

Episode #91 Gender Assumptions & Role Incredulity : Dr. Amy Diehl and Dr. Leanne Dzubinski

00:00:05 - 00:05:01

Introduction: You're listening to workplace perspective and employment law podcast raising the bar at workplaces everywhere. Workplace perspective is a regular podcast series for employers and employees focusing on education, training, and the law to help organizations of all sizes develop and maintain successful workplace relationships.

The opinions expressed by guests on workplace perspective are their own and should not be considered legal advice. And now, here's your host, Teresa McQueen.

Host: Thank you, James. And welcome everyone to workplace perspective where we are striving to raise the bar and workplaces everywhere. Today, we are talking with authors and gender bias researchers, Amy Diehl and Leanne Dzubinski about their research and a generous assumptions and role in credulity, a newly coin phrase for identifying a specific form of gender bias. It's going to be a great show. Don't go away. We'll be right back.

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Host: Welcome back to our listeners and welcome to workplace perspective. Amy Diehl and Leanne Dzubinski.

Amy: thank you for having us. We're glad to be here.

Host: I'm super glad to have you.

Leanne: Good morning. Happy to be here.

Host: Good morning. So before we get started, Amy and Leanne, why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about you and what you do, Leanne, let's start with you.

Leanne: I am the interim dean and an associate Professor of intercultural education in the school of intercultural studies at viola university here in Southern California. Wonderful. And Amy. Hi, I'm doctor Amy Diehl.

Amy: I am the chief information officer at Wilson college located in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. And I am a gender bias expert researcher, speaker, and consultant.

Host: All right. Well, I'm so happy to have both of you on the show today. And I'm really excited to talk about this subject. So let's just jump right in. So the two of you have coined this new phrase to identify a specific form of gender bias, which I'm not going to say again, because I got through it once, and I'm not sure I can get through it again. But why don't you tell me first of all, so how did you come up with a title and what does it mean?

Amy: Okay, I'll jump in. So Leanne and I have been collaborating on research going back 8 years now to 2014. And we our goal with our research has been to comprehensively identify gender bias in all of its various aspects and ways that it presents. And this concept of role in credulity came up when we were one day we were actually it was before COVID. We were sitting at lands dining room table in her in California. And we were working through some data. And we had our data, we were both qualitative researchers. So our data consists of people's stories. And we had organized our data. We sort our data. And we had come up with a whole lot of stories that related to this concept

that we didn't. There wasn't a term for in the literature. And what was happening over and over again that we were seeing in the data was women were expressing dismay at being assumed to be secretary, or the nurse, or the administrative assistant, or the court reporter, if they were, if they were a lawyer, there's nothing wrong with those roles that these women were not in those roles. So these women were directors or professors or lawyers or physicians to give you some examples. And but yet, when they walked into a room and they met somebody new, the new person would mistakenly assume that they were in some kind of support role or a role that was not that they were not in. And what basically what was happening is they were assumed to not be in charge. They were assumed to not be the leader. And what they were obviously they were expressing dismay of this. They weren't sure how to combat it. What to do to get around it because they were finding that when they were misperceived that it also led to them not being their authority, not being taken as it should be, given the role that they were in. So we didn't have a term for this. There was no term, we researched the literature.

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Amy: There was no, there was no term in the literature. So Leanne and I, one of the things we do in our research is we come up with names for things that don't have names currently. And we came up with the term role in credulity to describe this phenomenon. And the definition that we put to it is it's a form of gender bias where women are mistakenly assumed to be in a support or a stereotypical female role rather than a leadership or a stereotypical male role. And I love this quote. It's kind of a funny quote. But this is a lawyer quote, which Teresa, you will. I'm sure appreciate. She said, she said, one of the biggest problems I had was clients telling me that they needed to speak to a real attorney. An email would do. She said, I could pull the janitor in and tell him what to

say and the client would accept it because he was male. So in her case, she's working with clients who actually should know that she is their attorney, but they don't perceive her as being the attorney. And so they don't accept what she's telling them.

Host: Well, I'd be incredulous at that. I can tell you, I would be. No, I think and that's probably that to me is where it comes because you do have this moment of you just incredulous at the fact that I look the role in the position in the room. I'm attempting to control the room and right off the bat somebody makes this wrongful assumption. And you're less thinking, what did I do to give you that impression? That's what I've always done. And there's not much you can do about it. Is somebody going to think I'm the paralegal or the secretary or the court reporter or whatever it might be? I just don't know what you can. We're going to talk about what you can do about that

Amy: We are going to talk about solutions.

Host: Yeah, but there is that moment. You walk in and you go, really? Really?

