

# pink tape

How sexism manifests in modern academia.

story by **julia perian**

Where does prejudice disguise itself? Would you recognize it right in front of you? Have you unknowingly contributed to a culture of bias as you speak, interact, and share spaces with others?

Throughout the 21st century, society has made strides towards gender equality. Women have been pioneers in fields from STEM to the Vice President of the United States. However, sexism is deeply ingrained in American culture – a beast of many forms, this issue continues to beset the classrooms of Fairview.

For many female students, sexism is still a daily battle.

"I think [sexism] is very prevalent. I feel like [women] are just put down. We're seen in a light that nobody wants to be seen in," said Rania Jamal (10).

Despite society's progress, today's sexism disguises itself in the subtext. Microaggressions, double standards, and internal bias are all ways sexism continues to further inequality while hiding from the blind eye.

Academic settings are where these instances of sexism thrive. There are often double standards of how women and men are perceived in the classroom.

"If we actually answer questions, we're seen as too smart, or not desirable or somebody you want to be friends with, but if a guy does that, then it's totally okay," said Jamal.

"People tend to look down on girls a lot more for bad grades, whereas sometimes it can seem a lot more acceptable for boys to have below average grades," said Lydia Fey (12).

This double standard largely affects class participation.

"The AP classes that I have are predominantly girls. It's about a 2-1 ratio. That being said, I do have some boys who are definitely louder and take up more of the oxygen in the room," said history teacher

Sean Costello.

"I think that boys are much more likely to speak out in class, which might seem much more like participation on the outside, and while more girls are focused on doing the real work and more likely to actually complete things, but less likely to ask or answer questions," said chemistry teacher Maxine Morris.

"In my history class, 95% of people that answer are boys. I looked around this morning and everyone who raised their hand for a current event, was a guy," said Jamal.

While labeled microaggressions, the ramifications these biases have for female students are immense.

Some of the biggest challenges for women regarding sexism are internal. The psychological impacts of being stereotyped as unintelligent vary. For some students, these stereotypes largely affect their self-confidence in class, even when they are performing highly.

"I think that boys tend to have more experiences in their life where they are built up, and so they are more confident in themselves, and ... are more likely to speak up," said Morris.

"Girls are more likely to be self-conscious about whether or not they are intelligent, because ... they are worried they are going to be seen as an unintelligent woman," she adds.

"Sometimes it's hard to speak up around guys or other students in general because things you say could be easily judged, or you may be seen as too opinionated or outspoken," said Fey.

For other students, constantly facing sexism has caused them to internalize these stereotypes. In these cases, sexism succeeds at its main goal – to discourage women into becoming the stereotype they are perceived as.

"I think that you should be able to be very traditionally feminine and also be very

**WHY CAN'T WE JUST PUT ASIDE HAIR COLOR, OR SKIN COLOR, OR GENDER, AND SEE PEOPLE FOR WHO THEY REALLY ARE?**

**RANIA JAMAL (10)**

brilliant. It makes me sad when I see girls who don't even want to try because they have internalized the stereotype," said Morris.

"I don't know what to do to change their perspective, and so I kind of just go along with it. Because once somebody perceives you a certain way, it's really hard to change [their perception]," said Jamal. "If I put up a fight every single day, it gets exhausting."

Despite sexism's impacts, many women still persevere to achieve academic success.

"[When people doubt me,] it makes me want to challenge myself and work harder, because I want to ... prove to myself and to people that I can do hard things even as a social girl," said Aya Margalit(11).

"Girls just need to try to prove people wrong, because we know we're smart," added Kaya Hickory (11).

Though inspiring, this need to go above and beyond is not ideal. "Proving" people wrong adds an immense pressure to the already high levels of stress associated with academia.

"There's more pressure for girls to get everything right," said Hickory. "In classes where guys look down on me, I feel like I always have to have the right answer. I always have to be one step ahead of them, to prove to them that I can keep up."

Sexism is a nationwide issue that can't be fixed by one person or one school. However, within Fairview, some teachers still try to do their part in improving the school's culture.

"I try...to support my female students when they do something right. I try to

...intelligent as they are, and try to build them up with more confidence," said Morris.

"I work really hard on allowing opportunities to make up for what you're not getting...A lot of female students who I think would have previously dropped out of my advanced classes say that they are going to stay in them," she adds.

"I need to constantly reflect, to make sure that if one boy talked a lot today, can I make sure tomorrow that doesn't happen, and make sure I hear from some of the girls," said Costello.

Although some teachers are aware of the issue, there is still room for improvement.

"It would be good to talk about it in classrooms, and acknowledge that that happens," said Hickory.

"It is noticeable, but you have to be looking for it. A lot of [teachers] are trying to not see it in a way so they don't have to deal with it," she added.

"[Some teachers] have been...doing things [a certain way] year after year, and they don't see a problem with it. They aren't adapting to the newer generation of teaching," said Jamal.

