

The Chilly Climate

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Over the last twenty-five years we have eliminated many of the overt barriers that deprived girls and women in education. We thought that was all we had to do: open the doors and everything would be equal. We were wrong, for there are still many hidden barriers, especially in the classroom. Men and women sitting side by side in the same classroom often have very different experiences.

What I want to talk about today is the chilly climate for women—how women students are treated differently, by men and women faculty alike as well as by their fellow students—behaviors which ultimately undermine girls' and women's self confidence in their academic ability, lower their academic and occupational aspirations, inhibit their learning, and generally lower their self-esteem. When I talk about women and girls, today, I mean all females, of all races and ethnicity. And I want to add here that minority men are often treated in the same way.

The behaviors I'm talking about are not limited to men. Often women faculty and staff, and other female students may engage in these behaviors, even those who are the most concerned about discrimination may unknowingly treat male and female students differently. The behaviors do not happen in every class, nor do they happen all the time. Individually, by themselves, the behaviors are generally small and seemingly not important. But when they happen again and again, they constitute a pattern of behavior that dampens women's ambitions, their classroom participation and self-confidence. Classrooms, like educational institutions as a whole, reflect the strengths, weaknesses and biases of our society. Many of the ways in which both students and faculty behave have their origins long before they arrived on campus. These behaviors are often part and parcel of our daily behavior—they seem comfortable and "normal."

Devaluation

Men are more often viewed either consciously or unconsciously as the more valued students, the more important students. Thus teachers generally call on men more often, asking them more questions, and not calling on females as much, even when they raise their hands. White males generally get the most questions, then minority males, then white females, with black females receiving the least. Teachers generally pay more attention to male students. Faculty nod and gesture when males speak, but may look elsewhere when females talk. Teachers, male and female, give women and girls less eye contact. Eye contact is very reinforcing because it tells students that the teacher is concerned about their understanding the material and is checking to see if they are paying attention.

Teachers are more responsive to comments and answers from males than from females. Men get more feedback, more praise, more criticism, more help. In other words, when a male speaks the teacher is likely to engage in a dialogue; when females speak, they are more likely to get "uh-huh" which says nothing other than "You said something and I heard it." For some women, the only praise they hear from teachers is for their attractiveness. Males are more likely to be praised for their achievements and intellectual effort, not for the way they dress or look.

Men get more coaching, "Tell me more about that," or "Why do you think that is?"—words that tell the person that he has more things to say, that his intellectual effort is worthwhile. Men are called by name

more often—it makes people feel good in conversation when they are called by name, particularly by a person of higher status such as a teacher or administrator.

There is some evidence that males and females may be asked different kinds of questions. Females are more likely to be asked factual questions, such as "When did the revolution occur?" while men and boys are more likely to be asked harder and more open-ended questions, such as "When was the revolution?"—the kind of question where students can really shine if they know the answer, and if they don't, they can try to fake it.

There have been numerous experiments in which two groups of people rate things such as a set of articles, pictures of works of art, a set of resumes. The names of the authors are changed for each group. Those items for the first group which have men's names, have women's names for the second group, and those items with women's names for the first group have men's names for the second group. In other words, the gender of the author is reversed for each group. The results of these studies are remarkably consistent: articles that have a male name attached to them get higher ratings than when the same article has a woman's name. Both men and women do this: they devalue those items ascribed to females. Studies of how women's success is perceived show a similar pattern: men's success is attributed to talent; women's success is attributed to luck or affirmative action.

The way that women speak is not the valued way of speaking in class or in other public settings. Women are more likely to speak in polite and hesitant speech. They use more qualifiers and are more likely to use tag questions: "It's cold in here, isn't it?" Or they may use questions instead of making a definitive statement: "Is it cold in here?" Females are more likely to raise the pitch of voice at the end of a sentence—making it sound like a question. Females are also more likely to apologize when they speak, "I don't know if I ought to say this," or, "This doesn't make sense but..." People who speak like that may be seen as less bright because the valued speech is strong, concise, clear, assertive speech—the typical way that many men speak. When researchers noticed these differences in men's and women's speech, they began to advocate that women take assertiveness training courses and learn to speak like men. These courses are excellent for everyone, but what happened when women began to speak more assertively? What did people call women who spoke assertively? And so people began to re-examine women's speech and found out something interesting—that this tentative, more polite, less aggressive speech had a value—it encouraged other people to join in the discussion. After all, if I speak very, very assertively, no one may want to disagree with me unless they want to argue. What we now believe is that everyone should learn both kinds of speech—the so-called assertive male style and the softer, less aggressive so-called female style, and to choose which to use, depending on the situation.

