Casual sexism or unprofessionalism?

May 2, 2021 | 116 upvotes | by spiderunderweb

I study ComputerScience, and in my classes the majority of teachers are men, the class is mostly men with 1-3 women in each class.

Last Friday in my SQL class, the tutor asked if there were anymore questions. I raised my hand to ask a specific question about the syntax used in an example query. I asked "Why is that column name in all capital letters?". The teacher started laughing at me, and like a chorus, the table of men in front of me and the sides all broke out in laughter. It was humiliating but I hope that my face didn't show it. After they finished, I repeated my question (a little more serious). The teacher replied "I am not sure to be honest, it was probably a typo in the presentation" and trails off about making errors in the presentations followed by small laughs from himself and the class. I asked a few more questions until the laughter died down.

A few moments later one of the male students asked a question about the purpose of a view. As expected, the tutor gave a good explanation. I thought it was reasonable as first, thinking maybe my question was oddly specific, but... BUT AS A STUDENT I SHOULD NOT BE LAUGHED AT FOR ASKING A QUESTION.

Anyway...I feel like Ellie woods at the beginning of Legally Blonde. Its just time for me to start my amazing study montage.

I am in conflict with deciding if this was a case of casual sexism, or just unprofessionalism from the tutor. I am definitely leaning towards the second. What do you think?

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Comments

Twohagsover30 • 82 points • 2 May, 2021 02:14 PM

Engineering school graduate here:

This reaction is BOTH unprofessionalism AND sexism.

Men havn't been trained to 1) advocate for themselves or 2) respect women

My only advice is to get really good at asking 'why was that funny?' 'Can you explain why you're laughing?' 'would you be able to answer my question?'

Get them to sit down and shut up and answer the goddam question.

Make them say OUT LOUD why they're cackling and refusing to give your time respect.

When they can't, sit there and revel in the deafening silence.

It's a power we all need to embrace!!

Keep up the good work and don't filter your questions for the sake of others.

> Twohagsover30 • 22 points • 2 May, 2021 05:40 PM
>
> I won't say 'IT GETS BETTER'. But it DOES get easier.
>
> My favorite phrase is 'I'll wait'. After that, you just sit there and stare with raised eyebrows.
>
> dkwantsdk • 11 points • 2 May, 2021 08:03 PM
>
> Agree with this completely. Ask them straight up to explain the joke.

[deleted] • 78 points • 2 May, 2021 01:14 PM

You are entitled to feel safe in the classroom.

Not be the object of humiliation.

He treats you differently then the male students. It's sexism and lack of professionalism straight up.

ASeaOfQuotes • 51 points • 2 May, 2021 01:17 PM

It's probably both, because it's unprofessional whether it's sexist or not, and if you're the only one who got laughed at then all my bets are on it also being sexist.

What a frustrating situation. Please keep shining and performing your best, you'll do amazing things.

dkwantsdk • 37 points • 2 May, 2021 08:29 PM

Software engineer here. What an absolutely bizarre response to a perfectly reasonable question about syntax. Please do not let this experience stop you from asking important questions like this. If I worked with you, I would greatly appreciate such a question because it means you were paying attention to standards, and it would challenge me to interrogate my own coding assumptions and institutional knowledge I'm failing to make visible.

A secret about computer science - no one has any idea what's going on and this especially applies to the dudes in your class. You think you have imposter syndrome? I found that men in CS have it even more so because they are expected to be good at computers, but CS is 80% ambiguity, and these guys are incapable at showing any weakness or vulnerability. This is why they laughed at you. There was no inside joke you missed out on - they're

just deeply insecure. That's also why they vigorously nod their heads in class - they feel they cannot show any weakness. And the rest play games in the back because men are only allowed to show 3 emotions : anger, humor, or total disassociation.

Experienced and confident engineers don't do this. No question is stupid and they are comfortable in what they don't know. They are grateful for questions and make space for people to ask them because shared understanding is absolutely critical in software engineering and being a subject matter expert in the technology you're working with is often just a luxury rather than a reality.

Feel pity for these idiots, shut down their laughter cooly and logically ("can you explain the joke?"), report such behavior to your advisor, and bring that zero tolerance to every work environment.

so_crat_ic • 15 points • 2 May, 2021 05:03 PM

It doesn't matter which.. the perception is that "this is a good time to laugh". which is wrong. do they care? will they be introspective? depends on the person.

I dropped out of computer science college, because the teacher ogled me when I tried to ask a technical question. and that was the final straw. You'd have to be a stronger person than me to put up with this bullshit.

aquietsword • 11 points • 2 May, 2021 09:33 PM

Does your uni have those end of term reviews you can give on instructors? I would call this shit out if you have that opportunity. It's little things like this that over time erode a woman's self confidence which somehow translates to "women just aren't good at X" while propelling all the men forward for having dicks.

poody456 • 7 points • 2 May, 2021 09:47 PM

This is infuriating. I second the person saying to give the lecturer a bad review or if possible report them to the university

eru378 • 7 points • 3 May, 2021 01:15 AM

This sucks and you did nothing wrong. Good on you for holding strong and repeating the question. In a comp sci class it's totally normal and good to be thinking about things like the significance of capitalised letters. That sort of detail can and does often matter! If you feel comfortable, you could send a short email to the head of the department/school explaining what happened - any decent university staff member will be concerned about this, and especially with the gendered angle here. Students need to be able to come to class and not fear ridicule.