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Empirical Reflections on Women Students in USA Nonprofit Academic Programs and Realizations about Ideological Influence

Cover Page Footnote

A revised version of a paper originally presented at the 2016 Conference of the International Society For Third Sector Research, Stockholm, Sweden.

**Empirical Reflections on Women Students in USA Nonprofit Academic Programs and
Realizations about Ideological Influence***

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and

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Abstract

This research reports on the beliefs of a select sample of women and men faculty across the USA regarding women in nonprofit organization academic programs. The main differences were on professional orientation among graduate students, difficulty with quantitative oriented courses, and portrayal of women in coursework. To eliminate these differences, beliefs (ideologies) among faculty and students need to be altered. Sanberg's book *Lean In* is especially informative about changing beliefs about career orientation for both men and women to what she calls a belief in sustainable and fulfilling positions. Another valuable resource for faculty concerned about these issues is *Creating a Positive Classroom Climate for Diversity* by Garibay.

Introduction

Over my 41 years of university teaching, women have been the majority of students taught in my courses, especially in the nonprofit studies area. Attending meetings of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Associations since 1996, I cannot recall a single session focusing on the particular characteristics and needs of women nonprofit professionals or nonprofit women students; although, the topic sometimes comes up in informal teaching related conversations. In part, this research is an attempt to formally document aspects of those conversations through intensive interviews with select colleagues. When asked to participate in a panel on women in nonprofit/nongovernmental academic program instruction, I was challenged and discovered a lack of literature searching both online and from asking colleagues. The current research is an attempt to begin developing a literature and research on teaching women in NP/NGO programs.

Review of Literature

There is extensive research dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s on gender differences in classroom climate on college and university campuses. Topics range from differential reactions to humor used by male and female faculty (Cominsky and Zillmann, 1979) to studies such as those of Brooks (1982) and Boersman (1981) on interaction differences of men and women faculty. The Association of American Colleges released its report titled *The Classroom Climate- A Chilly One For Women* in 1982.

Widnall (1988) laments that by the end of the 1980s, not much changed regarding gender differences in college and university classrooms. She notes that in science education, women students differed considerably from men students in their perceptions of their preparation for

graduate studies, the pressures and roadblocks experienced, and their strategies for coping with these pressures. She also notes that much of the stress for both men and women results from not understanding the hidden agenda of graduate education. For example, while fellowships and teaching assistantships provide income for graduate students, the research assistantship also provides acceptance into research groups, provides a research topic, and allows access to resources such as computer time. She points out that thesis work is primarily an apprenticeship dependent on interaction with the adviser and problems usually go unreported for fear of reprisal. While men will express anger, women often expressed feelings of frustration or discouragement. Other important differences are reported such as no women having a self-estimate of self-worth in the highest category compared to 25 % of men who did. Despite a growing body of knowledge on gender differences and practices for better student experiences regardless of gender, she concludes that little progress was being made in the academy to address them.

Reinforcing the comments of Windall are Crawford and MacLeod (1990) who point out that previous research has indicated that women students participate in class discussions less often and less assertively than men. What they discovered was that female faculty were more likely to create a participatory climate for all students than male faculty. Women faculty are more attuned to the interpersonal aspects of teaching and to aspects of group dynamics in the classroom. In a recent report by the National Association for Women in Education (Morgan, 2007) reports there are still troublesome practices by faculty such as using women in examples with inappropriate sexual overtones or interrupting women's comments more often than comments by men students. The report made 270 recommendations. It is impossible to list them all so here are three examples:

1. Faculty members should examine their own teaching behaviors to see which students get the most and best responses such as encouragement, feedback, and coaching,
2. Faculty members

should avoid jokes, analogies, and language that assume common experience among diverse groups, 3. Faculty should be sensitive that men like more argument and classroom sparring where as women like more participatory and collaborative classrooms.

Perhaps the most current, comprehensive guide to the research and suggested state-of-the-art practices regarding gender, race, and ethnicity in the college and university classroom is the monograph by Garibay (2015). There is no question according to Garibay that students bring their own multiple social group identities to the learning environment and that these include but are not limited to gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, and religion. The central question is whether classroom climate is marginalizing or centralizing, and whether it is explicit or implicit. What has been shown is that creation of a positive classroom climate benefits all students. For example, use of inclusive language by saying “she” as well as “he” or try using the singular “they”.

