EQUALITY MATTERS

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The #MeToo movement brought about increased awareness of persistent sexism in our societies. The Council of Europe responded by adopting a recommendation in March to stop sexism, drafting the first ever internationally agreed definition of what constitutes sexism.

The Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) 1 Preventing and Combating Sexism aims at shedding light on what sexist behaviour is, alongside proposing concrete measures by which sexism, both online and offline, can be identified and addressed accordingly.

Sexism is very prevalent in all spheres of our daily life, however identifying it for what it is may require clarification. The Recommendation is explained in detail in the appended guidelines that provides a comprehensive list of tools and measures by which

sexism is to be addressed, particularly by means of: legislation and policies; awareness raising measures; and tools for addressing sexism in specific targeted areas. Coverage is in particular given to language and communications; the internet, social media and online sexist hate speech; media, advertising and other communication products and services; the workplace; public sector; justice sector; education institutions; culture and sport; and the private sector.

This newsletter gives an overview of the main points of this Recommendation and provides information on sexism in the internet, and the media in view of their high relevance to our everyday life as well as in the areas of employment and education. We augur that you will find this newsletter interesting and helpful!

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WHAT IS SEXISM?

The Council of Europe Recommendation defines sexism as:

"Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea **that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex**, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:

i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or

ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or

iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or

iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or

v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes".

INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF SEXISM MAY SEEM BENIGN, BUT THEY CREATE A CLIMATE OF INTIMIDATION, FEAR AND INSECURITY.

To grasp the real meaning of sexism, one needs to understand the importance, as well as differences, amongst sexism, gender stereotypes, discrimination and violence.

In this respect:

Gender stereotypes are the preconceived ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender.

Gender-based discrimination occurs where one person is treated less favourably on grounds of gender than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation.

Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

According to the Recommendation, sexist acts that appear as 'minor' stereotypes can be highly damaging, as they can serve as the basis for escalating acts of bias and discrimination and ultimately lead to bias-motivated violence.

Sexism can result in physical, sexual, psychological or socioeconomic harm and impact different sectors of the population differently. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by such behaviour.

" SEXIST ACTS THAT APPEAR AS 'MINOR' STEREOTYPES CAN BE HIGHLY DAMAGING "

Sexism:

- Is very prevalent and is perpetuated throughout various spheres and on numerous levels

- Serves as a barrier to gender equality

- Limits equal opportunities due to its excluding nature

- Hinders the potential and empowerment of those affected

- Creates an atmosphere of intimidation and exclusion

SEXISM ON THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE SEXIST HATE SPEECH

The internet and social media are platforms for freedom of expression and the promotion of gender equality, but they also allow perpetrators to abuse others. Online sexism can take different forms, such as:

- Online attacks
- Sexist scrutiny on appearance, speech and activism
- Sexist misuse of social media
- Sexist hate speech

In addition, the use of algorithms[1] can transmit and strengthen existing gender stereotypes and therefore may contribute to the perpetuation of sexism.

[1] a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer.

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SEXISM AND THE MEDIA

Sexism in the media, particularly - electronic, print, visual and audio, is manifested through:

- **sexual**, sexualised and racialised depictions and objectification of women, men, girls and boys;

- derogatory or trivialising reporting, rather than balanced and informed discussion of views and opinions;

- reporting and imaging of women and men in stereotypical roles;

- reproducing and perpetuating gender stereotypes with respect to victims of gender-based violence;

- unbalanced representation and the lack of meaningful participation of women.

Men represent 75% of news sources and subjects in Europe

www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-channel/stop-sexism

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SEXISM AND EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Sexism may be embedded in the culture of education establishments, from preschool all the way through to tertiary education, affecting students not only in education, but also in their career prospects and lifestyles.

Sexism in education can have different forms, for instance:

- Perpetuation of sexist imagery, language and expressions;

- Intolerance of non-conforming gender behaviour;

- Not addressing unconscious biases by staff and students;

- Failure to provide appropriate or complaint and recording mechanisms;

- Lack of sanctions for sexual harassment.

SEXISM AT THE WORKPLACE

Workplace sexism manifests itself through sexist comments and behaviour, specifically: derogatory comments, objectification, sexist humour or jokes, overfamiliar remarks, silencing or ignoring people, gratuitous comments about dress and physical appearance, sexist body language, lack of respect and masculine practices which intimidate or exclude women and favour fellow men.

Sexism may also lead to sexist assumptions, for instance: women are not provided with an opportunity for career advancement due to the notion of women being expected to take on caring roles; hostile attitudes are directed towards women who decide to juggle work and family life; as well as sexist remarks towards men who take on caring responsibilities.

> ## SEXISM MAY ALSO LEAD TO SEXIST ASSUMPTIONS

Besides these main areas of concern mentioned above; the Recommendation also addresses the following areas: the public sector, judiciary, language and communications, culture and sport and the private sphere.

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LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICAIONS

Language and communication play a crucial role when encouraging and working towards gender equality. Hence, non-stereotypical communication is crucial in that it educates society at large, raises awareness, and helps in preventing sexist behaviour. This helps in eliminating sexist expressions.

PUBLIC SECTOR

Sexism in the public sector and reliance on gender stereotypes can result in the refusal of public services and unequal access to resources.

JUSTICE SECTOR

Sexism and gender stereotyping within the civil, administrative and criminal justice and law-enforcement systems can prove to serve as barriers to the administration of justice. This is generally due to misinformation and discriminatory judgements.
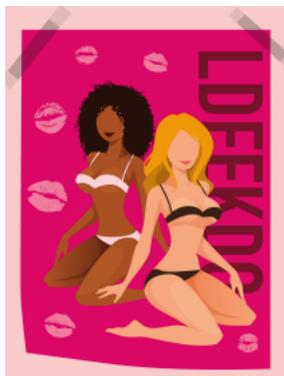
CULTURE AND SPORT

Issues that need to be addressed in sporting life include: the sexist attitudes of the media, sport organisations, coaches, sport leaders, athletes, etc.; sexist portrayals of women in sport, trivialising women's sporting achievements by depicting them in stereotypical roles or demeaning their sports; and sexism and sexist hate speech in sporting events.

PRIVATE SPHERE

Sexism within the family can contribute to reinforcing stereotypical roles, women's disempowerment, low self-esteem and the cycle of violence against women and girls. It can also influence life and career choices. Sexist behaviour remains widespread in interpersonal relations and women continue to perform much more unpaid work in the home than men.

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROPOSED MEASURES TO PREVENT AND COMBAT SEXISM

Tools to prevent and combat sexism can include legislative, executive, administrative, budgetary and regulatory instruments, as well as plans, policies and programmes, such as:

- **Legislation** and **policies** that prohibit sexism as well as respective monitoring systems;

- **Codes of conduct** at the workplace, self-regulatory policies for media professionals, as well as complaints mechanisms in all areas;

- **Awareness raising** and prevention campaigns for different stakeholders, including media literacy from a young age, campaigns in education institutions and at the workplace, as well as for media and communication professionals;

- **Resources and guidelines**, including online, such as training tools for educators, and tool-kits for managers at the workplace;

- **Integration** of the gender perspective in all policies and programmes;

- **Collaboration** between professionals and civil society to share knowledge and good practices;

- Further **research** on sexism in different areas, including cybersexism and cyberviolence, and widespread dissemination of findings.

Sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it.

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