Amy: Well, we found it really surprising too that in our later research actually, I started putting this term out on Twitter because I kept seeing women on Twitter complaining about this phenomenon. And so I thought, I've got to get this term out there to give them something in some way to label it. And a few of the women on Twitter, in particular, a few physicians, and they were there were women of color. So this happens to all women, but especially just troubling because it happens often to women of color, right? And there are a few female physicians that expressed that they had experienced this. And there were two in particular that had gone to they were physicians. They had gone to like a fellowship picnic or an interview. I think one was a picnic woman was an interview. And in both cases, they brought their significant others

with them. Their male partners. In both cases, they were assumed to be the wife or the girlfriend of the male partner, not the position in their own right. And so once I had put this term on Twitter, we came up with this additional situation where people were assumed ways women were assumed to be the wives of the professional or the girlfriend. Rather than a professional themselves.

Host: Right. Well, I want to, I think it's important because I'm a lawyer, right? So I think names are important, I think that when you said you came up with a term, I was thinking back to you. I do a lot of sexual harassment training and that's how the phrase sexual harassment came about was that this group of women had gotten together and they were all like you, they were experiencing and needing all these women experiencing this phenomenon, this treatment, and they had to come up with something to call it. And once they came up with a term, then they had to define it. And they happened to bring it up at a rally, and a times reporter, New York Times reporter picked it up, splash it across the headlines, and now you have sexual harassment. So it's going to be the same thing. I wish it were easier to say, but it's going to be the same. But Leanne, I want you to tell me why share with our listeners the importance of giving a name to something.

Leanne: Right, well, it's exactly what you were just saying to Teresa. I mean, if we don't have a name for it, then we can't identify it. And then it's hard to recognize it. The glass ceiling was another term that was coined quite a few years ago that has had the same impact on our society, our ability to identify a problem, diagnose it as it were in untreated, moving back to the sort of medical analogy. If we can't identify the illness, then we don't know how to fix it. So we've got to have names for these things. And Amy and I firmly believe in creating the name one was as an already exists for the things that we find in our data that women are struggling with on a daily basis in the workplace.

Host: And are you seeing you're obviously interacting on social media. So are you seeing people pick up the term and carry it forward?

Leanne: Yes. Absolutely. Go ahead. No, I was just saying, I read Amy's Twitter feed because I'm not really good on Twitter, but yes, everything she posts just seems to resonate. And that's something we found throughout all of our research really is when we describe these things for women, it's like a lightbulb goes off in their head and they say, oh, it's not something wrong with me because until there's a name, women tend to think it's personal to them.

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Leanne: And it's not personal. It's happening to all of us. So having a name just really helps with that depersonalizing and saying, it's not about me.

Host: Yeah, absolutely. That was how it was for me when I saw your article.

Amy: I want to mention one more thing, and that's in addition to us coining the terms, we really feel that it's important to get our work published. So that the terms are out there, just like you described for the case of sexual harassment. So we have published this in Harvard Business review. The name of the article is when people assume you're not in charge because you're a woman. And in that article, we define Role Incredulity and explain some examples and some steps that people can take to overcome this form of bias.

Host: Absolutely. That was the article that caught my eye. First it was the title and then raining through that. I'm like, oh yeah. Yeah, I've been there. I've seen it. And I think a lot of people do that. And they're just not sure. But you take us into a great segue. We're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, Leanne and Amy are going to share

with us some tips and some scripts for dealing with Role Incredulity when you experience it. So stay with us. We'll be right back.

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Host: Welcome back. Everyone, we are talking with Amy Diehl and Leanne Dzubinski about gender assumptions. We have been talking about what role in credulity is and why it's important. But as we said before, the break, we want to get practical. So let's start with the employer perspective because we like to talk about both sides. So let's talk about the employer perspective and what practical steps employers can take to try to eliminate this type of bias when it occurs in the workplace.

Leanne: Sure, Teresa, thank you for starting with the employer's Amy and I are convinced that for too long women have felt like these things were their individual problem as we were talking about before. And so when we diagnose things, we really want to start with what can the employer do to help mitigate this problem. And there's quite a lot of simple, fairly practical steps that can be done. Using names and titles in introductions as a standard practice in the company or organization can help right off the bat. Even on a platform like this, a zoom platform, it would be easy to add people's professional titles so that when there are new people in the room, it's crystal clear, who everybody is and what their role is. We can put those same kinds of credentials into our automatically created email signatures so that when emails are going

out, the person receiving it has right there in front of them exactly what this person's credentials are. When somebody gets promoted, we can announce that.

