

Gabriella Del Greco

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Japanese/Japanese American Women Writers

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Final Project Critique

Gabriella Del Greco's report on women and honesty tries to build a case for itself. She writes "surprisingly little has been published on the connection between honesty and gender" as if she is going to do it herself. However, the results of her study are blurry. It is unclear what these 5 narratives of lying have anything to do with gender. Most of the lying reported, such as lying to one's parents, is not exclusive to women. Granted, she does occasionally highlight issues faced by women exclusively. For example, the summary of "Sasha's" life story mentions how issues of reproductive justice are connected to gender, but it doesn't say anything you couldn't find on a basic Wikipedia page. Ultimately, the problem with this project seems to be its lack of depth: by trying to balance so many facets of honesty in a single 11 page paper: literature, the law, reality tv, music, psychology, sexual orientation, fad-movements, etc, it loses any semblance of coherency, and just becomes a grab bag of examples chosen to prove the author's familiarity with the subject.

Whether the author is familiar with the subject of honesty then, is an interesting measure to judge the project by. She certainly has read at least (2) books on the subject: *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*, and *Radical Honesty*, both of which she mentions in her article. The summary of the former is interesting, but it mainly repeats points already laid out in the book rather than do anything original with them. When she critiques *Radical Honesty*, it is clearly to

repeat her belief that dishonesty is natural. Again, what this has to do with gender is unclear. Overall, the author seems to have a basic grasp of the cultural significance of honesty, but she would either need to write 20+ more pages on the subject or leave it out altogether. The format is too short to fully explore the cultural ramifications of dishonesty, which could make up an entire book.

There's also the issue of culture in general. While she doesn't mention it, the author writes from an American perspective on honesty. How is honesty perceived in other cultures? It would be fine if she states the fact that her view is limited outright, but that she does not. She does pull interviews from people who come from different cultural backgrounds: conservative Indian, Mexican, etc, but little energy is put into discussing how this culture might affect their view of honesty. In fairness, the project deals more with the psychology of honesty than the sociology, but since she mentions culture a fair bit throughout the work, the lack of in-depth explanation is overly apparent.

Then there is the issue of the psychology of honesty. This is probably where the project succeeds most, as she brings in research to fortify her points, and she does this in both the introduction and between interviews. There could be more depth to her analysis of course, but for such a relatively short project, the absence of it is forgivable.

Finally, one must look at the scientific validity of this project. Even though it doesn't purport to be an actual study, the use of interviews to conduct research means that it can be graded as such. Because the author only interviewed 6 people, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population, the sample size is too small. It also focuses on a very narrow group, ie female college students at Scripps college. While there is some diversity in the socio-economic

background and racial backgrounds of the subject, there are also big gaps in representation. The author didn't interview any black women, for example, all the women she interviewed were cis, and only one of them identified as non-straight. All this means is that the project cannot be said to speak for all women.

In fairness, the author points out that the project is not means to draw any broad conclusions about women and honesty. For such a small subject pool, that would amount to generalization. By pulling in information from outside sources, she is at least able to situate interviews in a larger cultural context. Even though I criticized the lack of in-depth explanation of culture earlier, the inclusion of culture does have its merits. It in some way forgives the study for its lack of breadth. Because this was a college project, and not a published article, the study's flaws are more easily forgivable. The project functions more as an overview of the place honesty and gender have in our culture: a preview of what could be done if more time and effort were poured into this project. If the author was to make the project better, I would recommend first interviewing more people. I would also recommend talking to subjects multiple times, in order to catch issues that may have come up after the first interview was completed. I would then advise her to sort interviews which have similar perspectives on honesty—something she does already, in fact, and pick the most interesting one to talk about. The fact that life-stories encapsulated so much, and the author could only pick certain things to focus on, meant that the subjects felt short-shifted. However, this could be remedied if the author discarded the “life narrative” angle, and picked certain details from interviews to focus on. Once she did that, she should come up with a clearer message, and organize her project around proving it. The message

she choose, that honesty is “complicated,” did not feel inaccurate, but was too general to be truly interesting.

All in all, even though I found plenty to criticize about this work, the clear amount of effort and research that went into this project is commendable. Honesty is such a large subject, that it is hard to encapsulate in such a short project, and the author made a valiant effort. Even with its many short-comings, this work is a good preview of what could be if the author was more organized in her approach to the topic.