

Huffington post



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I will admit that I am rather new to the discussion on bigotry, privilege, and the various -isms. I was speaking with a female friend of mine a few months ago, and I remarked that women, on average, are less able to compartmentalize their emotions than men. She was (ostensibly) irate, and I qualified myself. You see, I had never been explicitly exposed to the socially-propagated idea that women are emotionally unstable. When I found out, I felt rather embarrassed in not only being sexist, but in being so trite and un-profound in doing so.

I am simply an observer of humanity, and although some people might suggest that I have internalized institutional misogyny, herein lies the purpose of my short essay. Imagine you're a mad scientist in a laboratory, and the U. S. government has charged you with the task of creating a perfectly average white man. You split white men down into their fundamental characteristics: hair color, body hair length, belly-button protrusion, etc, and then you take measurements and find the average of each of them. Because of the outliers, what will result will probably resemble Frankenstein's monster.

This is an analogy I find useful when discussing prejudice. The essence of the previous paragraph was that prejudice arises from two factors: perception of the average as informed by personal experience, and institutionalized power dynamics. These two are inextricably linked, and as one feeds the other, it is very difficult to isolate the effects. However, I will arbitrarily make the choice to begin by discussing perceptions of the average and see where that leads us. My econometrics professor last term proposed that while girls on average

tend to do just as well as boys on standardized math exams, the variance for boys is higher.

This is not to say that there are not girls who are incredibly gifted in math, but that there are fewer of them. But naturally, our life experiences are such that we will not be acquainted with the whole of a population, and that is where our prejudices arise. The vast majority of my friends at college are math or computer science majors, so the girls who I do interact with tend to be exceptional at math, and since I have no point of comparison, I don't regard them as any more exceptional than the boys with comparable acuity because they are girls.

However, as in my opening anecdote, sometimes our sampling of the population isn't so flattering. In those cases, we come to believe that the institutionalized power dynamics are an accurate depiction of the entire world, and we consciously draw "privilege" from them. The most common "privilege" in public discourse is white privilege, but institutionalized prejudice extends to things like male privilege, cis-privilege, and thin privilege. Sometimes it even leads to active bigotry.

In the ideal world, if we all were statisticians, had perfect data, and approached everything objectively, we would distill the portion of stereotypes that were actually real and omit the portion that are societal caricatures. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Observers of humanity like myself will continue to notice patterns in human behavior across heterogeneous groups, but I will make a conscious effort to not let that sully my daily interactions with my friends.

I will approach each individual as a person, because they are just that: the politics of their identity are too complex for a feeble mind like my own to accurately discern. But do notice that I assert that parts of the stereotypes are real. You cannot form an asset bubble on zero information, and similarly, building a stereotype out of nothing would require heavy orchestration, nothing short of state-sponsored propaganda. Unfortunately, it doesn't take very much real information to form a cascade, and if we could distill our stereotypes, the actual remaining substance would be, in most cases, statistically insignificant.