Host: I love that. Let's go back one. I love that email signature thing. I think that's super important. And I think that so many people forget this is the etiquette in me, right? This is the etiquette professional in me. I think every email you send should have a signature in it. You should have that signature line in it because it's got not only your name, your title, but your contact information. So when people need you, they don't have to go searching for you.

Amy: And I want to add one thing here. Yes, it's that the organization, organizations can buy and configure software to create the signatures automatically. So that each employee doesn't have to worry, it doesn't have to go out and set it up on their own, but they can be a standard across the organization. So that everybody has got their name, their title, and whatever other contact details. But then it's crystal clear for everybody across the organization. So employers should really take this on as a step. That they can do.

Host: Yeah, we have at our company. We have two signatures. So we have an internal automatic signature and an external automatic signature. Which is really helpful. Because you're inside the organization, they don't need that big block of signature, but there are certain things that are important for people to know. Internally, especially meeting new people. But I digress, I've gone down a bunny trail, Leanne keep going.

Leanne: Actually, I've been thinking, you know, it's in there. It's in mind, but people don't always pay attention. And so for me, when I was promoted to a new role, which was something I was about to say when people are promoted to a new role, sometimes it's important to

announce that over company email, but also I need that internal signature book, even within my organization sometimes.

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Leanne: I can't force people to pay attention to it, but at least it's there. You're right back to me and say, you need your supervisor's approval. I can say, actually, I am surprised at this point.

Host: Wow. I haven't had anybody do that in an email. It's usually like a face to face thing.

Leanne: Right. Yeah, so these are just practical things you can have name tags, physical name tags. If you're in physical meetings, if that if that might help with new people in the room, door signage, another thing that Amy and I have thought about is what are just the general images that the company is displaying in its physical workspace. If it's a medical facility, are all the pictures on the walls of nurses, females, and doctors, males, or are we using more representative imagery. That would apply with race and ethnicity as well as gender too. These are ways we can just start changing the culture by presenting images that are more accurate of who we're trying to be and what we're trying to achieve.

Host: That's interesting. Yeah.

Leanne: And then, of course, be consistent with titles. There's nothing worse than hearing doctor Smith and Amy when it's a man. They're trying to be consistent and just develop a culture that is respectful, I think, for everybody in there.

Host: Yeah, I do think it kind of goes back to a lot of this in my brain. I keep hearing etiquette bells going off. That idea of introducing someone and how you introduce someone, you do use their title, you know, for both individuals, everybody's kind of knows who's who in the

room, I love that. I love that. All right, so was that those are our great tips for employers. I think everything was super useful and very helpful. Employers, please take that to heart. What about our employees? What are tips for some of our employees, maybe some scripts, people can use when you're faced with this type of behavior, because the thing what happens is people tell you should address it, nobody really tells you what actually what can you say, what can you do in those situations to address it other than just roll your eyes and I'll worry about it later. I'm not going to make a scene. I'm not going to I'm not going to do an. What can we do?

Amy: Yeah, I think you've got, I think it's an excellent question. And there's two perspectives to this question. One is, what can you do if it's happening to someone else? Right. And second one is, what can you do if it happens to yourself? And I'm going to let Leanne explain what to do if it's happening to someone else.

Leanne: Yeah, so here's another word that's been added to our vocabulary relatively recently. This concept of allies, right? Who are our allies in the workplace, whether it's gender issues, race issues, whatever. So if you're the ally and you see it happen, you can speak up for the other person on their behalf. We all know that if women speak up for ourselves, sometimes that gets us a little backlash. But if we speak up for somebody else, it's okay, that's within our acceptable gender scripts, right? Another thing that I think is important is if you, if you see somebody mess up, give them an out, give them a way to save face so that they don't feel shame. So, oh, John, maybe you forgot that Amy recently got a promotion and is now, you know, whatever her new title is. So just create a culture, help create a culture that acknowledges. We forget things we mess up we're human. That's all right. The important thing is then to acknowledge it and fix it. Another thing women can do if you're frequently going into a situation where

this happens to you is you can create a buddy system. So Amy and I can go to a conference and I can say, hey, I'd like you to meet my colleague Dr. Diehl. She's the and I give her role and then she can turn around and introduce me. I'd like you to meet Dr. Dzubinski and this is her role. And then we're not, again, we're not doing it ourselves. We're doing it for each other. Now that has its own pitfall because, of course, it's unfair that women can't advocate for ourselves. So I didn't even situation. It's important to sort of figure out what's the way of the land here and what's the best strategy moving forward.