Devaluation can also be seen when men and women act the same way or have similar achievements, but are valued and viewed differently. For example, males value verbal aggression as positive, except when women speak that way. Silence itself may be viewed differently for men and women. Men who are silent may be viewed as "thinking"; women who are silent may be viewed as shy or not knowing much.

A woman's work may be doubted and challenged with "Did you really do this research by yourself? Who helped you?" Too often we believe that a woman who asks for help doesn't know the material or isn't very bright, while men who ask for help may be considered smart, interested and inquisitive. Women and men faculty and students may be more likely to frown when women speak than when men speak because women are devalued in the classroom.

Women's behaviors are often downgraded or trivialized. A female who cries because of academic pressure may be viewed as not tough enough, while a male student who goes out and gets drunk for the same reason may be viewed simply as "blowing off steam."

One also sees devaluation in the way in which women's issues may be trivialized, downplayed or ridiculed, such as sexual harassment or sexual violence. Sometimes women who show support of women's issues may be devalued.

Stereotyping

Comments still focus on women's appearance as in "I'd like to hear from that charming young woman in the front row," rather than "I'd like to hear from Mary who always has such good ideas." Stereotypes about women discourage them from pursuing an academic and professional life. Even in the 1990's we still hear of women being told that "a women's place is in the home;" "all women need to become mothers if they are to fulfill themselves;" "most women go to college to catch a husband;" "women are less capable of abstract things;" "women aren't good at 'technical' things."

I once did a paper on language, based on some work done at the University of Wisconsin. It was hardly radical, suggesting such things as instead of saying "policeman," we use "police officer." The paper was picked up by the press and we got the most negative mail we ever received—including threats such as "God will get you for this." At a very deep level people understand that language is not trivial and that it shapes our thoughts and values.

Courtesy and politeness may be used as a way to patronize women students, particularly when used in a paternalistic or patronizing manner, as in "We have a group of lovely ladies in our classroom," which shifts the focus away from intellectual activities to social behavior, simultaneously trivializing women students as well as setting different expectations from them compared to men. True courtesy is based on respect and caring and does not patronize, trivialize, or depersonalize others' abilities or talents, nor does true courtesy disappear when a woman acts in a way that deviates from sexual stereotypes. But even when it is less than patronizing, simple "politeness" based on stereotypes can have negative impact on women students. Males (students and teachers) may perform a task for a woman student under the guise of being helpful "Let me do it for you," but thereby deprive her of hands-on experience (as in a laboratory experiment), and at the same time communicate their own low expectations of the woman's ability to complete the task on her own.

Not only do men (faculty and students) interrupt women more, women may be particularly vulnerable when they are interrupted. At one study at Harvard, it was noted that once a woman was interrupted, she tended to stay out of the discussion for the remainder of the class, and thus there are more one-time female contributors than men.

Women are more likely to be singled out in the classroom, as in being asked "What is the women's point of view on this?" as if all women held a unitary point of view. Women are also likely to be singled out for touching, particularly by male faculty. Touch is often associated with power; people of power can touch people without power. If indeed the aim of the touch is to reassure or indicate friendliness, then men are being excluded.

I want to talk next about some of the differences between men and women and how these differences can also create a chilly climate.

Although most research as well as our social perceptions focus on the differences between men and women, the same research confirms that there are no traits, styles or behaviors (other than those linked to reproduction and sexuality) that are limited primarily or to one gender only. I'm going to be talking in generalizations, and of course, generalizations are always subject to criticism. Certainly not all men behave in a certain way, and certainly not all women behave in a certain way. But it is just as true to say,

for instance, that many women [or many men] are more likely to behave in one way more often than men [or many women]. Such generalizations can help us understand some of the classroom behaviors faculty members and students engage in, and how gender often (but not always and certainly not solely) shapes what happens in the classroom.

