

Picture a Scientist Discussion Guide
Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
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Credit: <https://ed.fnal.gov/projects/scientists/index.html>

The film *Picture a Scientist* is a sobering expose' on sexual and gender harassment in the STEM fields, particularly in higher education. A central message of the film is "if you think that it isn't happening at your institution, think again." While not every female scientist has experienced sexual harassment, the film cites research indicating that approximately 50% have. When you add to this the persistent slights, suggestions of incompetence, innuendo, and other things the film identifies, it is clear that the problem is systemic and rooted in our subconscious interactions with one another.

IANR is committed to making a difference.

Informed by what is presented in the film, this guide is designed to help facilitate discussions in departments, schools, centers, labs and other settings. It is through discussion that we will be able to continue to raise awareness of sexual and gender harassment, bias, and discrimination in all its forms. Awareness, however, is only a first step to making our environment more just, equitable, and inclusive. As Dr. Raychelle Burks said, "It's about doing. The correction requires action." While there is benefit to hearing people tell of their own experiences with discrimination and harassment, our bias in these facilitated discussions should be toward action. The central guiding question should be: "What are we going to do about it?" Working together we are empowered to make a difference. Let's do so.

Discussion Guide Framework and Sample Questions

The questions below are provided as examples of the kinds of questions that might be asked within a framework that leads a discussion toward suggestions for action. Facilitators need not ask each of these questions, or any of them. They are only provided as examples of what might be asked.

The framework below is also provided as an example of what a framework for this kind of discussion might look like. In this case, the framework includes:

1. *Providing participants in the discussion an opportunity to share their observations and reactions to the film and panel discussion.* This helps establish common ground for the discussion. It gives people an opportunity to share their initial thoughts and impressions that haven't yet been informed by the discussion. While some might make recommendations for action at this stage of the discussion, the

facilitator may want to acknowledge those suggestions, make note of them, and let participants know that this and other suggestions will be explored in greater detail later in the conversation. In this framework, be careful not to jump too quickly to discussions of action until you have given participants an opportunity to share their experience of the film. This stage of the discussion is important to helping people feel comfortable participating in the conversation. Comfort is established by not only having the opportunity to share your own experience of the film, but by having the opportunity to listen to others share their experience, and to being able to see the similarities and differences in those experiences. If you jump too quickly to discussions of action, you run the risk of silencing certain members of group.

2. *Asking directed questions about issues or topics that are of direct relevance to the organization.* In the example of the framework presented below, these topics/issues are a) choosing whether or not to report and when to report; b) addressing pernicious effects of gender harassment; and c) disproportionate attrition. There may be other topics/issues related to sexual and gender harassment and discrimination that are particularly relevant to your unit (e.g., gender harassment and discrimination in lab- and field-based settings; sexual and gender harassment in non-STEM fields). Doing this helps to narrow the discussion to those issues that are most relevant and to those where the unit is most likely to be able to make a difference through action.
3. *Discussion about what we can do about it.* The doing requires both individual and collective action. Questions guiding the discussion at this stage should address both what individuals can do and what the department/school/center/lab/etc. as a whole can do. If the conversation is only about the latter, some may leave feeling like they are absolved from individual responsibility or that they don't have the tools/skills they need to be able to act within their individual sphere of influence. If it is only about the former, then you will not be able to address policy, procedure, and operational level issues and will be less likely to harness collective effort required for systemic and cultural change.

Note that in this framework, these categories of questions do not represent discrete stages. For example, in talking about issues (category #2) the discussion will certainly turn toward solutions and action. Even some of the questions provided as examples below reflect the fluid nature of the conversation within the stages of the framework. The principle is to have a framework for the discussion and to think through questions within that framework that will encourage and facilitate discussion about the sensitive topic of sexual and gender discrimination in a way that leads to action. Don't allow the framework to be so prescriptive that the conversation becomes stilted.

Reactions to the Film

- What were your reactions to the film?
- Viewing the film elicits a visceral response from many people. Which parts elicited a visceral response from you? Why do you think your body reacted that way at that time?
- How has your viewing of the film informed your perception of sexual and gender harassment, bias, and discrimination?
- In reflecting on the film, what do you think is the experience of those who do not have clearly visible markers of marginalization (e.g., sexual orientation, low-income, disability, mental health, etc.)? How might their experiences be similar to or different from those presented in the film?

