Research Project Report

Leadership and Professional Development Project 2 (6FBS1639)

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24th September 2020

Word count: 6226

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to understand the reasoning behind the use of offensive language used by men towards women within the construction industry. Primary research conducted was an online questionnaire, sent out to an equal mix of gender and age in differing roles and job levels within the construction industry. The next stage was web linked interviews of two individuals who give greater depth and insight into their personal experiences. Secondary research identifies the key areas for change, and recommendations for new policy documentation and educating within the construction industry, the aspects of which are identified throughout this research.

Research Project Title

'Systematic Gendering' – A study of language use in the Construction Industry

Introduction

I have worked in the construction industry for over eight years, working my way up to management roles and then progressing as a director. I have experienced on a personal level and observed on many occasions, that men within the industry from varying sectors and job positions feel that it is acceptable to make sexist remarks and use offensive language towards females. This has not only been verbally but in gestures and general unacceptable behaviour. This is not isolated to the environment; it happens both in less formal settings as in networking events and in formal meetings.

I was concerned initially as to whether this topic would firstly be worthwhile, and secondly would it be taken seriously, but throughout my research I have uncovered that this is an important issue that needs addressing. The industry needs to change, through unveiling what goes on and educating males on the impact this has on females.

Rationale & Context

Primary rationale

My primary rationale was to investigate the way in which men address women within the construction industry. As I have mentioned within my introduction, from my personal experience within this sector, a large percentage of men feel it is acceptable to be discriminative in their behaviour and the way in which they speak to women. I wanted to understand why this happens and the reasoning behind it. Does it derive from gender or is it driven through long-standing power/culture relationships? I would suggest culture has a strong influence; construction is still the most male dominated across all industrial sectors.

Furthermore, what makes men behave in this way and why do women not behave in the same way? The industry has become more inclusive over the years, but a lot more work and research are required to understand why women are perceived as being less confident. "Men not knowing how to deal with women within the construction industry" (Tinsley & Ely, 2018), suggests women are lacking desire or ability to negotiate, that they are not confident, and that they are not risk takers. Giving explanation as to why women to date have failed to reach parity with men.

There are also assumptions from the workplace that men "hobnobbing" (social networking) tend to gain greater connections. This is something that I have witnessed on numerous occasions through observation. It has not been proven through research; however, women find this harder

as they are not faced with the same situations, or exposed to potential opportunities during networking, giving the assumption they are less confident. As I have previously mentioned this is something that I have experienced on many occasions. In situations where derogatory comments are made, I have felt that in these circumstances I had to accept this behavior for fear of causing any uneasiness, which could have a detrimental effect on my job and working relationships. Throughout my analysis and documented within my findings section of this report, you will discover that I am not alone in having felt this way.

Secondary rationale and Context

My secondary rationale, was to close the gap within my skills plan, aligning to "being confident in my competence but lacking belief in myself", is it the way in which I/people perceive me/themselves, or the lack of belief and respect from others? Comparing this to Patton, (Patton, 2015) he suggests, that often the answer to why people do what they do is found not just within the individual, but rather, within the systems of which they are a part: social, family, organisational, community, religious, political, and economic systems. Furthermore, Tinsley and Ely (Tinsley & Ely 2018) suggest that by taking an inquisitive, evidence-based approach to understanding behaviour, companies can not only address gender disparities but also cultivate a learning direction and a culture that gives all employees the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Throughout my practitioner research, and observations, my aim was to achieve a greater understanding as to why this occurs. On one particular occasion I was at an event with clients and I was referred to as the 'hot blonde' by a man in a very senior position, a joke was then made within another group of males I was talking with, that they would only give me some information on a project if I took one of them out to dinner.

As a leader, my natural style is "authentic" (Northouse, 2013). This lends itself to my connection with emotional intelligence and the main characteristics of an authentic leader. However, I am mindful that I need to understand "myself" by seeing where my shortcomings are, as Chavez says, "Getting to know your own heads" (Chavez, 2008).

I have developed my behavioral pattern; as in changing behaviors and believing in myself. However, I am conscious of areas within me that still require change; "perfectionism, procrastination, people-pleasing" as Josa suggests "Ditching Imposter Syndrome" (Josa, 2019). Throughout this process I have been reflecting on improving my self-awareness (Goleman, 2002).

