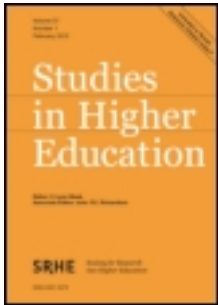


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Faculty women as models for women students: how context matters

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We explored how frequently academic staff serve as role models for women undergraduate students, how this compares to the family context, and the qualities associated with potential role models in both contexts. Participants were 138 psychology students at a Dutch university. They completed a self-administered, online survey about inspirational people and a sentence-completion task. Older university women were inspiring for 20.5% of students; younger university women for 14.4%. Men were rarely identified as role models in the academic context, but with almost the same frequency as women in the family context. Academic women were admired primarily for qualities related to their work and as people with authority/power while family women were associated mainly with relational qualities, like caring. Focusing on the academic context, we argue that there is a 'hidden *gender* curriculum,' which contributes to students' identity development and which may reproduce or disrupt social and cultural inequalities.

Keywords: faculty members; identity formation; models; gender differences; curriculum

Do faculty members serve as role models?

During an informal meeting of six female faculty members of the Psychology Department of Utrecht University in 2009, we asked them if they served as role models for their women students. Five of them thought this to be true. On the one hand, some students explicitly define them as such. For example, sometimes students compliment older professors for demonstrating a balance between intellect and appearance by wearing high heels or for showing that they have family responsibilities by obviously rushing home to cook dinner. In the case of young lecturers, students occasionally ask them how they had achieved their positions. On the other hand, the faculty women talked about consciously demonstrating a more complete picture of their lives than the academic part alone. For example, sometimes when lecturing or in other conversations with students, they refer to popular television programs that they have watched, their holidays, or their children. Additionally, the older women noted that over time they had changed from trying to perform as gender-neutral lecturers to disclosing varying bits of information about parts of their gendered lives outside of the academy.

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Discussing their interactions with the students, the faculty women agreed that the type of example they try to offer to students depends upon the educational context. During lectures for a large audience, they demonstrate how to effectively exercise control, e.g. how to gain and sustain the audience's attention, how to maintain silence in the lecture hall, and how to ensure compliance with rules of classroom conduct. Small seminar and tutorial groups afford opportunities for displaying how to create safe spaces for discussion and nurture others' self-efficacy. Finally, in dyadic interactions involving advising or supervision, personal exchanges between professor and student are possible and create moments when the professor may become 'just' a woman. Importantly, their modeling was not limited to providing gender-stereotypical examples of safety, care, and personal attention but also involved the display of authority. The faculty women recognized, however, that not all women students would identify with them as a role model, because, as women faculty, they offer students only a limited set of possibilities, and not all students are concerned about their future working lives (never mind imagining an academic life) or the prospect of combining work and family.

We suggest that as role models the examples these faculty women set for their students may be conceptualized as part of a 'hidden gender curriculum', i.e. implicit lessons on gender that may be learned alongside the formal education of the academy. Broadly construed, the hidden curriculum refers to the symbolic, material, and human environments of colleges and universities, of which gender is undeniably an important aspect (Margolis et al. 2001). Individual teachers and students contribute to the production of this curriculum in varied ways, but may also resist one another's 'lessons' to varying degrees (Skelton 1997). Thus, the hidden curriculum is never fixed and varies in its 'hiddenness' for both the producers and the receivers.

Role models and students' identity development

In that same year, we had the opportunity to explore the hidden gender curriculum at the university from the perspective of women psychology students. We wondered if women students would find academic staff members to be inspiring models and how these models would vary in terms of gender and age. Thus, we viewed students as active participants in the system that attempts to socialize them, at least in terms of their self-reflections on who inspires them (Margolis et al. 2001). We were also interested in comparing the university context with the family context as sources of inspiration. This may be useful knowledge for faculty members (women and men), who may be unaware of their participation in the hidden gender curriculum, and also for university administrators, who are responsible for the recruitment and retention of students and the quality of their educational experience.

