Female Maths Teachers – Will They Fall Prey to Stereotype Threat?

Abstract

This article refers to the results of a study published in The New Educational Review (Turska & Bernacka, 2010: “Maths lessons – are they gender neutral in the Polish perspective?”) and, as indicated in this publication, attempts to explain a particularly unfavourable perception of a female maths teacher by female students. To this end, the analytical perspective was changed: the female teacher became the actor of her own conduct instead of the ‘object’ of observation. With such an approach, it was possible to raise the issue of stereotype threat with reference to the female teacher. The study evidences that the easiest way to reduce the threat in terms of psychology is for the teacher to diminish the sense of gender identity.

Key words: actor-observer perspective, stereotype threat, sense of gender identity

Introduction

The negative answer to the question posed in the article published in The New Educational Review (Turska & Bernacka, 2010: “Maths lessons – are they gender neutral in the Polish perspective?”) was based on a premise that both the student’s and the teacher’s gender modify the perception of a quality mathematics lesson. This, in turn, was the result of an extensive study involving 921 male and female students who assessed the conduct of male and female teachers of mathematics. The findings indicate that female students (in relation to male counterparts) register a less favourable climate of classes, superficiality of feedback, and a smaller