Given the vast research and literature generated on women students and climate in higher education, the lack of attention in the literature on nonprofit education is both surprising and puzzling. Perhaps it has occurred because nonprofit education traces its formal status in the academy to the 1970s and was more concerned with its establishment than responding to classroom climate issues. However, it is also quite plausible that the success of the Women’s Movement in the 1970’s led to complacency by nonprofit faculty and university programs regarding the needs of women students. It may be a complacency driven by fundamental beliefs about women and their educational experiences. Rather than actively addressing the needs of women students, those needs may be taken for granted. Whether both men and women students were having their needs met, and developing the skills needed to excel in their lives and professional careers is an empirical

question. This inquiry is an attempt to put gender issues of nonprofit education classroom climate and courses into conscious awareness for both faculty and nonprofit academic programs.

Methodology

This research is based on in-depth interviews with 10 USA faculty members, five men and five women regarding their perceptions of women students in their nonprofit academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. All are accomplished teachers and researchers. The faculty members are from a wide range of colleges and universities across the USA. Some faculty members are from private colleges and universities, others from public institutions. Some of these colleges and universities are primarily regional universities and others are national and international in scope.

Results

Why are women students in NGO/NP programs?

Male Faculty

Most of the students in USA NGO/NP programs are women who are pursuing graduate education to improve their current employment and gain skill and knowledge to improve their position by moving into management. Some women students were characterized as hoping to switch employment sectors. Most of the women were characterized as wanting to make a difference in the life of persons. All the male faculty members commented that the reasons for women students in the program were basically the same as for men students. Two of the five men faculty members said that men students were more career oriented while the other three said there was no difference.

Female Faculty

Women faculty viewed some definite distinctions between undergraduate, certificate, graduate, and executive degree programs. One Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (NLA) director of an undergraduate program provided a representative and insightful comment saying that she saw no difference between men and women students; and their reasons for being in the program were these: going into youth ministry, had a personal mission like helping children, wanted to work for 4-H with rural youth. Sometimes women students are in NP programs because they want to start their own nonprofit. While undergraduate programs reportedly had fewer men, the reasons for men and women entering the program were said to be similar.

At the graduate level, several of the programs have a male composition of 40-50 percent of enrolled students. In other programs, faculty characterized the students as mostly women. Students of both genders were said to want to go into the human service area but some of them were said to be more interested in business. Women students were said to be more mission driven where as men students were more interested in bring about are there for a sector change. At one campus, it was reported that men are focused on finance. Graduate certificate students and executive degree program students regardless of gender were said to be attracted to the programs to gain particular skill and knowledge to advance their careers.

Realization about Ideological Influence

At the undergraduate level, no differences were mentioned between men and women students regarding career orientations. For graduate students, the career orientation of men and women was believed to be different. Women were mentioned as being less serious about becoming nonprofit professionals. Women were also said to be more mission driven where as men wanted

to foster sector change. Women have traditionally been believed to be different in their career orientation than men, a manifestation of ideology.

How are women students recruited?

Male Faculty

Recruitment was viewed as gender neutral with no difference in the way that men and women students were recruited. The idea of self-selection by program candidates was mentioned. Basically, students find the program and enroll. The programs use typical recruitment strategies like receptions or speaking engagements, web sites, etc. Several spoke of targeting recruitment from Nonprofit Leadership Alliance programs where students are pursuing the Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) designation. Some programs at colleges and universities emphasize community service at the undergraduate level and recruit students interested in making a difference in the lives of persons. AmeriCorps and CityCorps programs were also mentioned as good for recruiting students.

Asked why women students are in the program, male faculty saw no difference in recruitment of women and men students. The one exception was a campus where the president hired a good looking male recruiter of students who was adept at recruiting sorority women for the NGO/NP program. This was an anomaly compared to the rest of the responses on this topic.

Female Faculty

Three of the five women faculty said their recruiting was gender neutral and rather generic. Women sometimes enter the programs because their potential is identified by a faculty member, could be a man or woman faculty member and not necessarily one directly connected with the program. This is especially true at the graduate level. At the undergraduate level, students are

much more likely to be recruited into the program by other students and this is true of both men and women students.

One woman program director said that recruitment was skewed to women. They get information from the NLA on high school graduates for their undergraduate program, host lunches for new students and do email blasts to new students. They are currently working on a web site and brochure and intentionally have men on the brochure. This is a private university and they may be more driven to recruit students than publicly supported universities represented by the other programs. Also, they only have undergraduates.

Realization about Ideological Influence

There are no belief (ideological) realizations regarding recruitment of students in either undergraduate or graduate programs.