Leadership Skills Plan

Development Need One

Brief - Understanding myself

Description - Understanding myself by seeing where my shortcomings are and developing my behavioral pattern and changing behaviors

Identified - ESCI

Outcome required - Keeping a Journal and feedback from the workplace

Development Need Two

Brief - Believing in myself

Description - I am confident in my competence but lacking in belief in myself

Identified - ESCI and tutor discussions

Outcome required - Read "Ditching Imposter Syndrome" by Clare Josa

Being an Insider-Researcher

As an insider-researcher Patton (Patton, 2015) and Denzin (Denzin, 2005) suggest, the researcher/observer studying within their natural setting, gathering information, making the research "real", positioning me as a "native" researcher (Taylor, 2011).
My research has been based on people's perceptions, how they see and experience the world around them, so I have been solely reliant on their views on what they have experienced. I have had to be mindful that this is an individual viewpoint and throughout my project, I have had to remain unbiased by acknowledging my own biases and not influence cultural viewpoints from my own experiences and background. It is extremely easy to fall in to "Unconscious Bias". For example, Horton (Horton, 2014), "Diversity and Inclusion consultant" explains how you should be aware of your thought process and how easy it is to fall in to the trap of having a stereotype, as things cross your mind, stop it before it becomes your only belief/thought and eliminate "knee jerk reactions". Comparing to an article in the Guardian (Guardian, 14/12/2015), it suggests "refrain from being exclusive, develop your core values and recognise your unconscious actions".

When analysing the data I collated, I have been conscious of the fact that I am familiar with the context of my research, as Costley states (Costley, 2010), when you are in this position it can create issues for you as an insider researcher. Therefore, I have been mindful of how I have interpreted my findings and as Corbin and Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) suggest, I have attempted as far as possible in this kind of research to put aside my perceptions about what I might expect as the researcher to discover, letting the data and interpretation of it steer the analysis and tell its own story.

Research Methodology and Methods

Methodology

The response to my primary rationale demands the collection of qualitative data in the form of perceptions, intentions, and experiences. Therefore, my methodology needs to be a qualitative one and my methods and analysis need to follow in that form. My data is in the form of verbal written and verbal oral, so in my analysis I will be 'interpreting' that data making it important to raise my insider-researcher position as a matter of context.

Denscombe (Denscombe, 2014) says as a social researcher it is harder to view things objectively, as the social reality is created by peoples thoughts and actions, consequently, being a social researcher can never be completely objective due to my own experiences and how this can impact on the way in which I analyse my findings, aligning to qualitative research.

Sampling

My sampling technique was purposive and convenience sampling (Denscombe, 2014) as it has relevance to the issue that I have investigated, and knowledge, as I have experience in the topic of which I addressed, furthermore, I already know the specific people that I have 'handpicked', therefore producing valuable data. It is also a good way in creating an 'exploratory sample' as I am selecting the participants who I feel will give me the best insights into my research topic.   Theoretically imitating 'representative sample' as I will purposely be selecting a varied sample of ages which will help being a small-scale survey. Furthermore, my research is also an unexplored topic as mentioned earlier in my rationale.

My sampling frame was to target various personnel of varying hierarchy levels, genders, and sectors within the construction industry. Denscombe describes this as creating 'sample and response bias's, as I choose the participants of who I wished to take part, making it a 'researcher influenced selection'.   Therefore, it is 'non-probability' sampling as it is both 'purposive' and 'convenience' sampling. The audience I focused on was contacts within the industry and work colleagues. I selected an equal number of mixed genders, with differing roles and seniority levels in varying sectors within the construction industry to ensure my findings were derived from varying viewpoints.   As my research was to understand why men speak to women in an offensive way, I felt it would give me richer data and be unbiased if the genders were balanced. Furthermore, I believed it needed to be from differing job roles and hierarchy levels to understand if this behaviour derives from a power perspective, also if different sectors within the industry had an impact on my findings.

I initially made a list of participants from the criteria stated above of who I wanted to take part. For internal participants of whom I work with directly, I spoke to them to ask if they would be happy to participate. External contacts were emailed giving a brief on my project and asked if they were happy to be involved with my research.

Denscombe explains that to produce an exploratory sample you should not have fewer than thirty participants, however, due to COVID 19, several of my chosen participants had been furloughed, therefore reducing my original number from thirty down to eighteen. Denscombe states this could have had implications on my statistical analysis, furthermore, not producing valuable data. However, as you will read further on in my report within the findings and evaluation sections, this has not been the case.

Following their acceptance, I emailed all participants the consent forms to sign and return prior to sending out the questionnaires via Survey Monkey. My selection process was then based on the responses I received, as I had already set my criteria on who I wanted to take part. As mentioned, I was initially looking to approach thirty participants as I anticipated a seventy percent response. The final number that I sent out was eighteen and I received sixteen back.

Methods

I initially looked at using three methods; questionnaires, followed by one focus group and then my final step was to interview three of the participants in a semi-structured format. However, due to time constraints and the impact of COVID 19, I had to remove the focus group method, although research shows (Pini, 2002) that it enables connections made between individual and collective experiences. It can also drive discussions and reflexivity regarding gender issues, however, I still felt due to time and not being able to conduct the focus group face to face I would not get the results required. I also reduced the number of interviewees to two, again down to time constraints and participants availability.

Furthermore, the sample of research participants was designed to include mixed gender, demographics, and occupations, this was to ensure the findings were balanced and unbiased to any particular group.

