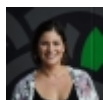


Why women leave science, you ask? THIS. This is why. ^[1]

Submitted by [Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer](#) ^[2] on 13 October 2013 - 8:41pm



^[2]



[Puedes leer esta entrada en Español [aquí](#) ^[3]]

Over the last 3 days or so, the science blogosphere has been a firestorm. Scientist, science writer and diversity advocate Dr. Danielle Lee aka The Urban Scientist aka @DNLee5 was attacked. She was attacked professionally and personally, in multiple ways.

Danielle was approached by the blog-editor of Biology-Online, a blog platform and aggregator, about contributing for their site. You can read the exchange between Dr. Lee and the blog-editor [here](#) [4], but bottom line, she was asked to freelance without pay, to which she politely declined. Then all hell broke loose. The blog editor replied “Are you an urban scientist or an urban whore?” Please, read that, again. Think about it, and please hold on to your indignation for a minute or two.

What happened to Danielle, in my opinion, is a poignant example of the kind of attitudes that force women, and more so women of color, away from science. Recently a lot has been said about women dropping out of the so-called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) pipeline. You can read some posts [here](#) [5], [here](#) [6] and [here](#) [7]. There is no doubt, that there are many factors that contribute to the attrition of women from science and engineering fields. There is [implicit bias](#) [8]. There is [stereotype threat](#) [9]. There are [social and cultural perceptions](#) [10] of what girls and women should and shouldn't look like. And then there is [THIS](#) [4] attack on Danielle Lee.

Sadly, this happens to many women. They are discriminated against just because they are women, or worst, also because of their ethnic background, or their gender preference. Women and girls are constantly bombarded with messages that devalue who we are, our knowledge and our expertise. Not all of them are as blatant as the disrespect that Danielle experienced and often come as subtle, seemingly innocent comments.

Dr. Danielle Lee is a professional. She has spent many, many years studying, training and working hard to get to where she is. She HAS the right to charge for providing her expertise and her time. She did nothing wrong and yet she was attacked.

The blog-editor of Biology-Online tried to diminish Danielle as a woman, as professional, as a scientist and as a human being. Danielle said it best:

“It wasn’t just that he called me a whore – he juxtaposed it against my professional being: Are you urban scientist or an urban whore? Completely dismissing me as a scientist, a science communicator (whom he sought for my particular expertise), and someone who could offer something meaningful to his brand. What? Now, I’m so immoral and wrong to inquire about compensation? Plus, it was obvious to me that I was supposed to be honored by the request.”

Adding insult to injury was the fact that Scientific American, who has hosted Danielle's blog for about two years, decided to take down the post that Danielle wrote detailing her exchange with Biology-Online's blog-editor and her thoughts on the situation, because **“@sciam is a publication for discovering science. The post was not appropriate for this area & was therefore removed”**.

By taking Danielle's post down and deeming it “inappropriate”, Scientific American is saying is that the process of discovering science is entirely separate from the experiences of the people

doing the discovery aka scientists. Um, yeah. NO. Science, Scientific American, doesn't happen in a vacuum. The experiences that we have as scientists are inseparable from the process of discovery and in fact, they shape our scientific interests and our perspective. After all, "scientific knowledge is the result of human labor" [11].

The Urban Scientist [12]—the title Danielle Lee's blog on SciAm—is a space where (my emphasis) "a hip-hop maven blogs on urban ecology, evolutionary biology & **diversity in the sciences**". One would have thought that by giving Danielle a forum, Scientific American cared about the issues that affect minorities in science. One would have thought that SciAm would be open to stories that chronicle the experiences (good and bad) of women of color in science, of the people doing the scientific discoveries. After what has happened, one has to think again. (Scientific American's Mariette DiChristina posted this [13] today. I was glad to see this, although it is not an apology. I sincerely hope they walk the talk. The science blogosphere will be watching).

What happened to Danielle sucks. It should have never happened to her or anyone. But, as she said on Twitter, Danielle is not a victim:

"What this guy said was crappy. But I am not a victim. I spoke my peace, message was heard."

Danielle used this as a teaching moment and stood up for herself and for the many others who have been through a similar experience. As evidenced by the multitude of posts (on blogs, Twitter [14], Wired [15], BuzzFeed [16] to name a few) her message was indeed heard. With this post I add my voice to the crowd #standingwithDNLee.

P.S. What happened to Danielle evidences the need for a space to discuss the experiences, lessons and challenges faced by women scientists of color. This November, Ciencia Puerto Rico [17] (the organization for which I am a vice-director) will (under Dr. Greetchen Díaz's [18] leadership) launch Borinqueña a blog to precisely discuss these issues.

More posts #standingwithDNLee (I know I am missing posts, so please let me know):

Dr. Isis: Post 1 [4] and Post 2 [19]

Labroides [20]

Maryn Mckenna [15]

Dr. Rubidium [21]

Janet Stemwedel [11]

Kate Clancy [22]

Updated 10/14/13: Here's a growing list of posts [23] re: #standingwithDNLee.

Second update 10/14/13: Scientific American reposted Danielle's blog post [24], with an editor's note.

Tags:

- [women in science](#) [25]
- [WIS](#) [26]
- [Danielle Lee](#) [27]
- [women of color](#) [28]
- [Borinquena](#) [29]
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