

## Gender Sadism in Academia: Voices of Female Students in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** *This paper presents the gender biased experiences and inequality of undergraduate and graduate level female students of Nepal. Qualitative research methodology was applied for this study. A total of seventeen respondents along with college officials from two campuses participated in the study. The findings revealed that female students experienced a sense of fear and, consequently felt timid about reporting negative academic experiences. They perceived themselves as inferior student scholars due to pregnancy, having a child or for being married. Faculty members mostly favor male students and female students' comments and/or saying were not regarded as legitimate and not considered important in classroom discussion, decision-making and other curricular activities. As a result, they felt isolated in educational activities. The environment of the campuses and local culture was also perceived as one of the broader factors that impede gender balance and gender responsive activities within the academia. The findings contradict some physical problem between undergraduate and graduate level students but correspond about the support perceived in field works, practical works and some cultural aspects. However, this study concludes that colleges are not gender friendly in terms of academic delivery, curricular/co-curricular activities, practical works and assignments in one or another ways. Since there is no system to hearing the grievances of female students, a female help desk center to facilitate female students in each college would be fruitful to address the issues of female students.*

**Keywords:** College culture; college climate; female students; gender Sadism; gender differences; inequality; biased; grievances; administration; indecent behavior; insulting.

### Introduction

In recent years, universities and colleges of developed countries are increasingly dominated by young women, more women are enrolled in universities than men but in general, still the picture of women college students is not completely positive (Kelly and Torres, 2006). Despite women's gains in access to higher education, undergraduate and graduate women students frequently do not enjoy full equality of educational opportunities on college (Hall and Sandler, 1984). Many factors including, domestic and social expectations may contribute

to the limitation of women's full access in higher education, but institutional environment also plays a crucial role in fostering women students' personal, academic and professional development (Hall and Sandler, 1984). Hall and Sandler (1984) further added that women's educational experiences may differ considerably from those of men, even when they attend the same institutions, share the same classrooms and work with graduate advisors.

Nepal is progressing steadily towards attaining the EFA goals. If we see the indicators, some of the important targets such as primary student enrolment, and gender parity (0.99) in school enrolment have almost been achieved (UNESCO, 2015, p. 72), but the quality of gender environment remains far behind the expected reforms. Therefore, gender relations and practices need to be explored for the better understanding of the problems in order to bridge the gap. It is obvious that gender bias in academia has both immediate and long term impacts on the mental and physical well-being of students. A direct impact on education is that the quality of education is threatened by affecting learners' ability to concentrate (United Nations Violence Study, 2006). This again may increase the gender gap in education. It is commonly considered/accepted that education systems are fundamental in transforming practices, attitudes, values, including the practice of gender equality, non-violent behavior etc., but in order for these transformations to happen, learners need to have safe and supportive environments at school (UNESCO, 2014), so that we can have some ideas on how gender plays out with respect to the broader notion of educational participation (Leach, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014). Yet, Standing, Parker and Bista (2016) noted that some progress has been made on gender equality in Nepal but still remains an endemic problem.

Although a plethora of books, articles and reports have been written in recent years regarding the unwelcoming academic climate, female students still struggle with the college climate, influenced by gender stereotypes (Henry and Nixon, 1994). Women are not only quiet in the classroom; they are also missing from the pages of text books (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). In the context of Nepal, most curriculum and text book writers are males and are not sensitive towards gender issues. Textbooks do not include topics or lessons chosen with the explicit aim of bringing about gender balance in the family, society and nation (Bista, 2004). Hence, it is necessary to improve the institutional environment for better achievement in students' personal and professional development, because what happens outside the classroom is as important for students' personal and intellectual growth as what happens inside the classroom (Hall and Sandler, 1984).

Chong and colleagues suggest teachers' perceptions of their institutional academic climate to relate positively to student achievement across different academic settings (Chong, Klassen, Huan, Wong, and Kates, 2010). In this essence, Seifried (2000) noted that female students' experiences at coeducational institutions are not always equal to the experiences of their male counter parts (Seifried, 2000). Factors like type of institution, size of class, classroom setting, male/female mix in the classroom, academic subject of the class, curriculum of the particular course, and teaching style of instructor are significant contributor of how female students perceive their classroom experiences (Seifried, 2000). Institutional culture and climate have important consequences for recruitment, retention, development, improvement and

advancement of women (Mayyaa and Roff, 2004), so it is more important to understand the college culture and climate of each and every institution (Poudel, 2010).

### **College climate and college culture**

Culture and climate are the concepts describing a subset of the internal environment of an institution. College culture is a stable quality emerging from underlying institutionalized values and belief systems, norms, ideologies, rituals and traditions (Adelman and Taylor, 2006). Culture focuses on the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work. Organizational culture is a holistic perspective, whereas the climate can be defined as, the current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions and attitudes toward those dimensions (Poudel, 2010, p. 4).