What is their most challenging course?

Male Faculty

Without question, the most challenging courses were those with quantitative aspects. These are financial management, nonprofit economics, statistics, and methodology courses. Any class that is more mathematical is challenging for NGO/NP students and gender really doesn't matter. The students tend to have little background in finance and math. They are generally not business majors. Due to their personal interests and orientation the students generally are more interested in helping others and making a difference in the quality of life for persons.

Female Faculty

Like their male counterparts, three out of the five women faculty members mentioned statistics, financial, and methodology courses as among the most challenging. Again, courses that entailed more math were more difficult although the one MPA director mentioned that the

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) does a good job sorting out the really weak students in math. One woman program director mentioned that at the graduate level the most challenging course was social policy and another said that she really did not know.

Realization about Ideological Influence

Although many women today pursue scientific careers requiring outstanding math skills, both men and women faculty of NP programs felt that women found statistics, financial, and methodology classes more challenging. Women student found courses requiring quantitative knowledge and skill more challenging than men student. Traditionally, men are believed as more at ease in quantitative courses.

How are they portrayed in your texts?

Male Faculty

The male faculty felt their texts were gender neutral. They seemed to have not thought explicitly about women in their texts until asked. One expressed that this was an interesting consideration. There was a feeling that since women dominate the field, the texts have quite a bit of coverage on women. While the texts were viewed as gender neutral, the feeling was that women were more explicit in the case studies and these case studies often present operational dilemmas. Does this mean that women are more negatively portrayed in the cases? Nobody knew but they believed that the cases accurately were pretty representative of men and women and nonprofit organizations.

Female Faculty

The belief of women faculty was similar to the men in that texts were viewed as gender neutral. One said that the content was focused on skills, theory, policy discussions, etc. One

faculty said that gender was never brought up by the students in discussing cases. One mentioned intentionally looking at nonprofit texts in preparation for the interview and she was surprised at how many were written by women.

Realization about Ideological Influence

Both men and women faculty members believe the books in their courses are gender neutral. In part this is due to the large number of women authors of the texts used in their courses. It is also due to the portrayal of men and women in the cases.

How are women portrayed in your course?

Male Faculty

In the words of one respondent, it's all about woman power because the cases used in class and for reading assignments mostly highlight activities of women. One respondent said that in class it was all about encouraging women to be leaders and having them go after decision making positions. One faculty member went so far as to say he emphasized the "she" rather than the "he". For one respondent, the simple response was "no difference". Perhaps the most telling comment was that the emphasis in class time is on principles, definitions, and models which are considered by all the respondents as gender neutral.

Female Faculty

One women faculty member said that she was a woman, had worked in a nonprofit organization, and considered herself a role mode. Another woman faculty member said that her students would say she talks a lot about women in her class, particularly the pay issue. While they mentioned focusing on content issue, addressing women's issues and positively portraying women was certainly part of the courses these women faculty taught.

Realization about Ideological Influence

Men faculty believed that women and men were portrayed neutrally in class because the emphasis was on principles, definitions, and models. On the other hand, women faculty believed that they positively portrayed women and served as role models. Perhaps more importantly, neither men nor women faculty believed that they negatively portrayed women.

Describe their participation in co-curricular activities

Male Faculty

With 80-90% of the students in programs being women, they are the co-curricular activity leaders and participants. The women often commute to class and this is sometimes a problem in their participation and they also often have children and family responsibilities. Sometimes they bring their spouse and children with them to co-curricular activities. By default, the women students provide leadership for co-curricular activities on their campuses and what is known is that this participation develops their leadership skills.

Female Faculty

Because there are more women in most of the programs than men, the women are more likely to take the leadership positions in co-curricular activities. At least one woman faculty member mentioned that this was true for campus organizations across her campus. Of course, the level of participation varies from year to year. Graduate assistants tend to be women so they are more likely to be assigned to leadership support roles in student organizations.

Realization about Ideological Influence

Since women are the majority of students in both undergraduate and graduate nonprofit academic programs, beliefs played no role regarding participation in extracurricular activities.

What types of internships do women select?

Male Faculty

One faculty member said that his women students were more interested in employment with NGOs working with children or working at senior centers. The students follow either their interests or risk doing something new and challenging to them. It is very individualistic and very personal in terms of site selection. As another faculty member put it, internship selection is all about students feelings regarding what they want to do. There was a feeling on the part of some male faculty that internships were more of an undergraduate educational experience and cited the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance model, a model said to have no evident gender differences but a lot of passion regarding organizations involved in human trafficking.