Expectations

Although most of us like to believe we are free of sexist prejudices, stereotypes and biases, each of us has deeply buried beliefs and expectations of which we may be unaware. All of us have expectations as to how women and men are "supposed" to behave in various situations. Despite our conscious beliefs that men and women are "equal" we may nevertheless value men who are strong and assertive, and may be uncomfortable with women who act the same, because we expect them to be more passive and acquiescent. We expect women to be more nurturing and nice, and men to be assertive; women to be emotionally responsive and men to be emotionally distant. And when they do not act this way we are often uncomfortable. That's one of the reasons Hillary Clinton is often referred to as a "bitch"—she doesn't meet our expectations as being "feminine." When men and women behave according to our expectations, we are more likely to be comfortable and approving. When they do not, we experience discomfort; we may disapprove and even become defensive or aggressive. Many of our gender expectations are subtle. Think about how the following can affect student or faculty behavior in the classroom. Women are expected to be more modest about their achievements; men are expected to brag. In conversation, men are expected to analyze, explain, clarify, and control the topic and flow. In contrast, women are expected to reinforce and maintain the conversation, to reduce tensions and restore unity.

Gender is a major way in which we categorize people, categories that go beyond just "male" or "female" but categories which are rich with expectations for ourselves, for others, and how each gender shall relate to itself and to the other. Students come to classrooms with these expectations for themselves and for each other. Their behaviors and differences have origins that begin long before they arrive in our classroom. Gender affects everyone's behavior.

Men generally are more competitive in a classroom, speaking more often than females, trying to impress others. Often they try to be in charge, particularly when there are small groups of students working together, as in study groups or in lab groups. Some men are more likely to think that they should speak as often as possible. In contrast, some women may monitor their own behavior so that they don't talk too much and dominate the classroom. Male students are more likely to be concerned about autonomy and preferring to interact with others through competition and power. Women students are more likely to be concerned about connecting to other people and developing relationships and are more likely to interact by cooperating and synthesizing. Thus females may be uncomfortable when men or women assert their autonomy; men may be uncomfortable when women or men try to establish some level of intimacy.

Women are more likely to seek intimacy, friendship, and community; men are more likely to seek power and status. More men than women enjoy competitive verbal sparring and controversy; a classroom which stresses intellectual competition makes them feel good. In contrast, females often present information in a way that invites others' opinions rather than defend a single viewpoint; they validate themselves not by controversy but by gaining consensus in the group.

Men are more likely to answer a question quickly, they may call out or raise their hand even before the question is finished, and to organize their response as they are speaking. In contrast, many women—and some men—are more likely to think about what they want to say before they participate; they organize their response first and then raise their hand. You can see, then, how the tendency to call on the first

hand that goes up will have a detrimental effect on women's participation in the classroom.

Harassment

What I want to talk about next is the way in which students often treat each other, particularly male students harassing female students. Do you remember when it was OK for the boys to tease the girls? People laughed—or at least the boys laughed. The girls may have been uncomfortable, but no one took this kind of teasing seriously. In fact, many people thought of it—and some still do—as cute, as "boys will be boys," as normal, natural behavior.

Remember the rhyme: Georgie Porgy, pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry." Well, this kind of behavior, a kind of sexual bullying—is not OK anymore. When big boys do it, in the workplace, or in colleges and in public elementary and secondary schools, it is illegal. Georgie Porgy is a sexual harasser. Sexual harassment, whether it occurs in the classroom or outside of it, makes coeducation less equal for girls and women. One study of college students showed that between 70-90 percent of women students have experienced at least one incident from one or more males which they viewed as serious and to which they reacted negatively. In the classroom, male hostility may show itself in denigrating or rude remarks about specific women or women in general or even by hissing and booing when women talk about women's issues.

