate cultures that prioritize individualism over collectivism risk burning out their people and devaluing collaboration” (Arthral, 2019). Trusting everyone to share responsibilities could be vital to stem men’s fears that a woman’s career success is that their expense and the resulting backlash via microsexist behaviours. Metaphors that support the preferred litany of 2040 include tossing out the idea of a glass ceiling and replacing it with a kaleidoscope career model, in which organizations “look away from linear career paths and provide opportunities for all workers to take a career interruption and return at a later point” (Mainero & Sullivan, 2005).

Fear/Challenging CLA

Interview participants feared a backlash and reversal of progress. They saw pockets of this future already playing out in 2020 by how the pandemic has disproportionately had a negative impact on women in the labour force. They worried that women forced from the workplace, and ghettoized with fewer options and less capacity to return, will create a situation of men believing that back when it was more ‘equal’ women were thwarting their career advancement. That’s because they are now getting hired, promoted and earning raises more often without women there to ‘take’ them from them.

Figure 5: Fear/Challenging CLA

Litany

Backlash and reprisal from men against women in the workforce out of fears that "she's taking my livelihood from me"

Causes

Social

- Rise in men's activist & male supremacist groups
- Gender role norms infiltrate corporate culture
- Gender divide widens

Technological

- Widespread ability to spy on people's career backgrounds, gender & affiliations before hiring or promoting

Environmental (workplace)

- Explicit sexism & workplace harassment on the rise
- Double standards & homophily

Economic

- "She-session" of the pandemic has negative consequences for years

Political

- Self-reporting diversity remains voluntary
- Spread of populist politics & misogyny (e.g., MAGA mentality)

Values

- Feminine qualities further de-valued in the workplace
- Androcentrism

Worldview

Feminists are man haters

There's no such thing as systemic sexism

Women now "have it all" & should be grateful

Metaphors & Myths

Myth: The patriarchy works for everyone

Myth: Don't borrow trouble

Myth: Culture change must be slow to work

Myth: Women's work & men's work

Metaphor: Glass ceiling, sticky floor & glass elevator

Metaphor: Boy who called wolf

Metaphor: Tortoise & the hare

Worldviews that underpin a backlash against women in the workforce would need to deny that systemic bias even exists. They would need to reinforce negative ideas about feminism, a woman's ability to lead, and how ungrateful women are about how far they've come.

To deny that systemic sexism exists, one would need to wholeheartedly buy into the myth that the patriarchy works for everyone. Culture would need to be resigned to the new sticky floor concept that ghettoizes women in low paying jobs and precarious employment. It is an apt metaphor because, "it is related to the theme that women self-sabotage their careers and are responsible for self-imposed barriers in workplaces" (Smith Galer, 2017). Alternatively, the over-simplified metaphor from the 1980s of the glass ceiling would need to persist into the next generation. It's particularly potent because it is too singular on two levels. First, the term suggests that it's the only barrier and if women would *Lean In* they could shatter it which, "places unfair responsibility on women to smash the ceiling, rather than focusing on the role of men in creating and maintaining it", and second, "it describes only the women reaching up, rather than, say, the men that are peering down from the top" (Smith Galer, 2017). While the term may capture the phenomena that negatively affect women in the workplace, its breadth may make it unwieldy to address, and so instead, Diehl et al (2020) suggest, "having a more nuanced understanding of these associations holds significant potential for targeted intervention activities and leadership development opportunities designed to spur cultural and structural change." An aspect of such understanding that may help unlock change is acknowledging that while sexism is a system that privileges men, it also polices male behavior (Johnson & Smith, 2018).

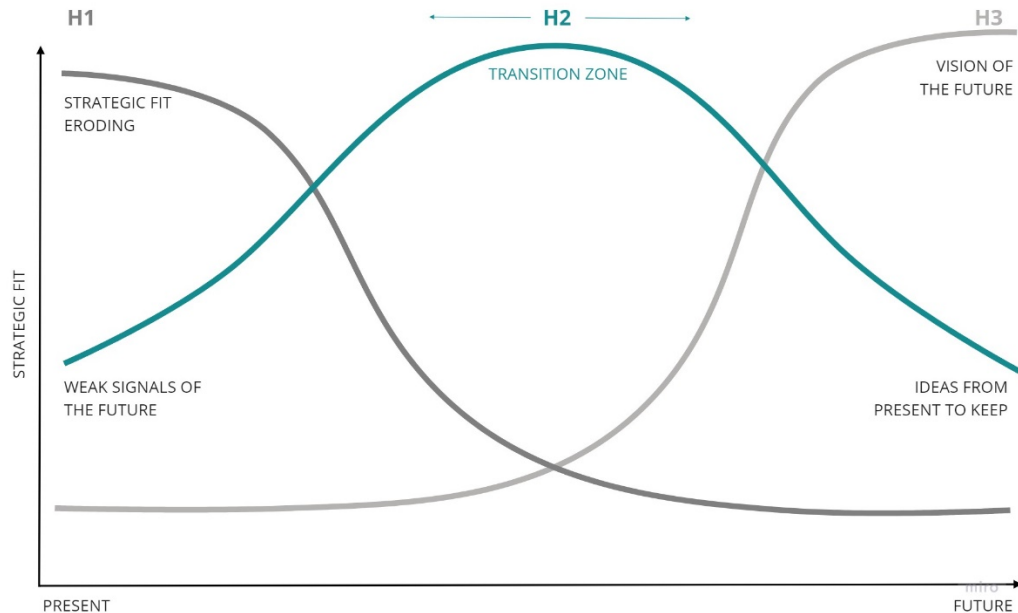
The myth that culture change must be and always is slow is reinforced by the metaphor of the tortoise and the hare, in which slow and steady wins the race. The other myth of not borrowing trouble, meaning not making waves, is reinforced by the boy who cried wolf, metaphorically putting women in a place to not be believed if they speak up or call anyone out.

Three Horizons Synthesis

Over twenty years ago, Gregory and team suggested that, "There is no step-by-step method leading reliably from a set of scenarios to a winning strategy" (Gregory et al, 1998). Since, methodological research led me to discover that it is possible, and that Three Horizons could do it. In mid 2000s, Curry and Hodgson (2008) and Curry and Schultz (2009) wrote extensively about Three Horizons, its

background from Bill Sharpe and Anthony Hodgson’s work, and how to engage it as a “strategic pathway” particularly as a workshop with subject matter experts.

Figure 5: Three Horizons Empty Workshop Graph



“This framework includes three lines, with each representing a system or pattern in the way things are done in a particular area of interest. The horizontal axis represents time stretching into the future from the present, and the vertical axis indicates the prevalence of each pattern in a relative way. The framework represents three different patterns: an established first horizon pattern giving way over time to an emerging third horizon, via transitional activity in the second horizon” (Sharpe, Hodgson, Leicester, Lyon, & Fazey, 2016, p. 47).

Three Horizons Approach

In the late 2010s, Hodgson, Sharpe and team re-describe the method as a pathway to transition to be embraced as required for a given project, writing that, “our intention is to lay a foundation for others to apply Three Horizons, develop their own practical understanding, and come to their own conclusions in their own settings and contexts about the relevance and validity of the approach” (Sharpe et al, 2016). Thus, I chose to embark and develop my own understanding of my subject matter in a solo expedition for two reasons. Primarily my original plan had been a focus on the female voice, but the data revealed

that the male perspective was potentially more critical. It became clear a workshop with women would be futile, and it was also too late to revector with a new target—a worthy follow up endeavor to be sure. Not to mention, the secondary reason I conducted the Three Horizons solo is because the pandemic lockdown posed logistical issues.

To create the Three Horizons on my own, I turned to Curry and Hodgson (2008) who suggest that different mindsets will create different versions of the future. I needed to embrace the mindset of the male audience that emerged from my research and attempt to tap into their “desire for change” (Curry & Hodgson, 2009, p. 9). The CLA work in Phase 3 revealed microsexism exists not simply because of the systems in place—the capitalist economy, the legislature, the policies, the practices, the firms, and so on—rather it’s the underlying mindsets of people who create those systems, uphold those systems, abuse those systems, or ignore those systems. It’s about the unconscious worldviews, the myths and metaphors that illustrate our value of those systems. So how does one examine this gap in values, and begin to navigate a way to close it?

