

## What is the role of men in sex and gender equality?

This was the topic of discussion on EOC's third episode of Sex and Prejudice and the panel of experts delivered on their ability to provide thought provoking discussions as well as short-and long-term solutions.

The episode was aired in partnership with TTT on Tuesday 14 June, 2022.

Speaking on the show, Omar Mohammed, Director of CAISO: Sex & Gender Justice and CEO of The Cropper Foundation, said self-inspection by men is crucial for sex and gender equality. This introspection is important especially for intergenerational dialogue as it is the accepted societal norm for boys to figure things out by themselves and not really require help from anyone because that would make them look weak. He said, "we need to eradicate this notion and provide spaces for boys to express how they feel so they won't realize in ten, fifteen, twenty years later that they could have done things differently."

Amílcar Sanatan, Gender and Development Specialist was also on hand to offer his perspective and echoed Mohammed's sentiments. He said, "we need to work with young men to sometimes connect those feelings and not point fingers and say it's their responsibility alone. We need to build a movement of people to build their confidence to have that empowerment in their own lives."

He further pointed out that young men in particular, should be engaged in discussion to unlearn some of the ideologies taught to them through culture and society. For him, jobs in the economy and household responsibilities are commonly understood as gendered but there must be a national effort to remove the barriers from professions and care responsibilities to ensure the equal participation and contribution of women and men.

Dr. Safeeya Mohammed, CEO, SISU Global Wellness also contributed to the discussion and said that the problem and solution lies within the family, particularly parenting. She put forward that there are stereotypical roles that have been assigned to men and women such as woman being the primary caregiver and the men as the primary breadwinner. She said, "we also need to change these typical words that we are accustomed to hearing, for instance if a young boy falls, we say don't cry like a girl or if a young girl wants to lead and define certain roles, we say she is being too bossy and introduce gender responsive parenting."

Kirk Quevedo, Co-founder of Brothers Against Violence On Women (BRAVOW), emphasized that men should acknowledge that they are part of the problem, but they are also part of the solution. Quevedo said that boys and men learn a certain adversarial language, a language of conquest on the street, that is a part of our culture. "So,

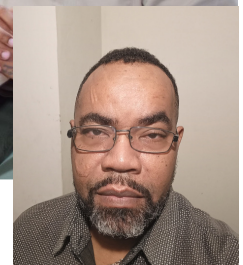


Mr. Omar Mohammed  
Director CAISO Sex and Gender Justice

Mr. Amílcar Sanatan  
Gender and Development Specialist



Dr. Safeeya Mohammed  
CEO, SISU Global Wellness



Mr. Kirk Quevedo  
Co-founder, Brothers Against  
Violence on Women BRAVOW

the notion of 'hit it, jam it and ram it and beat it out' is a language of violence which is learnt from a young age. However, educating men on this subject matter can be difficult as many of them don't realize that there is a problem, and we are a part of the problem."

Kirk added, "we live in a society which refuses on some level to accept or appreciate that we have a rape culture". He explained that we have a social structure that somewhat supports the notion that men are entitled to sex and we are afraid to call it out. However, we have to call it out and do something about it. As individuals, groups and even on a governmental level there are many things we could do to create a safer society.

He said that BRAVOW will continue to play its part by educating men and boys on how to break free of the "Man Box" by challenging masculine stereotypes and societal norms that endorse harmful gender roles that promote Gender Inequality. BRAVOW has also helped men recognize that their silence is affirming and when they choose not to speak out against men's violence.

# EOC On the Ground Again!

Last month, the EOC held its first on-site inclusivity training session since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The first recipient to benefit from the interactive session was Caribbean Welding Supplies Limited (CWSL Group). EOC staff went to the CWSL group's head office to deliver the presentation on sexual harassment.

The EOC offers FREE training to organisations to promote an inclusive workplace. The EOC also provides guidance to employers that are formulating or updating inclusive policies. Some of the topics include sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace and disability. Over the last two years, the sessions were facilitated virtually but the EOC is now offering these sessions physically, virtually or as a hybrid.

