



Making the Tea or Making it to the Top? How Gender Stereotypes Impact Women Fundraisers' Careers

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In a female-dominated profession, women fundraisers still face gender stereotypes, discrimination, and harassment, affecting their hiring, promotions, and credibility. This research explores structural barriers, gendered expectations, and their impact on career progression and leadership in philanthropy.

- Which forms of gender-based stereotyping and harassment do women fundraisers experience?
- How do gendered expectations shape leadership opportunities and professional credibility in philanthropy?
- What actions can be taken to dismantle barriers for women fundraisers?

The authors highlight workplace inequalities, provides valuable insights for women fundraisers on navigating gendered expectations, and encourages philanthropy leaders to foster more inclusive and equitable work environments.

[#women](#) [#feministanalysis](#) [#genderdiscrimination](#) [#sexualharassment](#)

Background

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Context



- Prior research shows that while women dominate the nonprofit sector numerically, men disproportionately occupy leadership positions, enjoy higher salaries, and benefit from a "glass escalator" that fast-tracks their advancement. This study, framed within **feminist analysis and nonprofit scholarship**, expands on these insights by providing empirical data on the **gendered experiences of fundraisers**.
- The authors conducted:
 - **A survey** of 790 members of the UK's Institute of Fundraising, of whom 91% of respondents were women.
 - **Three focus groups** with 15 female fundraisers to explore career progression barriers and coping strategies.
- Despite the perception that nonprofits are mission-driven and egalitarian, the research underscores how **patriarchy, racism, and classism persist in nonprofit organizational structures** and recognizes that factors like race, age, and disability compound women's challenges in the sector.

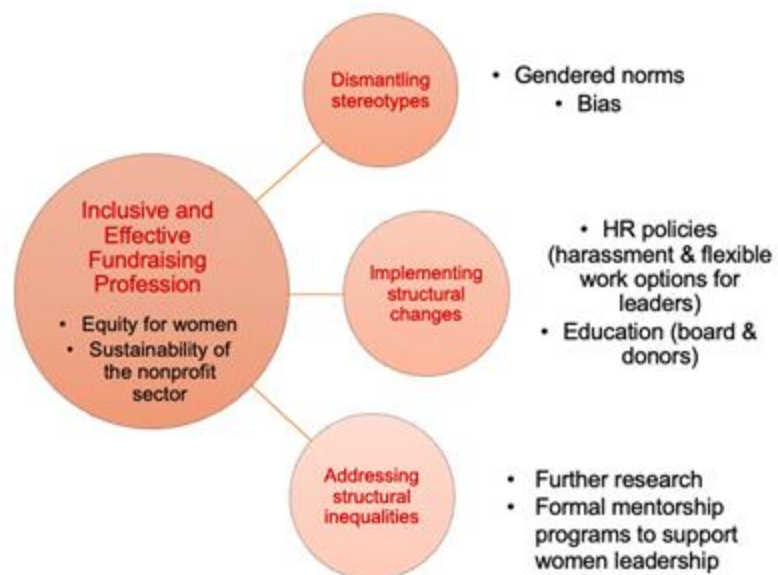
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Take aways & Learnings



- **Gendered Assumptions about Women Fundraisers.** They frequently encounter expectations that align with traditional gender roles, including being **less committed** due to caregiving responsibilities, facing questions about **marriage, fertility, and family planning** in professional settings, and being expected to perform "**female**" **office tasks**, such as making tea or taking meeting minutes.
- **Undermining of women's professionalism.** Female fundraisers often experience "**mansplaining**" or being ignored in meetings. Board members and donors assume junior male colleagues hold **higher authority** than their more senior female counterparts, and that women lack expertise in **technical fields like data analysis**.
- **Everyday Sexism and Sexual Harassment.** Women are **pressured to use their appearance or flirtation** to secure donations. Sexual harassment is often **dismissed or normalized**, making it harder for women to report.
- **The role of age, race, class, disability and sexual orientation in discrimination.** Younger women are often seen as **less competent**, while older women are assumed to lack **career ambition**. Women of colour and those from working-class backgrounds report **feeling excluded from professional networks**. LGBTQ+ and disabled fundraisers face **additional layers of stereotyping every day**.



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