
Concursul Interjudețean „BILINGUAL=BEST”
Ediția a IV-a, 31 ianuarie 2020

SUBIECTE
CLASA a XII-a

It's a good job no one starts a postgraduate degree in gender studies to meet men: my MPhil class at Cambridge contains precisely zero of them. Apparently, this is anomalous, according to course director Dr Andy Tucker. In the three previous years there have been a quarter to a third men: a better turnout than on many gender programmes.

Yet at the LSE this year, it's not much better: out of 85 students on gender studies master's courses, eight are men. Last year it was five out of 89 students. As Dr Jonathan Dean, a feminist political theory lecturer at Leeds University, says: "Gender studies degrees and women's studies remain overwhelmingly female-dominated. When I started in this field I thought I was the only man doing it."

Why is there such a dearth of male students? Especially when there are so many male lecturers teaching gender studies. After all, it's not "[women's studies](#)" any more (apart from at Oxford, among others), a change that has taken place over the past decade as "gender" courses in the UK have sprung up, aiming at a wider audience both of women and men.

This imbalance comes as more men than ever, among my friends at least, seem involved or interested in gender debates. At Cambridge, talks with a gender angle are always packed, and nearly half with men – whether it's a female student philosopher arguing that patriarchy still oppresses women or a university keynote debate on differences between male and female brains. The problem is not that men aren't interested. But for many, a fear of "feminism" and its practitioners persists. And that's what needs to change.

One man I spoke to, an international relations PhD student, said: "I do not recognise gender studies as being a very important discipline. I do think women's rights are important. But I think in courses like these they are too critical of what they call male-dominated reality."

Another student said he would be put off a gender studies course, "interesting though it might be," because the assumptions made about him – particularly his sexuality – would be too onerous and uncomfortable to explain. "If I studied gender studies I would seem gay. I would have to justify myself all the time – there would be so many really different assumptions about me. I would have trouble finding a woman."

Another student echoed Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949, when he said: "I wouldn't take gender studies because I'm a man and we aren't different. [Women](#) are the ones who are considered different."



Concursul Interjudețean „BILINGUAL=BEST”
Ediția a IV-a, 31 ianuarie 2020



In reality, men (when present) are greatly valued in gender studies courses, not loathed as the living, breathing patriarchy. "It seems to me that the women students are extraordinarily protective of the minority of men in the seminar group," says Anne Phillips, head of the LSE's gender institute. In his feminist political theory class (about a third male), most of Dean's men "seem to be on board or sympathetic" to feminism. But feminism isn't the only topic in gender studies – just as important are masculinities and, of course, queer theory. Last year, a male gender studies MA student called [Tom Martin](#) tried to sue the LSE for offering an anti-man course – the claim was thrown out.

Tucker at Cambridge seems relaxed by this year's no-show from men. "We want the best people. And this year, the best people who were able to take up places happened to be women. In a few weeks we're having a whole session on masculinities. It's important that those on the course engage with a range of theories, which includes masculinities, and this can be taught successfully whether or not there are men in the group."

(Source: *Why do so few men take gender studies courses?* by Zoe Strimpel, *The Guardian*, 2012)

Read the text and, using the background information, write a 250-word reflective essay on gender studies.