

Gender in the Classroom: When Expectations Collide

LTC Panel Presentation 19 April 2005

Instructor Identity: The Impact of Gender and Race on Faculty Experiences with Teaching

By Diana B. Kardia & Mary C. Wright, 2004

Summary of results from two studies by the
Center for Research on Learning and Teaching
at the University of Michigan

Two studies to explore faculty experiences and student perceptions regarding gender in the classroom:

- 1) Focus Groups of 29 Female Faculty in 1997-98
Groups arranged by race/ethnicity, course content, department gender composition

- 2) Interviews & focus groups with 24 male & female undergraduates in 1998-99
Interviews spanned 6 months and gathered student perspectives on over 150 female and male instructors.

For the complete study check out:
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_no19.pdf

Faculty Focus Group Results

- 82% report being challenged about their professorial identity
- They developed strategies to address the challenges but felt:
 - β Colleagues, committees and administrators failed to appreciate these efforts
 - β These same groups denied or ignored “the effort to establish basic professorial authority as women faculty and faculty of color”
- Lack of awareness impact of clothing, stature and physical appearance on classroom dynamics
- Increase in the advising/counseling workload associated with student responses to gender and race ethnicity
- Female faculty teaching identity-based content six times more likely to experience classroom challenges
- Female faculty of color in this group more than twice as likely to experience challenges than white female faculty

Student Perspectives from Kardia & Wright (2004)

More than 83% of the undergraduates interviewed reported different expectations for male and female instructors

I always have higher expectations for female instructors than male instructors. And, yeah, when they don't meet them it's a let down. And if it's a male instructor I tend to blow it off and say, "Well, that's typical..." I mean, I don't expect my male instructors to be as caring or concerned as I expect my female instructors to be. Whether that's good or a bad thing to be going on in my head, it's just a real thing. And I think it's pretty universal. (female student)

I think that stereotypes play a big role. I mean, if you're looking at a male teacher and he's overbearing, you might just excuse it and say, "Yeah, well, you know, he's a professor. He's just doing his job." But if you look at it as a woman professor you'd be like, "Women are supposed to be a lot nicer, and, you know, a lot more friendlier and she's acting like such a bitch." (male student)

Strategies to Address Gender Challenges in the Classroom

- Use dress and demeanor strategically
- Enforce preferred form of address
(Professor Smith or MS. Smith or Sally?)
- Make clear expectations about behavior,
assignments and advising boundaries
- Be selective about personal disclosures in the
classroom
- Maintain high standards as well as a commitment
to help students succeed
- Gather feedback from students throughout the
term to correct misconceptions

- Keep regular office hours – be accessible but beware of constant availability
- Acknowledge student contributions in class and relate subjects to student experiences
- Encourage student input and participation through discussions, presentations and questions