

Cross Talk on Campus: Collegiality and Hostility

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The author argues that, despite a veneer of gender equality on college campuses, the system of gender difference—particularly men's and women's differing communication patterns—continues to put women students at a distinct disadvantage. Focusing on language, the author outlines several areas where women students experience harassment in and out of the classroom and offers suggestions for changing biased communication patterns on our campuses.

We have heard it on the talk shows, and we have seen it in the press: women and men have different styles of talking. Girls are socialized to talk one way, boys another, and they eventually end up as women and men who have difficulty talking to each other. Conversation between women and men, some authors would claim, is crosscultural communication. They just don't understand each other. This situation among partners and friends can be remedied, we are told, if the men just realize that they need to learn, and understand, how women talk and vice versa. Once men and women learn how each other communicate, they can make adjustments and all will be well. In the land of milk and honey, perhaps.

If gender were merely a variable, a chance assignment at birth that just happened to bring about different ways of talking and living, perhaps we could talk with some value about differing conversational styles, about men having one culture and women another culture, and about good-natured efforts to take care of any misunderstanding in their conversations. But gender is a system, not a variable. What is referred to as "different kinds of talk" is neither accidental nor benign variation, but rather an important element of the prevalent and enduring gender/power hierarchy.

In this article I will address the gender system as it operates in talk on campus. I argue that the gender system, along with the class and race systems, means that women and men have very different talking experiences on campus and that women's experience is often exceedingly difficult. I do not think that all White, middle-class, male students have it easy on campus nor that they are deliberately making life difficult for all others. Many want and are working for change.

I do think that most students arrive on campus knowledgeable, if basically unquestioning, about gender, race, and class hierarchies and that these students are offered many locations and methods for further acting out those hierarchies. As one critic (Trömel-Plötz, 1991) argues, contrary to the popular book, women and men *do* understand each other quite well:

They know who is allowed to use dominant speech acts, like commands, orders, explanations, contradictions, doubts, advice, criticism, evaluations, definitions, punishment, attacks, challenges, accusations, reproaches; and who has to apologize, defend, ask for favors, beg, request permission, justify herself, agree, support, adjust, accommodate, and accept someone else's definition of the situation. (p. 490)

For more than two decades Title IX has prohibited gender discrimination in U.S. schools. For more than a decade we have had detailed information about the ways women (students and faculty) are neither equally welcomed nor equally treated in classrooms. Most administrators now know the phrase, if not the specifics of, "the chilly climate" for women on U.S. campuses; some administrators have encouraged professors to attend instruction workshops and encouraged them in making the communication changes that would treat women students not as coeds but as eds, not as add-ons but as students deserving of as much consideration and respect as the men students.

But there is not much indication that during the past few decades most campuses have become significantly friendlier for women. Assuming, for the moment, good will on the part of the administrators who declare that their universities are interested in equality for all, what's the problem and why is it so enduring?

Although we know that campuses vary a great deal and that faculty and students can display great individuality, we can make some generalizations about the collegiate and often noncollegial talk of women and men. I will summarize some of the problems experienced especially by women in the classroom and then some of the changes proposed by researchers and other critics to deal with

the difficulties. These are often serious problems that are not immediately obvious in the course syllabi that advisors use to help understand the content of courses. They are problems that may only show up at the end of the semester, in marked differences between men's and women's course evaluations.

In addition, I will mention pervasive extracurricular difficulties and dangers in the ways that men talk about women. These are problems that may be more central to students' campus experiences than the "intellectual content" of the courses. Acting on the "chilly climate" problems requires that we go beyond classroom critiques and reorganization to look at and hear how women are valued while they are on campus.

Current Expression of Problems and Solution

At the moment there is a veneer of equal access on our campuses. Women are now admitted to most schools without concern for female quotas as they existed in the past on many campuses. Women are admitted to most any courses on campus. However, once admitted, women are not expected to have an equal voice with men. Although women and men talk in a variety of ways, making generalizations difficult, below are a number of characteristics and problems that have been highlighted in a good number of studies.