I chose to focus on the H2 of the Three Horizons as my guide, with H1 and H3 data already available, I did not need experts to fill it in. First for H1, I input the current data and paradigms of “what is” today and what is eroding, informed by literature review that acknowledges the existence of and answers from the first interview question asked of participants about their current experiences of microsexism in the workplace impacting their career advancement.

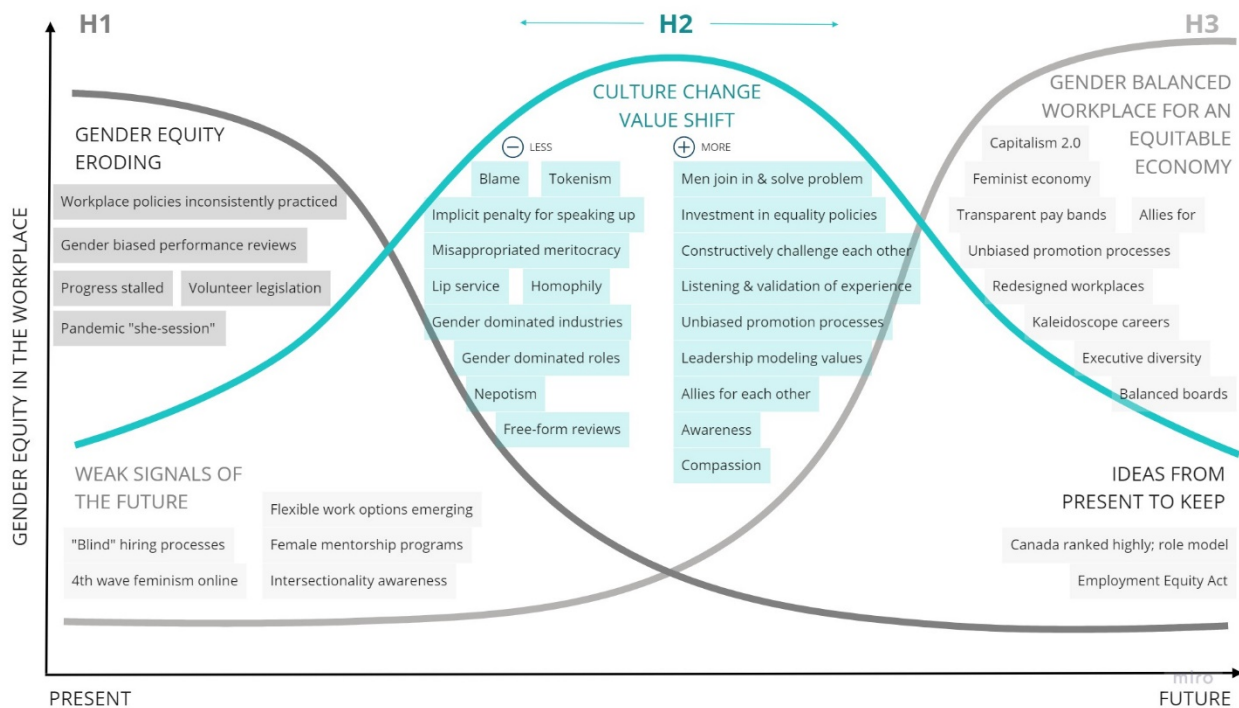
Next, Curry and Hodgson (2008) discuss how H3 is a vision of the future that “ought to be” and I had this exact vision as articulated by the participants of my Phenomenological Study and its subsequent analysis. My H3 was an articulation of the desired future that the women described “ought to be” in response to the future they want, fear and expect, backed by literature about economic impact and forecasts. In the H3, limitations would be overcome to reveal an aspirational future, but it is not necessarily a universally shared vision. For my synthesis work, it is assumed that we know what we want, and it is a future best for all genders, businesses, and the economy—as opposed to the typical workshop that works to uncover the future that the participants want. I already knew it from the interview participants, the literature review and the CLAs.

Thus, the H2 became the focus of the Three Horizons work—a strategic articulation of how to move from “what is” to the “ought to be” state—into a resolution of the conflicts revealed by the CLA male/female comparison. This approach has typically been done for strategy or policy issues yet can equally be reframed to enable a discourse about the shifts in the values that enable an H3 to become reality (Curry & Hodgson, 2008, p. 11). It is these transformative events that Curry and Hodgson (2009) call social shaping, and that can be a key to uncovering strategic insight (p. 17).

Three Horizons Result

With the CLAs more general about what is going on at a societal level and in the workplace, I used the Three Horizon exercise to achieve specificity. The overall purpose was to focus on the H2 as a path to transition and glean insights and direction for Phase 4.

Figure 7: Three Horizons Framework Completed



Horizon 1 "Lip Service"

Many women are surviving daily microsexism that impacts their career advancement in subtle ways, despite legislation and policies for equality.

Weak signals in the present to take into the future include learning from the ‘blind’ hiring practices and applying the theory to promotion, raise and career development practices. The pandemic lockdowns have revealed greater flexibility with working from home using digital communication tools, such as video conferencing (e.g., Zoom) and online whiteboards for synchronous collaboration (e.g., Miro). There are rumblings about the growing success of female mentorship programs, but the word needs to get out beyond woman-to-woman conferences (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019).

Horizon 3 "Allyship in Action"

A generation from now, men are actively involved in ensuring microsexism is no longer tolerated in the workplace. Women are thriving at all levels of any given organization—and not at the expense of men's success or perception as manly. Process and policy transparency were key for gender equality, and for increased diversity in all forms—and not at the expense of the business's success or perception as powerful.

Aspects of the present to preserve in the future are how well Canada is doing regarding gender diversity from a global comparison, ground that should not be lost (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). Additionally, the Employment Equity Act is an outstanding piece of legislature, however, one hopes that it will continue to evolve and expand, and potentially that organizational progress reporting would one day become mandatory—a signal of value.

Horizon 2 "Backlash Mashup"

For a culture change and value shift, there will be turmoil between those who believe microsexism exists and those who don't, i.e., those who predominantly enact it. There will be a tug of war over approaches, funds and priorities until a tipping point toward the H3.

In *How to Future*, Scott Smith with Madeline Ashby recommend Three Horizons as a process to, “help clarify the conditions or trends that need to stop, start or continue to reach an envisioned future” (2020, p. 175). With that in mind, I divided the H2, with one side devoted to ideas we need less of, such as less blame and retribution, and less gender domination within industries or roles. The other side was for

areas we need more of, including men joining as allies, advocates and role models of compassionate behaviour.

In Closing Phase 3

By choosing to use CLAs and slightly adjust Three Horizons, I was able to enhance the outcome of the analysis and synthesis phase. First, the male/female perspective CLAs contributed to prioritizing items to be included on the Three Horizons board. Combining the H2's state of flux with the understanding gleaned out of the Fear and Expect CLAs will help to navigate potential hurdles or setbacks in order to not let Want be rose-coloured glasses, but more grounded in reality, more cognizant of human factors impeding progress.

Where I discovered a gap in CLAs and or STEEP-V is in the lack of emotional inputs. Most causes seem to be from without, although Values almost gets us there, but it's still the generalized value system of the collective. Yes, the worldview is meant to be from within, those deep underlying beliefs of how we see and interact with the world, so it felt awkward to pin emotions there. Does STEEP-V need another E for emotions? Or do CLAs need an emotional needs and motivations layer? I kept looking for somewhere to include that men feel insecure, worried, or overwhelmed, too, especially within the male/female comparison CLAs. When value shifts and cultural transition are needed, it is tapping into the target on an emotional level that could be the potential key. With that understanding, the CLA analysis did provide substantial fodder for the images of the future designed in Phase 4.

With many foresight approaches available, my choice of Three Horizons proved the right to extract from my data what culture and value shifts needing to occur to minimize microsexism in the workplace. Keyword: what. As Bezold (2009) writes, aspirational futures lend well to developing strategies. My data synthesis also highlighted that while the strategic pathway may be illuminated, there are no instructions for how to navigate it. This gap was ripe for bridging by designing strategic steps, each with tactics that specifically address the worldviews, myths and metaphors that emerged from this phase into Phase 4.

PHASE 4: OUTCOME & SIGNIFICANCE

“ When I was working in educational research, my male supervisor wrote ‘Julie has a nice smile’ in my performance review. I asked him if he wrote the same thing in my male colleague’s review. He looked at me and said no. I asked him to remove that statement from my review. I was a little nervous that this request might backfire, but it did not. I felt as though my supervisor had more respect for me and my work after this.

