The role of critical discourse and language in gender equity to make change.

When the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) came into effect on 1 January 2016, they envisioned ‘a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed’ (United Nations, 2015, Item 8). Many important practical initiatives have pursued – and continue to pursue – gender equality, focusing on issues such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

But how people talk about both gender equity and women is also important, because “discourse” not only reflects but can also shape public opinion. Mainstream media, for example, often depict women in stereotypical and trivialising ways to the neglect of their professional attributes and achievements. The media also often rehearse rape myths and other problematic ideas that perpetuate gender-based violence and “the systemic institutionalisation of women’s inequality within social, political, economic, and cultural structures” (Meyers, 1997, p. 3).

In this table discussion, we will consider the roles language can play in helping to promote and/or hinder change. Dr Kate Power will share some of her research in this area and participants will be invited to reflect critically on the significance of language in their own contexts.

Dr Kate Power is a Senior Lecturer in The University of Queensland Business School, whose expertise involves critically evaluating how people and organisations use language to communicate about themselves and shape the world around them. She has published on media representations of women and gender-based violence and has a particular interest in the arts and culture sector.

Investing in Women to Accelerate Progress in Career Trajectories

In her renowned paper “A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter,” 2023 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Claudia Goldin, documents that over the 20th century, there has been a significant convergence between men and women in various domains, including education, labour force participation, and career choices. However, she highlights that there are still significant gender disparities that persist, particularly in high-wage professions and leadership positions.

What does the last chapter entail for gender equality? As we proceed to the final chapter of gender equality, Goldin emphasises the importance of understanding the underlying causes of gender inequality and suggests supporting work-life balance. In this round-table discussion, we will explore how we can accelerate women’s career in a university in concrete terms such as promoting greater flexibility in the workplace, improving access to funding as well as developing mentorship for various stages of women’s career.
Participants will be invited to an open dialogue, sharing insights, experiences including their own success and challenges, and best practices or suggestions for advancing gender equality in a university. We wish to identify actionable strategies towards creating a more equitable and supportive environment for women within the university setting. Together, let us embark on this journey towards the final chapter.

Dr Shino Takayama is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Economics at the University of Queensland. Shino specializes in the fields of financial economics, mathematical economics, and game theory, actively publishing and teaching in these areas. At UQ, she has supervised more than 60 students for their thesis research. She also chairs the gender-equity subcommittee in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law.

**Working with Diversity: An Intersectional Lens for Women’s Career Progression at UQ**

Universities are complex workplaces that have many and different labour markets, professions, specialisations, and disciplines. When you add to this the diversity of staff and student populations in terms of age, culture, abilities, sexuality, life experiences and neurological diversities, there are no ‘magic bullets’ to fix gender inequality as Glenda et al (2016) noted in their report Women careers and Universities, where to from here? They argued that because of this complex and inter-related nature of universities, there is a need for dedication, and perseverance to progress gender equity at universities.

The report also noted that two third of university staff wanted some form of change in working arrangement to address employment insecurity, marginalisation which results in lack of career opportunities and funnelling where women’s representation in higher level positions reduces.

In this brief round-table encounter, we ask, what happens when we apply an intersectional lens to this complex mix. What are the experiences of women at UQ.

You are invited to share your insights and experiences. We want to celebrate our achievements and contribute to a better understanding of women’s diverse experiences across academia and the professional streams in the university.

We also want to consider enablers to our careers’ progression focusing on ideas that address the unique challenges that face women across the spectrum of diversities (e.g., cultural, sexual, ability, neurodiversity etc). Our aim is to present pivotal strategies that when actioned will contribute to advancing gender equality in the university.

Dr Faiza El-Higzie is a post-doctorate research fellow at the School of Psychology with a focus on representation and an interest on initiatives and movements that destabilise structures of inequality. She is the Deputy Chair of UQ Cultural Inclusion Council and an advisor to Queensland Government through the Domestic and Family Violence Council and Multicultural Advisory Council. She has strong community links acting as a...
board director on international, national, and local community organisation and peak bodies.

**What’s happening at UQ – Sharing Good Practice**

How are we investing in women and tackling gender inequality at UQ currently? The Gender Equality Action Plan 2023-2025 was approved at the end of last year and contains seven objectives which address the barriers and actively takes steps to advance gender equity. These targeted actions such as increasing the representation of women in senior leadership, creating a work environment that supports those with caring responsibilities, and reducing the gender pay gap are set to achieve real change. The UQ Gender Equality Action Plan aims to provide an overarching plan to enable a coordinated ‘whole-of-UQ’ approach to gender equity. Around UQ, there are also great examples of good practice and targeted initiatives driven by locally based committees/working groups which are addressing gender gaps and are important to share.