Instructional Materials

In most cases the term *instructional materials* refers only to those materials brought in by the instructor. Women's own experience, not usually a part of those materials, is also not usually welcomed during class discussions. Although personal experience in general is dismissed, women's experiences are thought to be more personal than are men's. Jane Tompkins states:

You can't talk about your private life in the course of doing professional work. You have to pretend that epistemology, or whatever you're writing about, has nothing to do with your life, that it's more exalted, more important, because it (supposedly) *transcends* the merely personal.... [The] public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private hierarchy, is a founding condition of female oppression. I say to hell with it. (Hilberry, 1993, p. 49)

Soon after having written this, Tompkins took a leave of absence from her university and was working part-time in a vegetarian restaurant.

The lesson for us is that teachers and students are more likely to be active participants in classes that include materials from their gendered and ethnic experiences and from scholars with whom they can identify in some way. In *The Knowledge Explosion* (Kramarae & Spender, 1992), women scholars from many disciplines talk about the impact women's studies scholarship has had on the research and teaching in their fields. These scholars talk about the ways that, in recent years in some classes and in some disciplines, the models of knowledge-making have changed from the assumption that there is one fixed truth, for example, to the understanding that there are a plurality of shifting interpretations derived from different experiences. Women and men from non-dominant groups on campus are much more likely to feel that their thinking has legitimacy in classes taught by teachers who explicitly espouse more inclusive models of knowledge-making. Advisors can find out who these teachers are by listening especially to the comments of women and minority men taking the courses, by talking with teachers about their standards, and by looking at syllabi and reading lists. If men still hold the monopoly on intellectual authority in the class, it is likely that "thinking like a man" will be required. Campuswide, we will continue to experience problems as long as "thinking like a woman" is an insult.

Classroom Conversation

In U.S. grade schools, high schools, and universities, teachers call on male students more than on female students and allow boys and men to take up more class time than girls and women. In most classes a few students do most of the talking, but evidence from some studies demonstrates that two thirds of the silent students are women (Sadker, Sadker, Fox, & Salata, 1993/94). Some researchers have suggested that the silence can be heard as resistance to the dominating talk. Not speaking up might be one way of denying the authority of the speakers and their words. There may be some truth to this; the reasons for silence are several and will, of course, differ for speakers and situations. (And, because of cultural differences, the silence of White, Asian American, and Latino women may mean different things than the silence of, for example, African American les-

bians. Silences are telling, but not if we don't listen carefully.) I doubt that most of the students who are frequently made to feel that they are different get a great deal of pleasure out of resisting through silence. But the question is whether educators think that the much larger number of silent women is a boon—or a symptom of serious trouble in higher education. Campus publications blithely stress the need to respect diversity. There is already more diversity in the classrooms than most of us know. In general, most of us do not listen for it or understand it when we hear it. We haven't been trained to or even generally encouraged to.

Many studies in many classrooms on many campuses have found that male professors call on men more than women, ask men more difficult questions, interrupt women more, make more eye contact with men, use more sexist jokes, make more disparaging remarks about women, and use more false generics when both men and women should be mentioned. Women teachers also interact more with male students but are more equitable in their classroom conduct than men teachers are (Smith, 1991; Williams, 1990).

The speech of women and men students may be differently interpreted by teachers. Linda Laub Barnes (1990) found that male teachers "tend to be generally intolerant of emotional writing but even more critical when the author is female" (p. 151). Emotional speech is likely judged to be that which is said with passion by a woman. The same words will likely be heard as anger when spoken by a man.

In a study that Paula Treichler and I did at a large Midwestern university, the graduate men students were likely to talk about their satisfaction with classroom talk that was "a battle of ideas" and with challenging each other and the teachers. The graduate women students, on the other hand, were more interested in collaborative talk, in students being encouraged to contribute to a larger collective discussion rather than being forced, if they did talk, to give monologues (Kramarae & Treichler, 1990).

Classroom Interaction Models

Many women teachers perceive that the general equation of *professor* with *male* means that, if they are to be real teachers, they must talk as if they possess the authority in the classroom with the right to criticize, critique, and judge whatever they wish (McGann, 1992).