—“Julie” (Smith, 2016)

“By acting on people’s imaginations rather than the material world, critical design aims to challenge how people think about everyday life... by providing a counterpoint to the world around us and encouraging us to see that everyday life could be different”
(Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 45).

I struggled throughout the project to resist jumping ahead to this cool part, but I stuck to my plan and did the due diligence at each step, and it has been worth it. I created the culmination of all the context from Phase 1, the ethnographic research of Phase 2, and the analysis and synthesis of Phase 3 into an Ethnographic Experiential Futures design per the instruction of Candy and Kornet. It is a design into which the target audience, the male ally and advocate, can immerse and feel the future—and then be inspired to make it happen. As a follow up to the experience, I developed a four-step strategic plan to capitalize on that heightened inspiration and turn it into action.

Designing an EXF

If ‘the future’ does not exist but is the domain of ideation and imagination, Stuart Candy and Kelly Kornet (2019) ponder why, then, are images of the future so often written. In answer, they methodized a contrast to text-based images of the future into Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF). Their thinking is that tangibly experiencing the future is more powerful than the written word for making the future more real and realizable, because humans have an innate difficulty imagining the future. This idea is confirmed by studies that indicate the further out in time a person attempts to imagine, the less activation in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), or “in other words, your brain acts as if your future self is someone you don’t know very well and, frankly, someone you don’t care about” (McGonigal, 2017). Even Ladner (2014) gets in on this bandwagon when she complains that too often ethnographers never consider types of reporting other than academic writing, to their detriment (p. 160-161).

In their EXF method framework, Candy and Kornet (2019) describe phases of a repeatable, circular process that allows researchers to follow a structure that also admits wide variation. They state, “At a glance now, the three (or four) phases describe an arc from narrative elicitation to experiential expression, and specifically attempt to gauge impact.” Examples they provide range from an exhibition,

to a workshop, to an improv show. The suggestion is to use the framework to create “new avenues for complex collective acts of empathy, conversation and deliberation in the public sphere” (2019).

Figure 8: Image of the EXF framework cycle, sourced from Candy & Kornet, 2019



At each stage, Candy and Kornet’s (2019) framework asks critical questions. At the initial **Map** stage, they ask whose futures are being explored and why? For my project, it’s the futures of male allies against microsexism in the workplace. I acknowledge that it is not always men and it is not all men, but I choose male allies because, as shown in Phase 1, microsexism is largely experienced by women from men in the workplace, because it is chiefly those who do not believe microsexism exists that most often enact subtle exclusions, and those non-believers are predominantly men (Begeny et al, 2020; University of Exeter, 2020), and because surveys prove it to be much more prevalent in majority-male workplaces (Parker, 2018). Finally, because when men are deliberately engaged in gender inclusion, 96% of organizations see progress—compared to only 30% of organizations where men are not engaged (Johnson & Smith, 2018). Additionally, it is the mental model of the women who have experienced such microsexism affect their careers that is of deepest interest, and it is the ethnographically elicited vision of their preferred future that provides evidence of it.

Next, Candy and Kornet (2019) provide an optional **Multiply** stage and ask whether the initially found images of the future should be specifically challenged, diversified or expanded. If used, ask when and in which direction. In my case, the answer is yes, but not yet. It is a definite need for later. The images of the future that emerged in Phases 1 through 3 were extremely focused on the women’s perspective. There was some work on the Causal Layered Analysis of the male perspective, but that is not enough to

create a fully balanced vision of the future. However, it is not without merit that the preferred future of these women guides the speculative futures design for the male allies to experience. In an ideal world, equally rigorous ethnographic research of the male perspective would contribute to a much more balanced image of the future. For now, it is the female alternative future that is a catalyst for the male ally to understand and build compassion for through the experience.

Regarding the **Mediate** stage, Candy and Kornet (2019) ask, among other questions, how, where, and when can the future(s) be brought to life? And for the **Mount** stage ask, how, when, where and for whom is the experiential scenario made available? To answer both these, I turned to the Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) book, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* for inspiration of the creation of a speculative futures experience in which critical design is translated into materiality. Further, this definitive work suggests that there are many possibilities for socially-engaged design to raise awareness, create space for discussion, and become “a catalyst for change” (p. 33) And in the case of this EXF design, it is intended to, “help raise awareness of the consequences of our actions” (p. 38)

Introducing Kaleidoscope Anima

An immersive installation where visitors contemplate their reflection in multifaceted mirrors, morphing from a microsexist present to an equitable future.

I became intrigued by the kaleidoscope career metaphor that emerged from the causal layered analysis for the Wanted future. Women are building careers that start, stop, move laterally, change direction, and reflect the many facets of their lives. Men want to be shown that it’s okay to develop a career that is more than a one dimensional straight line toward the C-suite, that it’s okay to take pat leave, to explore other areas, to go back to school, to be more than a breadwinner stereotype (Arthrell et al, 2019). Several men are beginning to know this. Many do not. Those non-believing microsexist perpetrators, also tend to harbor strong patriarchal worldviews that include distinct gender roles (Holter, 2014). From the idea that women can have it all—career, marriage, family, life outside work—the question is asked, why could men not also have it all?

Additionally, mirrors give a kaleidoscope a feeling of infinity, which can be interpreted as infinite possibilities of the future for the one experiencing it. Participants see a unique view with each step

through the set up. Seeing one's own reflection is intended to create an "individualistic approach" as an "impetus for highly individual micromodifications of reality" into what Dunne and Raby call "micro-utopias" (2013, p. 162). These can be perceived as an antidote to microsexism.

Finally, I included *Anima* in the installation's name because the kaleidoscopic images of the future are intended to be experienced from the inside and to go deeper than the persona, to touch the soul, to reach "an individual's true inner self." And it is appropriate that anima sometimes also refers to the "inner feminine part of the male personality" that the experience will hopefully ignite (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

I will not fully execute this installation. Instead, I will detail out the full plans using Candy and Kornet's EXF framework to give a sense of what it could be if it were to come to fruition. As noted, the key purpose of this MRP was the journey to the design idea, more so than implementing it. To undertake such a venture would require extensive investment of time, money and a willing venue partner, which is outside my scope.

Installation Inspiration

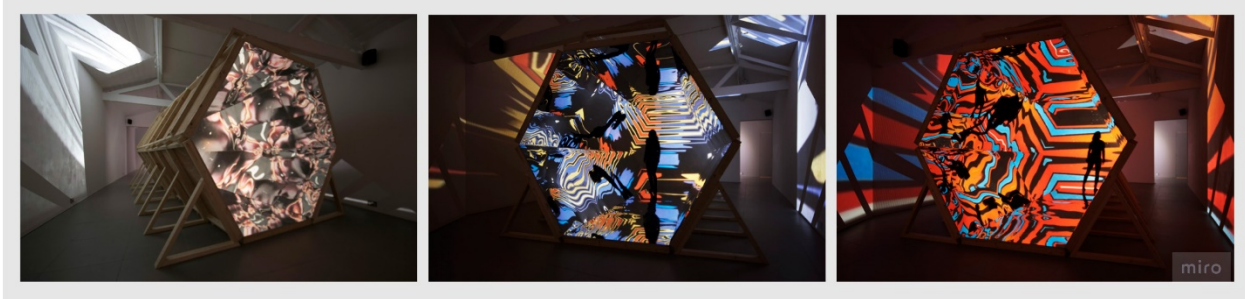
First, I will share three major inspirations that influenced the formation of the *Kaleidoscope Anima* installation plans.

Laura Buckley

Laura Buckley is an Irish artist who lives and works in London, known for working with installation, video projection, sound, light, sculpture, kinetic movement and digital print (Buckley, ca. 2019). In 2019, Buckley expanded her *Fata Morgana* sculpture and video to become the centerpiece of the Saatchi Gallery, London's Kaleidoscope exhibition (Simpson, 2019). From examining images and videos of the exhibit, visitors enter multiple hexagonal scaffolding 'tubes' that are about 10 feet high, and lined with mirrors, light and colours, each with its own characteristic.