My reasoning for choosing questionnaires (Denscombe, 2014) was for the ease of participants to complete at their own pace; however, I was mindful that by using this method I was not able to check that the responses were legitimate; therefore, I did not use pre coded answers. Furthermore, to allow the participants to answer freely, and ensuring I obtained greater data and to alleviate bias behavior. My questionnaires consisted of ten open ended questions designed specific to my research area. Ordinarily the research material would have been tested for validity, however, due to time constraints this did not happen.

I chose to use a web based survey for a number of reasons, firstly there was no cost for the number of questions I had in mind, and secondly time, as there are templates already set up, it is also an easy way to track the respondents, it is a trustworthy source and it confirms the legitimacy of the survey.

My initial proposal was to send out thirty questionnaires via "Survey Monkey". However, due to COVID 19 as mentioned within the sampling section, a number of my initial participants I had 'ear marked' were furloughed at the time, so I sent out eighteen and sixteen were completed, however one of the questionnaires did not have sufficient data to analyse leaving fifteen for analyse.

My initial thinking for the interviews was there may have been power relationships present within the focus groups that prevented some participants from having the opportunity to give detailed answers. However, after removing the focus group I felt it was important to continue with the interviews, therefore linking the common theme to questionnaires, as the data collated is derived from what the participants are telling you. Furthermore, allowing me to drill deeper into the data I had collated and analysed from the questionnaires. I chose two participants who had completed the questionnaires due to their responses to the questions, I felt there was more to unveil from their own personal experiences giving me a greater insight. Carrying out interviews also removed any errors that can arise from data entry.

As the researcher the agenda was set by myself with me leading the discussion using semi-structured questions, however, this did become an open discussion between myself and the interviewees. I have been mindful that the reliability can vary in consistency due to the topic and individuals.

The participants understood that I would be using the information discussed for my research and that it was in line with the ethics research as outlined within my ethics section below.

I conducted the interviews remotely via online platforms due to COVID 19, using Microsoft Teams. To ensure I fully captured everything discussed and with the consent of the participants., I audio-recorded the interviews, solely for my own studies.

Throughout my research I planned on making systematic observations on behavior's and patterns via colleagues within the workplace, this did not happen as planned as I had been furloughed and was working remotely from home.

My findings were recorded anonymously, referring to participants as clearly gendered pseudonyms.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the research taking place, I had to consider the following five main principles (Laerd, 2012) to adhere to throughout my research project process:

- To minimise risk or harm to all participants: My questions were "open ended". However, I remained mindful, that certain questions could trigger psychological distress and discomfort.
- I obtained informed consent from all involved in the research process: The forms where sent to all participants prior to the questionnaires being sent out, they were signed in electronic signature format and dated to confirm full consent.
- To protect their anonymity and remain confidential throughout I did the following: During my research, all participant names were only seen by myself, when writing up my findings I referred to the participants by clearly gendered pseudonyms. Any information that I received through discussions were solely used for analysis and not divulged to anyone else.
- Avoid the use of deception: Throughout the process I carried out systematic observations, I am aware that this could be perceived as "deception", as I would not have the persons consent of which I would be observing. All participants that consented to take part in my research were 100% voluntary.
- Within the participants consent form, it stated that they had the right to withdraw at any time: Should any participant had wished to withdraw during the process, I would have destroyed any data recorded via their involvement should they have requested.

As my project is industry wide and not linked directly to my organisation, I therefore gained consent from the University.

My research project proposal was approved by the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority (SSAHECDA). I also followed guidance given from the Student Ethics Checklist, of which I completed as part of my research project proposal.

Throughout my research project I have not been faced with any major ethical issues and no harm or distress befell the participants.
The only question presented to me by participants during in the initial 'recruitment' phase was regarding clarity of anonymity, however, my participants consent form confirmed complete anonymity.

Denscombe (Denscombe, 2014) states that it is important to carry out a risk assessment during a research project. I did consider the risks involved, and the risks presented where minimal, however, confidentiality did come to the forefront, but this was addressed and covered within my ethics checklist.
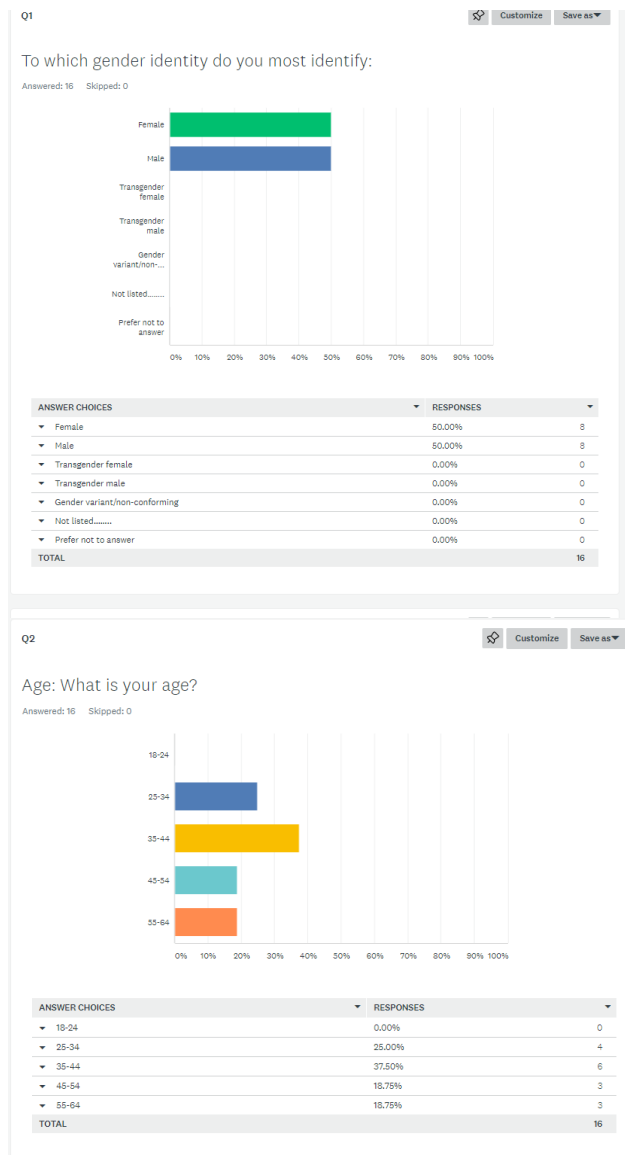
Results, Analysis and Findings