The 27 CWSL staff members received expert guidance on preventing and managing sexual harassment in the workplace through a digital presentation. Cheryl-Ann Peters, Legal Officer I led the presentation and was assisted by Investigative Officer 1, Natalia Hosein, as well as the Corporate Communications team.

Staff were treated to a pop quiz with prizes and skits during the presentation on sexual harassment. At the end of the session, all staff members enthusiastically participated in a trivia, where it was evident that they truly understood the scope of sexual harassment and how they can play a part in preventing such behaviour.

Commenting on this interactive approach, Shelly Dolabaille, Manager- Corporate Communications at the EOC said, "we wanted to take full advantage of all the benefits that physical presentations have to offer and incorporated interactive strategies. CWSL staff were fully engaged and participated every step of the way. We received great feedback as well."

Using the evaluation forms that were collected from the attendees, the Research Unit at the EOC put together a report to determine the success of the first on-location programme. The data revealed that 92.31% of participants rated the session a success. While it is imperative for employers to implement sexual harassment guidelines and policies, education sessions like these are equally important as it encourages all employees to strive toward creating a positive environment free from harassment and discrimination of any kind.



Cheryl-Ann Peters, Legal Officer I led the presentation



CWSL and EOC staff members

## Topics Covered At Session

- What is sexual harassment?
- What does not constitute sexual harassment?
- Dimensions to sexual harassment
- Sexual harassment in the world of work
- Forms of sexual harassment and how does sexual harassment manifest?
- Mechanisms to Prevent Sexual Harassment and to Respond to cases of sexual harassment
- Effects of sexual harassment on the organisation and the employee
- What should a sexual harassment policy entail?



**The EOC offers FREE training to organisations to promote an inclusive workplace. We are offering these sessions physically, virtually or as a hybrid.**

**TOPICS**

- What is the Equal Opportunity Commission?
- Discrimination in employment, education, accommodation and goods & services
- Accommodating persons with disabilities
- What is the EOC's complaint process and jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal?
- LGBTQI+ workplace inclusion
- Sexual harassment in the workplace
- COVID-19 Guidance for Employers



**To request an inclusivity training session email: [communications@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:communications@eoc.gov.tt).**



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**WORLD POPULATION DAY**

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**EOC publishes a column every Monday on page 14 of the Newsday. In case you missed it here is our column that was published on Monday 6th June**

# Differences between race ethnicity

Data collected at the Commission shows that in many instances, members of the public are unable to differentiate between race and ethnicity. In most cases complaints are lodged using the two characteristics otherwise known as status grounds, either incorrectly or interchangeably. For this reason, even though it is factually incorrect, the Equal Opportunity Commission ('EOC/Commission') groups race and ethnicity under the same header when collating data.

This column attempts to clarify the two status grounds so that the Commission can better assist the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. Please note that race and ethnicity are two of seven status grounds covered by the Equal Opportunity Act. These are: race, ethnicity, sex, marital status, origin including geographic origin, disability and religion.

Race, according to the field of anthropology is biological in nature. It consists of physical characteristics from one's genetic ancestry. Example skin, hair, and eye colour, bone and jaw structure and the tendency towards certain diseases among other things.

However, ethnicity is both social and cultural. It is based on identity with a group sharing similar traits, such as common language, heritage, culture, geographic region, foods and diets, and faith. Ethnicity derives from tradition and customs.

To understand the difference, think about the race and ethnicity of Caribbean people. A person's race may be black but ethnically, they identify as Trinbagonian.

Persons may have different social experiences based on their race, regardless



of their ethnicity. These persons may experience racism and be treated differently based on the belief that a particular race possesses distinct characteristics or qualities, that distinguishes them as inferior or superior to another.

A person of a particular race under normal circumstances cannot change their race to avoid this social experience, but a person can adopt or deny ethnic affiliations. Example, one can consider leaving a religious doctrine (e.g. Hinduism) for another (e.g. Presbyterian) or an individual moving from one geographic middle-income area and moving to a geographic upper income area.

Why is it difficult to untangle the meaning of race and ethnicity? Historically, the word 'race' originally functioned much like the word 'ethnicity'. Race referred to groups of people connected by a common descent or origin. A person's race, referred to their culture, ancestry, and sometimes language and religion. Race and ethnicity were sometimes used not to describe a person's physical features or ancestral origin, but to oppress a person who was perceived to be different.