The 'university years' have been understood as an important time for identity exploration in the domains of love, work/career, worldviews and becoming a self-sufficient person. They have been typified as the life stage of 'emerging adulthood', at least within industrialized societies (Arnett 2000; Kroger 1997). As part of these exploratory periods, young women may connect with, and be inspired by, role models, while still maintaining a sense of themselves as independent and having agency. In this sense, the academic role model differs from a mentor or sponsor, two other forms of academic guidance that students may benefit from while at university (Downing, Crosby and Blake-Beard 2005). Role models may inspire others in the absence of any personal

contact or instrumental power. They may even be unaware of the emotional identification and admiration they evoke.

We were interested in the university and family contexts, because of the potential impact of social and historical contexts on the identity formation process and student development (Kroger 1997). Despite considerable theoretical developments – from a focus on psychological development to theories that seek to integrate psychological development with processes occurring in a range of interpersonal and socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Jones and McEwen 2000; Merriam and Clark 2006), we could find little empirical research exploring what is entailed in being a role model. We turned to social learning theory, which is associated with a long tradition of research on modeling. Based on social learning theory, we expected that women students would identify with, and find inspiring, older persons of the same sex/gender who are higher in status (Karunanayake and Nauta 2004). We also anticipated that this pattern would be the same in the university and family contexts.

The location of this research, a university in the Netherlands, is also a significant part of the women students' social and historical context. Consequently, we first briefly describe relevant aspects of Dutch society and university education, in order to situate our methodological decisions and subsequent interpretation of the results.

The Dutch context

Following Hofstede's (2001, 2011) classification of national cultures, Dutch society scores very high on the femininity dimension, in contrast to the UK and the USA. Compared to these other western industrialized countries, the social roles of the sexes show more overlap, belief in equality of the sexes is more prevalent, there is less occupational and educational segregation, and the mother has a stronger position in the family. Similar to the UK and the USA, on the other hand, the power distance scores are very low; people in Dutch society, especially those who have higher levels of education, are not inclined to accept an unequal distribution of power. Lastly, Dutch society is characterized by a high ranking on individualism, just behind the USA and the UK, which indicates that people are expected to look out for themselves and their close family members.

The facts of daily life, however, in terms of the combination of work and care tasks, labor market participation, economic independence, and political and social decision-making, only partly confirm this characterization of Dutch society, according to the *Emancipation monitor 2008* (Merens and Hermans 2009). For example, women devote much more time to the household and looking after children and less time to paid work than do men, which contrasts with the ideal of gender equality expressed by the majority of the population. Furthermore, one-third of women and half of men agreed that women are better suited to caring for children than are men. Similarly, only 54% of women are economically independent even though women's rate of labor market participation is relatively high (70% of all women). This is because 75% of them work part-time (compared to 24% of the Dutch men). Consequently, women's risk of living in poverty is much higher than it is for men. Clearly, this contradicts the ideal of an independent income for women as endorsed by the majority of Dutch men (75%) and women (81%). Also, despite the cultural profile of combining high femininity with low power distance, the proportion of women in management positions is only 26%. Notably, the situation for ethnic minority women is less positive than for indigenous women (Keuzenkamp and Merens 2006).

Gender statistics for Dutch universities in 2009 differed somewhat from those associated with Dutch society as a whole – and still do in 2013. On the one hand, the distribution of part-time and full-time employment was more equal between the sexes, 46% and 54%, respectively, for women, and 31% and 69%, respectively, for men. On the other hand, there was a remarkably disproportionate ratio of women to men in the professoriate, especially in the higher ranks (11.7% of professors overall are women, with a slight increase to 17.4% in the social and behavioral sciences alone), and only 12.8% of the Directors of academic programs were women. Furthermore, academic women's salaries were notably lower than those of their male colleagues, a difference that can be explained only partly by age differences, i.e., on average, academic women are younger than academic men (Gerritsen, Verdonk and Visser 2009; VSNU 2009). Non-tenured academics do most of the undergraduate teaching, and as a consequence, women over the age of 45, the potentially inspiring same-sex people with whom women students have most contact, are relatively scarce and their status within the organization is comparatively low. In addition, their financial independence is uncertain due to their non-tenured status. Finally, the ethnic composition of university staff is mainly Caucasian (no national statistics available).