Along with a class's teacher, this issue varies depending on the subject or level of the class. In STEM careers and classes at Fairview, many women grapple with the associated bias.

"Maybe highschoolers are already getting a sense that they don't want to fight against ... these fields being harder on the women," said science teacher Tracy Clement.

"In [computer science, stereotypes] just make it a more difficult challenge to feel welcomed...I don't enjoy asking guys questions. I don't want to feel stupid, because there's already the stereotype of girls not knowing how to code," said Margalit.

Other students feel higher level classes or classes with different gender ratios experience higher levels of sexism.

"In my advanced classes, the guys just assume that I shouldn't be there," said Hickory.

"I think the classes that have a male dominance...there's definitely more of a stereotype of guys not feeling that the girls know the subject as well as them," said Margalit.

"As there's starting to be more girls in

my classes, it feels like less of a divide... I feel more comfortable asking questions and having group conversations with both genders," Margalit added.

Additionally, sexism differs depending on femininity. Stereotypes that portray women as unintelligent often play off of more traditionally feminine traits.

"I've heard 'Oh, you're just a dumb blonde,' so many times," said Hickory. "I think that people who are stereotypically feminine face it more," she added.

Because of the nuances regarding femininity, sexism can even be perpetuated by women.

"I had a group presentation with all girls, and nobody listened to the blond girl, while people took every word that the 'smarter' looking girl said to heart. I feel like I had to say other people's ideas, again, because

**THEY CAN'T SEE PAST MY APPEARANCE...IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE ALL MY HARD WORK IS FOR NOTHING.**

**KAYA HICKORY (11)**

nobody was hearing them the first time," said Jamal.

"It really kills me that we just can't listen to each other," she added.

Where is this bias originating? There are a plethora of factors, however, one universally problematic culprit is the media, which has helped solidify gender stereotypes since its creation.

"In a lot of movies, girls are just portrayed as dumb, like in 'Mean Girls', and even 'Legally Blonde,' shows the first half of that stereotype...Girls are shown as helpless, like the damsel in distress, and guys are supposed to be there to save them," said Hickory.

Although movie characters may not seem to have any influence on societal inequality, these films reach millions of people from a formative age. Both genders may subconsciously internalize these archetypes and carry them throughout their lives. This phenomenon has recently surged due to the rising influence of social media.

"On Tiktok, it's a way to get popular, to dress up all pretty and act dumb. Guys see and internalize that, and girls do too, and it adds to the stereotype," said Hickory.

Social media's influence on sexism is not

**IF THEY DON'T THINK I CAN DO IT, I'LL SHOW THEM THAT I CAN.**

**AYA MARGALIT (11)**

only concerning because of its addictive properties and wide reach. Many social platforms have user algorithms, creating a pattern of posts or ideas that the viewer likes, and then continuing to show them similar information.

"People who are sexist like posts from people who say sexist things, and social media forms a page for what you are interested in. So then people don't see different ideas and different things that are going on in the world," said Margalit.

The danger of algorithms takes the solidification of preconceived ideas to a drastic new level. "If you're sexist, you're only gonna see that opinion," added Margalit.

Outside of the media, much of sexism is taught or learned, or stems from other internal issues.

"I think a lot of the world is like sheep, like you go with the herd," said Margalit.

"A lot of its [origin] is kind of at home. The ideals that your parents taught you," said Hickory. "It could also just be a way to project insecurities. I think [some men] are just intimidated by girls who are smart. Because for so long it's been the stereotype that guys are the smarter gender," she adds.

It's hard to win a race when your opponent has had a 50 year head start; it's even harder when everyone around you is telling you how slow you're running. Sexism is detrimental, and it's essential that both teachers and students make efforts to minimize its presence at Fairview. Being aware of the way we perceive and treat others could make a large difference in our community. Recognizing internal bias, and then making an effort to minimize it, or even just simply listening to all of your peers, could help pave the way for a more equal academia.



"Vintage TV" by SadLiELF is licensed under CC by 3.0.



"Marilyn Monroe Photo Pose Seven Year Itch" published by Corpus Christi Caller-Times from Associate Press is licensed under Public Domain.

Sexism is so incredibly ingrained into the media that the blind eye might not notice its presence as we consume content and products. Some of the biggest pop culture icons of history, such as Marilyn Monroe, have both been victimized by the sexist public eye and painted in the media to further existing gender roles. Monroe was one of the most successful and influential figures in the entertainment industry, yet the media pushed the dumb blonde stereotype onto her, as seen in her role in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."

Despite her own feminist work to go against society's view of women, and the challenging background she preserved through to reach success, the media and public diminished her into a sex symbol. However, more recent media, such as the movie "Barbie," have been challenging this stereotype, even portraying men in stereotypes typically placed on women to point out the irony of this bias. As the public's media consumption increases, the media further influences wide-spread internal biases and stereotypes.