

University of Szczecin
English Department and Humanities

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Poland

iGIANT-inspired faculty meeting on gender/sex in academia, classroom/school design, and society in Poland.

Date and location of meeting: June 5, 2018 in building 4 (Philology building) in room 16 at 17:00 CET.

Meeting organizers: Laken Brooks, moderator, and co-organizer Professor Barbara Braid

Attendees:

Matt Obszanski
Adrianna Goldman
Barbara Braid
Laken Brooks
Department Director Hanna Pulaczewska
Ula Chwesiuk
Andrew Tomlinson
Anna Łazuka

Other interested parties:

Justyna Stępień

Discussion Highlights:

1) What are some of your experiences teaching sex/gender issues in class? How do these discussions look?

→ We each discussed connections with students and differences, over time, in how the classroom organization reinforced some patriarchal or ableist ideas. For example: the university doesn't have working elevators or accommodations for students with mobility issues, etc. Professors discussed how female students, especially in STEM classes, tend to be more quiet and sit in the front of the class whereas male students tend to sit in the back of the class, use phones/laptops without permission, and be more outspoken in the conversation.

2) How do you see the issues of gender/sex emerge in today's Polish society? How do you think these issues compare to other places around the world, and why?

→ The policy of 500+ came up, legislation that provides family with extra stipends per child. Professors discussed how this policy is advertised as a “woman-friendly” law, but how many women cannot have children or do not want children.

3) What are some common issues facing women and transgender people both in academia and society overall here in Poland? How have you seen these issues evolve or devolve over time?

→ We discussed abortion debates and healthcare accessibility; women in Poland often have to go across the border to Germany or to other countries to find abortions or access to certain forms of medical birth control. We also discussed luxury taxes on goods and how store/school designs rarely incorporate breastfeeding spaces for mothers or places to sit with children.

4) When you bring up issues of gender/sex/identities (feminism, queer theory, Marxism/immigration, etc.) in class, how do students tend to respond?

--> If you have encountered negative reactions, how do you react?

→ A couple of noteworthy students came up, and it was revealed that these students (one in particular) will target female professors and accuse them of “indoctrinating” students when these professors include academic information on gender/sex, such as learning about why women scientists or authors are often left out of textbooks or forgotten in history. This particular student did not converse with the male professors in the room in the same manner.

5) Many professors are criticized for "indoctrinating" their students when they teach about intersecting issues of gender, race, sexuality, and class; does this fear impact your experience as a professor, or do you notice students adopting this sort of attitude in the classroom?

→ Yes, this attitude prevails across humanities classes *and* classes related to STEM.

6) If students are reluctant to learn about these issues, what do you think drives that reluctance? How can we, or can we even begin to, reach past this student defensiveness?

→ Bring up these issues in relation to tangible lived experiences: for example, show students that women pay more for products than men or that women face design flaws that men do not always experience. By basing these conversations on fact and relatable occurrences, we can avoid some of the more subjective and politicized elements of feminology.

7) What do you perceive as being the role of women/race/class/gender issues in Polish society -- and in your classroom -- in a year? 5 years? How can we plan to prepare our students for this future?

→ We discussed how women’s accessibility in public spaces and in the classroom has changed -- and in many ways, it has regressed -- since communism in the 70s-80s. For example, abortions and reproductive care were less stigmatized in the communism times, whereas now people have increased difficulty finding these services. Women regularly worked, either on farms or in other jobs, as a requirement of communism; however, now some religious conservatism has encouraged women to enter back into the sphere of domesticity.

8) How can we make our classrooms more welcoming for students of these different identities?

→ By encouraging the university to change classroom design from the traditional lecture hall to more Socratic-style, circular settings to encourage women and men to speak equally and be

recognized on equal footing; to encourage the university to include spaces for students and faculty who are pregnant/breastfeeding/mothers because these students now have to use their cars or cramped bathroom stalls; to include curriculum that is open and diverse; to push for handicap entrances.

9) When it comes to innovation in art and STEM, do you see any interesting policies or innovations?

→ Mentions of some bias against plus-size women in Poland and Europe, in general. However, the members also mentioned how young female scientists are becoming more popular on social media and present promise for gender parity.

10) When it comes to policies about gender/family (like the additional money per larger families), how do you think these policies impact women vs. men? Do they reinforce old binaries or are they making positive space? How may these policies impact our students and the situations in our classroom?

→ Refer to notes above about 500+.

11) How is the experience as a female academic different than being a man? What forms of discrimination or the "male gaze" continue to linger in academia -- for example, body shaming, lack of promotions, etc.?

→ Many sales and representatives are catered to men even though women purchase more of these items that are advertised. Women continue to reside in lower-level roles whereas, statistically (although not necessarily the case in our department) men are in the higher position of department head, dean, etc.

→ Students are more abrasive with female professors, asking for more extra credit or accusing female professors of bias more often than they do with male professors.

12) What solutions do you propose to some of these larger issues that you discussed? If these systemic issues don't have immediate solutions, what can we do to immediately support one another?