As a consequence, the possible contexts outside the family where women's identity development may be enacted, both within the university and society at large, are fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, Dutch society is characterized as supporting gender equality, but on the other hand, the status of women within universities and society at large is far from equal.

Considering now the circumstances of students, more women (51% of all students) than men pursue higher education, and they graduate faster. However, there are still large gender differences in educational choices, with an underrepresentation of women in science and engineering and an overrepresentation in the health, social and behavioral disciplines, as well as the humanities (Merens and Hermans 2009). In general, about three-quarters of Dutch students live on their own (Kences 2010), and almost 90% had a part-time job while attending university. In many cases, this employment is a necessity rather than a 'lifestyle' choice (Moreau and Leathwood 2006). In other words, university students may be privileged on the basis of their intellectual capital, but this does not mean that they are also economically privileged.

Taken together, these statistics provide a picture of the contexts in which women university students work to establish their identities. Our research explores the contribution of important others (i.e. role models) in terms of gender, age and authority, within the constraints of the societal and university context.

Methods

Sampling context

The participants were recruited from the psychology department of one of the largest Dutch universities, which in 2009 had nearly 30,000 students in total and 1647 undergraduates majoring in psychology (18% reportedly from a non-Dutch background). The psychology department had 195 faculty staff members at that time among whom 45.1% were women and 54.9% were men – many of them having part-time appointments. [Table 1](#) shows that the distribution across ranks and age of those with full-time, tenured positions is skewed, with fewer women than men in high status positions.

Table 1. Distribution of full-time equivalent tenured staff over gender and age in 2009 ($n = 56$).

	Age	% women	% men
Professor	35–45	1.8	5.0
	45–55	1.8	7.7
	55–65	0	9.0
Associate professor	35–45	5.9	4.0
	45–55	5.8	1.8
	55–65	4.2	3.1
Assistant professor	35–45	14.4	12.8
	45–55	5.1	6.1
	55–65	6.1	5.4
Total		45.1	54.9

Among the female faculty, 12.7% were between 45 and 55 years old, roughly the same age as most undergraduate students' mothers (the majority of undergraduate students are between 18 and 24 years of age). Among male faculty, 33% likely came from the same generations as the students' fathers, i.e. they were between 45 and 65 years old. The faculty's ethnicity is not documented, but based on our observations was relatively homogenous, being mainly of Dutch origins.

Importantly, the teaching staff in the bachelor programme consisted mainly of women, tenured and non-tenured and full-time and part-time, with a 1:41 faculty–student ratio. There was also an important difference in the second and third year teaching contributions of women and men faculty, although it was not linked to differences in rank, salary or professional status. Specifically, lecturers, who spend four hours a week in class, with a large student audience, adherence to formal rules of classroom conduct, and predominantly top-down communication were mostly men. On the other hand, the teachers of seminars and tutorial groups, who spend four hours a week teaching in two-hour blocks, with smaller groups of students, a relatively informal atmosphere, and a teaching role focused on stimulating debate about assigned readings, discussing assignments, and evaluating student presentations were chiefly women. Personal conversations between teachers and students were limited to tutoring sessions, and formally at least, three tutor sessions (1.5 hours) were scheduled per year.

Participants

Our convenience sample consisted of 138 female psychology students who volunteered in response to a call for study participants on their web-based learning environment. They were registered in three undergraduate courses in the first, second and third year of the program. Completing 10 surveys over three years for research purposes is part of a program requirement, and all participants received course credit in return for their participation.

Their mean age was 21.4 years (range = 20–28 years), and they were a homogeneous group, with 92.1% self-identifying as heterosexual, 93.7% self-identifying as middle or upper class, and 92.6% self-identifying as having Dutch ethnicity. Among the 11 non-Dutch students, two self-identified as cosmopolitan, four as Northern European, three as South Asian and two as Latino. Within the sample as a whole, 60.3% reported having a sexual relationship at the time of recruitment. Self-reported

living arrangements varied as follows: 16% with their parent(s), 41% independently, 5% with a partner, and 38% 'otherwise'.

Consistent with the statistics for Dutch universities in general, 73% of the students had a part-time job of 10 hours per week on average. On average, they reported spending, on a weekly basis, 22 hours studying, 34 hours on activities related to their families, and 76 hours on activities related to their friendships.

