

# OpenTheo

## Q&A#57 Gender Segregation?

September 25, 2018



### Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "In relation to your "Paul Maxwell on Masculinity" video, I definitely have observed the beneficial impact that working together seems to have on men. However, you suggest that keeping men and women working separately as much as possible is the best way to allow men to have good sense of their own masculinity. What exactly would that look like in a modern context, and are there areas where you think that separation would become problematic? Prudence Allen's work on philosophical concepts of women indicates that the treatment of universities as male-only spaces did have some very negative results, and she argues for a complementarity view of the sexes that emphasizes the way positive interaction between the sexes can create more fruitful results, intellectual and otherwise, than if the sexes are kept separate. Are there spaces where you think gender exclusion should not take place?"

The video referenced in this question can be seen here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMXIWH\\_axL4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMXIWH_axL4).

Within this video, I reference the three volume work of Sister Prudence Allen, 'The Concept of Woman'—Volume 1 (<https://amzn.to/2xBUQ4P>), Volume 2 (<https://amzn.to/2QRzloG>), Volume 3 (<https://amzn.to/2NGIV0P>).

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:

<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these videos, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>.

My new Soundcloud account is here: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Welcome back. Today I'm responding to a question from the previous video, which is, in

relation to your Paul Maxwell on masculinity video, I definitely have observed the beneficial impact that working together seems to have on men. However, you suggest that keeping men and women working separately as much as possible is the best way to allow men to have a good sense of their own masculinity.

What exactly would that look like in a modern context, and are there areas where you think that separation would become problematic? Prudence Allen's work on philosophical concepts of women indicates that the treatments of the university as male-only spaces did have some very negative results, and she argues for a complementarity view of the sexes that emphasises the way positive interaction between the sexes can create more fruitful results, intellectual and otherwise, than if the sexes are kept separate. Are there spaces where you think gender exclusion should not take place? First of all, the books being referenced are Prudence Allen's books on the concept of women, which explores the history of this concept in Western thought. It's a very dense series of books, well worth reading.

It particularly explores the influence of Aristotelian notions and the way that that influenced the rise of the university as a realm that embodied and reinforced that notion of men being more intelligent or more apt for rational thought than women, and produced a situation where that just ended up being the case because women did not have support for intellectual and academic culture, whereas in the previous context of the monastic communities they often had a lot more than they did after the rise of the university. It's a very worthwhile series of books, so I highly recommend that. I'll leave the links for that in the notes below.

On this question more generally, there are important distinctions to be made between communities that are gender neutralising, which are many of the communities that we find ourselves in today, like the modern university, where men and women are designed to be interchangeable and to be treated indiscriminately within the structure of the university. So that's the gender neutralised context as one. Then there's the context of male or female exclusivity, so the context that is exclusive to male or female, the university that is one that rules out the presence of women, and that's a different sort of context.

But the context that I would argue for is one which is more complementary, that there is this bringing together of men and women in their differences, but in a way that gives both of them space to be different, has male-only spaces and has female-only spaces, but then brings them together in fruitful interaction so that they inform each other and learn from each other, but in a way that does not collapse them into each other. Many of the problems that we have within contemporary society are a result of the collapsing of male and female spaces into each other. Many men and many women will spend far more time every week working closely with a colleague of the other sex than they will actually spend with their own spouse.

That is a very strange position. It's not something that's common in human societies. This is something that's quite unusual to our society, which has so ordered itself around utilitarianism and achieving maximal production that it has broken down the more natural organic forms of human sociality that you find in just about any other pre-industrial and pre-modern society, and this is something that causes a lot of different problems.

So I was reading some survey recently that said that 70% of business people had a work spouse at some point, a work spouse being a member of the other sex with whom you have a deep affectionate and supportive relationship, and within these relationships it was pointing out that there are often quasi-marital dynamics. That's why it's called a work spouse, and within these dynamics often it's the man that's helping and serving as an ally and supporter for the woman and advancing her and her career, whereas the woman is providing emotional support and more traditionally female things in response. This is one of the areas where the Pence and the Graham rules really hit the road, that they're about institutions that have men in positions of power and influence, and women that want to enter those institutions and rise within those institutions can't really participate in the male groups, the male sociality that can often be very powerful within them, and so they need access to people, and if they can't have direct access to some of these people who have power and influence, they have a problem.