Female Faculty

Regardless of whether they were men or women students, the women faculty said that internship site selection resulted from individual student interest. In every case, student interest was the prime determinant of site selection.

Realization about Ideological Influence

Men and women faculty said that regardless of gender, internships were selected primarily based on student interests and preferences.

What types of employment do they pursue?

Male Faculty

At the graduate level, most are working and hoping to get a promotion. At the undergraduate level, they take a wide range of positions from community development to just getting a job with some income. In many cases, they are not too picky about their selection. When they go on to graduate school, some enter NP programs but many women go on to social work and men to MBA programs.

Female Faculty

The women faculty members felt that employment for women students from their programs was really no different than that for men students. Like internships, employment followed the interest of students. One faculty member mentioned an inclination for fund raising and lobbying positions for women graduates of her program. One woman faculty member said that men were looking for higher level management positions whereas women were more interested in the mission and vision of a nonprofit in taking a position.

Realization about Ideological Influence

As with internships employment was viewed by male and female faculty as following the student's interests. One believed that men were looking for higher level management positions and women more mission driven in seeking employment. In society it is often believed that women are more emotional and men more competitive.

Discussion

Are there different beliefs regarding men and women in nonprofit academic programs by faculty? There were some in the sample of faculty analyzed. This should not be surprising given the extensive research and literature generated since the late 1970s and early 1980s on classroom climate and differential behavior of faculty based on gender. NP/NGO programs should be expected to be no different and some differences were identified although the survey similarities far outweighed the differences.

Research once asked whether women can lead, a question that challenged beliefs at the time and now answered with many current examples of highly effective female leaders. Just as we once asked whether men are more effective leaders than women; so, in nonprofit education we should now be asking questions such as what skills and knowledge make women more effective

leaders or how can we better equip men and women in NP/NGO training programs for elite leadership roles (Northouse, 2016: 404-405). This latter question is especially important because many, if not most, NP/NGO training programs believe that they are preparing their students for leadership positions. Is their belief, their ideology, accurate? The question is this: How can students, especially women students, be better prepared for elite leadership positions through a changed NP/NGO classroom climate?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in recognizing and building on life orientations that impact especially on women students. Sheryl Sandberg (2016) in her book *Lean In* challenges the belief that success in a profession such as being a NP/NGO executive is becoming an executive director/chief executive officer. Rather, Sandberg suggests changing that belief to having a sustainable, fulfilling position. To do that, one aspect of the difference between men and women that will need attention in classroom climate is the research indicating that success and likability are differentially correlated for men and women. It holds women back and it is why they hold themselves back according to Sandberg. What men and women should be able to do is what they find personally rewarding and desire and they need to “lean in” to make it happen. They need have the confidence and fortitude to make it happen by disavowing everyday beliefs about success. Men and women need to challenge the prevalent ideology of professional success.

Another aspect of enhanced classroom climate for NP/NGO academic programs may be explicitly developing knowledge, skills, and personal orientations for success in international work which is central in the career goals of women students in NP/NGO programs. As Vasan (2004) points out, many NGOs do not provide women protection against sexual harassment, separate toilets, maternity benefits, etc. and this occurs even when judicial stalwarts, intellectuals, and senior bureaucrats are aware of the situation. NGO programs need to address this within their

classes or it is a disservice to their women students. The programs need to provide students regardless of gender, but especially women students, the knowledge to challenge the underlying belief systems (ideology) as well as practices.

From the literature on classroom climate, and especially faculty, as it relates to women students, there are skills, knowledge, techniques, values, and beliefs to incorporate into instruction. Wildman (1989) points out that women students tend to be quiet and not speak up in class. There are techniques for encouraging them to speak up:

1. Have a friend agree to take your notes for 30 minutes during class so you can focus on saying something interesting in response to the teacher's comments.
2. Pretend to take on a role such as advocating a position.
3. Discuss your participation with friends to receive suggestions for improvement and a sense of accomplishment.

She suggests other techniques for speaking-up in class. In a similar manner Garibay (2015) makes suggestions on a wide range of classroom climate aspects ranging from class discussions to grading in his exceptional resource earlier mentioned, *Creating A Positive Classroom Climate For Diversity*. All NP/NGO faculty are encouraged to examine and use this source for making their classroom climate as positive and encouraging for their women students, and indeed all their students, as possible.

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