Although most women students seem to prefer the class interaction, peer conversation, and written assignment method of teaching (a teaching model used more often by women than by men, who are more likely to use a lecture model), on most of our campuses, most students must adapt to the lecture teaching styles of male faculty because there are so many more male professors and because class sizes are getting larger on many campuses. Large lecture classes, which have relatively few writing assignments, are less a problem for men than for women, who prefer learning styles that incorporate writing assignments (Ferguson, 1992) and who prefer collective discussions.

However, student collective discussions are not necessarily equitable in terms of participation. One study found that in student-directed groups, the women practiced skills "that they had most likely already refined: Waiting, listening, acknowledging, affirming" (Sommers & Lawrence, 1992, p. 29). The men in the groups were taking over, directing the project even if the women did more than their share of the work of the projects. Teaching/learning models that stress student participation do not necessarily provide equal benefits for women and men.

Reentry Women Students

Most of our campuses are certainly not prepared to recognize the abilities, contributions, and accomplishments of reentry women, who often have divergent perceptions of the material and behavior in the classrooms; they are much more likely than younger undergraduate women to have experienced sexual put-downs and career impediments. They talk about patriarchy as a real constraint in their lives. We need more concern and research about how reentry women, who are the fastest growing segment of the college population, fare in the classrooms.

Harassment in the Classroom

Although it hasn't been often described that way, classroom male dominance that silences many of the women can be heard as harassment. So also can men's practice of abruptly changing topics introduced by women students and teachers. When a class becomes a battleground, many women students drop out or stop attending regularly. Most teachers of women's studies courses have real-life stories about intellectually draining and emotionally terrorizing students in their class-

es who appear to get pleasure from verbal and nonverbal intimidation.

I remember, too often, a class I taught several years ago: Sex-Related Differences in Language. A group of fraternity members managed to make their hostility known to all the class. They usually came in, as a group, after the bell. At the first class session, I told students to sit where they wished but to continue to sit in the same general area so I could draw up a seating chart and learn names. During the entire semester these men sat behind all the other students, making lots of noises and nonverbal signs of disapproval and disinterest that all could hear and I could see. I would ask them to speak up but would get only "I didn't say anything" responses. Unlike the women in my other courses crosslisted with women's studies, the women in this class, although in the majority, mostly did not talk. Even though I tried small group discussions and various exercises, the talk came primarily from me, with added noises from that line of rude, disruptive men. When I gave the first exam with open-ended questions, I was surprised to hear a lot from the women. They had obviously been not only reading and listening but also thinking a lot. These seemingly passive women were quite ready to write about their understanding of the materials brought into class. I asked several of the silent but "writative" students to stay after one class and asked why they were so quiet despite their obvious interest in the difficult and controversial ideas presented in the readings and in class.

They told me about the larger dynamics of the class. Women from several sororities had decided to take the class. Hearing this, men from fraternities associated with those sororities decided to take the class. The men's presence in the back row and their opportunities to criticize and ridicule, in other settings, any of the sorority women speaking out in the classroom was a powerful threat. Because there is no university regulation against this kind of voluntary block enrollment and no university support for dealing with the effects of it, I was left to figure out individual methods of avoiding the problem in the future. I renamed the course Women and Language, a less sexy title than the previous one, and I now begin each semester by stating that the course will be challenging and that if students aren't ready to read, think, and talk about language issues in new ways, they should consider dropping the course. But my actions do not prevent the men from harassing women elsewhere on campus.

Campus Efforts

Most campuses these days have public policy statements that attest to an interest in diversity in both hiring and enrollment. However, there is not related interest in diversity in teaching material and teaching models. Too many of us are interested in respecting difference only if it comes in quiet people who do not call upon us to change our own behavior and who do not challenge the habits and values of the institution. Women are not the only *different* category in the classrooms. Are African American males who talk without raising their hands assumed to be violating behavior codes? Are Hispanics who do not establish eye contact assumed to be disrespectful? Are Native Americans who do not respond directly to questions assumed to be slow or lazy? Are advisors aware of the many cultural differences in interaction norms? Are they aware of the problems students face when they take a course from someone who may be an expert in one area but who is ignorant, afraid, or disrespectful of the perspectives of other cultures?

