

Dancing backwards in high heels

January 3 2018

Who do students turn to when they want to ask for an extended assignment deadline or an increase in their marks? Most likely their female professors, says Amani El-Alayli of the Eastern Washington University in the US. El-Alayli is lead author of an article in Springer's journal *Sex Roles* which investigates the added work demands often faced by women in academia.

El-Alayli and her colleagues conducted two studies. In the first study, the team analyzed data from a survey of 88 US professors. They found that students make more standard [work demands](#) and requests for special favors to their female rather than male professors. However, female professors also reported more acts of friendship from their students. Although these can be positive experiences, the study's findings indicate that such friendly behavior may be emotionally taxing in the same way that special favor requests seem to increase the emotional burdens of female professors.

The second study involved 121 college students, and set out to find out if a certain type of student is more likely to ask favors from female professors. Interestingly, a [student's](#) view about women in authority or sexism did not play a role. Instead, students who believed that they were deserving of academic success, irrespective of their actual performance or the effort they put in, were particularly likely to ask a female professor for extra favors, and react negatively if those favors were denied. These effects were driven by entitled students' greater expectations of getting special favors granted by a female professor than a (identical) male professor.

"Our research provides more information about how students treat female professors, how they react to them when the professors stand their ground, and what kinds of students are particularly likely to treat female professors differently from male professors," confirms El-Alayli.

"Students with high academic entitlement were more inclined to be irritated or disappointed when a female professor denied their requests, and more likely to then persist in asking for favors after being denied," says El-Alayli. "They were also more likely to conclude, if the professor was female, that a request denial meant that the professor disliked them."

El-Alayli surmises that the gendered expectations that men are more respected and authoritative make even entitled students unlikely to oppose their male professors' decisions. They might even believe that it would be counterproductive or fruitless to oppose male professors and to keep on nagging, because they are not easily swayed. Thus, these students' entitlement may only manifest when interacting with female professors.

"Aside from contributing to burnout and taking time away from career-enhancing activities, greater demands and special requests from students may affect female professors' career advancement by causing them to get less favorable course evaluations or even more complaints filed against them," explains El-Alayli.

"Students may perceive female professors as less fair than their male counterparts if female professors are expected to expend exceptional effort to help out their students in unrealistic ways, thus resulting in worse evaluations."

More information: Amani El-Alayli et al, *Dancing Backwards in High Heels: Female Professors Experience More Work Demands and Special*

Favor Requests, Particularly from Academically Entitled Students, *Sex Roles* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-017-0872-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0872-6)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Dancing backwards in high heels (2018, January 3) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-high-heels.html>

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