

Helen White
Professor Ito
Linguistics 245
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Sociolinguistic Lab 4: *Language Myths*

For this assignment, I chose to discuss Myth 6: “Women Talk Too Much,” written by Janet Holms. To get a glimpse into the experiences of women and how much they communicate, especially in academic settings, I presented some of the findings shared in the chapter, and asked the two women I talked to if they had any experiences of being marginalized or ignored in the classroom. The findings I discussed were that men were found to speak far more often in classrooms and other public settings, while women talked more in private settings. When teachers were made to devote equal amounts of class time to each gender, they often felt as though they were devoting much more time to the female students, in a disproportionate amount.

The first person I talked to was a friend of mine from high school, named Kendall. She attends Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, and is a part of a military-style living program on campus, where men outnumber women seven to one. Part of the discrimination that Kendall felt that she was experiencing was within this program, where she has been called slurs, such as a “WAG” (meaning Weak-A** Girl). As a freshman in the program, upperclassmen have much more status and often get the chance to assert power over the younger recruits. She admitted that around these upperclassmen males, she often remains silent and feels unable to speak, though her freshman male counterparts talk, not as intimidated by these older, male authorities. She explained her feelings about speaking up in public settings by giving an example from the classroom: in her two different labs, she feels much more comfortable talking in the one where another female student is present versus the lab where she is the only female among two male students and a male professor. She clearly stated that she “feels more comfortable talking with another girl there” and that these strong male presences often leave her silent. However, she also confided that she considered herself to be making a difference by being in this military program, where issues of sexism are being taken up more and more often by the administration. Kendall’s activism is her adamant female presence in this male-dominant environment.

The other student that I spoke to was Leah, a fellow first-year at St. Olaf. She believed that most of the sexism she had experienced in the classroom was in high school rather than at St. Olaf. She noticed that in her discussion-based classes, the male students often talked over the female students. When this occurred, the male teachers would passively let this happen, while the female teachers would intervene. The one experience that Leah recalled at St. Olaf was a pattern of rivalry with a male student in the Great Conversation classroom. Leah and this student would often disagree in conversation. The animosity came to a head when Leah began to speak and the student broke in with “Can I disagree with whatever Leah is about to say before she says it?” Though this was meant as a joke, the underlying idea that men perceive what they have to say as more important than what a woman could say is still present. Her activism is in voicing

her opinion in the classroom, even when meant with hostility. Though a queer woman, Leah is studying to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church, a goal that will no doubt be met with opposition from some.

In my own experience at St. Olaf, many of my classrooms are female-dominated and therefore this issue does not often arise. However, I did have an experience with a male member of the Great Conversation in which I felt marginalized and silenced. I had decided to have a study group for the midterm in the lobby of my dorm, along with some of my friends also in Great Con. Another male student who I did not know, and who did not ask to join our study group, jumped into the conversation. In the middle of a point that I was making, he began talking loudly over me, but I kept talking, refusing to stop just because he was impatient to say something. When I did not stop, he voiced his frustration with me and expressed that he just wanted to talk and did not feel allowed to do so. Several more times throughout our study group, when I began talking, he would loudly cut me off to say something else. In this situation, I felt that he considered himself more entitled to talk and believed that whatever I had to say was simply not important. As a woman, I feel that my activism is to continue to speak up in the classroom and to stand up for myself.