In a London Live interview, Buckley described the concept of *Fata Morgana* coming from her young daughter's kaleidoscope kit and imagining what it would be like to physically enter it. She stated, "It

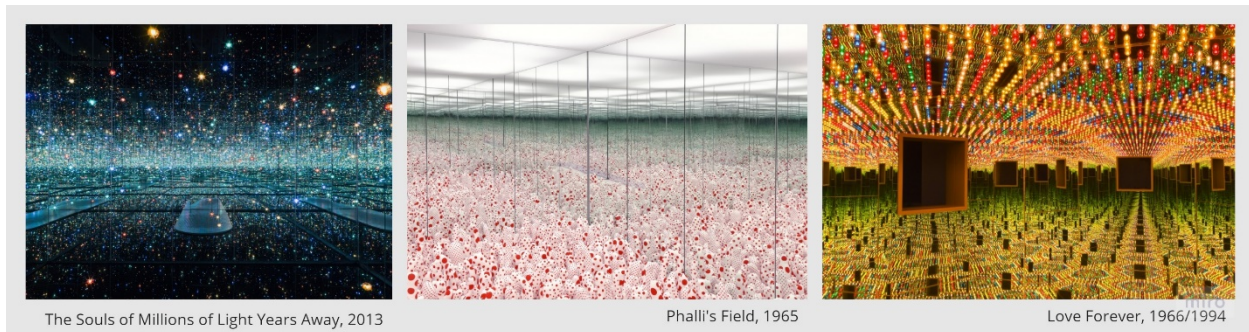
goes through different states of mind, so you have a lot of psychological states that it moves through. Between fun—it gets quite playful—to quite meditative, quite melancholy, and it builds into quite anxious segments as well. It’s basically kind of a big reflection or celebration of life in all its forms and ups and downs” (Buckley, 2019). At its first showing, the Guardian critic Skye Sherwin was moved to write: “Her fusions of sounds, images and objects seem to turn our thoughts inside out” (Simpson, 2019).



Images of Laura Buckley's *Fata Morgana* installations, sourced from SaatchiGallery.com

Yayoi Kusama

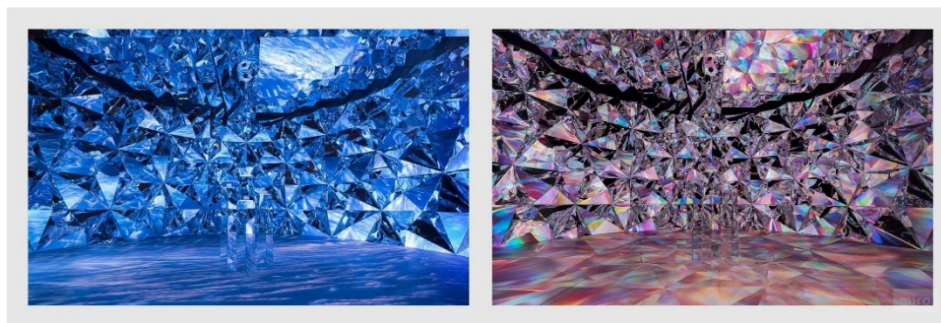
I first experienced a Yayoi Kusama installation in 2012 at London’s Tate Modern museum, and I have been a huge fan ever since. Hence, when she came to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 2018 with her *Infinity Mirrors* collection, I was first in line with membership card in hand. As with the future, “infinity may be a difficult concept to grasp, but it is easy to contemplate when you step inside one of artist Yayoi Kusama’s iconic Infinity Mirror Rooms” (AGO, ca. 2018). According to the AGO (ca. 2018), Kusama began using mirrors in 1965 to transcend the physical limitations of her own practice, to combine sculptural, architectural, and performative aspects to blur the lines between artistic disciplines and create an engaged experience as the visitor completes the artwork. The rooms are made up of six multi-reflective kaleidoscopic environments endlessly reflected within fantastic landscapes (AGO, ca. 2018). From both my gallery visits, I recall these immersive rooms produced powerful feelings of being spatially small and expansive at the same time, as if temporal and gravity constraints were lifted.



Images of three of six of Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrors*, sourced from AGO.com

Chris Cheung & XEX

In Shanghai China, Chris Cheung and his team called XEX exhibited an installation titled *Prismverse*, inviting guests to experience what it feels like to be inside of a diamond (Johnston, 2017). XEX filled the space with hundreds of complex geometrical tessellated mirrors and LED floor panels to create a glimmering kaleidoscope effect of colours that vary with every step (Johnston, 2017). To complete the surreal experience, speakers bathed visitors in a cool, sparkly soundscape as they walk through the space (Johnston, 2017).



Images of Chris Cheung and the XEX team's *Prismverse*, sourced from AWOL.com

Map

Mapping is the plan of whose future is being explored and why. The elicitation strategies predominantly took place during Phases 1 through 3, and it is determined that “existing evidence of future images suffice” for representing the demographic audience.

Framing gender equality as a woman's issue has given men a free pass; men have the potential to use their power to change workplace systems that reinforce sexism and should do so by starting with

interpersonal allyship (Schachter, 2020). The Johnson and Smith (2018) define a male ally as: “members of an advantaged group committed to building relationships with women, expressing as little sexism in their own behavior as possible, understanding the social privilege conferred by their gender, and demonstrating active efforts to address gender inequities at work and in society.” As per the seven key themes from the Phenomenological Study, it is those ‘good guy’ witnesses who did not speak up or provide support in the face of microsexism in the workplace, and who could be the easiest to target as male allies. Once they are on board and inspired into acting—i.e., have become male allies—then those who deny microsexism exists may be positively influenced to join in.

Personas of the ‘Good Guy’

Personas are a fictional individual expressing properties of a target group (Sanders & Strappers, 2012, p. 302). In the interest of time, I developed six personas from the ethnographic work done by Deloitte’s Doblin team in 2019 with 16 working men in the Toronto area (Arthrell et al, 2019). Had my research begun with men as my identified audience, then original persona work would be included as a full “empathic design process” (Sanders & Strappers, p. 241), however, the Doblin data will suffice for brush stroke appreciation of who these men are.

A common theme that shone through is how multi-dimensional the men are, even if they may not realize it. They have many of the male-perspective CLA worldviews swirling in their heads, while at the same time wondering whether it is working, if change is possible. Through the *Kaleidoscope Anima* we want them to recognize that their thoughts are valid, that these gender role worldviews are not working and that creating an aspirational future is possible.

Figure 9: Six Personas of Male Ally Audience

Lyron: Independent

Age: early 20s
NAICS 54: professional, scientific & technical services
Level: individual contributor



Career mantra after one year at his first career-level job

"My mentality in life is to just dive headfirst into something and figure it out later. Even if I don't know how to do it, I'm going to put my hand up, because this could be awesome. This could help my career. I think I'm smart enough to figure it out, and that excitement, that adrenaline of not knowing but going in and figuring it out, is thrilling to me."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- Me-first mentality
- Projecting false confidence
- Fears showing vulnerability

Male ally behaviour:

- Volunteers to help on challenging projects

Image source: <https://www.storyblocks.com/video/stock/young-professional-business-man-work-in-the-office-sitting-in-the-room-with-creative-interior-on-the-wall-concentrated-engineer-computer-laptop-guy-typing-on-the-modern-laptop-wearing-in-casual-hj79d0rjglo8k3> (Arthrell et al, 2019)

Sufjan: Breadwinner

Age: mid 30s
NAICS 52: finance & insurance
Level: senior leadership



Career mantra after his wife & children supported his master's degree

"As you climb the corporate ladder, you feel that you can't make mistakes, that you have to work a lot, you've got to put in the hours, you've got to do all this kind of stuff. And you're extremely—at least I was—worried about your job. The constant feeling is, I can't fail. I've got to close this deal. I've got to be successful because I've got a family. I gotta bring home the money."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- Sole income earner after having a child
- Fears reprisal of using flexible workplace policies

Male ally behaviour:

- Desire to better balance roles at home with his wife

Image source: https://www.123rf.com/photo_72507794-middle-eastern-businessman-with-coffee-cup-in-city.html (Arthrell et al, 2019) miro

Malik: Trust Builder

Age: early 40s
NAICS 412: motion picture & sound recording industries
Level: middle management



Career mantra after returning from paternity leave:

"There might be a project you worked super hard on, and you kind of build your reputation around that. You now have 'equity to cash in' to get a bit of relief in other areas. If I had to come in late because I had to take my son to a 10 a.m. vaccination, I can do that. People know it's not a big deal, I get my stuff done, and the quality is high. So people still have that trust."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- Pay dues before reaping benefits worldview

Male ally behaviour:

- Role models work-life balance by using flexible workplace policies such as paternity leave

