You Gotta Go to School for That? - The XY Files

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3631

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ATG: Tell us a little about yourself and your experience in the publishing/information world.

DR: My entire working life has been spent working for or alongside publishers. My first job was at Macmillan Publishers where I worked in the advertising department of Nature, the international journal of science. After that I went to work as the marketing manager at the Current Science Group. I worked for Vitex Tracz who is a serial entrepreneur. In 1995 we launched BioMedNet and later ChemWeb. It was the start of my addiction to the digital world! BioMedNet and ChemWeb were acquired by Elsevier Science in 1997. In 1998 I went back to work at Macmillan Publishers, this time as an associate director of Electronic Publishing and with Richard Charkin at the helm. I arrived just as the full text of Nature was being put online. In the summer of 1999 I met Adam Hodgkin who outlined his vision for xrefer, the central premise being that collections of reference works were more useful when put online and infinitely more powerful if linked in an intelligent yet automated way. I immediately wanted to be part of it.

ATG: What exactly is xrefer? How long have you been in operation? How big is your staff?

DR: Let me think a minute. Right now we have 13 permanent employees and we began operation about a year and a half ago, in January of 2000. As a company, xrefer is involved with supplying reference content to other sites, services and institutions. At the heart of everything we do is our xreferencing technology. This adds value to reference works by creating links across publications. xrefer.com is our destination site; here you can search across an extensive database of titles from publishers such as Bloomsbury, Oxford, Macmillan, Penguin and Houghton Mifflin. You can also see our xreferencing technology in action that xrefer has been actively syndicating reference content to other sites and platforms.

ATG: What do you mean other sites and platforms?

DR: By other sites and platforms I mean other Websites, and platforms such as digital TV and mobile.

ATG: That sounds exciting. We also understand that you will be introducing a new product.

DR: Yes, this autumn we are launching xreferplus which is a subscription product for libraries. It will consist of eighty titles from existing and new publishing partners. At least half of xreferplus will consist of new titles and most of these will have never appeared online before. It will also support an advanced search function, thematic search and browse. We are currently inviting librarians to sign up for trials.

ATG: If a librarian is interested in a trial how do they sign up?

DR: By the time your readers see this interview they should be able to sign up directly from www.xrefer.com. Right now, librarians have to sign up for a trial as part of a librarian questionnaire. So you can see we are trying to make it easier. The actual trials will start in late August or early September. But as you know, anyone can search xrefer.com now, and that is also a good way to get a feel for our technology and content. Of course, xreferplus will have new content, new functionality and a different look.

ATG: The current free database is useful for finding definitions, quotations, etc. In the subscription product will you expand continued on page 52

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no way impeded by the type of toy either. My little nephews were each issued a McDonald's happy meal complete with accompanying plastic toy. To my horror I realized that the Disney character toy they received was - gasp - a molded plastic version of a - gasp "girl." I cringed and waited for them to begin a plastic-induced hysteria and scream for something more appropriate like a molded version of a multi-wheeled all terrain vehicle. To my amazement they accepted the toy girl readily. Then they immediately began bashing each other's toys in a simulated fight, all the while yelling, "my girl can beat up your girl! Nu uh, MY girl can beat up YOUR girl!"

The differences do not stop there. The X chromosome death also apparently affects early communication skills. My little niece babbles on constantly about all manner of things all the time. Although she can hardly be understood, she is determined to "tell" you about it. My wee lad - as do all little boys - cares not much for simple communication. What he does care about is re-creating the sounds created by combustion engines - trucks, cars, airplanes, and heavy equipment. He does this very well, thank you very much. Just don't get too close or he will spray you.

But, for the male, the differences get worse from here. The differences manifested by these obvious behavioral X's are X's at the genetic level. Males are shortchanged. It's that damn X chromosome. I tell you.

According to Dr. Kenneth R. Miller, a biologist at Brown University, "it's the X, not the Y, that is loaded with important genes." In fact the X is where all THE important genetic stuff is. And the fact that males have only one X chromosome makes them susceptible to all manner of maladies including color-blindness, hemophilia, muscular dystrophy, and a host of other genetic disorders in much greater numbers than females suffer. Even at birth, males have a much greater incidence of malformation than do females. As a pediatrician recently told me, "compared to female babies, male babies are just biological wimps." Females have more stamina, less health problems, and live longer. Imagine me - a bio wimp. Gee, what a cross to bear.

So, not only has fatherhood made me keenly aware of the male/female differences, but now I have to deal with the fact that my child has inherited his father's inferior biology. Golly, what am I to do? How do I break the news to him? Will he blame me? Will he need therapy? He's out there now pushing his plastic versions of heavy construction equipment and spitting out ensalved engine sounds completely oblivious to his plight - having absolutely no idea that his babbling female baby colleagues are... well... better X endowed. How shall he manage?

Hopefully, he will follow in the wise footsteps of his father. I managed to compensate for my own inherent biological inferiority by becoming a librarian. It was only among the acronyms of LC, OCLC and BI did I find inner peace for my X shortcomings. We can only hope that my son will be able to overcome his own X chromosome deficit in a similar way.

Of course, he could just rely on the whole patriarchal, male-dominated society thing. Nah. That would be too easy.

Endnotes
1. You can read Miller's article as it appeared in Discover Magazine at (http://biomed.brown.edu/faculty/MMiller/Discover/T.html)

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>