College culture has been defined as the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions (Kuh and Whitt 1988, as cited in (Anne Skelly, 2004). Climate can be defined as, the common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions and attitudes towards those dimensions (Reid and Radhakrishnan, 2003). Thus, climate, compared to culture, is more concerned with current perceptions and attitudes rather than deeply held meanings, beliefs, and values. College climate is a measure -real or perceived-of the college environment as it relates to interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions. College climate is broadly defined as a set of beliefs and attitudes that drive the environment of institutions of higher education (Harris and King-jupiter, n.d.). College climate may influence social segregation that (already) exists in many colleges and universities. Hence, college climate can include how students perceive their professors, the student activities, student organizations, racial matters, and general social life in a college community (Reid and Radhakrishnan, 2003).

As Meyer and Firestone (2005) noted that many researchers follow the chilly climate, which refers to the interpersonal and institutional barriers women face in higher education, first coined by Hall and Sandler in the early 1980s, to describe the classroom experiences of undergraduate women (Litzler and Lange, 2006, p. 1) in some educational settings but there is no research that explores the experiences of graduate and undergraduate level female students in Nepalese context. Although studies like- the status of female education in Nepal: a study report, CERID 1994; gender assessment in education sector, New Era, 1997; girls' education in Nepal: research and investigative reporting on girls' education, Education Journalist Group, 2003; have been done regarding the lower participation of women in higher education by examining factors such as socio-economic, cultural, geographical, political, domestic etc., there is no research that reflects women's perception about existing college climate and its impacts on gender imbalance in higher education. In the absence of such reflections, this research seeks to answer these questions- how female students perceive and experience their college climate? How are they treated inside and outside the classroom?

What factors motivated and de-motivated female students in the existing college environment?

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception and experiences of female students about the existing college environment in terms of gender matters. More specifically, this study was designed to examine the composition of college climate and role of these factors to encourage and/or discourage female students inside and outside the classroom so that these ideas/approaches would further inform decision-makers to improve female students' participation in higher education.

### **Research Questions**

1. How women students perceive and experience their college climate?
2. How are women students treated inside and outside the classroom?
3. What motivated and de-motivated female students in the existing college environment?
4. How does the college climate help to increase female students' participation in higher education?

### **Methodology**

“How are female students being perceived and experience their existing college climate and how are they treated in the college reality?” was the major question I explored using a phenomenological approach within a qualitative research design. Since a qualitative inquiry helps to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live in it, which meant that the meaning is embedded in people's experience and how they perceive their experiences (Wray, 2005). The epistemological beliefs adopted for this study was subjective stance as knowledge is something created through interaction between the world and the individual, so the knowledge was built in quite a personal and subjective way throughout the local understanding (Poudel, 2010), which is dynamic and socially constructed. Owing this assumption, the method of transcendental phenomenology was adopted for the scrutiny of the lived experiences of female students. The Systematic approach and procedures identified by Moustakas (1994) includes; epoch, identifies significant statements in the data base from participants, clusters these statements into meaning units and themes, synthesizes the themes into a description of the experiences of the individuals, and then constructs a composite description of the meanings and these senses of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004) was employed to capture the lived experiences of female students and draw the conclusions.

## Participants

To explore the perceptions and experiences of female students, this study included eleven female students and six respondents from representatives of student welfare unions and college officials from the western region of Nepal. Two representative colleges from Kaski district of Nepal were selected. The colleges were representative in terms of having bachelor and masters level in education faculty and having the highest number of students in the region. Additionally, among the two colleges, one was public and the other one was government run. While selecting the participants for this study, my intention was to choose such respondents, who could draw on live experience of the existing college climate. For this purpose, I organized an introductory class in each college among the undergraduate and graduate students, and explained about the research topic, its purpose and importance.

Simultaneously, I asked students to participate voluntarily in this research and collected the names of those interested. Many students from each level (bachelor and masters) were interested, but as a qualitative researcher, it was impossible for me to interview all of them, especially from both colleges. Therefore, I utilized the strategy of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) and selected four students from master's level and seven students from bachelor's level. Additionally, three respondents were college officials and three were from students' welfare unions. All participants were given the informational sheet along with the consent form that described the purpose of the study and assured them of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and they were referred to by their pseudonym throughout the study processes.

