

**Student questions: Kathryn Johnson colloquium on “Privilege, Power, and Leadership in Academia”**

2/26/20

Question 1: Impostor syndrome seems to be an issue only related to an individual, for example they seem to doubt themselves. Is anyone else at fault if a colleague feels this way?

Question 2: Is it a negative factor that science is dominated by white men? As a minority myself I personally don't see that as an issue, if they have put in the effort to become qualified scientists why shouldn't they be where they are, and the same could be said about anyone else.

*Understood. At the individual level there is not 'blame'. But it is the individual's responsibility to recognize the cultural, societal and systemic factors that are shaping the field. In particular this is vital as individuals advance to positions where they are responsible for decisions in admissions and in setting environment for their mentees. E.g. how can we help a student to build confidence despite the phenomena of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat that disproportionately affect and disadvantage certain demographics.*

Question 1: During the colloquium today, Kathryn illustrated multi cultural dynamics for white female, as she identify as one. How would you expect multi cultural dynamics for minority groups?

Question 2: Also, Kathryn described her interest in how galaxies interact. How would you explain this interaction to someone that's new to the subject?

*I think the situation in general for white women is that we're further along than other URM groups. There is a lot more work to be done for other URM and greater barriers etc. On the other hand, the lack of women (and URM) at the very top in leadership positions across academia and in society is symbolic of the resistance to evolution – to accepting different modes of leadership and values. That evolution is needed to encourage the entrance and retention of diverse members in our field. So I think we need to be working on diversity at both ends – the pipeline (most relevant to URM other than white women) and leadership (all).*

Question 1: At the start of the Colloquium you showed a photography of you being the only female in your department. My question is, Is not maybe the reason for what you said the trend if I can use this term to women to choose less challenging or different types of sciences such as Psychology?

Question 2: My second question is about when you said that when you were saying women, you were talking about white women. As we know caucasians are the majority of the American population and that for centuries have been the etny with more privileges than the others. Isn't it the main reason for us to have more caucasians on top and less diversity? For what I've seen as a college students, a lot of students have to quit their dreams because of the lack of resources being female or male; and if they do not quit, they have to postpone until they have the means to support themselves.

*Your questions get to larger societal problems. As academics, our best course is to recognize these and build systems within our institutions which (to the extent possible) compensate for them.*

*To Q1: Assuming that all humans (regardless of demographic) are equally capable of doing science then the preferential 'choice' of women for other fields represents a loss of potential for our field – we are not keeping the best people and we should try to address that.*

*To Q2: Yes – a lot of the current situation is historical and to do with privilege. Again, this systemic problem represents intellectual loss for the field and we should compensate where we can.*

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Question 1: If minorities in positions of power often lose their authority when pursuing inclusion in the sciences, what is the best way of pursuing inclusion?

Question 2: What realistic steps can a white male in the sciences take to best support minority groups?

*Hard questions – but YES – white males have a key role to play as allies – to support and promote diversity, and listen to diverse viewpoints and requests for change. At some level, the following are things that I'm trying to do as a privileged white woman, Don't be silent when someone speaks up on diversity – bring your voice too. Volunteer to help. Lead the formation of a group to discuss the issues. Most important - be open to being criticized and feeling uncomfortable as you learn – its part of the process. Examine your own privilege and try to build empathy for other experiences. In my experience, the last two sentences are particularly hard.*