Host: I do think that's important, and I love what you said about not embarrassing the person giving that person and out. Nobody likes to feel chastised or especially like that, it takes you right back to kindergarten or grade school. You know, you feel like, oh my gosh, I'm so embarrassed. I never want to do that with somebody, especially when you're trying to make a point because you want this person to feel comfortable to explore and to try again to make it right and all those things. So I love that. Absolutely love that.

Amy: Yeah, if you want to pick up with what you can do, if it happens to you. And I want to start with a story. The story is about Tina Mickelson. Her name sounds familiar. She's the sister of Phil Mickelson, who's a call for. Gina is a golf professional in her own right. And she wrote, she wrote an article for the magazine. It's called Four Magazine. She described this story where she runs a golf shop. And so at the end of the day, I wish she was closing up a man, male customer walks in and has had a question, but he clearly didn't want to speak to Tina.

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Amy: And he motioned towards a teenage employee who was on the phone. Tina recognizing that he wasn't recognizing her as the pro, she decided to let this man wait. So she continues with her closing duties

and the man waits in ways and finally the teenager gets off the phone. And so he then asks the question, the teenager responds, well, he says, you're going to have to ask he motions to Tina, the girl professional, because I'm just the cart guy. And the man, what ended up happening was a man turned around and embarrassed and walked out of the store. But the follow-up that she added with this story was a few weeks later, he came back in, and he apologized and has since started treating, treating her very respectfully in the role that she's in. And so, you know, I wouldn't suggest that maybe as a default for how you should handle it if it happens. But clearly, this has been happening over and over again to Tina where she was assumed to be the shop girl instead of the golf pro. So the quick tips, if this does happen to you, is just to, first of all, proactively identify your role when you're meeting new people. Hi, I'm Dr. Diehl. I'm the chief information officer. We've talked already about including your title and credentials in your email signature and web conferencing. If you're organization doesn't do that for you, for you automatically, you can set up your own signature. And then, of course, the question is, what do you do if your role is misidentified? And usually it's the best approach is really just the polite but firm correction of the mistake and just say, you know, actually, I'm a surgeon. Actually, your lawyer actually, I'm the director of security. Just firmly, quickly correct the mistake. And then move on. And most people, this is not something that most people do intentionally. It's just mistaken stereotypical assumption. And so most people will, it'll be a learning opportunity for most people.

Host: Yeah, especially in the way that you handle it. And I think that's lovely. I think that's a great way to handle it. I know it feels like everything else that feels so satisfying to put that person in their place. And sometimes it might be appropriate to do that, depending on the situation that you're in. But you got to realize the consequences of that,

like Tina's story. She could have lost that customer. But thankfully, that person was big enough person to come back and communicate and that's wonderful. I think it's great. But I would suggest not jumping on that and really trying to give that like we said before, like, give that person and out. And really help them out.

Amy: Well, you really do want to help them save face.

Host: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. Because you want to make strides. And I think one of the ways we're going to make strides in so many fronts is by being and trying to be inclusive and trying to make people feel comfortable with society has changed. Get on board. Here's the way to get on the bus that's easy. And moving it forward that way. Well, ladies in our just remaining few minutes very quickly. Do you have any words of wisdom or any thoughts for the future with this Leanne?

Leanne: Well, yeah, I was thinking about this and it really just piggybacks on what you were saying. I was thinking about what would be my advice and I thought, you know, my grandmother used to say, catch more flies with honey than vinegar. That's exactly what you were just saying, right? It's so tempting to want to react. And if we can remain gracious, even though internally, we may feel turned up, I think we make a lot more progress that way. So I just encourage us all to try to keep that positive attitude as we deal with these things.

Host: Absolutely, I agree. 100%.

Amy: Yeah, and I'll just add, you know, if it does happen to you, don't take it personally. It happens to all of us. It's unfortunate, unfortunately, it happens to all of us, especially as women in male, stereotype professions. So don't be afraid to call it out. And just know that it'll be a teaching moment for the person who misidentified you.

Host: Wonderful. Thank you both so much for being on the show today and sharing your thoughts, your expertise with all of our listeners.

Leanne: Thank you so much.

Amy: Thank you for having us. Yes, thank you so much for having us.

Host: Absolutely. You can learn more about Leanne and Amy, including details about their upcoming book, gender bias in the workplace, the 6th barriers holding women back at work by visiting Amy's website at www.amydiehl.com. You can also connect with Amy and Leanne via our website at www.workplaceperspective.com. I want to also thank our listeners, my radio angels, James in the name at night, and workplace perspectives, team extraordinaire, our engineer producer Paul Roberts, our associate producer Melissa DeLacey. With music provided by the very talented Steven Verceloni.

00:25:03 - 00:25:13

Thank you all for joining us on workplace perspective and until next time, keep raising the bar.