When I listen to administrators say that they are putting a focus on getting more women and minority men on the staff and faculty to serve as role models, I am glad for the initial concern and action, but I worry that the administrators may be ignoring the evidence that larger numbers alone will not solve the problems.

Inequity in the Larger Environment

Most professors, even if we say otherwise, probably really think that we offer the core of what a college education is. Yet, as Howard Schein (1993) points out, most students aren't as interested or involved in intellectual development in the classroom as they are interested and involved in interactions with their peers. Although many reentry students are daily involved with work colleagues and families off campus, many of the younger students are primarily involved with other students in campus organizations, in dates, and in late-night discussions that are, for many, the primary methods of personal growth on campus.

Although I direct a women's studies program, teach women's studies courses, and in general work with colleagues to make classrooms more hospitable places for women, I have to recognize that my contributions (and those of my many colleagues) to campus discussions and actions regarding women's and men's interactions is

minuscule compared to those of the young men on campus.

Boys and men are the primary users of the Internet, and some are using it to make clear that girls and women are not welcome in this new communication forum (Taylor, Kramarae, & Ebben, 1993). Boys and men often publicly rate women on their physical attractiveness as they walk across campus. We know that at night the campus becomes an especially dangerous place for women who must be on guard against assaults on their way to and from, say, the library. However, we don't all know just how dangerous going out with their male peers can be for women students.

In a recent study of the ways that young White male students on a large Midwestern campus talk about and treat women, Sean Gilmore (1995) found that the men he interviewed talked about sex as a game, themselves as players, and women as points to be scored. Identifying approximately 30 sex games well known (by men but not by women) in the campus dorms and fraternities, Gilmore writes that the men's competition among themselves for "studhood" (equated with manhood) included three basic rules: having multiple sex partners, having advanced sexual activity, and having sexual activity with women perceived as attractive. The men bragged about humiliating, degrading, and physically hurting with their sexual activity. The men employed violent terminology, often using the language of sports competition (e.g., *scoring, home runs, blocking, a pass, going the full nine yards, tight defense, and stealing second base*) in talking about the women with whom they had, or anticipated having, sexual encounters. The men reported discussing *hate fucking* and *revenge fucking* of women who had the wrong attitudes and thus were deserving of it. They talked about *slamming, pounding, nailing, and fucking the shit out of women*. Women of color and lesbians were the targets of additional harassment in the men's actions. And men not perceived as sufficiently masculine or sexually active with women were taunted by epithets such as *homo, queen, fag, and queer*. As Gilmore points out, normalizing this kind of degradation and domination of women by shrugging and saying "boys will be boys" belittles the importance of the fact that these are the future coworkers, managers, executives, and judges who will have continued say about how women and their words are valued. Most of the men Gilmore interviewed indicated that they did not consider their talk about women and related behavior as problematic. However, in workshops

he conducted on campus, he found that some men did become concerned about the consequences of conquest sex talk.

Slighting or ignoring the harassment outside as well as inside the classroom makes us partners, facilitators, and producers of sexism in this country. But given that sexism and racism are wide and deep social constructions embedded in most of our thinking and acting, what can we do, individually and collectively, to make changes? I suggest here just a few actions, recognizing that others will approach the problems in somewhat different ways.

- We can keep in mind what changes would make real differences in our education system. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) suggests that we do have models of dialogues that are not primarily monologues. She points out that each social group has distinctive standpoints and partial situated knowledge. Each group can consider other perspectives without relinquishing its own or suppressing others' if everyone comes into a discussion without the determination to change the viewpoints of others and with the willingness to change their own. Collins writes:

Dialogue is critical to the success of this epistemological approach, the type of dialogue long extant in the Afrocentric call-and-response tradition whereby power dynamics are fluid, everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in order to be allowed to remain in the community. (pp. 236-237)

- We can usefully imagine what our campuses would sound like if many of us agreed to learn and to try such dialogues. For example, I would learn not to lecture as much as I do in class. I might provide some materials for others to respond to. I would need to learn not to ask for—or assume—silence from everyone while I talk at length. Teachers in other disciplines will have different approaches to active learning. But many of us will benefit from recognizing that lecturing, often an easy way of controlling a group of people and a situation, is often not the most valuable way of teaching.