Results

I sent out eighteen questionnaires and received sixteen back, out of the sixteen one had very little data to analyse. Three questionnaires were sent to work colleagues, one of which was my director, the other two were administrative and a manager. The remaining fifteen were sent to contacts within the construction industry of differing seniority levels, ensuring a fair mix of gender and age.

They were open-ended questions, so there was not any 'soft' numerical data to analyse.
I then interviewed two of the participants following analysis of the questionnaires, as I felt there was more to reveal from their responses.

The questionnaires were sent out electronically via Survey Monkey and the interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded. The image below illustrates the split in gender and age. My data collection methods used can be found in Appendix 1 (online questionnaire) and Appendix 2 (interview questions).

Q1   Customize   Save as▼

To which gender identity do you most identify:
Answered: 16   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	50.00%	8
Male	50.00%	8
Transgender female	0.00%	0
Transgender male	0.00%	0
Gender variant/non-conforming	0.00%	0
Not listed.........	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		16

Q2   Customize   Save as▼

Age: What is your age?
Answered: 16   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-24	0.00%	0
25-34	25.00%	4
35-44	37.50%	6
45-54	18.75%	3
55-64	18.75%	3
TOTAL		16

Analysis

To prepare for the analysis, I printed off the responses from my questionnaires and made notes from the recordings of my interviews, then following the 'six themes' of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) I started by familiarising myself with the data, I then identified keywords creating a code (Braun & Clarke, 2013), following on from this, I then created a theme derived from the codes and analysis of my findings.

My questions for both the questionnaires and interviews were open ended and the data was from the same source. Therefore, there was no linkert-scale data to analyse. I refer to all participants by clearly gendered pseudonyms, to ensure complete anonymity throughout.

The word cloud below reveals the most frequently used words that I identified through the questionnaire and interview responses, the 'Theme Analysis' table illustrates how I created the themes from the participants responses.
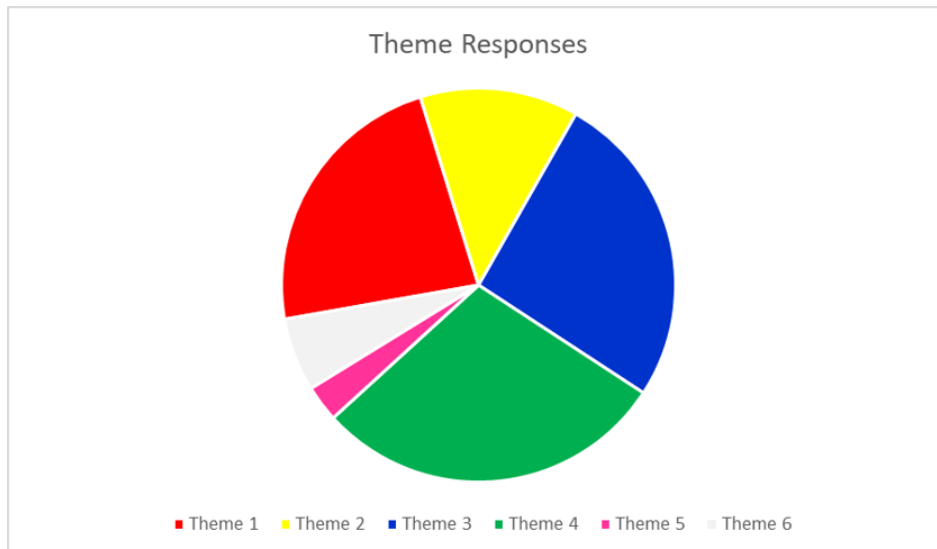
Theme Analysis Table