Procedure and survey

Participants completed a questionnaire designed for this study as part of a more extensive self-administered, online survey that was made available via an electronic course management system. They could fill it in at a time and place of their choosing. The introduction emphasized that their answers would remain confidential.

For this study, three parts of the questionnaire are relevant. Part 1 included the demographic information concerning their gender, age, living situation, sexual identity, class, ethnicity and how they allocated their time to the different areas of life, i.e. family, friendships (including sexual relationships), study and employment. Part 2 consisted of a series of questions, answered by 'yes' or 'no', that asked if there were people at the university who inspire them, and if those people were older or younger compared to them. The same series regarding the family mentioned explicitly fathers and brothers, along with mothers and sisters as possible 'yes' answers. Multiple answers were allowed. If a respondent did not report any person who inspired her, she was asked if she missed such a source of inspiration in her life. Part 3 involved a sentence completion task requiring single-word responses to sentences about academic and family positions. The participants were instructed to fill in the first word that came to mind after reading a sentence, such as 'An academic woman is ...' or 'A mother is ...'. This assessed the qualities the participants associated with faculty men and women and the female positions in the family.

Analysis

We used IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions 16 (SPSS), delivered by Surfspot (www.surfspot.nl) to analyse the frequencies and correlations for the data collected through Part 2 of the questionnaire, i.e. the people who inspired the participants. Missing cases were deleted listwise, because this did not substantially affect the size or composition of the sample.

For the sentence completion task, four coders, who were female contemporaries of the participants, independently identified clusters of responses for each position and then agreed upon the final clusters and the labels. The coders achieved consensus through discussion, and they chose cluster labels to represent the meaning of the cluster. For example, the cluster labelled 'admirable' for academic women encompassed the responses fantastic (9×), attractive (5×), interesting (3×), admirable (2×), beautiful (2×), clever (2×), inspirational (2×), someone to look up to (2×), strong (2×), top (2×), important (1×), an example (1×), powerful (1×), outstanding (1×), status (1×), successful (1×), sophisticated (1×), self-conscious (1×). The cluster labelled 'offering safety, important' for mothers included the responses important (5×), protective and safe (4×), unconditional (3×), everything (2×), the most important person in my life (1×), always there (1×), comforting (1×). As authors, we relabelled 'negative' for academic men as 'arrogant' and 'negative' for academic women as 'critical, catty' to

Table 2. People within the university who inspire participants ($n = 132$)^a.

	<i>N</i> *	%
Older inspiring women	27	20.5
Younger inspiring women	19	14.4
Older inspiring men	4	3.0
Younger inspiring men	1	0.8

^aSample size did not add up to 138 due to missing cases

* Based on multiple responses.

avoid any confusion based on two different sets of characteristics having the same label. Subsequently, the coders classified the clusters as pertaining predominantly to one of three context categories: relationships, tasks or power. We chose the relationship and task categories based on the classic dichotomy used in theorizing about group/leadership functions, i.e. group maintenance and goal achievement (Bales 1958; Cartwright and Zander 1960; McGrath 1984), and we expected these to apply to the family as well as to the education setting. Usually, they are also associated with gender stereotypes. Due to our interest in the connection between academic and family role models and authority, we added power as the third category.

Results

People who inspired the participants

Twenty-two participants (15.9%) reported that they had no inspirational academic role models, but only eight participants (5.8%) indicated that they missed this academic source of inspiration. Of the 116 other participants, 41 (29.7%) reported being inspired by university people, who were most likely to be female and older than the participant (see Table 2).

Ninety-eight participants (71.1%) reported inspiring role models within the family domain. Moreover, they identified female and male models in almost equal numbers (see Table 3). Generally, inspirational family members were more likely to be older than the participant, and having an inspiring mother was strongly correlated with having an inspiring father ($r = .52, p < 0.001$). Due to the small frequencies associated with the other types of inspirational family members, no further correlations were computed.

Table 3. People within the family who inspire participants ($n = 138$).