We invite you to take part in this table discussion lead by Assoc Prof. Ruth Knibbe, and joined by Dawn Osborne, Senior Principal Advisor Gender Equality, Workplace Diversity and Inclusion. Explore, how can we all contribute to moving the dial on gender equality at UQ? Where does investment have to be focused to make change? How can the UQ community support the implementation and outcomes of the GEAP? How does sharing positive practice make a difference?

Associate Professor Ruth Knibbe joined the School of Mechanical & Mining Engineering in 2016. She was the first female teaching and research academic in the School. She is an ARC Future Fellow and the Deputy Head of School. Since joining UQ she has been actively involved in developing initiatives to develop an inclusive culture for women, in particular in the EAIT faculty. Together with a team of women academics she started the EAIT Women’s Working Group (EAIT WWG) and currently chairs this working group. Through the EAIT WWG she has run a range of workshops, panel discussions and networking events with the aim to improve gender equity, diversity and inclusion in EAIT.

**Dawn Osborne** is a committed feminist and a strong advocate for a gendered analysis to drive forward change towards gender equality in our society. In her current role at UQ as Senior Principal Advisor – Gender Equality, she leads the UQ SAGE Athena Swan and wider Gender Equality Planning. A large part of her role is to work collaboratively across all areas of UQ, advocate for systemic change and working to ensure that the voices and rights of all are integrated into policies, procedures and approaches.

**Tackling Entrepreneurship’s gender gap**

In Australia, only 22% of startups are founded by women (Accelerating women Founders: The untapped investment opportunity, Deloitte and SBE, 2022). Despite significant progress in promoting gender equality, women still face unique challenges and barriers when starting and scaling their businesses.
Supporting women entrepreneurs is not only a matter of fairness and equality; it is also crucial for economic growth and innovation. Numerous studies have shown that gender-diverse businesses perform better financially, drive innovation, and contribute to job creation.

How can we tackle the entrepreneurship gender gap and invest in women entrepreneurs to accelerate progress in our communities?

Join this table discussion lead by Beth Lawrance, Empower Manager at UQ Ventures, and special guest Fleur Johnston, Founder and CEO of PeopleBench.

Beth Lawrance is the UQ Ventures Empower Manager. Beth leads our women-focused portfolio, supporting women in entrepreneurship through the new Empower program for early-stage startups and our LeadHers programs and events. Beth is passionate about championing greater diversity in the startup ecosystem and supporting women to excel in their careers and businesses.

Investing in Women Across the Lifespan

The UN has declared 2021-2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing, with a goal that people as they age should be able to engage in activities that they find meaningful for as long as possible. But often age intersects with gender to deny women opportunities, such as in the workplace, or to curtail how society expects them to behave. Moreover, women are often given covert or overt messages about what is appropriate at a range of points across the lifespan.

Finally, ageist messages can begin early and be so entrenched in later life that women limit themselves and their opportunities for growth.

How can we tackle the stereotypes and tropes for women across the lifespan?
How can we support women breaking the mold in how they live their later years?
What can we do to change systems which perpetuate ageism, including in the University sector?

Join this table discussion lead by Nancy Pachana, Lead of UQ’s Age Friendly University and Healthy Ageing initiatives.

Professor Nancy A. Pachana is a clinical geropsychologist, neuropsychologist and professor in the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland. She is Director, Healthy Ageing Initiative in the Health & Behavioural Sciences Faculty, and Program Lead of the Age Friendly University Initiative, at UQ. She is also co-director of the UQ Ageing Mind Initiative, providing a focal point for clinical, translational ageing-related research at UQ. She has an international reputation in the area of geriatric mental health, particularly with her research on late-life anxiety disorders. She is co-developer of the Geriatric Anxiety Inventory, a published brief self-report inventory in wide clinical and research use globally, translated into over two dozen languages. She has published over 300 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and books on various topics in the field of ageing.
More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are going into business, how can we as a community support this growth?

Dr Sharlene Leroy-Dyer (she/her) is a Saltwater woman, with family ties to the Darug, Awabakal, Garigal and Wiradyuri nations. Sharlene was the first Aboriginal person to gain a PHD in Business from the University of Newcastle. Sharlene is a Senior Lecturer in employment relations and the inaugural Director of the UQ Business School Indigenous Business Hub. Her current research areas include Closing the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in Education and Employment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour history, Aboriginal involvement in the trade union movement and Indigenous entrepreneurship. Her work was recently cited in the Universities Accord White paper and the ‘Closing the Loopholes’ Bill passed in parliament.

Sharlene is the Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Policy Committee of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and has served for over 15 years as an elected officer in various positions at a Branch, Division and National level. As an Aboriginal activist and unionist, Sharlene is passionate about improving the educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples.