

## Female Bosses Discriminate, Too

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I'm a female PhD student supervised by a modern female supervisor. Strange as it sounds, the female trainees in the lab (myself included) receive different treatment from our supervisor compared to fellow male trainees in the same lab. We receive increased workload, less praise, and fewer financial rewards. We may be biased but our male counterparts in the lab agree. While this may be an isolated case, I know of five other similar situations here and at other Canadian universities. Have you heard of similar stories? Has there been research done? How do we deal with this delicate, unbelievable scenario?

Confused

Dear Confused:

Suppose a male supervisor paid his female students less and worked them harder than men. He'd be eviscerated by a jury of his peers. Sexism would be the rallying cry, and his position would suddenly be moot. Even being suspected is a hanging offence, as we learned from the experience of Lawrence Summers, the president of Harvard University. This year he was accused but denied being sexist. It cost him \$50 million (in diversity programs) just to keep his job.

But a woman treating female staff differently than she treats men? That, as you point out, is delicate. There's an assumption that women are the kinder, gentler sex. They're strong on empathy and are better communicators, research tells us. But do these attributes cancel out aggression? Hardly. Evidence shows that in girls and women it's more covert. As early as age three, girls use language and facial expression to exclude other girls and cement alliances, according to large body of research including a study published this spring by Craig Hart a professor of human development at Brigham Young University. By adolescence, girls in single sex schools start to victimize other girls using letters and indirect aggression, including "ignoring, neglecting, excluding and giving nasty looks," described by Australian researchers Vennessa James and Laurence

Owens, as effective ways to generate pain and confusion. These behaviours increase as girls get older, they found.

How does this translate into the workplace? I have heard about women sabotaging female colleagues and subordinates (especially in universities), but there is not much research on it, for some reason. The little there is tells us that women are perceived by both male and female subordinates to be less effective in meting out discipline, according to Arizona State University management professor and dean, Leanne Atwater. In 2001 she and her colleagues asked 163 employees if they thought the discipline they received from a superior was fair and effective. When their boss was a woman, 35 percent of the female employees rated it as effective. When their boss was a man, 64 percent of the women did. Now Atwater points out that we don't know if the supervision was really unfair or just perceived that way. But we do know from a new study of 60 international female business leaders by Caliper, a Princeton based management consulting company, that women leaders scored significantly higher than men on empathy and sociability, but lower on following established procedures and being cautious. They were found to be bigger risk-takers, contrary to prevailing stereotypes. And it certainly is risky to violate your institution's, not to mention your province's discrimination policies.

You and your lab mates should document your workload, salaries and the type and frequency of feedback you get. If you find variations by sex, bring your concerns to the graduate program director. Do this as a group and bring your salary records. If the program director can't help you, go to the department head, then to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. But keep your expectations modest. "Doctoral training still resembles a medieval apprenticeship," says an academic friend who knows the drill, adding "a PhD student rarely wins arguments on differential treatment even when the supervisor is recognized by her colleagues to be..." Here he used a word that means covertly aggressive and a lot less than fair. It's one thing to be nasty across the board. But to target a certain group is discrimination, no matter who dishes it out. In some contexts, I guess, that point is moot.

Dear Susan:

I used to own a business when I lived in Latin America, but now I do accounting for someone else in a small enterprise. Even though I am essentially a clerk with a mediocre salary this is OK because I don't want the stress and responsibilities of a higher position right now. Recently, although this is the salesperson's job, I have been pressured to make collection calls

to Latin American clients because I speak Spanish and know the business culture. Not being in sales or management I have no way to put pressure on these clients, and besides, I resent doing someone else's job (she gets the commission) and I have too much work as it is. What should I do?

Just Riding the Bicycle

Dear Riding the Bicycle:

Work it in to your schedule and ask for a raise. Like it or not, you have a skill that no one else has in your office. In economics, when a resource is scarce its value increases. Employment is no different. Have you ever bought peaches in winter? They cost more because they're hard to find. Your language skills and business background give you leverage and should be recognized. A thank you would be nice, of course, but as the wheels can't turn without you, it's not nice enough.

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