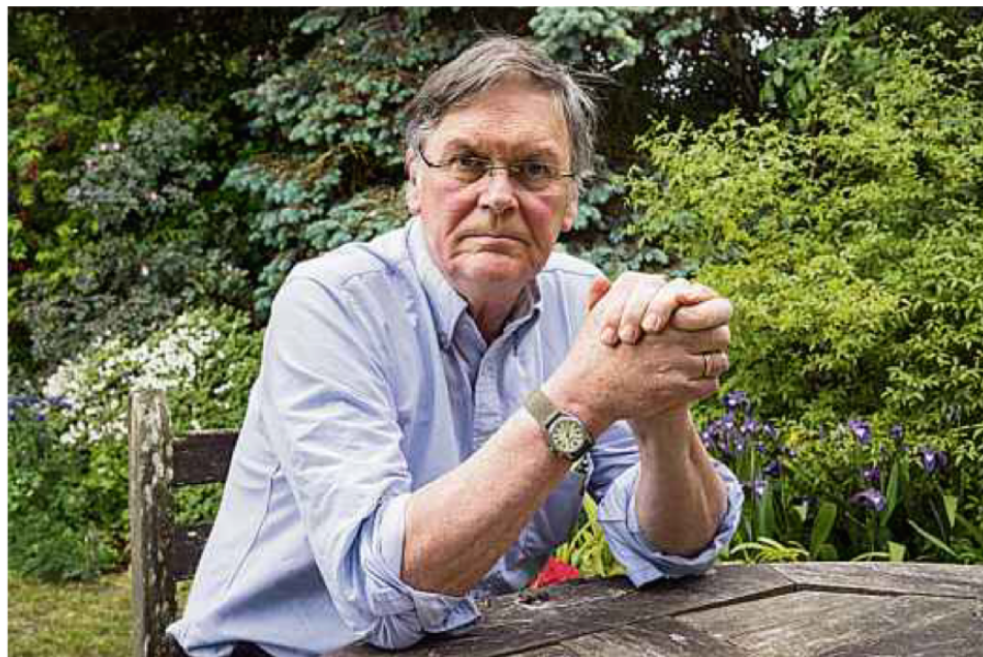


Experiment with emotion

ANTONIO OLMO

Emily Grossman was trolled for countering Tim Hunt's comments about tearful female scientists. It's the men in white coats who really need to open up, she tells Sian Griffiths



Sir Tim Hunt said 'girls' in laboratories were prone to tears. Emily Grossman, below, a science educator, wants scientists of both sexes to be more emotional

When Emily Grossman went on television last year to share her views on sexism in science, she was unprepared for the backlash that followed. The science educator and broadcaster had been asked for her opinion following the so-called Tim Hunt affair. Hunt, a Nobel prize-winning scientist, was forced to resign his honorary post at University College London after making remarks at a conference in South Korea that were interpreted in some quarters as being sexist.

Speaking during a lunch at the conference in June 2015, he said: "Let me tell you about my trouble with girls. Three things happen when they are in the lab: you fall in love with them, they fall in love with you, and when you criticise them, they cry."

An international hullabaloo followed. Critics said his remarks were chauvinist and unhelpful when huge efforts were under way to encourage more women in the UK to study science.

Grossman, who has a double first in science from Cambridge, went on television alongside the outspoken journalist Milo Yiannopoulos to argue that it didn't matter if women cried in the laboratory. In fact, she believes scientists would do better research if they allowed themselves to express emotion at work.

In the days following her TV appearance, Grossman was surprised to receive what she describes as "a torrent of abuse on social media – thousands of

comments. "I was publicly attacked, shamed and humiliated. I read every single one, and there were thousands of them," she says.

"Many were undermining me, my credentials, women in general ... they seemed basically designed to shut me up. It wasn't the personal attacks that upset me the most, it was the ones attacking me as a representative of all women: saying that women are biologically inferior to men, aren't clever enough to be scientists, are illogical, incapable of rational thinking ... and should get back into the kitchen.

"The ones that really upset me described women like me as crybabies and emotionally incontinent toddlers."

Some of the messages were anti-semitic as well as misogynistic.

Undaunted, Grossman described her experience of being trolled in a TEDx talk, in which she also elaborated on her thesis that better science would be done if men as well as women were able to express their emotions at work.

"There is an outdated stereotype that all scientists are cold, hard, logical and unemotional – and male. And it's not only wrong but immensely damaging," she says.

In her talk, she points out that many of the best scientific discoveries have involved a combination of logic and

imagination, and that "many of the big minds in science have been deeply in touch with their feeling and intuitive nature". Einstein, for instance, said: "I sometimes feel that I am right. I do not know that I am." And the French mathematician Henri Poincaré wrote: "It is by logic that we prove but by intuition that we discover."

According to Grossman, if we change the stereotype of scientists as unfeeling, rational men, more women might be attracted to the subject.

"The proportion of women in Stem [science, technology, engineering and maths] careers is only 14% in the UK, and women make up only 17% of science professors. Nearly half of all mixed state sixth forms don't have a single girl studying physics," she says.

"Why don't girls enter science? Because they see it as 'not for people like me'. If you ask someone to draw a scientist, most people will still draw an old white man in a white coat with crazy hair."

Far from being silenced by her experience of being trolled, Grossman is now even more determined to spread the message "on social media, in schools, in workplaces, on public platforms – dispelling the damaging stereotype of scientists as cold and unemotional, inspiring girls to see themselves as sci-



entists, and encouraging all people, particularly men, [to see] that it really is not just OK to cry but good to cry.

"I cried after the trolling following my TV interview. I cried because I witnessed so much fear, anger and hatred. But crying is OK. In fact, crying is essential. After I'd cried for a while I came back bigger and stronger, clearer, ready to process and understand what had happened to me. Science needs you, not just even if you cry, but especially if you cry."

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