They can't rise within these institutions, and so that relationship between the sexes is one where influence and power and aid and support tend to flow in one direction, but they are needed by women in order to advance. But then the question is, is that going to develop into a quasi-marital relationship, the sort of secretary-boss relationship that we'd associate with something like *Mad Men* and that sort of world of the 60s and 70s, where often there's a very overt gendered dynamic, quasi-marital dynamic that exists between the male and the female within the workplace. But these things are very common, and it leads to a sort of emotional weakening of the bond of marriage, a distraction from it, and the fact that these are the sorts of bonds that would be formed by men and women working together in the past, and now they've migrated elsewhere, and they're no longer being a relationship that is making marriages stronger, rather it's detracting from their power, and marriage becomes something weaker and less powerful, something that's less ordered out into the world, less ordered out into a common good and a common labour, because you're doing that elsewhere with some other colleagues of the other sex.

And that is a very serious thing that we don't think about enough, because we don't want to think about it, because we know that just about so much of the modern society that we live in depends upon having men and women working interchangeably, birth control, abortion, and a very extensive state system, welfare, and all these sorts of things that enable women's liberation, as we understand it. But these are deep problems, and they lead to dysfunctions. Our society is an unusual one, in that it is ordered around primarily

utility and maximisation of product and the attainment of wealth, wealth in a very abstract, money-focused way, rather than upon the development of human communities and relationships, and the bonds of the family, and these sorts of things, the extended life of the family.

And that leads to all sorts of problems. It also leads to a problem of dysfunctional sexual culture, with all sorts of hookups, the blurring of the lines between friendship and sex, which we see a lot within our current context, friends with benefits relationships, and that sort of thing. We see it also in the way that there is a context that just makes things right for sexual abuse and exploitation.

It's one of the things that makes it difficult in the current context when we're talking about people like Brett Kavanaugh and others, and the context in which they grew up in is a dysfunctional sexual context, one where parents and the university acting in loco parentis have been removed from the scene, and increasingly you have contexts where a feral masculinity that is collapsed into a gender-neutralised space where men and women are interchanging and interacting freely, it leads to all sorts of sexual abuse. And not all of it is the fault of the individuals involved in it. A lot of it is the fault of a culture that makes things right for that, that creates the conditions where that is likely to happen, where people who do not observe the lines well, who do not know the lines well, will end up hurting people.

That is a huge problem. But we formed a society by our collapsing of the sexes into each other where that is quite likely to happen. And now that we are becoming more clamping down on these sorts of things and dealing with the dysfunctions of that context of sexual liberation and the integration of the sexes into these spaces, and we are starting to deal and tackle that feral masculinity that develops within those contexts, the context of frat culture and things like that.

But we are not forming a healthy masculinity in its place. Rather we are leaving this force with increasingly penalised and punished but we are not actually directing it in a healthy way. We are not channelling it.

And this leads to all the different sorts of issues that we are facing within the current context where there is distrust and antagonism between the sexes. Now we need a healthier culture. We need a healthier culture where men and women have far more distinction in their sociality and are brought together far more carefully and under far greater supervision and in terms of norms and things like that.

Now that sort of context can be a highly charged one. It's one of the reasons why we enjoy watching films and reading books about a society that has a very pronounced sense of the distinction between men and women and the etiquette of bringing them together. Because there is a sexual charge to that, it creates a very fruitful realm for romance.

But when we lose that distinction it kind of collapses things into each other and we end up with something very different entirely. A deformed form of masculinity. A deformed form of femininity.

Often that masculinity for instance can go feral and it can be destructive and abusive or it can just be emasculated and not have much manliness or virility to it or strength to it. It loses its backbone and the ideal man is someone who's harmless and nice and highly sensitive and those sorts of things are not bad things when they are expressions of a man's self-control, his ability to control his strength. But if it's just about a man's weakness and the man not being able to actually exert any strength, never being able to stand up and offend someone when it needs to happen, then it's not a virtue at all.

It's just a sign of weakness and often that's what we're producing because we lack these contexts that will really develop us in our distinct friends. We're seeing the damage and the tensions in other areas. On the internet you see this a lot as male and female spaces of discourse collapse into each other.

There is just conflict so much of the time. I read a piece a while back that compared the current context of culture as one where you constantly see these interactions between the bad boys and the mean girls. The bad boys that are this sort of feral group operating from margins in shadowy ways often using anonymous, they're anonymous, they're people who are using pseudonyms and things like that and they're causing mayhem, confusion, things like that and challenging and very aggressive and agonistic in their tendencies.

