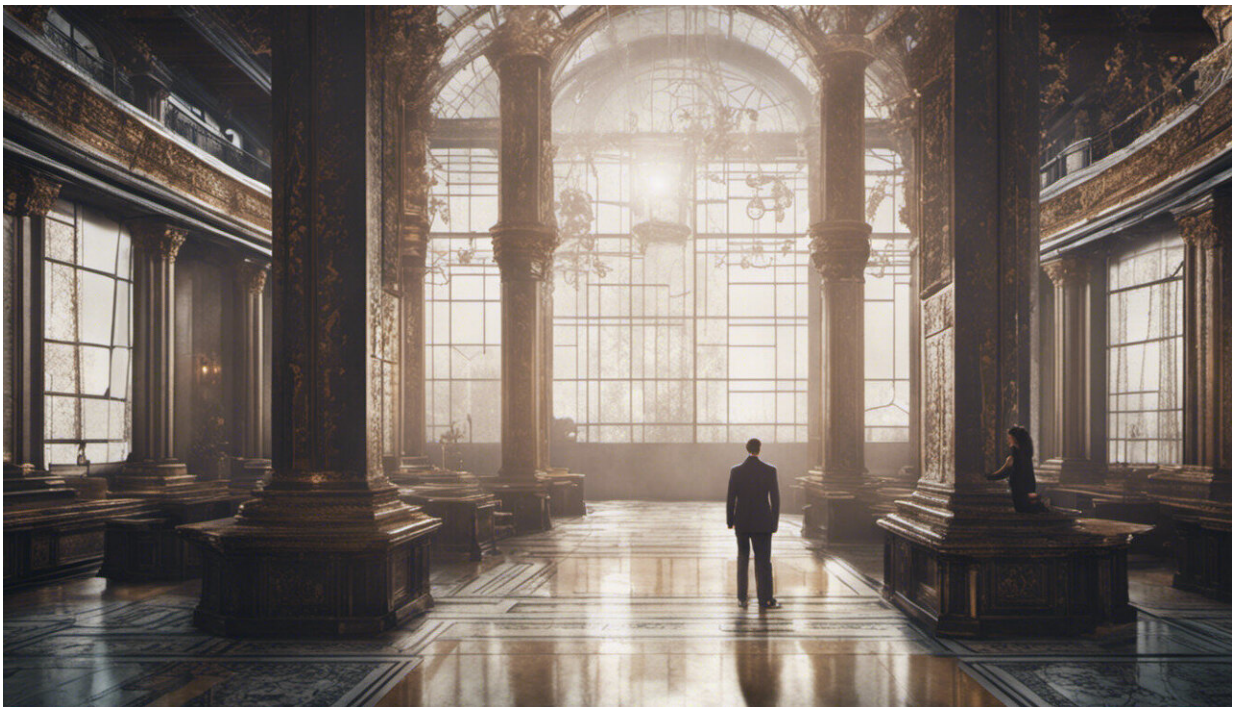


Well, actually: Mansplaining is a problem in the workplace

December 16 2022, by Linda Schweitzer, Chelsie J. Smith and Katarina Lauch



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Since the term "[mansplaining](#)" has entered the cultural zeitgeist as a social media phenomenon and hashtag, its popularity and usage has only skyrocketed. In just six months between November 2016 and April 2017, for example, it was mentioned at least [10,000 unique times](#) on

Twitter.

Mansplaining is a portmanteau combining "man" and "explain" that refers to a man providing an unrequested explanation to a woman. It is characterized by the confidence of the speaker, a condescending tone, an interjection or interruption and the underlying assumption that the target has no prior knowledge of the subject.

The term mansplaining was first popularized by Rebecca Solnit in her 2008 essay, "[Men Explain Things to Me](#)." In it, Solnit described an interaction with a man where he explained to her the premise and importance of a book he assumed she had no knowledge of—a book that Solnit wrote herself. He continued doggedly despite her friend's repeated insistence of "that's her book."