Image source: <https://www.storyblocks.com/video/stock/young-professional-business-man-work-in-the-office-sitting-in-the-room-with-creative-interior-on-the-wall-concentrated-engineer-computer-laptop-guy-typing-on-the-modern-laptop-wearing-in-casual-hj79d0rjglo8k3> (Arthrell et al, 2019)

Mateo: Job Jumper

Age: early 30s
NAICS 71: arts, entertainment & recreation
Level: middle management



Career mantra about staying no longer than 3 years at a company:

"It's that whole pleasing thing. If I can go in somewhere, find a problem, and solve it, it's like a gold star. As a kid, I remember getting these stickers, or those rewards like, 'Here's a certificate for putting in a whale of an effort, for doing unassigned homework.' I would always do something to please. I think, when I switch from job to job, it's an opportunity to push myself, challenge myself, and also make things easier for people."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- Need for perfection
- Hero mentality

Male ally behaviour:

- Kaleidoscope career
- Desire to help

Image source: <https://creativemarket.com/RobotDean/1383998-Casual-man-using-smartphone> (Arthrell et al, 2019) miro

Charles: Goal Setter

Age: late 40s
NAICS 54: professional, scientific & technical services
Level: senior leadership



Career mantra after a slow start to finding success:

"I've always had a hang-up about not being good enough, so I always try to set goals. Goal-setting is interesting. It's like, 'Hmm, what do we do now?' because you always want to be on the upper curve instead of flat. Flat means you're just going down."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- Fears financial insecurity
- Over prioritizes work
- Values titles and pay grades
- Works weekends

Male ally behaviour:

- Open about vulnerabilities, e.g., emotionally insecure about providing for children

Image source: <https://www.shutterstock.com/search/40-year-old-businessman> (Arthrell et al, 2019)

Jae: Fresh Perspective

Age: early 40s
NAICS 51: information & culture industries
Level: middle management



Career mantra after burning out & taking a year off:

"I think a lot of the confidence I had was, not fake, but maybe forced, just because I thought I was in this race to get as high as I could as quickly as I could. Now, I'm not necessarily as concerned with that. I can't 100% say I'm 100% divorced from understanding rank and things like that, but it wouldn't make my top 10, while it was definitely in my top three back in the day. And you know what, I'm actually enjoying my job now."

Risk factors for microsexism:

- History of allowing blind spots to misguide his priorities

Male ally behaviour:

- Priority shift to work-life balance
- Conscious appreciation of others
- Kaleidoscope career

Image source: <https://creativemarket.com/RobotDean/1383998-Casual-man-using-smartphone> (Arthrell et al, 2019) miro

Recalling the Phenomenological Study interviews where one of the participants spoke about wanting a “coca cola future” where everyone was supportive and collaborative. Nathan, a senior business leader interviewed by Doblin, shows it is possible. Arthrell and the Doblin team (2019) write:

In his current position, Nathan feels like he’s paying forward the kindness and trust he received from his leaders to his own team. “Someone on my team is like, ‘I don’t think I can do it.’ I’m like, ‘What do you mean, you can’t do it?’ She’s like, ‘I don’t know this, and I don’t know that.’ I said, ‘You gotta start somewhere. And you’ll learn it. And I always say if you know 50–60 percent of a job, you’ll figure out the rest.’” Nathan focuses on uplifting his team. In the workplace, we noticed he would acknowledge when he didn’t know something and would give his direct reports the opportunity to speak during group meetings. One of his direct reports, completely unprompted, stated, “You should know, he is the best boss I have ever had. Ever.”

Multiply

Candy and Kornet (2019) see multiply as an optional step, and if used it is a means to generate alternative images that challenge or extend existing thinking (optional, especially in first iteration). I would include it, and interpret it as way to keep audiences engaged by soliciting and implementing feedback. I would let the audience challenge existing thinking, and ‘multiply’ the experience through iterations. A feedback loop with the audience to inquire if the installation resonates with them would help the installation, and its depicted scenarios, to grow and develop more successfully. I also suggest that such opportunities for the audience to contribute to the outcome would build trust, and further generate positive feelings and word of mouth.

Audience feedback was a topic of a *Culture Professionals Network* webchat, during which top gallery and museum provided insights (Caines, 2012). Primary sage advice included being “unambiguous research aims” and what you want to learn as a guidepost for all decisions. Ideas from the discussion that resonated with the *Kaleidoscope Anima* vision included “having multiple collection methodologies” so that some focus on amassing fast responses and others on depth of responses. One such deeper method could be conversational to capture expressions and emotions that are still fresh immediately after experiencing the installation. Additional tools mentioned included surveys, focus groups, social media, and even letting participants loose to roam a gallery and post sticky note ideas all over the exhibits.

Mediate

“This step is about taking relatively vague ideas or future narratives toward more concrete ones. As our examples suggest, there are myriad ways to make this move, from hybrid design/research exhibition, to rapid prototyping, guerrilla art installation, and improv theatre” (Candy & Kornet, 2019) The chosen form for *Kaleidoscope Anima* is an immersive installation that participants would physically approach, enter, experience and exit. The design responsibility lies with the me, the researcher, to create images of the future for participants to experience and be inspired to make it happen.

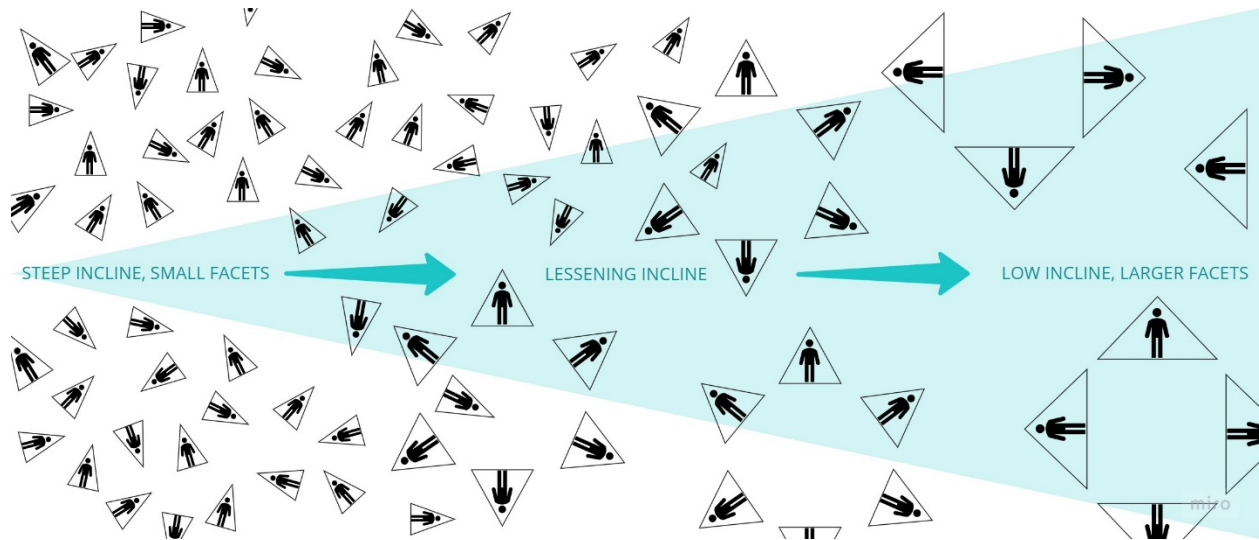
Much like Laura Buckley’s *Fata Morgana*, this overarching experience will be of one physically entering a life-sized kaleidoscope. For *Kaleidoscope Anima*, participants would move from the beginning to the end of the ‘tunnel, typical kaleidoscopic and additional elements described below will unfold to suggest a progression from the present to the future, from status quo to transformation, from microsexist to inclusive, from male-dominated to balanced, from stalled to advancement. All while seeing their own reflection in the mirrors as a suggestion that they are an integral part of this aspirational future.

Mirrors, Lights & Colours

Kaleidoscopes are typically made up of mirrors reflecting light and colourful beads, which will be the backbone of the exhibit.