And then a more feminine form of sociality where people are trying to manufacture consensus, freezing out other people, freezing out challenge, demonizing opponents and appealing to third parties to act against them, all these sorts of things. And so you have these conflicts between these two very gendered tendencies and we're seeing that an awful lot. We're seeing it in the university as well as people like Jonathan Haidt and others have noted and Jordan Peterson and people like that.

These differences that we're seeing around issues of free speech and the context of challenge within the university are highly gendered. It's not accidental that the greatest challenge to these things comes from the context of female-dominated disciplines and where that occurs it's just two contexts at odds with each other. You see it for instance in something like the movement from so many people from the new atheist movement to an anti-social justice warrior movement.

Why is that? The new atheist movement attracted a certain type of men, young men, young men who like debate and agonism, young men who are more science-oriented, young men who appreciated the example and the image of the older men who really led that movement. People who are pugnacious debaters, who were unflinching, who sort of facts don't care about your feelings types. People like Richard Dawkins, people like Sam

Harris, people like Chris Hitchens, Daniel Dennett.

These people tend to be raised or come from an Oxbridge male context predominantly. They're brought up in an academic context which is very much about rigorous debate and challenge and pushing against each other, testing ideas and arriving at objective truth through that honing process. Whereas the social justice movement is very much about the subjectivity of my truth, about restoring subjectivities, pushing back against anything that challenges that objective science or all these arguments and seeks to close people out.

Close people out by demonizing them, by appealing to third parties to intervene against them, all these sorts of things. And so one attracts a very male-dominated group and the other tracks a very female-dominated group. Both of these are dysfunctional tendencies by the way because they're not very corrected by the other but what we have is this polarization and this conflict where we've tried to gender neutralize things but these gender tendencies are coming to the surface anyway in ways that just cause mayhem and lead to people being suppressed or stifled and it's not good for anyone.

So what do we do about it? What we need to do I think is recognize the importance of male and female spaces and what they serve. They do different things and they have different strengths. If all your spaces were spaces of agonism you would not actually develop the strengths of cooperative and exploratory work and there's something very good about that.

Now not all male spaces are agonistic by any means but there's a particular male tendency and strength there and that male tendency and strength is one that is very good for testing and stress testing ideas for leading to an emphasis upon strong ideas over weak ideas and weeding out weaker ideas even if that means excluding certain people from the conversation and pushing certain people forward whereas a context that's very much focused upon inclusion brings certain things into the conversation that would not be otherwise seen and both of those are needed. The university needs to be a place where ideas are challenged and tested and honed where people defend truth where people attack error where there is a backbone for these things for these contexts. It's the same for the church where we collapse male and female training into each other.

We lack the ability to develop a healthy intellectual virility the strength of men who can fight for things who have who prove themselves using mastery strength courage and honor and the traditional context of the university really prized those traits and really developed an intellectual virility and what we have today often is a breaking down of that context with the rapid influx of women and we've not really got something good to replace it and so in that former context what you have is the expectation of first of all the old honor culture being removed the old honor culture where men would fight jewels if their arguments got too heated and we develop certain institutions to serve to guard

against going to that extreme so institutions that you can appeal to the law to settle your dispute and that enables people to deal with things in a way that they would not otherwise and prevents things from blowing out of proportion and that's very important but that leads to a certain sort of male intellectual culture where male virtues and male tendencies provide the bedrock of that ethos so you have the emphasis upon strength you must put forward strong arguments forcefully and you must assert yourself in the conversation you must push yourself forward don't expect just to be invited you must have mastery you must prove that you know the things in every single detail and you can defend it at each point and that's important you must master yourself and you must be able to present your case forcefully but without losing your temper you must be able to show courage to put your positions on the line to put them out there where they could be challenged and and refuted and you must face your opponents directly there's honor to it that you recognize yourself and you recognize worthy adversaries and worthy companions in the struggle to test ideas to hone ideas and to become sharper in your thinking and that context of agonism is one that produces very strong cultures of thought for many issues it's only part of a culture of thought though if that's all you have you will be missing out a lot of other things and often what you find with female groups is they accentuate other strengths of discourse the ability of people to cooperate in more exploratory forms of discourse where they bring together insights the bringing into the conversation of subjective perspectives and vantage points those things that are excluded by a highly objective driven form of discourse which is typical of men men are far more objective task and thing oriented whereas female groups are far more person oriented there's a tendency for women in general as individuals but in male and female groups it's far more accentuated because you're playing to the strongest tendency of the group and what happens in these different groups is on the one hand the male group can be hyper objective in a way that blinds itself to its own the things that it is bringing to the conversation the things that it is rationalizing inadvertently and the forms of power and other things like that on the other hand the female context can be dulled to the broader context the objective realities that correct and challenge and unsettle certain subjective perspectives and that is something that male and female groups interacting together they need that interaction basically as human beings we need to have the interaction with the other sex to become rounded human beings if you're only interacting with your own sex and only able to interact with your own sex well there's something deeply dysfunctional there's something that's been lost and part of that is an understanding of the common good and a common end but also it's an understanding of your own character and a development of your own character so your strengths are not just things that run away with you and your tendencies are not just things that you're at the mercy of rather your tendencies are developed and strengthened and harnessed so that they can relate in other contexts so you can be a man who can have really strong arguments but you can quietly listen to a woman and learn from her that both of those are needed and in the same way a woman can be someone who can be in a typical female environment and operate very well in

