

Authors: Ashley Piney*, Sophia Rogers*, & Katie Kroeper

*first authorship is shared

Remain Calm: How Emotional Responses Influence Perception of Women Confronting Sexism

While previous studies show that people who confront prejudice are negatively perceived by others, recent research has focused on methods to mitigate these effects. In this study, we examined how the emotional tone of confronters ameliorates observers' negative perceptions. Specifically, we presented participants ($N = 682$) with a workplace scenario involving sexism between two characters, Emily and John. In all scenarios, Emily confronted John's sexist remarks, but we manipulated her emotional tone in the confrontation to be either angry, confident, calm, or sad. Afterward, participants rated Emily's competence, warmth, and unprofessionalism. Findings revealed that Emily was perceived as competent, regardless of her emotional tone during the confrontation. However, Emily was perceived as warmer when she expressed low arousal emotions (i.e., calmness or sadness), compared to high arousal emotions (i.e., anger or confidence). Moreover, expressing anger led to Emily being perceived as unprofessional. We also observed discrepancies between male and female participants. Female participants perceived Emily as more competent and warmer, whereas male participants perceived her as more unprofessional. These findings suggest that regulating one's emotional expression may be a key factor in effectively challenging prejudiced behavior, though such regulation may prove challenging in the context of a confrontational exchange.