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Neal DeRoo

Dordt College, neal.deroo@dordt.edu

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Does Gender Matter in the Academic World?

Abstract

Posting about how much gender matters in the academy and higher education from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/does-gender-matter-in-the-academic-world/>

Keywords

In All Things, gender identity, college teachers, work environment

Disciplines

Christianity | Higher Education

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Does Gender Matter in the Academic World?

 [all in allthings.org/does-gender-matter-in-the-academic-world/](https://allthings.org/does-gender-matter-in-the-academic-world/)

Neal DeRoo

Does gender matter in academia? I'm fairly sure that it does. Pretty much certain, in fact. And I say this, not primarily because of statistics or hiring numbers or anything like that, but because I've talked with many women who work as academics in the field of higher education, and in so doing I have come to realize that my experience as a professor is very different from theirs. Rather, it is not that my experience as a professor is, overall, wholly different from theirs; indeed, in general our experience is very similar: the joys of getting published; the agony of rejection letters; the hard work of teaching; the politics of the academic "game." There is much in our experiences that is the same, as one would expect of people in the same field.

But in talking with them, I slowly came to realize that there were some very small differences in our stories, little things here or there that, when put together, create a very different experience for someone involved in the academy. Instead of telling their stories for them (and we contacted several women whose experiences I have in mind here to ask them to write about this for us, but they all refused or were unable to do so, for a variety of reasons), I thought it best to relay my experience with some of these "little things." I will not claim that my experiences are universal for all men, nor that all women will be devoid of them. But I wanted to offer a glimpse into what life is like for me, as a man in the world of higher education. Here goes¹:

1. I have never been shushed in a meeting or other professional setting.
2. No one has ever tied my appearance to my job performance, either in course evaluations or in job reviews.
3. No one asks me who is watching my kids while I'm at work.
4. I have never been asked to get coffee for other people at a meeting.
5. If I volunteer to do so, it is generally viewed as a positive reflection on my character.
6. My moods are taken as reflecting the kind of day I've had, not the kind of person that I am.
7. I can be direct and to the point and it isn't held against me.
8. Offering a proposed course of action in a straightforward manner will increase, rather than decrease, its likelihood of happening.
9. Rarely do I have to make something seem like someone else's idea if I want it to happen.
10. I have never once had my comment ignored in a meeting, only to see a colleague get positive feedback when they repeat my comment moments later as if it were their own original idea.
11. When I'm in a meeting, people who don't know me do not assume I'm the secretary.
12. I can be too tired for small talk.
13. If I talk about my children at work, it is generally considered admirable, rather than unprofessional.

14. I can be unsure whether gender is a factor in higher education.
15. No one assumes I got my job “just because he’s a man.”
16. I do not normally feel like I am speaking on behalf of my entire gender.
17. I have never been told that I am responsible for other people’s sinful thoughts.
18. I am afraid that a student could harm my reputation, but I do not worry that I will be physically harmed.
19. If I make a mistake, I am likely to get a second chance.
20. My thoughts, ideas, and feelings are never dismissed as “hormones” or attributed to my [sexual cycles](#).
21. The fact that I have sexual cycles is not part of everyday discourse.
22. It is unlikely that a group of students will have trouble viewing me as an authority in my field merely because I’m a man.
23. If I don’t know something in class, students will not question my fitness to be a professor.
24. Students generally assume my frustration is their fault rather than proof that I am too emotional to teach philosophy.
25. If I take time out of a work day to watch my kids, I am lauded for “making time for my family.”
26. The fact that I occasionally take time out of a work day to watch my kids has never been used as evidence that I may not be “ready yet” to be “back at work.”
27. I can be a professor to students with no expectations that I will be their parent.
28. Students of both genders are comfortable talking to me outside of class.
29. If students find me attractive, this does not negatively impact their ability to learn from me.
30. I have never once worried that I have too many male authors on my syllabus or that my students would accuse me of having a pro-male bias.
31. I can write on this topic without fear of being labeled a “radical.”
32. Being a “radical” may not negatively affect my job status.
33. I can discuss the different experiences that males and females have in our culture without it being dismissed as self-serving, whining, or trying to make my inability someone else’s fault.
34. If I blame someone else for my shortcomings, it is not automatically dismissed as a false accusation.
35. I have not been told, while a young professor, that engaging in small talk with students is “unprofessional,” will cause them to “lose respect” for me, or is otherwise damaging to my ability to be their professor.
36. I am not likely to be told, while an older professor, that failing to engage in small talk with students is “aloof,” “uncaring,” or otherwise damaging to my ability to be their professor.

37. When I apply for a position, I can presume that my [letters of recommendation](#) will spend more time [talking about my professional abilities than my personal characteristics](#).
38. When I apply for a position, I am more likely to [be described with superlatives like “outstanding” and less likely to be described by “doubt raisers” such as, “It appears his health and personal life are stable.”](#)
39. I do not have to ask my letter writers to check out websites like [this one](#) before writing a letter of recommendation for me, and I don't have to worry if I am too uncomfortable to ask them to do so.
40. I do not have to serve as the informal adviser for every student of my gender who is thinking about graduate school or is having problems in my program.
41. Displaying empathy and kindness has never made me feel that others thought [I should give up my chosen field](#).
42. If I were to make a sexual comment about a student, there is a chance that people would partially blame the student.
43. I have never been called [“fresh meat”](#) by a professor while in grad school.
44. I have never worried about [what sexual signals my actions are sending](#) to a professor, colleague, or student.
45. Before sitting down to write this, I had never thought about what it's like to be a male in academia.
46. I think it's a bit weird that someone would wonder what it's like to be a male in my job.

Are the things I say here “normal”? I know that they are not normal for all professors, including for many women. So, how deeply is my experience as a professor a “gendered” experience? Is my experience a “male” experience or just my experience? Please share your thoughts and experiences in the comments below, and we can open a discussion on how much gender matters in the academy and higher education.

Footnotes

1. The inspiration to try to describe my experience in a numbered list of smaller events comes from [Peggy McIntosh](#). ↩