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Gender Bias in Physics: An International Forum

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Abstract. A website on gender bias in physics (<https://genderbias.compadre.com>) was created to help women and gender minority physicists communicate their stories, ideas, and questions about gender bias in physics.

A FORUM ON GENDER BIAS IN PHYSICS

Gender bias is pervasive in the physics profession. Implicit gender bias has been widely reported in most countries represented at past International Conferences on Women in Physics (ICWIPs) [1], and in some countries the gender bias is open and explicit. Since gender bias is ingrained in society, addressing and eliminating bias requires systemic changes. In the meantime, physicists who have female or gender minority identities, including transgender and non-binary individuals [2], need to be supported and informed about strategies they can use to combat gender bias and avoid demonstrating gender bias to others. Gender bias can take place suddenly and unexpectedly. Often, women and gender minority physicists are so stunned, they do not know how to react when confronted with gender bias.

To help move our world forward in combating gender bias, the U.S. delegation to the 6th ICWIP created a website [3] to serve as a forum for discussing gender bias in physics. The Forum comprises three main parts: a database of experiences of gender bias in physics, a discussion forum, and resources.

Database of Experiences of Gender Bias in Physics

The foundation of the Gender Bias Forum is a database where members of the Forum can share their experiences of gender bias in physics. Members fill out a form with information on their status at the time of the incident, information on the other person(s) involved, what happened, how they responded, what effect it had on them, and if they think their response was useful.

Experiences submitted to the database are reviewed by a moderator, and coded for the type of bias (implicit/explicit) and type of experience. Codes will be developed organically from the experiences submitted to the database.

At the 6th ICWIP, experiences were gathered from attendees to start populating the experiences database. More than 50 experiences from conference attendees were gathered, entered, and coded.

Discussion Forum

The discussion forum allows members of the Gender Bias Forum to share their questions, concerns, and responses to incidents of bias. Specific experiences in the database can be copied to the discussion forum to start conversations or as references. Moderators will make sure the discussions stay professional and helpful. Having a space where members can hear from others who have similar experiences can be validating. It is also hoped that discussion will promote positive and useful responses for future incidents of bias.

Resources

The resources section of the Forum is publicly accessible, unlike the other sections. Resources are shared in the following categories:

- Sexual harassment
- Active discouragement of women and gender minorities
- Microaggressions
- Gendered/biased language
- Exclusion and denied access
- Inequitable treatment

Participants and public visitors to the resources pages can recommend new resources to the Forum moderators.

GOALS OF THE FORUM

The primary goal of this community will be to support female and gender minority physicists by providing a place to help them explore the most common forms of implicit and explicit gender bias, and share effective strategies to help these physicists navigate through these situations. While pervasive explicit gender bias is common in only some countries, papers in the past ICWIP conference proceedings and discussions with members of the delegations suggest that there is widespread implicit gender bias in nearly every country that has sent a delegation to the previous ICWIPs.

Besides providing a place for women and gender minority physicists to discuss and learn about gender bias, another goal of the Forum is to make this a safe space for these minority physicists. Participants may submit experiences anonymously, and they may post discussion comments anonymously. The database and discussion forum are restricted to members, and membership requires agreeing to the policies and goals of the Forum. Moderators also help keep this Forum as a place where women can share their stories and questions without fear of retribution or attack.

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3. <http://genderbias.compadre.org>.
4. <http://www.uswip.org/6th/Delegation.html>.