

Gender Dynamics in the Classroom and Clinical Education Settings, Part 2

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PART 1 OF THIS series emphasized how understanding gender differences can enhance the relationship between teacher and student. The purpose of Part 2 is to illustrate how gender differences can affect teaching and learning in the athletic training classroom and clinical education settings and to offer some general pedagogical strategies to enhance the experience for both teachers and students.

Perceptions of Best Practice

An individual's perception is often more important than reality. This is especially true in teaching, where a teacher's perceptions and expectations can have dramatic results on students. Good or bad, what teachers expect from their students is usually what is achieved, and several longitudinal studies support the self-fulfilling-prophecy hypothesis that teacher expectations can predict changes in behavior beyond effects accounted for by previous achievement and motivation.¹ But what is it that athletic training clinical instructors perceive or expect? In a recent study, Lauber et al² investigated the perceived importance of clinical-instructor behaviors among male and female clinical instructors in CAAHEP-accredited undergraduate athletic training education programs. The study revealed that male clinical instructors rated best-practice clinical-instructor behaviors differently than female clinical instructors did. For example, they rated behaviors such as "explains procedures clearly," "accepts responsibility for own actions," and "demon-

strates clinical knowledge, competence, and judgment" as important. Female clinical instructors, however, rated clinical behaviors such as "provides useful and constructive feedback," "demonstrates clinical skills for students," and "corrects students tactfully without belittling them" as important. These noted differences among male and female clinical instructors appear to be related to acculturation differences in the instructional and learning styles of males and females.

Instructional Styles

Regardless of what accounts for differences in human behavior, male and female teachers organize their lessons and present information differently. Therefore, teachers must be cognizant of how their teaching behaviors can affect students. Research suggests that male teachers tend to lecture and ask fewer student questions, whereas female teachers are more likely to express empathic and accommodating behaviors through expressions such as warmth, caring, and understanding in their teaching.^{3,4} Women invite their students to participate more freely in discussions.³ Men tend to be more outwardly confident and generally appear more rigid to their students. On average, male teachers provide less feedback to students, and when they do, it is typically to correct errors and clear up misunderstandings.⁴

Consider the following example of gender differences. To establish an understanding of therapeutic ultrasound, a male professor in the athletic training classroom might be inclined to teach from a factual

TABLE 1. COMMON TEACHING STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS

Male Teachers	Female Teachers
Prefer lecture	Prefer discussion/dialogue
Ask fewer questions	Question students
Corrective feedback when necessary	Supportive feedback
Subject centered	Student centered
Task oriented	Relationship oriented
Direct	Implied

Note. Adapted from Brady and Eisler,³ Centra and Gaubatz,⁴ and Grossman and Grossman.⁵

point of view, moving from example to example in a linear fashion that includes instruction of theory, tissue responses, contraindications, and indications. A female professor is more likely to establish understanding and wide knowledge of the subject by asking questions, using case studies and differential-diagnosis approaches, and encouraging students to describe how the modality is used rather than telling them how to use it. Table 1 describes common teaching styles and strategies used by male and female teachers. The intent here is not to suggest that one gender's instructional style is "better" or more effective than the other; rather, it is to inform athletic training educators that being aware of the teaching and learning differences between genders can help one understand student-teacher relationships.

Learning Styles

Differences between the instructional styles of men and women can have important educational implications. In many situations, student achievement is maximized when a teacher's instructional style matches a student's learning style, but teachers must be careful to avoid teaching to one specific gender. In other words, good instruction requires one to accommodate the learning styles of male and female students equally. Grossman and Grossman⁵ suggest that male students prefer autonomous learning environments where they manipulate materials, work with numbers, and use logic to solve problems, and female students prefer

TABLE 2. MALE AND FEMALE LEARNING-STYLE CHARACTERISTICS

Male Students	Female Students
Find new solutions to problems when old solutions no longer apply	Delay decisions until all information is gathered
Responsive to feedback from peers	Responsive to support and feedback from teachers
Prefer to work independently	Prefer to work with others
Prefer to manipulate material	Prefer explanations and directions
Prefer competitive environments	Prefer cooperative/collaborative environments

Note. Adapted from Grossman and Grossman.⁵

learning environments that encourage cooperation and integration. These authors suggest that female students prefer teacher clarification and support, whereas males tend to seek support and feedback from peers rather than from teachers.⁵ Table 2 describes common male and female learning styles.

Strategies

Good teachers realize that a wide variety of teaching methodologies and pedagogical techniques are necessary to engage all students in the classroom and clinical education settings. Research indicates that athletic training students rely on multiple learning styles.⁶⁻⁸ Therefore, using multiple teaching methodologies encourages all students to learn more collaborative speech, improve their ability to listen, and improve their ability to work in groups because they are not forced to use a single learning style.⁹ Teaching and learning activities in athletic training settings should include several pedagogical methodologies such as problem-based learning, small-group discussions, cooperative assignments, clinical problem solving, service learning, competitive games with rewards, independent projects, computer instruction, hands-on lab, reflection papers, role play, and journal assignments to ensure that the learning styles of both male and female students are being met.

Conclusion

Like other allied health professions, athletic training requires mastery of various clinical competencies and proficiencies. For some students, learning complex skills and concepts can be frustrating. Good teachers realize that in order to reach students they will need to employ a combination of teaching methods and motivational strategies. Good teachers understand that overreliance on one specific pedagogy such as straight lecture alienates students and decreases effectiveness regardless of gender. Good teachers use multiple pedagogical methods to engage students of both genders in the learning process. ■

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