Well on Your Way

an assistant professor's companion

Elizabeth Odders-White

nodramaturg publishing

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makes that clear. I continue to struggle with insecurity, especially when I'm venturing into new territory professionally . . . *Who am I to think I can do X; I'll never be as good as Y* . . . We all know the drill. We put so much of ourselves into our jobs: our energy, our creativity, our lifeblood. It feels so personal. Our entire reputations and perceptions of self can rise and fall with our career successes . . . or perceived career failures.

That said, I have come a long way toward trusting and accepting my own intrinsic worth as independent from my actions and accomplishments. And, more important, I have finally begun to embody the understanding there's nothing I need to do to prove my value. Ever.

Which brings me to a small but important plea. (I'll beg if I have to.) Let's not make tenure mean more than it does. Yes, it impacts our lives in significant ways. Yes, it is worth celebrating when the outcome is positive and can be terribly painful when it isn't. And still, we are fundamentally the same people whether we end up with tenure or not. Confusing the outcome of a noisy, imperfect, and, I might say, arbitrary process with a measure of our value only compounds the pain unnecessarily. Please, let's not do that to ourselves and those who love us.

I'll finish with this deceptively simple message: We are enough, regardless of CV . . . or relationship status, or weight, or any other external characteristic that might describe us. I'd shout this from the rooftops and follow people around to whisper it in ears, if I could. Once we accept this truth, and really let it start to sink in, we can stop wasting enormous amounts of time and energy questioning our own abilities.

As beautifully stated by Nathaniel Branden in *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*: "If my aim is to prove I am 'enough,' the project goes on to infinity—because the battle was already lost on the day I conceded the issue was debatable." None of us can afford that.

So I propose we join in learning to accept, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that our intrinsic worth has never been—and will never be—open for debate.