Theme 1 - Participants identified a need for educating and training	
Education of society, many people still lack the education and that is why we are not inclusive	Angela
Some males believe it okay to speak to women in an offensive way, I have to assume that they are not educated, I find it very difficult to believe that they would actually be aware that they were being offensive and still continued with their actions	Mick
Understanding by males of gender equality	Phil
We need to look at schools and promote the industry better for females	Samuel
Role modelling, calling out unacceptable behaviour, more training	Kelly
Companies to take a zero tolerance to offensive language towards women in the workplace	Susan
Unconscious bias training for all. Education about what is acceptable in terms of language and interaction	Anita
Theme 2 - Participants felt they had to accept behaviours out of fear	
I have experienced bad things on site, I feel I have to just get on with it. If I complain it is seen as causing a fuss or me not being tough enough for the industry. There is a lot of fear during these situations depending on the position of the individual to. As a sub-contractor I have to think of the company and repeat business rather than me.	Angela
Calling out bad behaviour is uncomfortable as people like to be liked	Andrea
I laugh off comments but replied with sarcasm to get my point across without it being uncomfortable for all	Susan
I have been made to feel very uncomfortable in corporate social environments	Anita
Theme 3 -Participants experiencing offensive and sexist language	
Stroking of my hair, crude language, sexist remarks & patronising behaviour	Angela
Uncomfortable comments about women, inappropriate sexual comments	Andrea
I have seen men make rude comments to women and have challenged them to respect women as they would men	Nathan
Derogatory terms used by males towards females / sexualising of females	Phil
Scaffolders abusing women passing by	Lee
Used to see derogatory sexist language, but less so now. Men typically more sexist	Kelly
	Susan

I have experienced comments like 'you should make the tea' and are you the 'PA', normally from older generation males. Also 'send a girl to site?!' *I was at a networking event when a man told me I could only become a member of a club if I slept with him. At another networking event a male property lawyer introduced me to a group of males and said 'she said you can feel her tits'. This has all been within the last 3 years*	Anita
Theme 4 - Participants believe more women are required in the industry and leadership roles	
There needs to be champions focusing entirely on diversity	Mick
Leadership to drive inclusivity	Andrea
Promotion of construction career paths and options at a younger age	Rebecca
Men need to accept that the industry is not exclusive to them and there is equality	Annabelle
Greater percentage of female workers required	Phil
Incorporate more women within the workforce at all levels, make construction careers more attractive to women	Lee
Wider opportunities for women in trade positions	Adam
Hire more women in senior roles, promote and develop within to grow into leadership roles	Susan
More women in senior leadership roles	Anita
Theme 5 - Participants felt power between genders was an issue	
I believe that many use their powers to continually endorse fear in others to make them feel more powerful. Females are assumed less competent, when a female gets something wrong that rights her off for any further comments/suggestions during that project	Angela
Theme 6 - Participants see culture as a lead cause	
Cultures need to change! There needs to be a vast cultural change so that mindsets change	Angela
Cultural changes in the way people behave, changes to working environments	Andrea

Findings

My findings during my research project unveiled data I was expecting to see, however, I was shocked by certain experiences some of the participants had faced. Furthermore, I also learnt that this issue runs far deeper than I first envisaged.

Below I have listed three of my themes with the responses that I identified to have the greatest need for change as demonstrated below. I have then summarised my interpretation of these findings.

Theme 1 - Participants identified a need for educating and training
Theme 2 - Participants felt they had to accept behaviours out of fear
Theme 3 -Participants experiencing offensive and sexist language
Theme 4 - Participants believe more women are required in the industry and leadership roles
Theme 5 - Participants felt power between genders was an issue
Theme 6 - Participants see culture as a lead cause

Theme 1 - Participants identified a need for educating and training
Angela said that there is requirement for educating society, as many people still lack the education and that is why we are not inclusive
Susan believes that companies need to take a zero tolerance to offensive language towards women in the workplace
Phil said that males need to understand gender equality
Mick assumed that the reason in which males speak to women in the way that they do is that they are not educated as he doesn't believe they would be aware that they are being offensive
Kelly said there needed to be role modelling and calling out unacceptable behaviour through training
Anita felt that unconscious bias training is required for all, educating about what is acceptable in terms of language and interaction

Theme 3 -Participants experiencing offensive and sexist language
Angela had experienced stroking of her hair, crude language, sexist remarks, and patronising behaviour
Andrea experienced uncomfortable comments about women and inappropriate sexual comments
Nathan has witnessed males make rude comments to woman and has challenged them to respect women as they would men
Phil said he hears derogatory comments used by males towards females and sexualising of women

Kelly used to see derogatory sexist language, but less so now, however she says men are typically more sexist
Susan has experienced comments like 'you should make the tea' and are you the 'PA', normally from older generation males. Also 'send a girl to site'?!?
Anita was at a networking event when a man told me I could only become a member of a club if I slept with him. At another networking event a male property lawyer introduced me to a group of males and said 'she said you can feel her tits'. This has all been within the last 3 years