- We can be supportive of same-only cultural centers, women's studies programs, and African American studies programs where students and faculty with common experiences of discrimination have a greater change to develop and articulate their standpoints and thus can offer stronger voices in discussions with those who hold domi-

nant standpoints, which often ignore or belittle alternatives.

I saw a discussion on ACADV, the academic advising electronic forum, about conflict in the classroom on issues of race and gender. An advisor quoted a White male student who said to African American students, "Why don't you get your own country clubs?" Someone else on the newlist responded that "generally students don't need to be protected, and they can either accept or reject the views of others" without the teacher entering into the conversation. I would, however, suggest that we get into the conversation by making sure that the campus doesn't just provide lots of places for dominant voices to go on speaking their dominant views and too few places for minority voices to speak without fear of hostility and reprisals.

In another posting to the ACADV forum, an advisor included advice for African American students: get involved with African American organizations for refuge, solace, and cultural identity—that is, to survive. On many campuses some of the cultural centers that are home to these organizations are being threatened with closure, and on other campuses such organizations are having a difficult time establishing centers. Another posting mentioned that in a study several years ago, Asian American students taking calculus at Berkeley were more likely than African American students to study together—and were more likely to succeed. I wonder if the study places and the interaction are equally comfortable for women and men. This can, and should, be researched.

- We can make sure that students know about women's studies classes, African American studies classes, and other classes designed to address prejudice and to respect alternative ideas. (This is not to say that even in such classes students will not encounter hostile, adversarial students and teachers. But changing some of the traditional premises about knowledge and authority may mean that, for a moment at least, women and men who are supportive of feminism have a different audience that allows different things to be said.) We can also tell students about the teaching methods used in various classrooms, enabling students to more readily find the environment in which they can most successfully think and learn.

- We can support long-term courses and programs to deal with these issues. A new study suggests that men who are educated for a short period of time about the effects of violence on women

may be *more* likely to commit rape. In a study of 99 university men, those who listened to a tape of a woman's account of a rape and were told to feel empathy for the victim actually displayed a higher intention to engage in sexually aggressive behavior. According to one employee at a center for battered women, "Men, in general, connect violence with sex, which is reinforced by society. By listening to these tapes, it triggers a response or connection that is already there" (Smith, 1994, p. 3). Some of these connections are currently taught or reinforced on our campuses. Evidently only through continuing programs and a lot of discussion with many of the men on campus are we likely to make a difference so that college men do not think that accounts of violence against women are sexy.

Conclusion

In sum, I am arguing from a great deal of evidence that the so-called gender misunderstandings on campus are not that at all. The individual harassings are part of, and help maintain, a patriarchal system that means that even when women are half the undergraduate student body, they do not hold half the power.

Gender is a hierarchical system, and through too many college experiences women and men learn whose speech will be heard as normal, whose arguments will prevail, who will be required to learn and support the communication behaviors of the other, and whose language will be heard as deviant, irrational, and inferior (Henley & Kramarae, 1991). Because advisors hear many students talk about many classes, they often know more about what is really going on in classes than many other teachers do. Advisors can help put these issues on the desk.

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A Myth of Higher Education?—You Be the Judge

Our student protagonist, an incipient field biologist, spent all semester diligently participating in an ornithology class, keeping up with all assignments, doing all of the reading, attending all lab sections, and even making use of the teaching assistant's office hours. After a productive all-nighter, the student walks confidently into the final exam. Upon opening test book, the student finds five pages of pictures of birds' legs and feet and the instruction that each species be identified from these pictures.

Our protagonist is outraged after having assiduously studied evolution, geographic distribution, physiology, ecology, and the like. The student storms to the professor, tosses the uncompleted exam on the professor's desk, and heads for the exit in a huff. "What's your name?" demands the professor. "I need to document your abrupt departure!" "You tell me!" retorts the student, raising a pants leg to the knee.