

How a ‘Handsome’ Ivy League Grad Was Nabbed by Gender Misconduct Cops

How does it feel to receive a gender misconduct violation? Not good. That’s the impression one gets after reading Benjamin Sweetwood’s recent [public confession](#).

Sweetwood, writing at [The Tab](#), shared a traumatic experience: While an undergraduate at Columbia University, he was accused of gender misconduct. Here is his story:

I was in Chinese class in the Fall of 2014. I was a bit of a jokester in class, though also a good student, so it’s not like I didn’t make contributions to the class. Often we had to use new vocabulary or sentence structures to make up our own sentences.

One somber autumn morning, I took the opportunity to call myself handsome in Chinese. Wo hen shuài, I uttered in my unchecked malevolence and without care for cultural norms or general moral principles.

The next day, Sweetwood was asked to stay after class. His instructor informed him that he had been reported to the Gender-Based Misconduct Office. The following afternoon, he met with the dean and was told it was unacceptable to refer to himself as handsome in Chinese. He denied wrongdoing, but nonetheless was assigned a case manager from the Gender-Based Misconduct Office. He was to undergo “reeducation.”

I remember this frightening little office was located outside of Columbia’s west gates, where no one can hear you scream (it may have moved since then).... The office was empty; it was just me in the waiting room: Ben “Gender Misconduct”

Sweetwood. For the first few minutes of our meeting, the case manager launched into an edifying speech on how my white privilege was playing a major factor in my lack of clarity into the depravity of my actions.

Sweetwood writes with humor and has a cavalier tone through much of the article. But while sharing his “dark and shameful secret,” it also becomes clear he doesn’t view the devolution of free speech as a laughing matter. Campus speech codes, he says, are serious business, and the tentacles of political correctness run deep in our institutions.

This experience taught me one thing more than any other: the human toll of “triggered” culture is a serious matter. I cannot help but feel for those who are deeply embedded in it, or rely on it for food and shelter.

Perhaps most interesting is how each character in Sweetwood’s narrative responds when he protests his persecution. They are not personally offended, they say. They sound sympathetic and understanding, but—“Even if I were to agree with you, you know I can’t say anything.”

One thing becomes apparent after reading Sweetwood’s story. This is a system that thrives on fear—a fear that affects everyone, not just the blasphemers.

It’s chilling when you think about it. An anonymous whisperer was able to have someone “reeducated” because he made a joke about his looks in Chinese. It sounds so very (microaggression alert) un-American, more like a program the Stasi would create.

Are occurrences like Sweetwood’s the new normal? If so, what does that say about us?

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