Theme 4 - Participants believe more women are required in the industry and leadership roles

Mick suggests there needs to be champions focusing entirely on diversity
Andrea said it requires leadership to drive inclusivity
Rebecca believes promotion of construction career paths and options at a younger age
Annabelle believes men need to accept that the industry is not exclusive to them and there is equality
Phil says there is a greater percentage of female workers required
Lee suggests incorporating more women within the workforce at all levels, and make construction careers more attractive to women
Adam says wider opportunities for women in trade positions
Susan believes more woman should be hired in senior roles, promote, and develop within to grow into leadership roles
Anita says more woman in senior leadership roles

A few of the participants that had been in the industry for over ten years could see an improvement.
Kelly has been in the industry for thirty-one years and works for a large well-known main contractor and believes that things have improved over the years. However, Anita has also been in the industry for over ten years working in a senior position for a main contractor and over the last three years has experienced extremely inappropriate language and behaviour from males. Furthermore, Angela has been in the industry for seven and a half years working for a sub-contractor and has suffered appalling experiences.

I interviewed Nathan who has been in a senior role and worked in the industry for over ten years, for main contractors and manufacturers. He has witnessed men using offensive language towards women and 'called them out' for it. However, during the interview, although he feels it is wrong, he believes it is down to culture and 'just how men behave' and that there is no offense meant by it. He agrees that bringing more women into leadership roles would help.
I also interviewed Angela, who as I mentioned works for a sub-contractor at mid-level and has been in the industry for seven and a half years. She believes there is a real issue and many women are suffering and accepting this behaviour for fear of causing any awkwardness either in their job roles, relationships with clients and/or securing future work. Angela believes that this is a cultural issue and sees it related to 'power', being a predominantly male dominated industry. In her view by bringing more females into leadership roles would help in driving this behaviour out. This is a real issue that she experiences and witnesses regularly. Angela believes that men need to be educated on the effect their behaviour is having on women.

The type of company they worked for be it a small sub-contractor or large main contractor does not appear to be a contributing factor, through my findings I would suggest that this issue is a lot more common and widely spread than individuals would expect. In my view I believe it is linked to culture and not generalised to specific generations. Males seem to appreciate that this is an issue but do not appreciate the severity or impact it has on females.

Throughout the project I have explored a number of "Theoretical" secondary research; looking into journals and articles on behavior's and attitudes, this included "Psychological"

characteristics of men and women, (Archer, 2019). The findings showed that women scored a higher percentage in agreeableness, emotional intelligence, empathy and social interest. However, Men, by contrast, demonstrated that they can be more destructive, but are greater risk takers and impulsive. However, I opened my research into other industries, this was due to the lack of comparative research carried out on language use and behaviors within the construction industry. Research carried out over the years has predominantly been on the subject of women coming across barriers, in relation to career progression due to men's behaviour's, little research on the way in which men address and undermine women. Is it a mindset or an unconscious act? A large proportion of the research has also been outside of the United Kingdom, offering a differing cultural perception. However; some research does link to behaviours, "Women's progression in the work place" (Jones, 2019), this is focused on career development and gender pay gaps, but also acknowledging "boys club" with extensive research in to the disadvantage on networking events etc, this aligns itself greatly to my research findings and personal experience.

Smith-Cardineau (Smith-Cardineau, 16/10/2017) talks about language use and it being fused with cultural biases generally favouring men, and how language can be used to promote gender equality, however, this is mainly around 'gendered terminology' as in 'manpower' and 'man up'. She also talks about Hilary Clinton blaming women for being less powerful than men and that they themselves are to blame. Furthermore, Kelan (Kelan, 2009) explores gender discrimination and believes the onus is on women to overcome such obstacles. However, Atwood (Northouse, 2013:352) says '*We still think of a powerful man as a born leader and a powerful woman as an anomaly*'.

The Chartered Institute of Builders (2019) have recognised that there is a requirement for more women within the industry and the Equal Opportunities Commission say by breaking gender barriers down it will help in resolving this, however, I believe it is not just about breaking down barriers, moreover, it is about changing mindsets and the overall culture. Kark and Eagly (Kark & Eagly, 2010) state, we cannot have gender equality until leadership between men and women is shared equally. In my view by bringing more female leaders into the construction industry we can drive out offensive language and the unacceptable behaviour discovered in my findings.

My interpretations:

- Participants believed there was a real need for educating males on the use of language and behaviour towards females and the effect it has on them.
- In my view it is connected to culture, as my findings suggest this is a cultural issue and training should be given to address this.
- It revealed that there was a requirement for more females within leadership roles and within the construction industry.
- Female participants felt they had to accept these behaviours due to concern over their careers and/or future working relationships.
- There was a mixed response on whether it was specific to generations and if behaviours had improved over the years, a larger percentage of males felt it had, however, only a small percentage of women felt this was the case.
- My findings revealed that most females had experienced sexist and inappropriate language/behaviour, varying in levels of offensiveness.
- There was some evidence that this happens as it gives men the 'upper hand' and makes them feel more powerful. Their behaviour varied in different environments, in formal meetings it was more about power, however, in less formal settings like networking events, it was discovered that the language and behaviour was very much a 'boys club' scenario with sexist remarks and quite shocking behaviour.

