

Why Can't Men Stop Talking in Classrooms?
An Ode to Mr. Loudmouth's Presence in Academia

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Imagine having the audacity, the confidence, the entitlement to move through the world believing that you should externalize every thought you have, and that people will always listen to you.

And having it come true over and over and over again.

In a classroom setting, femme coded bodies are aware of leaving space for other students to have the opportunity to share their thoughts, too. There are unwritten rules of etiquette that we are all conscious of. You should not answer the same question twice. You should not spend ten minutes monologuing your opinions. You should not start talking unprompted. You should not interrupt other students. You should not speak over the prof.

So why do men feel that these are acceptable things to do?

Throughout my five years thus far in academia, I have come across countless men who believe it is their right to dominate the classroom, treating the space like yet another place they must assert themselves as the leader of the pack or else they will be dismissed as adequate.

Mr. Loudmouth, do you get a kick of adrenaline when you cut off women profs? Do you feel satisfaction when you make all the other students listen to you making your subpar statements? Do you enjoy bringing up irrelevant points and veering well off-track? Does it make you feel powerful to play devil's advocate?

What must it be like to constantly have your superiority reinforced by societal structures and the ways people who look like you are portrayed? It is society that has allowed men to control conversations, classrooms, academia for so long. And it is society that is still allowing this to continue. Society has given men permission to talk without thinking and expect people to listen to them. Educational spheres are full of men who believe they are entitled to the time and attention of peers and experts alike. And because they have "put in their dues" and have had formal teaching, they believe that their voices are even more important.

If women were socialized the same way as men, this would be a very different conversation. We wouldn't be asking what we have to do to be heard, what we have to do to be taken seriously, what we have to do to earn the successes that we have had.

We wouldn't have to always be perfect. We wouldn't have to always do the mental and social labour for everyone around us in addition to ourselves.

Because I am a woman, I have to work harder. I have to wait longer. I have to talk louder. All because society has conditioned women into believing that they cannot take up space, that they

must always be conscientious of others, that they have to be gracious for the attention that they are given.

This is bullshit. And I'm so very tired of it.

Why can't I monopolize the time of others? Why can't I over-explain and talk down to my peers? Why can't I go through the world without constantly analyzing how I am being received? Sometimes, it feels very tempting to do so. But this isn't the solution. Because this behaviour isn't just synonymous to being a rude man, it's synonymous to being a rude human. And the world has enough rude people in it.

So how do we solve the problem of men taking up more than their share of space in classrooms? How can we take back the ground we were forced to cede to them in the fight for sharing our thoughts?

It is so hard to combat this because it is a subtle way of undermining women authority figures and creating an environment that makes others feel like their thoughts do not have the same value. When addressing it afterwards, the critiques can sound ridiculous and easily deconstructed. *You are participating too much in discussions (where everyone is encouraged to participate). You are giving too many opinions on a topic (that everyone is instructed to think critically about). You are engaging too much with the materials (that everyone has been told to analyze).* It is an issue that must be dealt with while it is happening, and oftentimes other students do not have the power to do so.

The next time a man in your classes is taking up too much time and space, think about how you, perhaps with others in your class, can respond to it and minimize the harm that it does to everyone. Think about the ways you could constructively intervene and participate in the discussion. Think about how you can help to make the classroom a more safe and inclusive space for those who are less comfortable and less privileged in it.

Because unless we take responsibility for making academia less male-dominated, it will never happen. Society has stacked the systems against us. We need to work at dismantling them, one small action at a time. We're doing it now. I see it happening. And these small actions grow to have big impacts on everyone who witnesses them.