

Discussion Question Answers Subtle Discrimination

Lipson Video and Articles Questions

1. What is subtle discrimination?

Subtle discrimination is the quiet, slow process by which people are made to feel uncomfortable, out of place, less capable or even less valuable than their peers, based solely on their gender.

2. Give an example of how Drs. Urry and Lipson experienced subtle discrimination in their careers.

- Urry: Professors would address classes she was in as “Gentlemen and Meg.”
- Urry: Another professor used inappropriate photographs to discuss optics and resolution.
- Urry: She was told her problems were her personality, not her struggles with a patriarchal system.
- Lipson: Ideas being ignored by male faculty, then recognized when posed by a male colleague.
- Lipson: Being told to “toughen-up” when she couldn’t access laboratory equipment
- Lipson: As the spouse of a scientist, she was ignored at a dinner party, while a husband of a female scientist was very popular.

3. What were the motivations for issuing the Baltimore Charter?

The motivation for issuing the Baltimore Charter was to address “the need to develop a scientific culture within which both women and men can work effectively and within which all can have satisfying and rewarding careers.”

4. What are some professional challenges women face, as described in the Baltimore Charter?

Some professional challenges women face include limited access to the profession compared to men and unequal treatment in the laboratories, lecture halls, and observatories.

5. Describe a recommendation for changing the dominant scientific culture from the Baltimore Charters.

- The continued progression of affirmative action (including the publication of standards, the inclusion of women in the selection process, and further transparency)
- More inclusive criteria for hiring, promotion and awards that consider different career paces and the demands on women in daily life (like familial care)
- The end of sexual harassment
- The introduction of gender-neutral workplace language and expectations
- The fostering of a safe, comfortable workspace

6. What was most surprising about the accounts of Drs. Urry and Lipson?

Answers will vary based on student opinions.

7. Why might some scientists be resistant to changing the dominant culture?

Some scientists may be resistant to changing the dominant culture because, as the statistics show, that dominant culture is masculine. If a majority of physicists are male, they likely fear a loss of authority or dominance that would come with shifting the dominant masculine physics environment to more gender-equal or neutral.

8. Have you ever experienced or witnessed subtle discrimination in class? How can we prevent this from happening?

The first part of the question is totally subjective. However, ways to prevent subtle discrimination in the classroom include the elimination of any form of sexual harassment, using gender-neutral language in lectures, instructions, discussions and assignments, and giving respect and attention to all peers regardless of gender.

AIP Statistical Research Questions

1. In “Women Physicists Speak Again,” what was the top reason women gave for being discouraged about physics?

(Page 10 has the table with this information) The top reason women gave for being discouraged about physics was interaction with colleagues.

2. In the same report, what was the most agreed-upon aspect of physics that needs improvement?

The most agreed-upon aspect of physics that women felt needed change was people’s attitude about women in physics.