- Why is diversity and inclusion in science and/or your profession important to you?
- What does it say about the value we place on diversity and inclusion that many women continue to experience sexual and gender harassment?
- What are the markers that say to you that diversity, equity and inclusion are values of those within the sciences and/or within your profession? What evidence of those markers do you see now?
- What new ideas did you come away with after viewing the film about ways to make science and the scientific professions more equitable and inclusive?

Choosing Whether or Not to Report

- Dr. Jane Willenbring described her decision to wait to report what happened to her in Antarctica. What are your thoughts on those who chose to either not report abusive behavior or who choose to wait to report? What are potential reasons why someone would choose to not report or wait to report harassment and abuse?
- What is it about our policies, procedures, culture, and/or other ways of doing things that discourage people from talking about sexual and gender harassment, and from acknowledging it and/or reporting it when it occurs?
- What would need to change to make it easier for someone like Dr. Willenbring to be more willing to report harassment and abuse?

Attending to what is below the surface on the iceberg

- How does the iceberg analogy (see page 8) contribute to your understanding of the scope of the problem?
- When have you experienced or witnessed the kinds of behaviors and activities that reside below the surface on the iceberg? How did you feel when you experienced or witnessed these kinds of behaviors?
- Dr. Raychelle Burks said: “You get used to being underestimated. You get used to being treated a bit shabbily... You get used to being invisible in the sciences.” How does a statement like this and Dr. Burks’ experience inform your perception of what it is like for women of color in the sciences? Who else might feel invisible in the sciences?
- What does it say about the value we place on inclusion when we tolerate the kinds of behaviors that are below the surface on the iceberg?
- What can be done to bring attention to those pernicious behaviors below the surface that constitute gender harassment?
- Dr. Raychelle Burks describes having to spend extra time crafting responses to emails in which she is subtly disparaged, put down, or excluded. What is the impact of the kinds of behaviors below the surface on the iceberg on females and those with identities that are often marginalized or underrepresented in the sciences?

The leaky pipeline

- The film recounts the stories of female students and scientists who leave the field because of discrimination and bias. Dr. Jane Willenbring explained that she questioned whether it would be better to be a bus driver than to continue as a scientist. She also expressed concern about her daughter's desire to be a scientist like her mommy. What is the degree to which there is disproportionate attrition in your discipline? What can be done to address the systemic and other issues that contribute to the problem of disproportionate attrition from the sciences of females and people of color (colloquially referred to as the leaky pipeline)?

Working Together We Can Make a Difference

- What suggestions do you have for intervening when you see gender harassment?
- What would need to change to make it easier for people who have experienced sexual and gender harassment to say something about it? How would making those changes be better for everyone? How would be go about making those changes?
- In the film we see the story of the male colleague of Dr. Jane Willenbring, Dr. Lewis, who witnessed the degrading comments and behavior of David Marchant. Dr. Lewis felt uncomfortable, yet did nothing to intervene. He later tells the story of a sexual predator at a professional conference, and again, no one did anything to intervene, leaving the situation to play out table after table. When have you experienced or seen situations like these? What are your suggestions for someone who sees or suspects this kind of behavior?
- Dr. Willenbring said that she views Dr. Lewis as an ally. Based on what you saw in the film, why do you think she sees him this way? What do you think are the characteristics of an ally? What could you do to be an ally for those vulnerable to sexual and gender harassment? What needs to happen differently in our department/school/center/lab/etc. to encourage allyship?
- What are we currently doing to ensure an inclusive environment in our department/school/center/lab/etc.? What could we do to make our environment more inclusive than it currently is?
- What changes to policies and procedures could we make to ensure a work place that is more equitable and inclusive for women and others who are traditionally underrepresented in the sciences?
- What is our responsibility to influence diversity, equity and inclusion in our field/discipline? How could we harness our collective action to affect change within our field/discipline?

Ten Tips for Facilitating Discussions on Sensitive Topics

Be Intentional. Be Reflective. Be Accountable.