that and yet also can be someone who can have a good argument without making it personal and these are big challenges that we have within our current context where we're pushed towards our extremes and our tendencies so what do we how are some of the ways that we can develop these well i think we need male and female spaces that are exclusive to men and women we also need spaces where men and women are have male and female groups that are hospitable to the other sex they invite the other sex in to play by those tendencies and then we need spaces where the two sexes get together as distinct groups and then other spaces where they're more integrated and that is a challenge but it's the way that good speech operates good speech for instance in the law court requires a lot of different forms of speech that are distinguished from each other they exclude other forms of speech but are nonetheless integrated so you need the speech that occurs between the client and the advocate and you need the the speech that occurs between as people are arguing out the case the speech of the judge to the jury and to the various advocates and the the court you need the speech of the jury among itself as it deliberates you need the speech of the court reporters you need the people the wider crowd and their involvement that needs to be done before a wider context of witnesses and all of this is required in order to arrive at justice the choreography of all these different forms of speech so that they're not just stepping on each other's toes but they are serving a common good and there are certain forms of speech that need to be excluded from certain contexts so if you want to have your case defended well generally you need to get someone else to do that for you but you need to talk with them you need to have that conversation with them and when that is lacking the process of justice doesn't operate very well likewise within human societies we need these distinctions we need separate spaces for men and women and to bring them together carefully in ways that are more choreographed than our current ways ways where we actually learn from each other and rather than just butting heads which is so often what is happening now this form of culture i believe would help us to recognize the strengths of men and women and the necessity of the insights and the strengths that they bring to the conversation one of the problems that we have within our current context is just this runaway notion of inclusion but an indiscriminate and imprudent form of inclusion where you're just collapsing men and women into the same space and then dealing with that conflict often by stifling men and presenting a situation where women feel they can't express themselves fully either you need to recognize the differences and bring them into relationship in a way that allows both to find their true voice and enables people to be formed in intergenerational relationships so you don't have this dysfunctional collapsing of male and female spaces into each other but nor do you have their dysfunctional just division and divergence now within the church this is very significant because significant as i mentioned yesterday when you collapse male and female spaces of discourse into each other you do not develop the strength of the bond among men the bond between father and son fathers and sons and the bonds between brothers and the broader bonds that those represent within the community that provide the backbone and the strength of a community and many of the dysfunctions that we



