Jacob Timm

JOUR 4551

TA: Wooyeol Shin

<http://technologyandsexism.weebly.com/>

Reflection

For the multimedia production assignment, I decided to create a website that went in depth about sexism within the STEM community. STEM, or Science, Engineering, Technology, and Mathematics, is a focus of study that severely lacks a female presence. Sexism in STEM is an issue that hits home because I am currently pursuing a STEM major (computer science), and one of the aspects of the major that I dislike the most is the sexism that I have witnessed continuously since I began my college career. There has been plenty of research surrounding the sexism issue within the STEM community, but the majority of the research available deals with the workplace, not the classroom. In order to learn more about sexism in STEM at a college level, I decided to interview a wide range of people in majors such as computer science, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, and more.

When I ask my computer science friends about sexism in STEM, the majority of them did not believe it was a problem at the classroom level, and was instead a problem in the workplace. However, since I have witnessed sexism inside of the classroom, it made we wonder if the sexism that I witness is considered sexism to my friends, and what students outside of my friend group thought about the issue. In order to do this and gain an understanding on the general opinion of the STEM community at the University of Minnesota, I interviewed 88 people in a variety of STEM majors. I asked them four questions: How old are you? What is your major? Have you witnessed or experienced sexism towards woman either in class or in the workplace? Do you believe that sexism is a problem in the STEM community?

In order to set up the context for the rest of the project, I wrote a page called “Why did you do this?” that explained various cases and instances of sexism in the STEM world. I detailed possible causes of the gender gap, the results of various Google image searches for STEM careers, sexism in Silicon Valley, and sexism in the gaming community. For the “Sexism in Silicon Valley” section, my main source was Alice Marwick’s dissertation entitled *Status Update*. I used this source because Marwick obtained a vast amount of information and data about sexism within Silicon Valley. For the “Sexism within the gaming community” section, my main source was the Deadspin article entitled *The Future of Culture Wars is Here, and it’s GamerGate*. The article outlined GamerGate and other incidents involving women in gaming, which was beneficial due to the widely varying opinions of gamers who were witnessing GamerGate occur firsthand.

Throughout the interviewing process, I gained a surplus of information and arguments for both sides of the sexism issue. Both sides, yes sexism exists and no sexism does not exist, are represented on the web site under the pages “Yes, sexism is an issue” and “No, sexism is not an issue”. For both sides of the issue, I also did research on evidence supporting both claims, coming from a wide range of sources. The major sources for the “Yes, sexism is an issue” side were studies done by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the organization Girls Who Code. Girls Who Code puts on an all-girls science summer camp, and more information about the organization is detailed in the website. I chose these sources based on the fact that they gave great statistics on the percentage of women in STEM, the percentage of girls interested in science but do not pursue it as a college major, along with others. My reasoning behind picking mainly statistical based sources is the fact that I wanted this project to be on students’ thoughts on sexism within the STEM community at the University of Minnesota, which is information that can only be gathered by interacting with those involved in the community.

For the side “No, sexism is not an issue” the main sources I used were students themselves. Since sexism within the STEM world has been established as a near fact, it is difficult to find credible sources that disagree with the general consensus. Students in STEM offer more data and arguments for my argument then any source that I found, so I chose to solely use the opinions of students and their answers to my questions as my source for information for this side of the argument.

The bulk of my project is interviews with fellow students. Due to the project being about sexism with the STEM community at the University of Minnesota, opinions of actual students carry more weight than an article that details sexism in the workplace. The majority of the students I interviewed were male, around 60%, which is actually better than the ratio of men-woman in the STEM community. I decided to aim between the ratio of men-women in the STEM community and ratio of men-women on campus, due to the fact that interviewing 50% men and 50% women would skew the results in one way or another, and would not be an accurate sample size of the STEM community. In order to obtain the general opinion of the STEM community as a whole, more men needed to be interviewed, whether they thought sexism was an issue or not. The data from these interviews are scattered throughout the project, culminating in a final “Survey results” page that breaks down the numbers.

The general opinion of the students I interviewed is that sexism is a problem within the STEM community at the University of Minnesota. There were many arguments for and against the issue, but in the end there were a higher percentage of students who thought that sexism was an issue. The major argument for the “Yes, sexism is an issue” side is that female students believe that there opinions are not taken as seriously as men’s, i.e. being questioned more about their answer than their male counterparts. The major argument for the “No, sexism is not an issue” side is that, in general, it is only the older professors and a vocal minority that are sexist, while the overwhelming majority of other students are not sexist. Whether or not it is a few bad apples that spoil the bunch, the general consensus was that sexism is a problem. If it was only a few older professors and a few students who were actually sexist, then they would be shamed and ridiculed by the other students, but they are not. And since a majority believe that sexism is an issue, then the argument that it is only a few older professors and students cannot be true.

This project relates to the course in a number of ways. In the course reading *Status Update*, one of the major themes was the culture of Silicon Valley, and an underlying theme of that was the sexism that is present in the tech community. Whether it be the lack of female CEO’s, the fact that journalists cannot explain the work of a female programmer without mentioning her looks, or the fact that woman who rapidly rise the ranks are criticized of sleeping their way to the top, the conclusion Marwick made was that sexism was a problem in the tech community. Although a large majority of my inspiration for this project came from my own experiences as a computer science major, another large portion of my inspiration came from Marwick’s conclusion of sexism within the tech community, and I decided to instead make my own conclusion of sexism with the STEM community at the University of Minnesota.