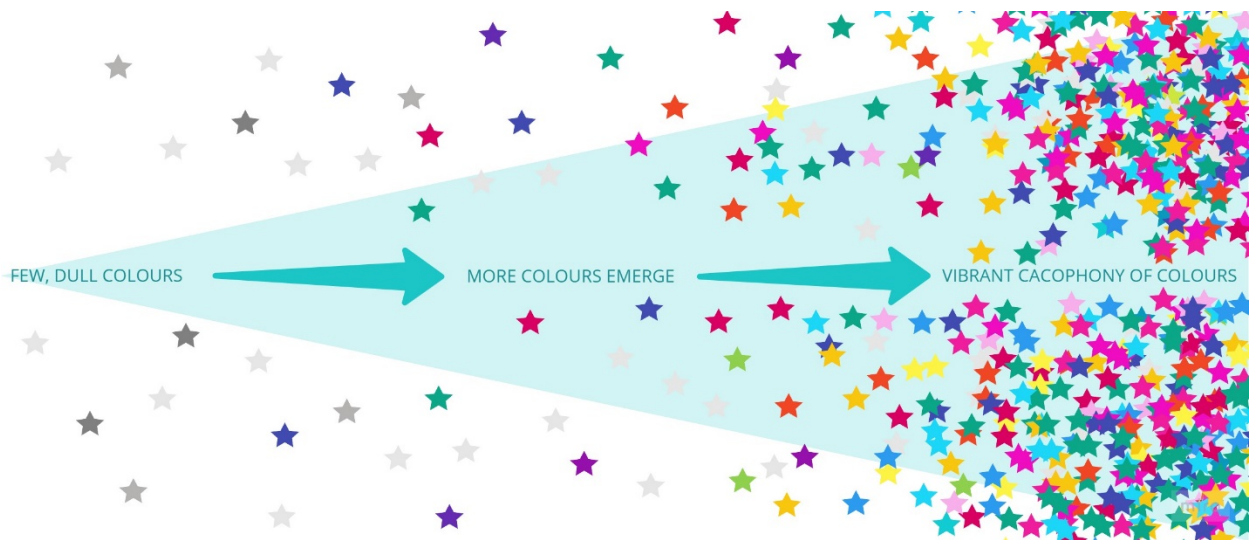
Mirrors: In her *Infinity Mirrors* collection, Yayoi Kusama uses visitors’ reflections to “create an engaged experience” as they become participants in completing the artwork (AGO, ca. 2018). Similarly, *Kaleidoscope Anima* will enclose wedge-shaped mirrors in a life-size ‘tube’, typical of kaleidoscopes, combined and steeply inclined (45 degrees) to optically absorb visitors’ images into the experience when stepping among them (Britannica, ca. 2020). Upon entering, each small facet would be a sharp reminder of how each subtle microsexism cuts away at the receiver’s self-esteem. By the end, the mirrors would be positioned at a lesser incline (90 degrees) would be used so that the participant would appear less fragmented and more wholly completing the image of the equitable, balanced future (Britannica, ca. 2020).

Figure 10: A visualization of the mirrored wedges reflecting throughout the *Kaleidoscope Anima* installation



Colours: While the mirrors would start fragmented and end more holistic, colourful beads would be used to showcase an evolution from dullness to vibrancy. The exact material would need to be explored. As the visitor moved from start to finish, more ‘beads’ in more colours of greater intensity would be added, as a metaphor of growing diversity.

Figure 11: A visualization of the colour evolution in the *Kaleidoscope Anima* installation



Light: From a technical standpoint, the *Kaleidoscope Anima* display would borrow from *Prismverse* using LED floor panels to light the way (Johnston, 2017). The panels would start dim and become brighter, as a metaphor for moving from darkness to enlightenment.

Layers of Sound

Additionally, ambient music and the spoken word will be layered to enhance the experience inside the kaleidoscope and to fully communicate greater aspects of the aspirational futures scenario, as described in the Three Horizons.

Spoken word: Expressions taken from interview verbatim of the current state would be recorded and played back over multiple speakers. These words would start off all in softly spoken, almost whispered male voices to indicate the subtle and implicit nature of sexism, and how they are often deeply internalized to be true whether they are or not. As the visitor moves along, the words would grow a little louder with female voices starting to join. The nature of the phrases would change to be more inviting and inclusive, and start to be taken from ideas expressed in the Three Horizon's H2, and finally evolve into the visionary expression of H3. It would end with words of support and include both personal and business success for all—male, female or otherwise.

Figure 12: A visualization of the spoken words played over speakers in the *Kaleidoscope Anima* installation



Music: Ambient cello music would morph from dark and moody to calming and light. I chose the cello because its "tenor radiance" is "vaster and deeper than any spoken language" (Wallace, 2017). To capture a sense of dread budding into delight, I would consider compositions and recordings from Silicon Valley's Zoë Keating, "a cellist and programmer, [who] has unlocked a secret world in her

thoughtful, layered soundscapes” (Wallace, 2017). Listening on YouTube, one can hear her deep soulful lows and plucky highs, and imagine it enhancing the overall *Kaleidoscope Anima* interpretation.

Mount

Given that this installation will need plenty of space for participants to physically encounter the exhibit with plenty of breathing rooms, then venue considerations for mounting it would be important. For this, I would turn to the DesignTO, who give emerging designers a chance to showcase their work, and even offer a venue-designer matchmaking program (DesignTO.org, ca. 2020). Their annual Festival forms Toronto’s design week each January, to celebrate design as a multidisciplinary form of creative thinking and making. Their mission is as follows: “DesignTO brings people together to celebrate contemporary culture, provide opportunities for emerging talent, and engage the community with exceptional and accessible public programming” (DesignTO.org, ca. 2020).

Unofficially, they also have a strong desire to toward socially conscious projects, and provide a safe place for people to express themselves that build community and culture through design (Hoang, Khan, Kwan, McCardle & Murray, 2020) which aligns nicely with the goals of *Kaleidoscope Anima*.

Measure

I would introduce a fifth step to the cycle to measure the EXF’s success. For *Kaleidoscope Anima*, that would mean measuring attendance, and pairing its interpretation with the feedback and insights gathered from the Multiply stage. Long term, success would also be seen in reinvigorated gender equality statistics, such as the bridging the gender pay gap, increasing gender diversity from management to board positions, and reducing gender domination within industries.

Four-step Strategic Plan

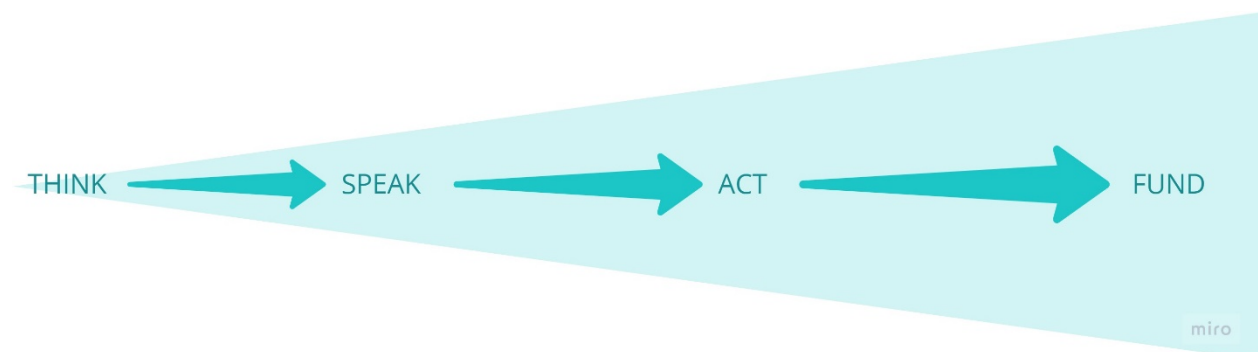
Or, everything you need to create the future in a simple, comprehensive guide

“Without vision, strategy is merely reactive.
Without realistic strategies to achieve them, visions are only lofty ideals”
(Bezold, 2009, p. 85)

Critical design, such as the *Kaleidoscope Anima* installation, “can help people construct compasses rather than maps for navigating new sets of values” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 44). With an inspired compass in hand, how does one know what steps to take to reach the aspired-to destination?

In answer, I extend the strategic into the tactical, with specific and backed ideas for eliminating microsexism in the workplace, as suggested by Bezold (2009). The idea is that participants leave *Kaleidoscope Anima* excited for change, and open to learning how to direct their energy constructively. The following four-point plan is intended to spread outward from the self to the organization because worldview change starts from within by first noticing and acknowledging, then it grows outward to workplace culture with easily doable steps that can change the bigger system. As Harvey Schachter (2020), a management issues expert, states, “It starts with sharpening your situational awareness and understanding the workplace dynamics that make it difficult for women to fully participate.” For these steps, I am using second person to demonstrate the intimate, conversational nature of these suggestions.