Conclusion(s)

The evidence from my findings clearly illustrates that there is an issue with offensive language use and general unacceptable behaviour from men towards women, this is not isolated to any specific environment or size of the organisation. Men need to be educated on unacceptable behaviour and companies need to support and drive this. Whether this is derived from an unconscious act or they believe this is culturally acceptable, it is not, and change needs to happen. The key areas identified were the need for training and educating and more females in leadership roles to ensure parity between men and women. Although some of the larger construction companies have dedicated diversity and inclusion teams this is not enough alone.

Recommendations

Following on from my conclusion, I would recommend the following:

- That my findings be published to large organisations within the construction industry, key players, and influencers to drive this industry wide, one particular construction company was the first in the industry to be awarded the 'National Equality Standard' in 2017, this needs to be driven through the industry and down through supply chains.
- Human Resource and Equality & Diversity practitioners need to put together new Policies / Codes of Practice on language use and unacceptable behaviour and Zero Tolerance policies.
- The industry needs to look at having 'Champions' and bringing more women in to leadership roles.
- This message needs to be taken to networking events and conferences to highlight the findings to a wider audience.
- Hold seminars with actors conducting 'role plays' with the scenarios discovered in my findings so 'males' can envisage the impact this has on women in a real-life setting.
- Carry out focus groups in six months' time.
- Due to this being a small-scale research project and time restraints, I would suggest further research be undertaken on a larger scale in the future.

Evaluation

Following completion of my research, I am pleased with the findings I discovered through my questionnaires, however, I feel the interviews did not necessarily add as much depth to my findings as I initially envisaged, this was down to me only interviewing two participants, due to time. Furthermore, I would have held one or two focus groups, however, I removed them due to time constraints and the changes COVID 19 posed. I would not have been able to conduct them in a natural setting as in 'face to face', and in my view this would not have given me the open discussions I had first hoped for. However, I do feel my research will have the impact I desired, and my findings will be taken seriously.

Reflections on my leadership skills development

At the beginning of my research project I was concerned as to whether people would take it seriously, this was down to me lacking belief in myself, I felt it required researching but I used to question myself if others would feel the same. However, the research project has taught me to value my own ideas and opinions and not doubt myself. I have spent a lot of time reflecting and feel I have learnt a great deal throughout this journey, aligning to my original leadership skills gap.

My first development need was 'Understanding Myself', my second development need was 'Believing in Myself'. I now understand why I feel/do/react in certain ways, as I am worrying how others may judge me. However, although I now believe in myself more, this is an ongoing development need to truly become my 'ideal-self'.

Throughout my project I have gained a greater understanding of myself, by following the cycle of Boyatzi's 'Theory of Self-Directed Learning' (Goleman, 2002), I have learnt to experiment with new behaviours by revisiting the cycle and reflecting on why I have thought and acted the way I do in situations, it has provoked change in my behavioural pattern and helped me on my journey to becoming my 'ideal self' and developing my 'self-awareness'. Furthermore, Manz et al (1986) (Tat & Zeitel-Bank, 2013) states, developing 'self-leadership' is a vital part in emotional competence and by focusing on the process of self-influencing, you can control your own behaviour, thereby influencing and leading oneself into developing 'self-awareness', therefore, being aware of your own actions. Furthermore, by influencing and leading myself it will make me a more successful leader. Manz & Simms (1987) state self-observation will increase overall self-awareness and self-focus, as Neck & Manz (2013) say, to lead others well we first need to lead ourselves efficiently.

The highlight for me was when I looked back through my learning journal, I had written a note in July regarding two specific comments, one participant had said that they loved what I was researching, another participant thought the questions within my questionnaire were very good, receiving this feedback gave me the reassurance and encouragement that I needed at that time.

My overall leadership style has not changed and I still feel I am an Authentic leader (Northouse, 2013), however, I feel I am more emotionally aware and believe that opinions are that of the 'individual', whether we agree or not, it is their/my opinion. Therefore, to enhance and develop my leadership skills it is not only key for me to listen, but equally learning to 'speak up', no 'one' 'individual' idea or opinion is wrong. Sinek quotes (Sinek, 2014:3) *'If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader'*

Reflections on the research process

Conducting the research project has not been an easy process for me, this has been for a number of reasons, firstly COVID 19, therefore removing any face to face support from the university and having to carry out the proposed methods of research in new ways via web based platforms. I had not long returned to work from being furloughed when the project started. My son also started secondary school in the first week of September.

However, I would say that I have learnt a great deal, I am now more confident with my own ideas and opinions which I can transfer into my professional life to progress in my career and in leading others.