Persons who identify as a particular race or ethnicity experience obstacles, sometimes systemic, that limit their opportunities. Where someone is treated less favourably due their race or ethnicity, this constitutes discrimination. Race and ethnicity are protected status grounds or characteristics under Section 4 of the Equal Opportunity Act,

Chapter 22:03.

A specific example of a complaint that the Commission received under the status ground race included:

I. When an employee ('complainant') claimed that he had not been promoted by this employer on account of his race. A specific example of complaint that the Commission received under the status ground ethnicity included:

II. When a student at a school ('complainant') claimed that she was removed from classes because of her natural hairstyle.

In conclusion, the Commission hopes this article would better inform the citizens and prospective complainants of the differences between race and ethnicity as it pertains to discrimination.

Members of the public can lodge a complaint using any of the options listed on the Commission's website:

[www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt).

Monday 13th June

# Try conciliation instead of litigation

When we conduct our free inclusivity training sessions with organisations or when we do public education exercises, we explain the complaints process at the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) from the point of lodging a complaint to a resolution of the matter via conciliation. In some cases, we are asked about the process of conciliation and what typically happens at a session. This column seeks to provide clarity on the process of conciliation and how it is a helpful and beneficial tool.

Conciliation is an alternative out-of-court dispute resolution process in which the parties in a dispute seek to reach an amicable resolution with the assistance of a Conciliator, who acts as a neutral third party. What this means for our customers, is that they can utilize the Conciliation process to be the architects of a resolution to their dispute.

When a person lodges a complaint with EOC, we receive, investigate and as far as possible, conciliate the complaint. What this means is that once the complaint has been filed, the Legal Services Unit at the EOC will receive and investigate the matter. After investigation, if the matter is referred to conciliation, the parties to the dispute have the opportunity at the conciliation process, to listen to each other, clarify issues that may have led to the dispute and craft a resolution that is suitable for both parties.

When a complainant has decided to file a complaint at the EOC, they will already be in some sort of distress because of the perceived discrimination and will like a quick resolution to the conflict. Conciliation is a useful tool that addresses the distress this person is feeling and provides an alternative to going to court. Many persons who feel they have been discriminated against are reluctant or even afraid to report the matter because they dread getting into a pro-



tracted court process. The good news is that they do not have to – they can use the conciliation process to resolve the matter in an informal, quick and cost-effective way. Conciliation gives the person who made the complaint (the complainant) and the person or organization being complained about (the respondent) the opportunity to talk about the issues in the complaint and try to resolve the matter themselves.

The conciliation process is quite unlike a court hearing, and we will now explain some of the appealing features of conciliation:

- An attorney is NOT essential at conciliation. Although parties can have support persons including attorneys present, the process is informal and the parties to the dispute engage in dialogue, led by the conciliator, to work out a resolution.

- A process of empowerment and self-determination - The philosophical underpinning of conciliation is that the parties to a dispute can come to a voluntary, unforced decision based on informed choices. The act of designing your own settlement is empowering.

- Expedient resolution of the dispute – this means that the conciliation process can be completed in a relatively short time frame. This is a benefit to parties who have no desire to have their matter in the court system for years and out of their control.

- The agreement made in conciliation is binding. When parties have reached a resolution in conciliation, an agreement is prepared by the conciliator and reviewed and signed by both parties. Once signed it, becomes

binding on both parties and then sent to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal to be registered as a court order.

- The process is private and confidential– discussions and agreements are kept confidential and away from the public and possible media scrutiny.

- Conciliation at the EOC is FREE

- Conciliation is NOT like a court hearing. The person who manages the conciliation (the conciliator) does not decide who is right or wrong or how the complaint should be resolved. The role of the Conciliator is to help both parties talk to each other and try to reach an agreement.

There are four categories in which a complaint can be made – employment, accommodation, education and goods/services. Within these categories, the complaint must fall within one of the seven status grounds included in the Equal Opportunity Act; that of - race, religion, sex, marital status, ethnicity, origin (including place of origin) and disability.

