

Feminist Credibility: Negotiating Subjectivity in Public Spaces - June 15, 2017

The following is an approximate transcript of the second keynote talk at the HASTAC Feminist Scholars Digital Workshop. For resources related to this talk, visit <http://feministcredibility.weebly.com/>

My presentation today is called *Feminist Credibility: Negotiating Subjectivity in Public Spaces*. But, I'm actually going to back up from this title a little bit and start us with *female* credibility.

This presentation will create space for us to examine the ways women's perspectives are often treated as less credible than other perspectives in supposedly "objective" and "neutral" spaces, from research to politics. I will focus mostly on professional spaces, which carry with them certain types of privilege--but my hope is that the strategies we develop here might be transferable to other contexts as well. Further, we'll think about how taking on the mantle of "feminist" can sometimes exacerbate this ethos problem--but also how feminism can give us the tools to reckon with it.

I will start by providing examples of the subtle ways this undermining behavior can happen, and together we'll brainstorm some ideas to respond to these types of situations. I'll then provide some additional context (including empirical evidence of many of the gendered patterns we'll discuss) and some scholarly and practical resources, and we'll have some time for conversation at the end. My hope is that we'll leave today having generated a list of possible responses, interventions, and strategies for calling attention to or otherwise negotiating threats to our and other women's ethos drawn from our shared experiences. (This is not an individual endeavor. We have to support each other.) Throughout this presentation, I hope you'll feel free to share your own experiences and ideas. Although there are challenges to having a truly interactive conversation with so many people online at once, my hope is that we can manage it using multiple media.

BEGIN SCREENSHARE

I'm sending out a link to a website right now. That website contains three major areas. The first is a Today's Meet chat--if you were in Jenny's keynote, you know how this works. Navigate to the link provided, click join, enter your name (something non-identifiable if you like), and chat away. I'm asking us to use Today's Meet rather than the chat function in WebEx because Today's Meet will allow me to create a handy

transcript, which I'll be happy to share with you all. The second major area on the website is a GoogleDoc with useful resources. It's set so you can edit it--please feel free to add categories as well as resources and also notes about the resources you provide. The third major area on the website is a short video. The video is provided in case you'd like to look back through it after this talk, but I'll be screenshotting it all to you shortly so we can stay on the same page.

Now, for a few examples. I'm going to screenshot this video to you so that we're all seeing it at the same time.

CLIP – Tim Hunt - appeal to objectivity

What we see here is evidence of something I call an ethic of objectivity. Hunt appeals to objectivity as a way to demonstrate that his way of seeing the world is right and good. Science is objective and neutral and runs along fine until you let girls do science, and then things go awry. Hunt is an egregious example; you may have encountered this in colleagues who ask you to be logical or take a step back. When something like this happens to us in the moment, it can be very hard to refute--precisely because it is so infuriating. **Let's take a moment to share some possible responses to coming up against an ethic of objectivity.** The difficulty of this response is tied to the concept I'll demonstrate in the next clip, so let's watch that and come back.

CLIP – Don't be hysterical - stereotype of women as emotional

You may also be familiar with the stereotype of the hysterical female. When a woman disagrees with a man, he tells her to "calm down" in an effort to cast her as emotional or out of control. This is the flipside of the appeal to objectivity--one is an explicit claiming of objectivity, and the other is an implicit claim that is lodged by accusing the other/female party of lacking objectivity--being emotional, hysterical, irrational. Note that this often happens when the woman has not, in fact, raised her voice or behaved aggressively--a man behaving similarly would not receive the same response. At other times, an emotional response may be warranted--it may be a rational reaction to an unjust situation. However, as women, we know what we risk in showing emotion in professional spaces. ["take it down" example] So, how do we call out these moments that are intended to shame women into compliance/silence? Let's again take a minute to discuss.

[Explain who Sean Spicer is]

CLIP – Sean Spicer and April Ryan - policing behavior

So we've talked a fair bit about emotion. What we see now is that at times, men's emotions are treated as valid and women's emotions--as well as their bodies and actions--are made subject to them. So in this clip we see a white man telling an African-American woman what to do with her body because it's making him feel bad that she's shaking her head. This isolated instance is frustrating enough, but it's also part of a larger pattern--her head shake was drawing attention to his established pattern of incompetence, and he tried to make it stop. What do we do when our behavior, our bodies, are policed in professional settings in order to make other more comfortable? How do we resist this? [dress codes - aimed at making boys comfortable and not distracted] [salary negotiations - female salaries suppressed to protect male emotions]