	<i>N</i> *	%
Mother	62	46.6
Father	60	45.1
Older brother	19	14.3
Older sister	14	10.5
Grandmother	8	6.0
Others from parents' generation	7	5.2
Grandfather	6	4.5
Younger sister	6	4.5
Younger brother	5	3.8
Others, namely female cousins	2	1.5

*Based on multiple responses.

Table 4. Coding of responses to the sentence completion task: university domain ($n = 130$)^a.

Dimension	Academic women ^b (%)	Academic men ^b (%)
<i>Power/authority</i>		
Emancipated, status, success	7	
Admirable, attractive	25	33
Arrogant		5
<i>Relational</i>		
Eloquent, interesting	6	12
Critical, catty	7	
<i>Task</i>		
Learned, sensible	48	43
<i>One-of-a-kind responses</i>	7	7

^aSample size did not add up to 138 due to missing cases.

^bThe bold scores represent the highest number in the column.

Sentence completion task: qualities of women

In general, the coded qualities are consistent with gender stereotypes (see Tables 4 and 5). Women in the university domain were mainly associated with the characteristics of the task and power dimensions (see Table 4). On the task dimension, academic women were described as ‘learned, sensible’ (as were academic men). A smaller percentage of responses were coded as fitting in the relational dimension, with 7% being negative characteristics (‘critical, catty’) and 6% being positive characteristics (‘eloquent, interesting’). For men, the relational dimension was only positive. On the power dimension, academic women were described primarily as being ‘admirable and attractive’ (this was also the primary characterization of academic men), with an emphasis on emancipation in 7% of the cases. For academic men, 5% of the respondents characterized the power dimension in negative terms (‘arrogant’).

In contrast, women’s positions within the family, such as (grand)mother, and sister, were most frequently associated with the relational dimension (see Table 5), with grandmothers as well as sisters described as mainly ‘loving, social’ and mothers as predominantly ‘caring, supportive’. In the case of sisters, 7% of the responses were negative (‘troublemaker’). Only mothers were associated with the task dimension, but only for 7% of the responses. Notably, the power dimension was associated in different ways with two female family positions, i.e. mothers were described as offering safety, and grandmothers as having wisdom. Unfortunately, we did not ask participants about their associations to male family members because we did not expect that fathers and older brothers would figure so prominently as inspiring role models.

Discussion

Below, we comment on how our results shed light on the possibilities for undergraduate students’ identity development in the context of the university and family domains. Firstly, we discuss the percentages, gender and age characteristics of inspiring people, as well as the qualities attributed to potential role models. As it is generally accepted that students’ experiences before entering university have a great significance for their success at university (Evans et al. 2010), comparing the university and family contexts was important. Subsequently, we elaborate on the hidden gender curriculum

Table 5. Coding of responses to the sentence completion task: family domain ($n = 130$)^a.

Dimension	Mother ^b (%)	Grandmother ^b (%)	Sister ^b (%)
<i>Power/authority</i>			
Offering safety, important	11		
Wise		21	
<i>Relational</i>			
Loving, social	28	58	50
Caring, supportive	46	7	20
Inspiring			14
Cold		5	
Troublemaker			7
<i>Task</i>			
Responsible	7		
<i>One-of-a kind responses</i>	8	9	9

^aSample size did not add up to 138 due to missing cases.

^bThe bold scores represent the highest number in the column.

and its contribution to women students' identity development. Next, we account for the limitations of our study, and finally, we reflect upon the practical implications for faculty.

Inspirational people during emerging adulthood

For almost one-third (29.7%) of women undergraduate students, inspirational people in the university context were important. An additional 5.8% would welcome such a model. University role models were predominantly older, and more frequently women (34.9%) than men (3.8%). These results were not consistent with Downing, Crosby and Blake-Beard (2005), who reported that 68% of women college students in the same age range as our participants mentioned at least one academic role model and that male role models were rated as more influential than female ones. These differences may be due to varying institutional contexts and questionnaire set-up, but also to self-selection of the participants (Downing, Crosby and Blake-Beard reported a response rate of 44%).

