

Land of Milk and 'Honey'

Confronting Gendered Experiences in Field Research

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Response to Question 2: so Meta, so Praxis

Q2 09:30 AM (submitted Anonymously, because OF COURSE IT WAS)

I understand that generalizations about certain groups should not be supported or considered valid, for example the statement “women tend to be more emotional” is thought to be an invalid conclusion or generalization. However, we also utilize certain generalizations from research to draw valid conclusions, for example the statement “students tend to value male instructors more highly than female instructors” is taken to be a valid conclusion signifying that there is a bias problem in academia. Is there a conflict of logic here?

Ah yes, there is a conflict of logic here... insofar as your question is predicated on the logical fallacy of false equivalence between a demeaning, enculturated stereotype and widely-replicated findings derived from systematic research conducted by diverse, trained social and life scientists using a multitude of interview, observational, and experimental methods. Or as Prof. Robin Nelson phrased it “One is sexist drivel and one is empirical evidence gathered from people raised on that sexist drivel.”

As I prepared my response to your question, in consideration of the dozens of articles shared in the talk and other Q&A document, I first focused on the emotion literature, to curate myriad citations that systematically explore the extent to which there are gender differences in emotion neurobiology, perception, and expression and for which emotions; how gender-differentiated social positionality shape different lived experiences and the effects on emotions directly, and indirectly through physical and mental health; the dynamics for intersectional identities, how this manifests for cis-women and trans-women and in which contexts, how enculturation for gendered expressions of emotions begins in childhood and how these are similar or different across the cultural landscape, how such attitudes can deprive too many men of emotional well-being, and the dangers and difficulties from cultural expectations that women constantly perform happiness, warmth, and welcome through smiling.

I delved into the literature on the history of Western jurisprudence that for hundreds of years has codified crimes committed in the “heat of passion” as less egregious and with a lesser penalty or sometimes NO penalty. You know, the violent offenders whose emotional responses to the victim’s provocation renders them “incapable of self-control.” A “provocation” defense or “extreme emotional disturbance” defense routinely invoked when men murder their wives or husbands or partners or gay men in a fit of rage, because their emotional state from being cuckolded, being dumped, or being propositioned overwhelmed their capacity for reasoned judgement. A legal system crafted by <checks historical notes> heterosexual men to be predominantly sensitive to heterosexual men’s emotional dysregulation. [“Men’s violence against women is a leading cause of the premature death for women globally”](#) and most of these homicides are perpetrated by intimate partners or family members. To paraphrase Charles

Baudelaire “La plus ennuyeuse des ruses du diable est de vous persuader que les femmes sont plus émotives.” Pardon my French.

But as the clock ticked by, I remembered Lindy West’s [exquisite fulmination in 2013](#) “We can't cite "everything," and our challengers know that. It's an insulting diversionary tactic, it's an attempt to drag us all backwards... What are you supposed to say when the 8,000th faux-incredulous jackass throws you the *same argument*— as though holding *each of their hands individually* through the empirical facts of the world around us is a worthwhile use of my time. As though feminist academics haven't filled books (decades of books) with answers to that shit already.” (emphases by original author).

And indeed, today I have allocated time, thought, effort, and expertise not to my primary research efforts, as so many of our male colleagues were able to do, but instead to a question devoid of good faith and evincing of a casual sexism and interdisciplinary disdain that is an ongoing obstacle to an inclusive and equitable academy.

Thank you for coming to [my SABER talk](#).

[Citations, resources, and main Q&A documents that accompanied the talk](#)

Additional Resource: [Picture a Scientist](#), PBS Documentary
Researchers expose longstanding discrimination against women in science.
Available/Streaming (as of 4/14/2021)