In other words, these are the super easy, totally doable ‘microactions’ you can try that could have amazingly positive macro outcomes on you, your organization and the economy.



1. THINK

The idea here is think about *yourself*.

Yes, think about yourself. Think about how hard you worked to get where you are, but also take a moment to recognize the tailwind that eased you, as a man, forward (Schachter, 2020). Consider your own thoughts and actions in the workplace, and cultivate a “student for life” mindset (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 154). Reflect on your own behaviors, particularly if you are a business leader, and how we are establishing expectations for what success looks like through our day-to-day actions (Kaji et al, 2019). Accepting that the capability to think and act in microsexist ways exists in all of us is a first step against reducing it (Begeny et al, 2020; University of Exeter, 2020). It is less about never committing microsexism and more about being receptive to feedback (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 159). This builds trust with colleagues, and will help hopefully combat the worldviews that we are post-feminist, that sexism is solved, so why are women complaining because they have it all. Hopefully, through thoughtful self-reflection, we will all realize that microsexist potential does exist in all of us, and defending against it is neither unmanly nor a zero-sum game.

How to consciously think your way out of microsexism

Strategically own and leverage your privilege (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 154; Schachter, 2020). To do this difficult work, you can:

- Become aware of the inevitable microsexist thoughts you have—very likely unconsciously
- Take note of the microsexist ways you act—very likely unintentionally
- Reflect on our own behaviors and day-to-day actions, particularly as business leaders (Kaji et al, 2019).
- Practice stopping yourself before microsexism happens, and it will eventually become a habit
- Openly acknowledge and apologize for microsexist actions that you didn’t catch in time
- Accept feedback if someone points out your own microsexist misstep—it’s okay, we all do it, just acknowledge and apologize
- Learn to positively interpret whatever traits female colleagues may possess, for example, reframe emotion as passion not weakness, or become comfortable with assertive women, and admire confident, autonomous women (Schachter, 2020)

2. SPEAK

The theme here is to speak up for *others*.

Let me start by saying this is not in any way about speaking *for* others. And, this level should not be undertaken until one fully embraces the idea in step 1 that microsexism does exist, it is real, it is valid, and it is within us all to do something about it. It's not about finger pointing or making yourself look good. Be sure to speak out a kind, non-confrontational way, as suggested by several the Phenomenological Study's interview participants. Speaking out will increase the psychological safety of those around you and will potentially have a bonus of increasing your own ally network (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 157). When you demonstrate speaking out, others will begin to feel they have a voice too. This could go a long way to addressing the common theme from the Phenomenological Study that women feel silenced, and as one participant specifically asked, "why do I have to speak up? Why can't Bob take the burden off me and say something for once?" And, the hope here is that when we can speak up for ourselves and speak out for others, there is no longer a tug of war.

How to speak up against microsexism

Be willing to disrupt the social and professional equilibrium (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 159). These simple tips can help you do that:

- Look around the room and say something when female colleagues are missing from the table (Schachter, 2020)
- Notice someone not participating and invite their opinion to the discussion (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 156; Schachter, 2020)
- Support and show compassion for others who speak up or who share their experiences
- Detect and remove repercussions, however implicit, for speaking out, no matter how mild the microsexism may seem (Stein et al, 2016)
- Encourage female colleagues to lead in their own way, which may be more collaborative and less hierarchical, or may differ from what you think gender norms should be (Schachter, 2020)
- Know when to be silent, for instance, never, ever ask a woman to smile more or smile for you

3. ACT

The theme here is to *take action*.

This is the old adage that actions speak louder than words. Thus, the next step after speaking up is to employ “intentional acts of inclusion” (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 154). These efforts are significant and specific ways to share unwritten rules of the organization with colleagues who historically may not have had access to circles of power (Holder, 2020, p. 267). This is especially true if you are in a leadership position, “Policies and programs for change are not enough; senior leaders need to role model and reward the behaviors they want to see in order to establish new norms for people to follow” (Arthrell et al, n.d.). The simplest way to achieve this is to seek advice of women (Schachter, 2020). Combined with taking said advice, the supportive actions outlined below can be even more potent. The hope here is that these actions will reverse the idea that success comes in only one size for men, that anyone can have a kaleidoscope career, and that women in leadership positions are neither unicorns nor superwomen, they’re just smart and determined—and that is okay.

Ways to act that work to eliminate microsexism

Embrace ‘decentering’ (the antonym of the idea that men be at the centre of activity and attention in the workplace) and intentionally invite other perspectives to be seen and heard (Schachter, 2020). To do this you can:

- Help enforce gender neutral language, for instance in titles and communications use ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’ (Stein et al, 2016), and in job descriptions, reduce male-biased words such as ‘strong’ and instead try ‘excellent’ (Dulcimer Labs, n.d.)
- Give credit where it’s due for accomplishments and jobs well done (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 156, Schachter, 2020)
- Invite marginalized and diverse colleagues to work-related social gatherings (Holder, 2020, p. 267)
- Support people’s growth and development in your organization (Jana & Baran, 2020, p. 156)
- Join workplace initiatives dedicated to increasing diversity, inclusion and equality (Johnson & Smith, 2018)

- Role model the importance of a work-life balance by prioritizing home life during non-business hours: take paternity leave, go on vacations, use up your wellness benefits, enjoy your lunch hour (Arthrell et al, 2019; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019)

4. INVEST

Finally, the concept here is to *fund change*.

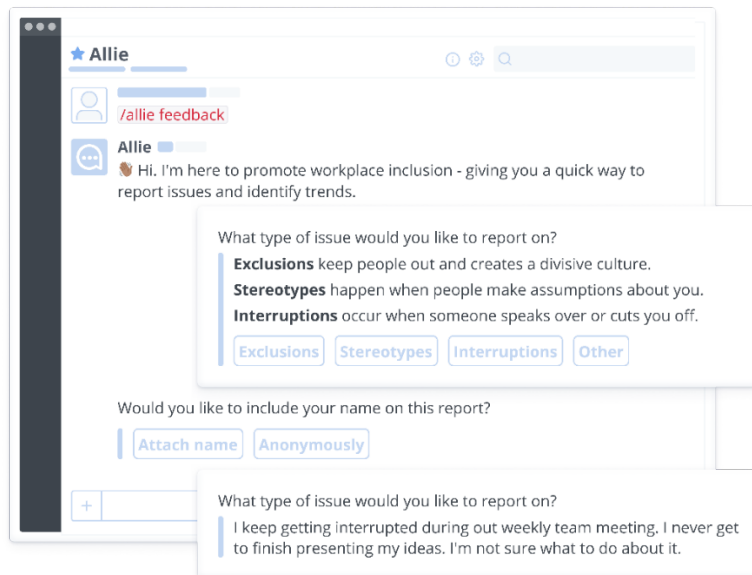
Chances are your company has diversity, inclusion or equality policies in place, or at the very least a human resources professional on staff—call on them to resource your organization’s intentional acts of inclusion. Gender balance is a result of management proactively pushing for it (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013). When an organization directs precious resources toward eliminating microsexism in the workplace, it sets an example for all its employees. This perceived sincerity can increase the effectiveness of its programs and not have them appear to be superficial efforts (Holder, 2020, p. 268), which helps to eradicate perceptions of lip service and tokenism. An organization that acknowledges that systemic exists and it is willing to spend the time, effort and money it takes to fix it for both employee and business benefit may well demonstrate to men that they do not have to resource guard; there is enough success for everyone.

How to allocate funds to end microsexism

Be an advocate for organizational and institutional spending on:

- Training
 - Sensitivity training for awareness of bias and appreciation of differences (Holder, 2020, p. 268)
 - Diversity and inclusion training as key ingredients to achieve business success (Holder, 2020, p. 269) and target it at decision makers (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019)
- Fair-practice processes
 - Develop performance reviews that are task-based and focus on substantive outcomes, from a small pool of reviewers who know the employee well (Kostoula, 2018)
 - Make promotion processes transparent by outlining specific expectations for each level, and conduct joint evaluations of performance-based attributes (Dulcimer Labs, n.d.)

- Establish salary transparency and pay structures that ensure equal pay for work of equal value to reduce the pay gap (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019)
- Inclusivity programs
 - Level one, mentorship: develop mentor/mentee strategies that can close the gender gap, for instance between female employees or between skill and interest matched employees (Mitchell, 2020), which also provide a safe space to navigate difficult challenges in the workplace (Arthrell et al, 2019)
 - Level two, sponsorship: create opportunities for male allyship through sponsorship programs (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019) in which high impact employees actively advocate for their protégés' advancement is effective for advancing women's careers (Dulcimer Labs, n.d.)
- Accountability
 - Ensure there are enough administrative funds set aside to provide full reports for the EEA, even if it remains voluntary
 - Offer support groups, online networks and safe spaces for employees to speak about workplace concerns (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019), for example, add the *Allie Slack Bot* (alliebot.com) to your company's Slack communications channel as a safe space to share microsexist moments, and also allow the organization to track trends and progress; screenshot below



Screenshot of the Allie Slack Bot with a sample communication, sourced from alliebot.com/features/

In Closing Phase 4

Gender equality and diversity are shown to be positive for all of society, not only women. My notion of targeting men to be allies is not a blame game, but rather a cooperative game where everyone wins. Particularly men. There are model societies and scientific studies that prove it. Except that men are not yet fully aware, and thus not fully engaged in pushing for equality come to fruition. Like comedian Michelle Wolf's joke that, "if men got periods there would be a three-week work month" (CTV Comedy Channel, 2017). The gist of which is that in a patriarchal society, when something affects men then it is prioritized, and something is done about it. Gender equality both concerns and depends on men (Lappegård Lahn, 2015).

Norwegian sociologist and men's studies expert Oystein Gullvag Holter suggests that both men and women still consider gender equality a feminist cause, something primarily for the benefit of women. With most research and public debate primarily revolving around women it is understandable that men would feel the issue is not about or for them (Lappegård Lahn, 2015).

However, Iceland has most nearly attained gender equality through both legislative action and cultural worldviews, and the unintended consequence has been greater benefits to men's lives (Plank, 2019). A recent study by Norwegian sociologist and men's studies expert Oystein Gullvag Holter shows that gender equal countries score much higher on well-being and lower on depression among both men and women (Lappegård Lahn, 2015). People are also less likely to get divorced or to die as a result of violence, and men specifically are more likely to live longer. Further in *The Patriarchy is Killing Men*, Plank quips that, "feminism is the antidote to shorter male life expectancy" (2019).

The positive effects of gender equality on men's mental health alone could have significant, positive outcomes not only on their lives but also on definitions of masculinity. Holter's studies also suggest that men who identified with traditional ideas of masculinity, such as men must provide at any cost, were more likely to have suicidal thoughts and exhibit signs of depression—and be less likely to seek counseling (Lappegård Lahn, 2015). If their code of idealized masculinity were not honored, the stress would affect their overall health (Plank, 2019).

An ethnographic study from Deloitte indicates that men are struggling to balance their role in society and feel little freedom to express their whole selves beyond their role as financial providers. The report suggested that men studied feel leadership holds different values around family, work-life balance and personal connection that do not align with them, that they want their workplace to treat them, “as a more nuanced, unique individual beyond whether or not they ‘ticked the box’ as a man” (Arthrell et al, 2019). This suggests that there is a male willingness to let go of rigid beliefs and embrace a more balanced and broader view of masculinity, and to work toward gender equality. They simply need to be shown how and reassured it is okay.

Significance of Timing

At the time of writing, the coronavirus is approaching one year since its appearance and subsequent global pandemic. Most Western nations including Canada are facing a significant second wave. How we choose to recover from the Pandemic now will have significant impact on our health, and on the direction our economy goes. That is because women have been hit hardest economically. An RBC Economics report concludes that at the start of the pandemic in Canada, “ COVID-19 rolled back the clock on three decades of advances in women’s labour-force participation, setting Canada’s economy up for a slower recovery than might otherwise be the case” (Desjardins & Freestone, 2020). This is not good news when gender equality progress has been stalled for years (Employment Equity Act: Annual Report 2019). Without attention to inequity in post-pandemic recovery, a potential decline in our achievements is a real threat, given the gendered economic, health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all aspects of society (Desjardins & Freestone, 2020). I concur that the timing is ripe to engage male allies in stemming workplace microsexism (Johnson & Smith, 2018) as a means to simply recover but to capitalize on the upheaval of the moment for transform.

And transformation toward a feminist economy would entail focusing on the, “interrelationship between gender and the economy, on the premise that patriarchy and capitalism are interrelated forms of dominance” (Urban & Pürckhauer 2016). Again, this line of sight toward a feminist economy is not exclusively beneficial to women. Men would benefit too.

The pandemic brings to light ways in which gender equality and a feminist economy would benefit men, particularly in relation to their mental health. Suicide is known to peak during a financial crises for all

genders, the increase tends to be sharper for men (Plank, 2019). Again, turning to Holter's (2014) studies on men, gender equality is associated with lower male suicide. Stated another way, gender inequality is associated with a strong tendency that men kill themselves more often than women, what Holter calls oversuicide. His studies show that the pattern of male oversuicide is reduced in more gender-equal societies (p. 13). This again is correlated with men's identity as one-dimensional breadwinners, and that they cannot fail (Arthrell et al, 2019).

If we can inspire men—and everyone—to embrace the idea that these unconscious biases and subtle acts of exclusion against women are the key to turning around their health, wellbeing, family life and the economy, we can prevent so much harm, and also be so much closer to realizing a gender equitable and balanced future.

CONCLUSION

“Engaging men as well as women, and collaborating across organizations and sectors to tackle entrenched attitudes will be one of the most difficult but critical keys to success, ensuring Canada’s continued position as a global leader on women’s equality”

(Devillard et al, 2017).

Starting my MRP, I envisioned getting deep into the essence of how small subtle microsexisms contribute to an individual’s stalled career advancement and are a factor in the overall stalled progress of achieving gender equality in the workforce—plateaued gender wage gap, unbalanced representation at senior, executive and board levels—the effects of which snowball to include business profitability and innovation capability, the macroeconomy and even the GDP. And I did. I did connect those dots. What became exciting is that this was not where the story ended. I discovered so much more than anticipated: that men are the lynchpin to rekindling the stalled progress toward achieving the equality and equitable treatment of all genders in the workplace. Forever, microsexism has been considered a woman’s fight—both to bear the privileged culture that permits its relentless onslaught, and to fix the patriarchal system that perpetuates its advantage. What made that insidiously difficult was the subtle, vague, silent and deafening ways that microsexism occurred—or did it? “Or was it just me?”

Through the process of answering my research question, it became clear that was perhaps a red herring question. Or perhaps a transition question to the real underlying issue. What really needs to be asked, researched and answered is perhaps: *How might male privilege be harnessed to foster an equal and gender diverse work environment?*

I attempted to answer this in a small way in Phase 3, but without much effort until Phase 4, which does not do this new research question justice. A full ethnographic exploration of the male side of the equation is needed, of men’s perceptions and experiences with women in the workplace and career advancement, and what equality means to them—their wants, fears and expectations, if you will.

It's not all men, and it's not only men who enact microsexism in the office. However, all men can be involved. Men need to be given permission and be shown that equality does not mean that they will lose out on opportunities, career development, raises or promotions. It means that, like women, they can have it all. They can have ambition, have a work life balance, have a personal life, have a family. They can have the career they want, the way they want it, and have an identity that is so much more than as a breadwinning, sacrifice-your-life pursuit or else be seen as less masculine. They can have a kaleidoscope career and have it be okay. They can express compassion for coworkers and passion for the work at the same time and have it be okay. They can have improved mental health and live longer lives. They can have all this and help achieve gender equality at the same time. Helping women in the workplace is not a zero-sum game. It's win-win.

THANK YOU

Bio

My career started in advertising as a copywriter, evolving to user experience design at digital agencies, to UX manager at two of Canada's big six banks. Leaving the corporate world, I founded a community-based pet sitting startup, which unfortunately turned out to be a niche market dominated by a well-funded incumbent. While I learned much, it also demonstrated I have a lot to learn.

I brought an entrepreneurial spirit, a focus on human-centred design, and ethnographic research capabilities to my studies in Strategic Foresight & Innovation. Having been disillusioned with utopian techno-heroic answers to our problems, I welcomed SFI as an opportunity to explore how strategy and foresight can be a means for social change and human advancement.

Bias

I live in urban Canada, and am a privileged, middle class, white, cis woman, who is in a child-free hetero marriage. I am politically left leaning and am an advocate for the social safety net, including universal healthcare, childcare, education and income. I am looking forward to capitalism 2.0. I have experienced the microsexism described and studied in this research report—and you may have noted that my research question alone was both addressing biases and loaded with them.

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