In our study, the qualities attributed to academic women and men, the potential role models for our participants in the academic domain, displayed a similar hierarchy of dimensions. Apparently, academic women and men may inspire because of their scholarly task orientation and authority. The difference in the percentage of power qualities attributed to academic women (32%) and men (38%) was modest, given how few academic women occupy positions of influence within the university (see Table 1). From the student perspective, however, all faculty members are in positions of authority in that they have direct impact on the outcome for students. This, together with (likely) a lack of understanding of the significance of differences in academic rank and how power is exercised within the academy, might lead undergraduate students to conclude that it is a level playing field for women and men. Moreover, within Dutch society, belief in the equality of the sexes is prevalent, which would reinforce these perceptions. In contrast, participants were less inclined to attribute relational qualities to either academic women or men. Nevertheless, within the power and relational dimensions, some gendered differences were evident. As authority figures, academic women

and men were described as ‘admirable and attractive,’ but academic men were associated with arrogance to some degree, meaning that their authority had both positive and negative sides. On the other hand, while the relational qualities of academic men were unconditionally positive, academic women were described in both positive (‘eloquent,’ ‘interesting’) and negative (‘critical,’ ‘catty’) terms on the relational dimension. These differences bear further study. Do they reflect differences in the behavior of academic men and women, or do students perceive similar behavior on the part of academic men and women as different because they are judged according to different norms?

Compared to the university context, there was virtually no difference in the percentages of inspiring women and men identified in the family context, a result that surprised us, given that women remain the primary caregivers for children. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that female and male persons are inspiring in the same manner either within or across domains. In Josselson’s (1987, 1996) extension of Marcia’s work, she noted that women who had not resolved the identity crisis of adolescence idealized their fathers for their strength and success. Given continuing gender gaps in publicly recognized achievement and wages within Dutch society, there remain good reasons for ambitious young women to be drawn to their fathers or brothers as having what it takes to reach their goals. In a more recent study conducted in the Netherlands, Dutch fathers appeared to influence their daughters on the value ‘work as duty’, while mothers influenced their daughters mainly on the values of autonomy and political traditionalism, which includes the preservation of traditional norms and values, having respect for authorities, providing a strong army, and stimulating loyalty and patriotism (Roest, Dubas and Gerris 2010).

In general, the qualities attributed to female family members in our study were rather gender stereotypical, with the relational dimension most prevalent. Nevertheless, there were noteworthy differences in the three dimensions across the two domains. In the relational dimension, the qualities attributed to the older family women were unconditionally positive, whereas they were mixed in the academic domain. In addition, in the power dimension, older family women were described in quite different terms, i.e. as offering safety and wisdom, rather than being admired and attractive.

Overall, and contrary to social learning theory, we conclude that women students, i.e. women in emerging adulthood, do not identify with role models who represent a fixed combination of gender, authority, and age. In the university context, the inspiring people mostly had the same gender as the women students, but were not necessarily older. In the family context, inspiring people were neither uniformly women, nor necessarily older. Academic women, potential role models for women students, were more frequently associated with task-related qualities compared to authority-related and relational qualities. On the other hand, older family women, also potential role models, were associated mainly with relational qualities and less so with authority-related and task-related qualities.

Unintentional teaching of women students: a hidden curriculum

Clearly, faculty women have something else to offer to female undergraduate students compared to faculty men or family women. Within the academic domain, women were more likely to be identified as role models than men, and academic women were associated with different qualities than family women. In this sense, faculty women are part of a hidden curriculum as they provide unintended lessons; lessons that they may be

unaware of or are shaped in idiosyncratic ways, reflecting the individual woman's life experiences and social positioning, as represented in the faculty women's comments in the introduction.

This hidden curriculum heuristically has both a 'weak' form and a 'strong' form, and both may be at stake here. The weak form refers to the professionalization process of, in our case, 'becoming a psychologist.' The strong form refers to the reproduction of gender, race, class, sexuality and other inequality practices of the wider society (Margolis and Romero 1998). Both contribute to students' identity development. Thus, from a pedagogic point of view, documenting the features of a hidden curriculum in order to support the formal equality goals of higher education would seem to be important. Only by revealing those features – on the level of content, pedagogics and the institutional environment – does the hidden curriculum become available for reflection, informed dialogue and negotiations (Cotton, Winter and Bailey 2013).