1. Prepare yourself and others for the discussion.
2. Clarify the purpose.
3. Establish or remind people of the clear ground rules for the discussion.
4. Create a framework for the discussion.
5. Be an active facilitator.
6. Be prepared to deal with intense and emotional moments.
7. Include everyone, but be respectful of an individual's reluctance to share.
8. Summarize.
9. Reflect.
10. Act!

1. *Prepare yourself and others for the discussion.* Don't go into the discussion without having first taken time to reflect on your own responses to the questions that you are going to ask. It may be that you have biases and/or strong opinions about the topic. Know what these are. It may be helpful to talk to a trusted colleague about these biases or opinions in advance of the discussion to help you think through how you can keep these from exerting inappropriate influence over the flow of the discussion.

Review materials in advance. Develop a framework for the discussion (see example above). Be willing to develop a written list of talking points or even write out what you are planning to say. Rehearse it. This doesn't mean that you should read from a script, but rehearsing will help you better communicate what you intend to say.

Let those in your group know in advance that the discussion will be occurring. Be careful not to spring a discussion on a sensitive topic on anyone. Allow those in the group to review materials in advance of the discussion so that there is common ground. It helps to have a common starting point. In this case, the common ground includes the film *Picture a Scientist* and the panel discussion (<https://ianr.unl.edu/diversity-and-inclusion-ianr/picture-a-scientist>). Don't assume, however, that everyone saw the film and panel discussion. It may be helpful to send out a brief summary of the film and of sexual and gender harassment. It may be helpful to provide everyone with the framework of questions or discussion points in advance so they can come prepared to participate after having given thought to their responses.

2. *Clarify the purpose.* Don't go into a discussion of a sensitive topic without an objective in mind. The objective should *not* be: we are going to talk about this and see how it plays out. Start with the end in mind. What is it that you are hoping to accomplish? How will everything you do, from start to finish, help you accomplish that objective? Letting people know what the objective is, and even discussing the objective upfront can help everyone be on common ground.
3. *Establish or remind people of the clear ground rules for the discussion.* This might not seem necessary, but when addressing sensitive issues it is helpful to remind people of the communication principles that contribute to civil discourse. These may include:
 - Listen respectfully and actively (with an ear attuned to understanding others views; don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking).

- No interrupting.
- Commit to learning, not debating.
- Comment in order to share information, not to persuade.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- Avoid assumptions about others or generalizations about social groups.
- Do not ask individuals to speak for their social group.

Keep the list short. Most people will tune out after 3-5 rules.

While it may seem awkward to discuss ground rules before the discussion begins, doing so helps to reinforce that the discussion is about a sensitive topic. Doing so helps attune people to others and to the impact of their behavior on others. It is much easier to talk about ground rules before problems arise than after.

4. *Create a framework for the discussion.* Scaffolding for the discussion is important to accomplishing the outcomes you desire. This framework can include the following:
 - Introductory comments to set the stage for the discussion. This should include a statement of the purpose or expected outcome of the discussion to let people know what they are working toward (see above).
 - Discussion or reminder of ground rules (see above).
 - Predetermined questions loosely organized and prioritized to help you accomplish your objectives. You need not ask each of your predetermined questions, and you shouldn't feel that you need to limit yourself to only those questions that you have predetermined. This is only a guide or framework for the discussion, not a script. Also, allow the questions to stimulate discussion by asking appropriate follow up questions, making connections between what various people are saying, and summarizing.
 - Activities that will encourage sharing and discussion. For example, you may consider having people respond to certain questions in groups of 2 to 4 people. Especially when asking people to share their own experiences, it may be easier to do so when they aren't making their comments in front of a large number of people. Smaller groups also allow for a larger number of ideas and viewpoints to be expressed.
5. *Be an active facilitator.* This means asking follow up questions to encourage understanding and to facilitate discussion. It means summarizing what is being said in light of other comments or questions. It means responding with empathy. It means preventing people from dominating the conversation. It means guiding the discussion toward accomplishment of the agreed upon objectives. Facilitating discussions of sensitive topics requires a lot of mental and emotional energy. Make sure you are rested and mentally sharp. Come prepared to work!
6. *Be prepared to deal with intense and emotional moments.* Dealing with topics such as those presented in the film *Picture a Scientist* are sure to elicit intense emotional responses in some, if not all of those participating—including the facilitator. Come prepared to help people navigate the emotion that is associated with talking about these topics. The strategy should not be to suppress emotions or discourage their expression. These are emotional topics, and getting to solutions requires people to work through the intensity of the emotion associated with them. The strategy

should be to acknowledge with empathy the intensity of the conversation and the emotion when it is expressed, and to use that as a catalyst for the discussion and for change.