It gets worse, too, when faculty ignore male student behaviors which denigrate or demean women students. Thus faculty may consciously or unconsciously collude with individuals or certain behaviors when they fail to take action as when male students roll their eyes or indicate annoyance by their behavior or body language when women students speak or when male students make sexist or sexual remarks about individual women. Women students who are hissed or ridiculed by other students when they raise women's issues in the classroom may also be ignored by faculty. Blatantly sexist remarks about women in general may be overlooked; there is no discussion or other response. The message to men and women in the classroom is clear: such behaviors are acceptable. Thus men are often allowed to denigrate, act rudely, ridicule or express hostility to women in class.

The impact on women students is strong; it can affect their sense of psychological well-being. The behavior is upsetting and often demeaning. When it happens in fields where females are relative newcomers, such as in science, some women may change their major and their career plans. They may also be angry at men and believe that all men are like this.

I've talked today only about some of the ways in which colleges are not yet truly coeducational and equal. Our report talks about teacher style and pedagogy, including feminist pedagogy, and the curriculum which often ignores women as authors or contributors or as subject matter. I remember one psychology textbook which showed only pictures of men until they got to the section on neurosis, and then only there did they show women's pictures. The report also discusses how women faculty, particularly if they engage in non-traditional teaching methods, may be evaluated more harshly by their fellow faculty members and by students.

What can we do about the chilly classroom climate? There is much we can do. Our new report (The Chilly Classroom Climate - A Guide To Improve The Education of Women, published by the Washington-based National Association for Women in Education) provides a comprehensive blueprint for change. It has more than 270 specific recommendations for administrators and faculty, including over 100 which are aimed at helping faculty members make their day-to-day teaching more effective and fair.

Faculty Behaviors

Good teachers want to be fair. Many of the recommendations in the report are directly aimed at helping faculty members treat women and men students equitably. Many could also be described as ways of helping teachers become better teachers; others are aimed specifically at ensuring that women receive encouragement and opportunities to participate.

In addition to individual specific teaching strategies, observe your own teaching by video-taping a class session, recording it on a cassette or having a colleague observe in order to assess if you are treating male and female students equally.

Develop and implement a plan to identify those who do not participate and strategies to help them participate more. (Telling students that participation is important for their grade usually does not work.)

Examine your teaching behavior to see which students get the most and best responses, such as how you use praise, attention, reinforcement, encouragement and help, such as eye contact, calling on women, responding when they participate, calling them by name and coaching ("Tell me more about that").

Use praise, feedback (evaluation), and remediation (specific suggestions for improvement) as *deliberate strategies* to encourage students to learn and participate.

Because many women and some men do not raise their hand until they have decided what it is they will say in response to a question, calling on the first hand that goes up will often exclude women and some men. Asking students to think about the question and not to raise their hand until the teacher tells them to can make it more likely that women will participate. Similarly, asking students to write down their answer (without having to hand it in) before they raise their hands can also increase women's participation.

Avoid sexual jokes, jokes about women in general, the use of sexist humor to liven up the classroom, or sexual analogies to make a point. Talking about sex or women in a humorous fashion makes many women uncomfortable and may discourage them from participating in class.

Avoid sports analogies. Many women and some men, as well as some international students, may not understand comments such as "why it is necessary to punt on this issue." The assumption of a common background which one does not possess makes it difficult for students to admit they did not understand what was said.

Intervene when students interrupt each other or otherwise discourage other students from participating. Ignoring such behavior gives the implicit message that you approve of the behavior or are powerless to stop it.

Explore ways to integrate the subject of women into the curriculum.

Explore collaborative teaching strategies as a means to increase student participation.

Do not single out women for not participating, as in "I wish you women would talk more." Instead, encourage women individually to participate in some of the ways discussed in the

report, or discuss in a general manner why it is difficult for some students to participate.

(Editors note. With apologies to Dr. Sandler, many of the amusing anecdotes and personal reflections were omitted due to space limitations in publication.)

To order the report *The Chilly Classroom Climate—A Guide to Improve the Education of Women*": Send check or institutional purchase order payable to NAWE, at 1325 18th Street NW, Suite 210, Washington, DC 20036-6511, phone: 202-659-9330, FAX: 202-457-0946, or e-mail: nawe@clark.net