Monday 20th June

# Discrimination on religious grounds

THE EQUAL Opportunity Act, Chap 22:03, prohibits discrimination based on religion. Religious discrimination refers to treating individuals (eg employees, customers, tenants, students) differently because of their religious beliefs and practices, and/or their request for accommodations associated with those beliefs and practices.

Religious discrimination may manifest itself in several ways and can be founded on a person's religious affiliations, characteristics, perceptions, or stigma associated with any religion. The act protects people who were discriminated based on their religion (one of seven status grounds) under the categories of employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation.

For instance, under the category of employment, employers are encouraged to provide reasonable accommodations to employees or prospective employees to practise their religious beliefs. An employer should not schedule activities that conflict with a person's religious needs unless they can prove that not doing so will impose an undue financial hardship. For example, scheduling a meeting or workshop that clashes with a person's observance of the Sabbath.

In the act, there are certain exceptions that are made based on religion. For example, discrimination on the ground of religion in a case where being of a particular religion is a necessary qualification for employment in a religious shop; a commercial enterprise that trades predominately in religious items. Also, under the act, "offensive behaviour" does not apply to acts committed in a place of public worship,



which means a church, mandir, temple, mosque or other similar building or temporary structure in which religious activities are conducted, whether permanently, intermittently or temporarily. Section 25 of the act lists three exemptions for religious bodies. The act shall not apply to:

(a) the ordination or appointment of priests, ministers of religion or members of a religious order;

(b) the training or education of people seeking ordination or appointment as priests, ministers of religion or members of a religious order; or

© the employment of people in any school, college or institution under the direction or control of such a body being employment of people in a manner that conforms with the doctrines of that religion or is necessary to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of the adherents of that religion.

Further, the act provides for a panel of advisers to the commission comprising representatives of every principal religion in Trinidad and Tobago. This panel is appointed by the Attorney General. The commission, whenever considering a complaint of discrimination on the grounds of religion, consults with and considers the opinions of the panel in making its decision.

The commission continues to advocate for a balanced approach to issues of re-

ligious beliefs in the categories of education, employment, the provision of goods and services and the provision of accommodation. It encourages employers and employees to find practical resolutions, wherever possible.

This proactive step averts any potential complaints of religious discrimination and probable legal disputes. It is in the interests of every individual to attempt to find reasonable solutions through discussion, mutual respect and, where practical, mutual accommodation.

If a person has been discriminated against based on their religion, they can lodge a complaint at the Equal Opportunity Commission. To do so, visit our website:

**[www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt)**

Monday 27th June

# Difference between sex and gender

SEX AND gender are sometimes used interchangeably but they are not the same, a distinction important to note, as the Equal Opportunity Act protects against discrimination on the ground of sex (and six other status grounds) but not on the ground of gender. However, the act also prohibits a separate category of conduct known as “offensive behaviour,” which is akin to hate speech in public, and one of the grounds on which hate speech is prohibited is gender.

According to the World Health Organization, sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristic that define male and females, for example different reproductive organs, different levels of certain hormones and chromosomes. Gender is socially constructed and refers to social roles, responsibilities, behaviours, attitudes and identities deemed particular to men and women, and boys and girls, as a consequence of social, cultural and historical factors. In many ways, gender is an identity – a personal sense of how that person conceptualises their own gender, which may not be the same as their biological or physiological characteristics. There are more than two genders including male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, and all, none or a combination of these.

Male and female are sex categories, whereas masculine and feminine are gender categories.

Femininity refers to the cultural expectations we have of girls and women, while masculinity refers to the expectations we have of boys and men. This is reflected, for instance, in children’s toys where girls’ toys are largely domestic in nature, such as dollies, doll houses and cooking utensils, or in statements such as, “the woman’s place



## **Assigning attributes or characteristics to an individual based on that person’s sex can lead to stereotyping and can have negative consequences that limit a person’s rights and access to opportunities.**

is in the house” or “young ladies need to be seen and not heard.”

Similarly, toys for boys can range from cars, fire trucks, doctor’s equipment, and construction machinery or in statements such as “men don’t cry” or “be a man.”