In other [notable examples](#), an astrophysicist [tweeting about climate change](#) was told to "learn actual science" and a NASA astronaut [was challenged on her own tweet](#) about an experiment that she conducted in a space-equivalent zone.

The ongoing social media discourse around mansplaining and its connection to the professional experiences of women questions whether this form of behavior can be found in the workplace and, if so, what effect it is having.

Covert workplace mistreatment

Research suggests that covert forms of workplace mistreatment have [increased over the last 20 years](#). This is sometimes attributed to the increased condemnation of overt discrimination.

Most incidents of mistreatment in today's workplace are due to a [lack of civility or violations of social norms](#), rather than openly discriminatory,

hostile or violent behaviors. Covert mistreatment such as disrespect, condescension and degradation are [particularly harmful](#) because of the ambiguous nature of intent.

We set out to explore how the term "mansplaining" is being used in popular discourse surrounding the workplace. We also wanted to know if mansplaining exists outside of social media, or whether it is just another example of online [backlash against experts](#). To do so, [we investigated the prevalence of mansplaining](#) in the workplace.

Finally, we wanted to establish who is experiencing mansplaining, who is perpetrating mansplaining and its potential impact on the target.

A working definition

To define mansplaining in the workplace context, we scraped Twitter for tweets that mentioned mansplaining and included work-related terms. Our analysis expanded the definition of mansplaining: someone (usually a man) providing an unsolicited—or unwelcome—condescending or persistent explanation to someone (usually not a man) that questions their knowledge or assumes a lack of knowledge—regardless of the veracity of the explanation.

We then surveyed working North Americans to ask them if they had experienced mansplaining, how frequently it occurred if they did and the perceived gender of the perpetrator.

We were particularly interested in knowing whether the "man" part of mansplaining was appropriate. As such, we asked people of all genders to report on the behaviors we associated with mansplaining and didn't specifically ask respondents about mansplaining itself.

Beyond social media

Our research indicates that mansplaining is much more than a social media phenomenon and permeates beyond the virtual realm to affect people in their working lives.

Nearly every individual in our study, regardless of gender, experienced at least one of the mansplaining behaviors. However, women and gender minority employees experienced a wider range of the characteristic behaviors and experienced them much more often.

This suggests that mansplaining may represent a type of [gendered incivility](#) in the workplace—a form of rudeness most often experienced by women and gender minority employees and most likely to be perpetrated by men. The term "mansplaining" may be an overgeneralization, but it does seem to accurately reflect the experiences of women and gender minority employees.

Our results also suggest that mansplaining has significant detrimental effects on the targets—much like [workplace incivility](#) does. Each of the mansplaining experiences were associated with lower organizational commitment and job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions, emotional exhaustion and psychological distress.

Mansplaining is not a fad

Organizations should not dismiss mansplaining as a product of [social media](#) rudeness or as a passing fad. Instead, mansplaining should be understood as an issue related to selective incivility where individuals are targeted based on their identity and made to feel like they do not belong.

Once identified as a form of incivility, mansplaining can and should be

addressed in the workplace. Interventions that are effective at counteracting incivility might also be effective at mitigating mansplaining.

The [Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace intervention](#) is one such training that mitigates incivility and encourages civility in the workplace. A [Canadian hospital system that used the intervention saw improvements](#) in respectful behavior, job satisfaction and trust in management, while employee burnout and absenteeism dropped.

The book, "[Subtle Acts of Exclusion](#)," might also be a handy resource for leaders and employees aiming to address this covert form of gendered mistreatment. This handbook helps organizations prevent microaggressions so that employees feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in their workplaces.

It's up to workplaces to mitigate the harms caused by mansplaining and prevent it from becoming a recurring issue in the [workplace](#). The productivity and well-being of employees depends on it.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Well, actually: Mansplaining is a problem in the workplace (2022, December 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2022-12-mansplaining-problem-workplace.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.