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Tweeting about sexism is good for women's wellbeing

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Tweeting about sexism is good for women's wellbeing

What is this research about?

Research studies have shown that women are more likely to accept unfair treatment than to confront it. This is not surprising given how risky confrontation can be. Confronters tend to be criticized, disliked and risk backlash from friends, family and colleagues. If women tend to do actions that make them feel good, then they will be more likely to repeat them when faced by unfair treatment such as sexism.

Given the popularity of using social media to rally together against oppressive governments (e.g., Arab Spring) and activism hashtags (e.g., #distractinglysexy), the researcher tested whether tweeting about sexism would increase women's well-being in the face of unfair treatment such as sexism.

What did the researcher find?

Foster found that although women were not told what to tweet about, they spontaneously tweeted about the unfairness of the sexism they read about. And, compared to the comparison groups, only those who tweeted showed decreasing negative mood and increasing well-being over the three day experiment.

Foster concluded that tweeting about sexism may be a way of confronting sexism that will make women feel good, and therefore, women may be more likely to confront sexism in the future, rather than to accept unfair treatment.

What you need to know:

Social media can be used to promote equality in a way that empowers women. When women experience sexism or unfair treatment, they can respond by tweeting about their experiences to decrease the negative effects of the incident on their well-being and mood.

What did the researchers do?

Mindi Foster, a psychologist in Laurier's Department of Psychology, showed women examples of real-world gender discrimination that occurred in the media, in politics and at university on each of three days. Women were then assigned to either "tweet about what they read", "tweet about the weather", "create a tweet but not post it", or to not tweet at all. After completing one of these four tasks, women completed various measures of well-being.

How can you use this research?

Organizations that advocate for women can use this research to provide women with the tools to confront sexism.

Women can use this research to guide their social media actions when they experience unfairness and sexism.

Mental Health organizations can use this research to guide their campaigns for increasing the negative mental health impact of sexism on women.

About the Laurier researcher:

Mindi Foster is an Associate Professor with the Department of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is Director of the **iWISER lab** (MindiFoster.com) mfooster@wlu.ca.

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