Assigning attributes or characteristics to an individual based on that person’s sex can lead to stereotyping and can have negative consequences that limit a person’s rights and access to opportunities. For instance, a woman may not be considered before an interview panel for a post in a technical field such as engineering, technology or mechanics because men stereotypically excel in these fields. Even further, a young woman’s dream may be limited because of societal narratives that say she will not excel in the above listed fields.

One way to determine whether you have been discriminated against based on your sex is to use a comparator. This

means looking at the treatment of one person of a particular sex compared to someone else in a similar circumstance. If someone is treated unfavourably, while the person in a similar circumstance is treated favourably because of their sex, then discrimination has occurred.

An example is if a man applies to a culinary school but is denied entry simply because he is a man or there are a certain number of spots assigned for male students. Another example is a woman being denied service at an auto shop because women may generally be viewed as not being knowledgeable about maintaining or fixing a vehicle. Also, men and women in the workplace occupying the same post with similar merit but there is a disparity in salary.

In all of these instances, they can lodge a complaint at the Equal Opportunity Commission. We will receive, investigate and conciliate the matter.

Discrimination must occur under four broad categories: employment, education, provision of goods and services, and provision of accommodation.

If you have been discriminated against based on your sex, you can lodge a complaint at the Equal Opportunity Commission by visiting our website:

**[www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt)**

Monday 4th July

# Discrimination based on marital status

**THE EQUAL Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination based on a person's marital status (along with five other status grounds). According to the act, marital status means the status or condition of being: (a) single; (b) married; (c) married but living separately and apart from one's spouse; (d) divorced; or (e) widowed.**

The act protects people who are discriminated against based on their marital status in the broad categories of employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation.

## Employment

It is an unlawful practice for an employer to treat an employee or prospective employee differently based on the individual's marital status or assumed marital status. This may include refusing to hire or employ the person, refusing to select a person for a training programme or any other benefit associated with the position, terminating an employee and even discriminating against a person in remuneration for their services or in the terms and conditions of their employment.

However, the employer may ask questions about marital status based on company policy for related employees. For instance, the employer can ask a job applicant if they have a spouse working within the company if the company is attempting to prevent collusion or corruption or has a policy to refuse to place spouses in a position that:

- \* Places close relatives in a direct supervisor-employee relationship.
- \* The work involves a potential conflict of interest.

\* It reduces workplace problems of morale.



\* There are workplace hazards increased by employees in a close relationship.

## Education

Under the category of education, the act protects both students and applicants from discrimination based on their marital status. For instance, reserving spots in a part-time degree programme only for applicants who are married and enrolling applicants who are otherwise single, divorced or widowed in the full-time programme. For students who are currently enrolled, discrimination includes limiting the student's access to any benefits, facilities or services provided by the educational establishment.

## Provision of goods and services

This board category covers any person concerned with the provision of goods, facilities and services to the public. The act also states that this category applies "whether or not for payment,"

which means that the person does not have to pay for an item or service to qualify to lodge a complaint. It also means that even services that are done pro bono are covered by the act.

## Provision of accommodation

Under this category, a person should not discriminate against someone based on their marital status in the terms in which the accommodation is offered, refusing an application for accommodation or giving precedence to someone else based on marital status. Also, the act is clear that a person should not

be denied access or limited access to any benefit connected with the accommodation or evicting a person based on their marital status.

One example is a landlord who specifies "married couples only" when posting an advertisement to rent an apartment. The landlord can argue that they view a married couple as financially stable and would be more likely to pay their rent on time, compared to a person who is single, divorced or widowed.

Landlords should refrain from making determinations about a potential tenant's payment capabilities or any other pre-conceived biases based on status. This is discrimination on the grounds of a person's marital status under the category of "provision of accommodation".

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) is aware that the act in its current format excludes cohabitational relationships in the definition of marital status. In an effort to broaden its protective authority, the EOC proactively submitted amendments to the Attorney General in 2011, one of which includes that the definition of marital status be amended to include commonlaw relationships.

The commission continues to promote equality of opportunity and inclusivity for all through its campaigns, programmes, public education and training sessions, and other free services. To lodge a complaint of discrimination on the grounds of marital status under one of the broad categories mentioned in this column, visit the EOC's website at [www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt). There are step-by-step instructions to lodge a complaint using three available options.