CLIP - Clinton Trump debate - rhetorical space

END SCREENSHARE

I want to talk about not just interruptions but rhetorical space--who is allowed to take up rhetorical space? Researcher Dale Spender in *Learning to Lose: Sexism in Education* utilized empirical studies to assess who talked the most in mixed-gender classroom settings. Surprise--the men always talked more, whether measuring by time spent or number of words. But here's the important bit: When asked to evaluate their perception of who talked more in a given discussion, women students were pretty accurate; but men perceived the discussion as being "equal" when women talked only 15% of the time, and the discussion as being dominated by women if they talked only 30% of the time. This research is dated and I use it because I haven't seen the study replicated more recently, but there is a massive body of related work on gender and rhetorical space -- see the Annotated Bibliography of Gender Bias in Academe in the Resources document. Now, our question for this concept: How do we call into relief the fact that women's rhetorical space is diminished in professional contexts?

While you're working, a few more examples.

The Geena Davis Institute for Gender In Media found that, in crowd scenes, women tend to comprise about 17 percent of any given crowd. Davis argues: "If there's 17 percent women, the men in the group think it's 50-50," she told NPR. "And if there's 33 percent women, the men perceive that as there being more women in the room than men."

Women got just 7% of speaking time at Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference earlier this year. If you think that number is bad, consider that Apple hires more women than most tech companies--32% of the company is women.

A forthcoming study in the Virginia Law Review called "Justice, Interrupted" finds that male justices on the Supreme Court interrupt the female justices approximately three times as often as they interrupt each other. As more women join the court, the reaction of the male justices has been to increase their interruptions of the female justices. ... In 1990, with one woman on the bench (Sandra Day O'Connor), 35.7% of interruptions were directed at her (should have been 11% out of 9 justices); in 2002, 45.3% were directed at the two female justices (O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg); in 2015, 65.9% of all interruptions on the court were directed at the three female justices on the bench (Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan). In the last 12 years, 32% of interruptions were *of* the female justices, but only 4% were *by* the female justices.

Studies show that people who have more power are usually interrupted less, and these are some of the most powerful women in the nation. [Explain rules about advocates] Interruptions by male advocates account for approximately 10% of all interruptions while interruptions by female advocates account for 0%. In 2015, male advocates interrupting Justice Sotomayor accounted for 8% of all interruptions in the court. Justice Sotomayor is the court's only woman of color.

Some of you may have heard about a story making the rounds recently about a physicist--a woman--who was treated quite badly at a panel at the World Science Festival in NY. As reported by actor-director Marilee Talkington, physicist Veronika Hubeny, an expert on string theory and the only woman on the panel, was barely given any opportunity to speak. The moderator, Jim Holt, acknowledged this. When he finally asked her a direct question, he also spoke over her to answer it for her. At one point she laughed at being interrupted yet again, and he scolded her for giggling. Eventually, Talkington burst out and said, "Let her speak please" and the audience erupted in cheers. Holt said he'd been heckled, but then let Hubeny speak.

Moving from feminist anger to Interventions - discuss amplification, a tactic developed by women in the Obama White House (as reported by the Washington Post) to help each other be heard

So, we have established that women are more likely to be labeled emotional--and they also are more likely to be subjected to material disadvantages to protect the feelings of men. Research has shown (and women know from experience) that ideas are more

likely to be taken up if forwarded by a man and that we are afforded less space to get those ideas across in the first place. I've asked you to brainstorm interventions/responses for dealing with these problems, but we've left out two important bits having to do with human subjectivity: First, calling out these problems is made more difficult by the fact that we are non-men. Second, overt identification as a feminist can make calling out these problems even harder. [Ahmed - killjoy]

A group of sociologists analyzed a dataset of 1.6 million papers in the scholarly database JSTOR. They found that 31% of men and only 21% of women engage in self-citation.

I want to provide one more resource for you, and I'm drawing it from my own work. Beginning in my dissertation, and subsequently in several articles, I advanced a theory I call apparent feminism. It has three tenets: 1) Make your feminism explicit/apparent. Remember this is based on timing and positionality. Don't do it if it puts you in danger. Do do it if puts a face on feminism for someone who trusts you. 2) Hail non-feminist allies. I like to work with womanists, non-identified folks with similar goals --I don't want to argue about what they call themselves. 3) Call out ethics of objectivity/efficiency/neutrality. Remember that the strategies that you select to respond to those moments will differ depending on your positionality (feminist, female, academic), but choose the ones that work for you. Find ways to leverage your subjectivity to shore up credibility.