7. *Include everyone, but be respectful of an individual's reluctance to share.* Without active facilitation, discussions about sensitive topics such as those presented in the film are often dominated by one or a few people who are willing to speak up. With few exceptions, this will not result in accomplishment of expected outcomes. Start with the assumption that everyone has come prepared to share something, and then create a framework that allows everyone to share. This may mean getting people into smaller groups to talk about an aspect of the topic. It may mean calling on people (make sure you let people know you will be doing this in advance). It may mean asking those who have already spoken to wait to share something else until others have spoken.

While it is important to give everyone the opportunity to speak, it is equally important to respect someone's desire to not do so. If someone chooses not to share or comment, be careful to not apply pressure. Do not make assumptions about why someone doesn't want to share. For example, when talking about sexual harassment, choosing not to share doesn't mean that the person has experienced it. Don't make the assumption that they have. Just respect their decision to not share. Also, just because someone doesn't speak up doesn't mean that they aren't actively participating in the conversation. Some of the most potent advocates for change may be among the most quiet during the discussion.

8. *Summarize.* Make sure to reserve time at the end of the discussion to summarize the key points and take-aways. Those participating in the discussion are more likely to feel that it was worthwhile if there is a summary. This can be improved if it includes a statement of expected next steps that are directly informed by what was shared during the discussion. While the facilitator can provide this summary, they can also get help from the participants. Some ways of doing this could include asking participants to write or share:
 - The 1 or 2 most important or meaningful things they heard.
 - What question they have that is still unanswered.
 - Something that they learned or heard that they wouldn't have thought of on their own.
9. *Reflect.* After the discussion, set aside time to reflect on how you did as a facilitator and on what you learned from the discussion. Be sure to write down your summary of the discussion, including the most salient themes that the discussion appeared to coalesce around. If the discussion resulted in ideas for action items, make sure those are recorded. If you used an advisory committee to help develop the framework for the discussion, make sure to engage them in the reflection.
10. *Act!* You've stated that your bias is toward action, and you have facilitated a discussion leading to the generation of ideas that can be acted on. Your priority now needs to be on the doing, on the implementing, on the action! Don't let too much time pass before acting on suggestions generated during the discussion. People need to see that action is being taken. For most people, the shelf life of their confidence that something will ever come from these kinds of discussions is pretty short. Pick something that came from the discussion, act on it in a visible way, attributing the idea as an outcome of the discussion. But, be careful to not stop there. Develop a plan for acting on other suggestions as well, including those that are systemic in nature and that may take time (years even) to implement in a way that will affect change.

The image features a large iceberg floating in the ocean. The top part of the iceberg, which is visible above the water, is labeled 'PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS'. The bottom part, which is submerged, is labeled 'GENDER HARASSMENT'. The water surface is marked with a wavy line. The iceberg is divided into two main sections: 'SEXUAL COERCION' and 'UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION'. The submerged part is further divided into 'GENDER HARASSMENT'. The text is arranged around the iceberg, with some text appearing on the visible part and some on the submerged part. The background is a sunset or sunrise over the ocean.

SEXUAL COERCION

promising professional rewards in return for sexual favors

threatening professional consequences unless sexual demands are met

UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

sexual assault

rape

unwanted groping or stroking

PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

GENDER HARASSMENT

relentless pressure for sex

unwanted sexual discussions

nude images posted at work

relentless pressure for dates

sexually humiliating acts

offensive sexual teasing

sexual insults
e.g. "for a good time call...",
calling someone a whore

sexist insults
e.g. women don't belong
in science

offensive remarks
about bodies

obscene gestures

sabotage of women's
equipment

vulgar name calling
e.g. "slut," "bitch," "c**t"

gender slurs
e.g. "pu**y"

insults to working mothers
e.g. "you can't do this job with
small kids at home"

Sexual Harassment of Women:
Climate, Culture, and Consequences in
Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
<https://www.nationalacademies.org/sexualharassment>

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