The student development literature emphasizes the link between identity development and what is learned (e.g. Tett 2012). Yet, it does not seem to draw on the notion of a hidden curriculum, although gender has been a topic of interest (e.g. Laker 2011; Pasque 2011; Sax 2008). Instead, models of identity development incorporate student–faculty interactions into, for example, context (e.g. Jones and McEwen 2000) or human ecology (e.g. Evans et al. 2010) without considering the nature and consequences of those interactions. An exception would be Chickering and Reisser (1993), who included student–faculty relationships as an environmental influence and emphasized the importance of accessible faculty, who students would come to know as 'real people' and would interact with in a variety of different situations. In the Dutch university where our study was conducted, such meaningful student–faculty interactions are more possible in the learning contexts where women faculty are found (i.e. small, informally structured seminars and tutorials). This then may account for the difference in the number of inspirational women and men faculty identified by our participants. Another exception is scholarship that emphasizes student diversity and multiple social identities (e.g. differences in gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on; e.g. Jones and Abes 2013). Here, the presence of diverse faculty is emphasized. Our study suggests that there may be value in integrating these two literatures. The notion of a hidden curriculum offers a means to theorize how faculty can make a difference to student development beyond the formal instruction they offer and which faculty members may be more attractive to particular students.

Limitations of this study and future considerations

Our study is somewhat limited in focusing on gender and the hidden curriculum for female students only, leaving out the male students, who are in the minority among psychology majors. Furthermore, we attended to this on the pedagogic level, i.e. how gender matters when we consider teachers as potential inspirational models, and how age and authority interact with gender. At the institutional level, the gender composition of the staff and the gender-differentiated distribution of staff across the varying methods of curriculum-delivery reflect the environment of one university, and thus, we cannot determine the impact of the institutional environment. We are also unable to comment on the content of the hidden curriculum, i.e. the choices of what is included and excluded. That would require another study. Although exploratory, our study

suggests that research on role models and the hidden curriculum within the broad area of arts and sciences may be a fruitful topic for further investigation.

Given the complexity of the area, with multiple levels of involvement (cultural/societal, institutional, formal pedagogic contexts, informal pedagogic contexts), numerous possible inequalities/differences (e.g. ethnicity, class and gender), the many opportunities for interactions among the various levels of involvement, and the differences between, and among, academics and students, the quantitative approach that we have applied in this study can only offer a preliminary exploration. For a fuller picture, we would need a qualitative approach, for example, interviews with students of both sexes about their experiences with social inequalities in content, academic staff (role models, mentors, and sponsors) and the institution. Similarly, having groups of faculty reflect systematically on the hidden curriculum and its outcomes would be important. This approach would be consistent with a trend in theories of student development towards models informed by constructivist or post-modernist assumptions (e.g. Jones and Abes 2013).

Our convenience sample was notably homogeneous socio-culturally, making it impossible to carry out statistical analysis related to ethnicity, class or sexual identity. Nevertheless, our data are consistent with previous research. According to the literature, students from lower income families should be more likely to live at home, have a job and work longer hours, but to be more likely to miss having people who inspire them (Crozier et al. 2008; Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010). Consistent with this, five of the 12 students who self-identified as lower class were living at home (i.e. 40% compared to 16% for the whole sample). Eight of them had jobs, which is comparable to employment rates for the whole sample, and four of them exceeded the average of 10 hours employment (with 16, 20, 30, and 35 hours, respectively). Most importantly, none missed having a person who inspired them, and seven explicitly mentioned their parents as inspirational. Otherwise, their responses did not seem to differ substantially from those of the other students. Any future study would need to use purposive sampling to incorporate differences in socioeconomic circumstances and minority status into the analysis.

One may question the applicability of our results based on a sample of Dutch psychology women students to other student groups. As a discipline, psychology in Western Europe has become female dominated and white, relatively privileged women students are in the majority. Nevertheless, we argue that likely our results also pertain to middle class emerging adult women students in less female dominated disciplines at universities with a similar utilitarian and efficiency-oriented approach to education (Nussbaum 2007) and situated in societies fraught with the contradictions regarding gender equality that are characteristic of the Netherlands.