## Data collection

Data was collected through in-depth interview with semi-structures questionnaire (interview guide) and some crucial guiding questions. However, the major tool for data collection was general guide interview as termed by Patton (1990). I agreed with Patton (1990) that, the general guide interview approach involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. The interview guide simply serves as a checklist during the interview to make sure that all the relevant topics are covered (Patton, 1990). Hence, in order to facilitate the generation of rich and detailed data, the themes and guiding questions of the interview were prepared in line with the research objectives. Most of the interviews were conducted at a location preferred by the research participants, but the location was confined within the college premises.

## Data analysis

To analyze the massive information collected from the in-depth interviews, I attempted genuine and empathic interpretation of the information that the research participants communicated to me. Although there are several views on phenomenological data analysis and interpretation; for instance, Patton (1990), (Polkinghorne, 1989), and (Giorgi, 1985), but the four phases composite method was implemented for this study.

First phase of the data analysis was the epoch in which, each interview sessions were organized without any assumptions and complete transcriptions of each interview was prepared. The second phase was transcendental phenomenological reduction, which describe in textural language just what I saw in the field along with a number of steps. The steps included bracketing the information, horizontalization, reducing or eliminating statements and developing a fundamental textural description using the language of the research participants to describe the experience under study. The third phase adopted was imaginative variation; which helps to seek a variety of meanings by varying the frames of references, employing polarities and reversals and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives. The ultimate aim was to structurally interpret and derive the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The final stage of data analysis was synthesis, during which I integrated the textural description and structural interpretation in order to present unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole.

To maintain the quality standards of the study, the Guba's model- truth value-credibility, applicability-transferability, consistency-dependability and neutrality-conformability, was used for establishing trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) of the study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

After conducting interviews with each research participants and scrutinizing all the interview transcripts, I decided to encapsulate the data with regard to academic level (bachelor's and master's) of the researched colleges and some important themes related to the research questions. From the detailed account with the seventeen participants, this study encapsulated seven key themes from the information shared by the participants. As I have generated four research questions which focused on perception and experience of female students towards the overall college contexts in terms of how they were treated inside and outside the classroom, the physical setting of the colleges, personal and professional behaviors of the faculty and peers, and policy provisions on programming and service delivery were found to be important/influencing factors. Therefore, the themes that emerged were; (a) physical setting and sense of safety, (b) socialization in college community (c) relationship with faculty, administrator and male peers, (d) field works, practical works and assignments, (e) interaction with faculty, administrator and peers, (f) scholarship, free ship and assistantship, and (g) access to source of knowledge and institutional policy.

#### **Physical setting and sense of safety**

The female respondents have negative perception about physical setting and sense of college safety. They did not feel secure nor felt that they had any self-identity in the college and described being a woman in a college meant worrying about personal safety, sexual violence and possible attacks. The women students reported either being personally attacked or recounted stories from women friends who had been victimized in college. Whether they or their friends had been victimized, the impact was one that contributed to a culture of fear for

female students. Currie (1994) found that students' mobility and use of libraries, parking lots and student union were directly related to their feeling of safety in college. In line with this feeling, lack of space in classroom was one of the most important issues of female students. College administration put more students than the capacity of a classroom and there were shortage of desks, benches etc.

*The college had 100 students in one classroom where 20 set desks and benches were kept. These were inadequate to adjust 100 students, hence we had to stand or leave the class in many occasions- Erica, a respondent of bachelor level.*

In the studied colleges, students were required to switch classrooms for different subjects. When a class would finish, the male students would run, push and overtake the female students. They (male students) would occupy all the front seats in the next period; the desks and benches would be full when the female students reached the classroom. Hence, the female students were compelled to sit in the last desks, stand or leave the class. Gathering of external people (students from other classes/faculty) in the classroom was common in the first year classrooms, which made the classroom like a public area, and therefore created a disturbing environment. On a daily basis, male students teased female students by throwing chalks in front of the faculty members in the classroom and exhibited similar behavior in the canteen, library and other areas within the college. Sumi, a respondent from the bachelor's level shared:

*When I enrolled in this college, I saw a mass of students in the classroom like a rally. Male students from the second and third years and from other faculties entered into our (first year) class to identify the beautiful female students and look at them. Therefore, the classroom was always full of such male students, but the college had no policy to control such behavior. Most female students attended classes standing up for many days. Even in such situations, these male students would tease us, but the faculty members wouldn't listen to our complaints.*

According to the information provided by the college administration, the number of students in each classroom was higher than the physical facility could actually accommodate: they assigned 75-150 students in one classroom. Additionally, female students reported that if the number of female students seemed more in any section, the college administration would retain them because they assumed that the female students would leave college more than the male students for customary obligations such as marriage.

