

Dear Mr., Ms., Mrs.: Removing Gendered Language from Promotion and Tenure Processes

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Transcript

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And for our fourth panel we have first Deana Brown one of the people who has helped make today a possibility. She's an Assistant Professor and Librarian here at the Albertsons Library and she is the liaison to the Gender Studies Program and she will be presenting *Dear Mr., Ms., Mrs.: Removing Gendered Language from Promotion and Tenure Processes*. She will be followed by Michelle Fretwell who is a senior in sociology and a student in the Intermountain Social Research Lab. She will be presenting- and I love this- STEM. S-T-E-M. *Sexist Technology Elevating Masculinity in Higher Education*. And then this panel will be closed out by Sharon Paterson, who is a sociologist and who is a mentor in that Intermountain Social Research Lab and her areas of expertise include neo-liberalism, grit discourse, and economic disadvantage among students in higher-ed, and she will be presenting *Applying Gender Theorizing of the Reproduction of Inequality to Understand Class Inequality in Higher Education*. So a lot of focus on higher-ed from a variety of different gendered perspectives So I welcome Deana Brown to begin.

DEANA BROWN

Cooooo!...

[Audience applause]

I'm gonna give a- give a plug for yet one more event before I start. On Thursday the 19th, so if any of you are peaked by Tom Trusky's work gender studies in the library will be co-hosting a zine making workshop in this very room from 2 to 4 o'clock. Snacks and all sorts of fun. I think it's like the fifth one that we've done.

UNKNOWN

Yeah they're really...

DEANA BROWN

They're a blast. So you're welcome to come join and all supplies are provided. You can just sit and hang out and see what other people are making as well. But it's a good time, guaranteed. Alright. Without further ado. So I was serving on the library's promotion and tenure committee

this year, and for students in the room if you're not familiar with what the tenure process is you can kind of think of it like doing a thesis at the end of your degree. It's this giant culmination of all of the work that you've done that you then submit to someone else as if to say "Hey I'm awesome! Please give me my degree", or "Please grant me tenure", or what have you. So what I was doing is I was serving on the committee here in the library that was looking at the dossiers of my colleagues and writing up recommendation letters that would then send to the Dean and they would go through the process. So as we were going through this process it occurred to me that there was something kind of wrong, and I decided that I was going to take it upon myself to make it right. And what I saw that was wrong was that the first kind of step in this process where I noticed this was the form letters that we had used in the past, that we would send to our Dean, which then would go to the Provost, which then go to the President, all had Mr., Miss, Mrs., he, she, her language in them. And I-I personally do not use Mrs. or Ms. when I'm signing anything or identifying myself and-and part of that is you know, that could be a whole other presentation and everything, that is the that is contained in that, but I-I just don't feel that that...there's really any reason for that sort of language in a promotion and tenure language which is supposed to be about all the work that you have done as a scholar. It doesn't matter if you're married. It doesn't matter what your gender is or how you identify or who you want to have sex with. None of that has anything with promotion and tenure. And so I posed the question to my colleagues that were on the committee with me, "Hey what do you think about not using that language in this letter?" and I explained my reasoning and I gave examples of ways that we could alternatively refer to candidates throughout this process. So that was kind of a first step in this. So some of the questions that were kind of percolating in my head as I'd been thinking about this are clearly this- you know- it used to be that everything said he, him, or his, and there's some historical context here, so I was gonna kinda go and investigate that a little bit. I was super curious what P&T guidelines looked like at other universities, certainly a look at other neighbors is always a good place to get started um...so then I would want to see how Boise State compares and uh...and then ultimately be like "Hey, can we change this?" So here's what we found. So, this is not new. Um...and uh...but some interesting things that I've discovered as far as language and some kind of formal documents. So we can start at the top all the way back '66 in Sweden the introduction of the word "hen" was first introduced, which is a non-gender specific pronoun. It didn't really take a whole lot of um...it didn't really get ingrained in the culture at that point. It was kind of reintroduced again in '94, and that uh...I think at that point it did start showing up in some governmental documents here and there, but really in 2012 is when you may have been seeing stories about this in the news, there was a children's book that was published and there was a lot of brouhaha about the children's book that was using this terminology in it, and it so that kind of got the discussion going again. Certainly other neighbors in Finland have a word that's very similar that they're using. And the UK back in '75 there was an act that was put forward um, The

Sex Discrimination Act, and that was actually about um, job advertisements which was super interesting and so it was addressing gendered language like salesman um...and the act was putting forward that going forward it needed to say something like salesperson. And then closer to home in the US I was looking at the APA who- you know- they're all about formatting things, so I was like well they've probably got some thoughts on this, and certainly they do. Back in '91 there was a group that came forward and at that point they were talking about more-just the heteronormative language, and removing that from writings, but more recently in 2016 there's a group that has actually talked about kind of taking a different angle on it and broadening it and using language as much more inclusive. So, so it was both disheartening and encouraging to know that this this isn't new. This has been going on for a while, but that- you know- some progress is being made. So next what I wanted to do is to find out what's going on with places more near us. So I went and I looked at...uh...the P&T guidelines of other publicly-so these are the university guidelines, and for those of you that don't know how P&T stuff works those are the university guidelines and then each department has a separate set of guidelines that are discipline specific. So like my guidelines as a librarian are going to be very different, in some ways, from folks in the sociology department. So I'm looking at the overall arching guidelines that everyone in the university is assessed under. And I went and did- just did a Google search, a keyword search for words like him, his, her himself, herself, and so you can see here that some universities are doing awesome. They don't they don't have any, so Montana State, Central Washington, and U-dub have absolutely no gendered language. You'll notice a couple of little spikes on there and you'll notice that we're one of them. And Eastern Washington seemed ridiculously higher than everyone else, and so I kind of went back and looked at the data again and I was like wait a minute they're P&T guidelines are like 40 pages long, so that's why they had gotten way more hits than everybody else. So that's why I was like let's do this as a percentage. So going and redoing those numbers as a percentage of that really doesn't make us look good. And...uh...and by quite a bit. And our guidelines are actually kind of short compared to some of these other institutions So, uh... So can this be changed? Um...I think it can. I don't think there's any reason not to. And so what I have decided to do is- you know- start locally. So um...as part of my parting gift of being on the P&T committee this past year Um...ah...we not only have changed the templates for the letters that go out to everyone, but also- and I'm keeping my fingers crossed on this- but I'm pretty sure that it's pretty much a done deal that our- my colleagues have voted on going and removing gendered language from the library's promotion and tenure guidelines, which really wasn't that hard to do. Um, and...uh...you know I didn't get a whole lot of push back. One person one person was like grammatically that's not correct, but I'm totally on board with you doing it. I pointed out well you know language changes over time. And...uh...we're in this in-between phase were we don't really have a good like alternative, so right now this is the best we can do. But I would say by and large that it was very heartwarming

that the vast majority of people were like Hey, what the what? Why? I didn't even think of this, and yes we should totally change this. So...uh...so I think you know acting locally is a great way to start. Um...depending on how much free time I have

[Laughter]

I-I am contemplating uh...um...suggesting it to Faculty Senate. And to have it changed in everyone's guidelines because there really is no reason for that sort of language to be in there. Um...if you're interested here are some of the sources that I consulted. Some pretty interesting stuff in there. I've got lots of other data and other ways that I'm thinking about kind of crunching this. So like looking at...um...universities gendered language and do they offer a gender studies minor, major, or Ph.D., and what sort of stories can start being told from that. So I really am just kind of getting started on this journey and...uh...it's super interesting to know. Alright, so that's all I got.

[Applause]

End of Transcript.