see within the church today is inability to stand firm on certain issues are a result of that dysfunction the weakness that results when you lose a male only space on the other hand many of the other weaknesses that we're seeing the weaknesses of abuse and other things like that are when either you collapse spaces into each other in ways that do not give men and women space where they're primarily working in distinction from each other and they have their own space and they're not actually in a space where power dynamics and other things can lead to abuse of each other and then you also have a situation where there is communication there needs to be communication between the sectors where you have strong and influential women within the community older women who are able to speak for the younger women who are able to provide a context that is secure and safe for them in a way that is not just collapsed into a male context and trying to fight out a corner within there but where they have their own space now this is going to require a lot of wisdom and it will differ from context to context there's not a universal one size fits all thing here it will often require a lot of adjustments other times it won't require so much of an adjustment i have found that there are certain things that i will learn in primarily female contexts that can never learn from male contexts there are things that develops that in your understanding that you do not have in male contexts you can it's very important that men listen to women and learn from them it's very important that men read women that men spend time around women and take note of what they say on the other hand so many of my primary theological contexts are predominantly or exclusively male and frankly they have been just a lifesaver for me they have been contexts within which i can i can actually express myself without things being constantly collapsing into conflicts over personality engagement tendencies and all these sorts of things they've allowed for a far more searching conversation a conversation that's far more effective at stress testing ideas without it getting personal and they really allow for a common end they allow for a certain sort of academic virility to be developed and you just do not have that within many contexts and i talk to so many men who feel this keenly they feel the loss of this and how stifled they feel in mixed contexts that they spend most of their lives in it's one of the things that again in the debates about men and women about the universities and free speech and discourse within these contexts it's so often raised as an awkward issue but as a real issue that this is a gendered problem that it's the women that prevent the men from having that it's the men that are primarily pushing for freedom of speech for a context of agonism and struggle and battle over ideas and thinking things through through that stress testing context and the women who are working with a far more a mode of discourse that's far more typically feminine and a mode of sociality that makes it very difficult to have challenging discourse that operates according to the very stereotypical modes of female competition where everyone has to have an equal voice where people who are dissenters are excluded very quickly where there is an appeal to third parties to intervene against opponents where there's a sabotaging of people's identity of people's reputations and where there's a development of a manufacturing of consensus and a closing of people out a use of social power to close people down and these are the

dynamics that we're seeing on university campuses now in many contexts of discourse and often in theology and it's dysfunctional it's not actually serving the common good now that is not necessarily something that is it's not a sign that female discourse is just dysfunctional it isn't in the same way as male discourse is not just dysfunctional because it has an argumentative and agonistic tendency a tendency that can sometimes boil over into direct antagonism if mastered well it can be a very powerful dynamic one of the things that you see within female contexts is it brings voices to the surface that are not brought to the surface in male contexts in those male contexts often those voices are excluded or prevented from coming forward because they're weaker voices it also provides for a lot more of a context for certain sorts of collaboration now male groups can be very good for collaboration struggling together working things out but there's a different sort of collaboration that can happen within female groups and often a certain type of male society can prevent exploratory thought collaborative thought cooperative thought it can make it very difficult for that to take place whereas within female groups that can often be easier to occur now how to bring those together requires a lot of choreography just like the law court requires a lot of choreography a recognition of these different forms of speech that are component parts of a larger come a larger reality that's ordered towards the common good that does not privilege one of those forms of speech over all of the others but recognizes that each one of them is indispensable to the whole and likewise it should be the case with male and female contexts that we recognize the need for each other in the need to learn from each other the need to have conversations between conversations but also the need to have distinct spaces and that is difficult online online so much of our spaces have been collapsed into each other we're all speaking at the same time and over each other and in conflict with each other and some people feel um hurt by the insensitivity of it and others feel um stifled by the hypersensitivity of it but if you give people a bit more space aerate things a bit and distinguish between conversations and then bring those conversations into conversation you can actually get somewhere but this requires thinking about speech in a far more careful way that we tend to we tend to think about speech just as something you just set it loose and you set it free and it just happens in an effective way or you just put voices forward to the front of the conversation you don't actually think about the character of that conversation the ways that things need to be ordered together in a way that brings out the best in everyone and tempers their weaknesses that actually helps them to get over some of the dysfunctional tendencies which we all have and so this is something that we're nowhere near sorting out we have formed a society that depends upon the collapsing of men and women and their spaces into each other for women to have true dignity within society we have created a situation where they have to function within predominantly male or traditionally male spaces which leaves men without spaces where they can really develop virility and male strength it develops a sense of virility itself as something that is antisocial and something that's a threat because women struggle to deal with it directly and also breaks down those structures of training that actually lead to maturity in these traits where these traits are strengths that are used for the common

good for service for others and not just for self advancement or for breaking bringing other people down and it leads to a dysfunctionality in relations between the sectors where the work relationship as men and women work alongside each other in indiscriminate ways invites abuse invites dysfunctional relations distracts detracts from the power of marriage and takes what used to be at the heart of marriage and moves it elsewhere so all of these problems are huge issues that we don't want to talk about because so much of our society is predicated upon this collapsing of spaces into each other but we really need to we need to do something about this and it will require both men and women making significant changes now i think it would be better off all of us as a result of this if you have any further questions please leave them on my curious cat account if you would like to support this and future videos please do so using my patreon account if you have found these videos helpful please share them with your friends and subscribe and lord willing i'll be back again tomorrow with another video god bless