There are at least three topics that should be taken up in future research. Firstly, it is important to know more about the need for inspiring academic role models among those, who, like the 6% of participants in our study, expressed a desire for such a model, but also about the apparent lack of need among the remaining 64% of participants. Secondly, more needs to be known about potentially negative effects of role models. For example, women students may be discouraged by possibly exceptional balancing acts, childlessness or bitterness of successful academic women. Two further examples are potential covert aggressiveness and rivalry of women mentors (Pinker 2008) and the negative stereotypes of women students held by some successful women academics (Ellemers et al. 2004). Finally, attention should be directed toward other aspects of the hidden curriculum, such as the epistemological assumptions

of scholarly endeavors and their implications for students as ‘knowers’ (Belenky et al. 1986); the degree of personal contact between staff and students when academic institutions emphasize efficiency, performance measures and economic profit (Nussbaum 2007); the masculine tenure track and the competitive university culture (Kurtz-Costes, Helmke and Ülkü-Steiner 2006); and the white, middle class conventions of social interaction (Cotterill, Hughes and Letherby 2006).

Practical implications

Among the 70% of participants who have no inspiring university role model at the moment, almost 6% would explicitly welcome such a model. Likely, the remaining 64% would profit from role models during this formative period of their life, *if* there were appropriate models available. What then are the ideal characteristics of such role models, particularly if the goal is to advance a beneficial hidden curriculum?

A gender match between role model and student may be important, especially for women. Lockwood (2006), for example, explored gender matching in two studies with introductory psychology students as participants. In the first, where students read about a successful professional in the occupation that the participants intended to pursue, gender matching of participant and potential role model influenced the female participants’ identification with the role model, but had no impact on the males. In the second study, the participants were asked to describe a career-related role model who had inspired them. The majority of female (63.1%) and male participants (75.6%) nominated a same gender role model. The reason for the men students’ choices was unclear, but 27% of the women students explicitly mentioned that it was ‘important for them to have a role model who had overturned gender stereotypes or achieved success in a traditionally male-dominated field’ (44). Thus, having same-gender role models available for students is important.

In our study, the inspiring role models in the university setting were most likely to be *similar* in sex/gender but *different* in age compared to the women students. Encountering difference may stimulate reflection on, and awareness of, one’s identity and serve to bring to light much that is taken for granted (Jones and Abes 2013). This in turn may foster a kind of agency in that such self-consciousness enables critical reflection on imagined future identities. Thus, although academic women and men may think that a ‘generation gap’ or a ‘gender gap’ (or possibly a gap in race/ethnicity, class, sexual identity) reduces the connection with their students, on the contrary, sharing details of one’s life may encourage an empathic relationship that will contribute to students’ identity development.

Making the hidden curriculum explicit, reflecting on its content, and deliberately incorporating issues of relevance to students would seem to be a useful practice. For example, incorporating work/family life balance into the hidden curriculum is one example of addressing a topic that continues to be of concern for young women (e.g. Jacques and Radtke, 2012), and increasingly, young men. It would also serve to stimulate student thought about how the relational dimension is an important element of everyday life and cannot be separated from other dimensions, such as work and power/authority.

In general, then, a diverse group of academics, who are reflective about the ‘hidden curriculum’, would be most effective in enhancing the contribution of role models to students’ identity development.

Conclusions

Based on our survey, we conclude that more than 20.5% of undergraduate women (psychology) students find older women academics to be inspiring, with young academic women less frequently nominated (14.4%) and academic men, older or young, infrequently selected. The image associated with academic women is reminiscent of the traditional ‘bluestocking stereotype’, however, with an emphasis on qualities that are task-related and power-related and comparatively few qualities in the relational dimension. Thus, inspiration in the academic context differs considerably, both in terms of quantity and quality, from the inspiration women students report finding within their family contexts.

We argue that the features of inspirational academic models are informative in relation to ‘a hidden gender curriculum’, the informal lessons about gender that are learned in conjunction with students’ formal education. In our view, the exploration of universities’ hidden curricula should be continued to acquire more adequate knowledge about the way academic institutions contribute to the identity formation of their students and how they reproduce or disrupt social and cultural inequalities.

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