Furthermore, by keeping a learning journal it gave me the reflexivity required during the research process, I had recorded throughout June that my proposal ideas and process may need to change due to COVID 19, I was then concerned that this would impact on the responses I received. I was also anxious how my questions in my questionnaire would be perceived. On the 29th June I had written 'good responses', however, I had noted that maybe I should have worded my last question differently, this helped me in reflecting and preparing my questions for my interviews.

I feel overall it has been a great experience, throughout the lows and highs, it has challenged me and pushed me out of my normal boundaries, therefore, I believe enhancing my skill set personally and professionally Furthermore, I have learnt to break tasks down in to sections to alleviate the sense of being overwhelmed when faced with writing a project report, and to keep simplicity to allow the reader to follow and understand the primary rationale. Learning to reflect has given me greater insight into myself as a person and understanding the fundamentals of leadership.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire
Appendix 2: Interview Questions
Appendix 3: Ethics Form
Appendix 4 – Participants Consent Form

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

The questions below are purely for analytical purpose, your identity will remain anonymous throughout my research. However, if you are not comfortable answering any of the questions, you do not have to.

1. To which gender identity do you most identify:
- Female
- Male
- Transgender female
- Transgender male
- Gender variant/non-conforming
- Not listed……..
- Prefer not to answer

2. Age: What is your age?
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64

3. Ethnic origin:

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

4. How long have you worked in the Construction Industry?

5. Have you ever experienced or witnessed offensive language used by the opposite sex? If yes, please explain the situation / circumstance in which this occurred.

6. If you have experienced offensive language, did you feel you had to accept this with fear of causing an issue with your job/position?

7. In your opinion does language used differs dependent on gender?

8. In your opinion do you believe males think it is acceptable to speak to women in an offensive way?

9. What in your opinion needs to be done to make the industry more inclusive?

10. Dependent on the environment, be it a formal meeting to a networking event. Do you find that you are spoken to, or spoken about differently in these settings?

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, how do you believe educating and training males will help?

2. How deep routed to do you feel this issue really is?

3. In your opinion, why do you believe this happens?

4. Do you believe this to be a culture related or is there more to it?

5. Why do you think having more women in leadership roles will help?

6. What would you suggest would help in overcoming the issue women are facing?

Appendix 3 – Ethics Form

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE - CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned *[please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS]*

……

of *[please provide contact details here sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as email address and/or contact telephone number*

……..……….

hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled
"Systematic Gendering – A study of language use in the Construction Industry"

Please note that this Research is being undertaken under the UH Protocol Agreement number cBUS/6FBS1483/UCSA/03004(1) and that you may contact the Project Supervisor named below at the contact email address (below) should you have any queries

1. I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed, and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

2. I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

3. In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice, video or photo-recording will take place and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

4. I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

5. I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or has put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

Signature of participant (below)

………………………………………………………………….   Date…………………………

Signature of Student investigator (below)

K. Wills

………………………………………………………………………   Date…18/06/20…………

Name of Student investigator

Katie Wills

Name(s) and email Addresse(s) of Supervisor(s) – 2020 Projects
David Griffiths – d.griffiths5@herts.ac.uk
Chandra Tester - Chandravali.Tester@oaklands.ac.uk

Appendix 4 – Participant Information Form

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ('ETHICS COMMITTEE')

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study

"Systematic Gendering – A study of language use in the Construction Industry"

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the research that is being done and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University's regulations governing the conduct of studies involving human participants can be accessed via this link:

http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/secreg/upr/RE01.htm

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of this study?

My research aims and objectives are to drive for a more inclusive industry, ensuring a better understanding of the impact certain behaviors have on women, by unveiling that this goes on and how wide the problem is. My goal is to primarily promote greater self-understanding for myself and that of others within the industry. Furthermore, enabling a better understanding of experiences of people, allowing for human resource and equality and diversity practitioners to look at implications; therefore, having the opportunity to create new policy documents. Finally, to ensure personnel take this issue seriously.

Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect any treatment/care that you may receive (should this be relevant).

How long will my part in the study take?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for the programme duration of up to three months.

What will happen to me if I take part?

All information gathered during the research will remain anonymous.

What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?

None

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
You will be helping the research project explore the reasons behind the subject and assisting in formulating a possible resolution to it which will enrich future generations.

How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
The programme will follow the ethical guidelines of the University of Hertfordshire and any information collected will be treated as strictly confidential and any views given will be non-attributable to any employee.

What will happen to the data collected within this study?
All data collated will be analysed and used to produce my final report, the findings will only be seen by the university. I will also give feedback to each participant.

Who has reviewed this study?
This study has been reviewed by the University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is cBUS/6FBS1483/UCSA/03004(1)

Who can I contact if I have any questions?
If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me, in writing, by phone or by email:

Researcher: Katie Wills
07513 505237 / willskatie@yahoo.co.uk

University contacts:
David Griffiths – d.griffiths5@herts.ac.uk
Chandra Tester - Chandravali.Tester@oaklands.ac.uk

Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar.

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.