*One day, in the month of Poush, we reported our problems regarding the lack of seating space in the classroom to the College Chief and recommended that each section be broken down further to accommodate all the students. However, his response was, "the wedding season (February and March) is coming and many female students will get married and the section will be adjusted accordingly, so I do not think it is necessary to breakdown the section ..... If not, we will breakdown the section"- Jeena, a respondent from the bachelor's level.*

If students perceive a higher degree of safety, they are more likely to challenge what is perceived to be unfair. The students who were more open and who had experienced

discrimination were more positive about the climate than the students who had self-identity issues and had not experienced discrimination (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger and Hope, 2013). As such, the female students were experiencing discrimination in various areas of college, like library and other resource centers. Even in the library, often considered an important academic spot for the source of knowledge, there were no standard rules and regulations against indecent act and behavior towards females and the staff never protected the harassed female students. Regarding the library experience, Jeena said that there were more than ten thousand students in their college, but the self-study tables were limited in the library. Moreover, there was no provision for female students to study separately in the library, which sometimes created big hazards for female students.

*One day, we (Jeena and Reena) were studying in the library, where there were 4 tables vacant in the left corner of the first floor. We were studying at the last table. After 15 minutes, a group of male students came near the table where we were studying and borrowed different books and novels. Among those books, they turned the cover page of a novel named "women in love". They showed the book cover towards us and read out some vulgar texts loudly, which made the situation embarrassing, so we had to run away from there-Jeena, a respondent of bachelor level.*

Although there was no special provision of seating arrangement for male and female students, the female students of master's level were not facing the physical problem in the classroom like bachelor's levels. The problem of physical setting was one major problem in the college but it was not for the master's level due to the minimum number of students. They experienced easy and helpful environment in the classroom but the situation out of classroom was critical for them. "We feel unsafe to walk alone in the college, especially outside the classroom and the situation is more severe in the evenings when we have class", said Muna, a master's level respondent. From the detailed interview of master's level students, it was found that master's level students did not face physical problems.

*I would like to express my feeling of college environment which is extremely different. I am an old student of this college and I earned intermediate and bachelor's degree certificates from this college. When I enrolled in master's degree, the academic environment in the classroom was good. Some male counterparts, who were my class mates from the bachelor level, were very cooperative and I think maturity is one important factor for cooperation and positive thinking.*

This finding was consistent with the situation concluded by Currie (1994), that students' mobility and use of libraries; parking lots and student union were directly related to student's feeling of safety in college. More than two-thirds of the women respondents stated that if they felt safe they were likely to attend college more frequently or extensively and if assured of their safety, almost three quarters of the female students indicated they would attend college more frequently in the evenings (Kelly and Torres, 2006). Hence, the sharing of the female students above shows that the existing college environment is not safe at any time for female students. Although physically and geographically the college was in a safe location,



the position of female students within the college was not secured at all. Therefore, the sense of college safety could be a major issue for female students in the researched colleges.

### **Socialization in the college community**

The participants (female students of this study) shared their uneasy experiences in college socialization and were marginalized by their male colleagues along with faculty and administration in several aspects. Feelings of isolation and lack of convenient peer community were common concerns for them and they shared that they perceived themselves as timid to socialize, which hindered their academic success.

Almost all female students reported that it was very difficult for new students to socialize in the college. When female students entered college, they got less attention and care from the college staff. Colleges had no provision to facilitate students' socializing through social events like orientation about the college, including its rules and regulations. Additionally, the huge college premises with spread-out classrooms, departments, and offices were not clearly or adequately marked with signs. Therefore, the new students faced problems in locating their classrooms. The female respondents were worried about the indecent behavior and activities of male students, which were the major factors for creating difficulties in socialization. The common problems made by male counterparts that hindered socialization of the female students were frequent teasing, dominating and insulting them.

*When there is a free period (mostly because teachers are not present), some male students form a group in a common area like the hallway or corridors from where most students pass through. Then, they would start teasing, dominating and insulting the female students. When we (female students) are walking close to the group, they pretend they are talking on their mobile with someone and they speak offensive and vulgar language, while others start laughing and looking at us lecherously. Therefore, recently we changed our route- Erica, a respondent from the bachelor's level.*

Riya, a bachelor's level student said that the male students with whom they needed to spend the time within college, were not familiar. Therefore, she questioned the feasibility of socializing yet feeling safe with them. From experiences of the female students, the college environment was totally male dominated, and female students victimized and were treated as second class citizens. These findings were consistent with research by Kelly and Torres (2006); who noted being a woman in society meant worrying about personal safety, experiencing sexual victimization, and being blamed for attacks on their person. These female students recounted messages they received from parents, peers, and society in general who told them they should fear for their safety (Kelly & Torres, 2006).

Similar to the responses of the bachelor's level students, the master's level female students also expressed their experiences about the difficulty of socializing in the college community. It was not easy in general for students to socialize in college, however, the situation of female students was more pathetic as a result of the nasty behaviors of the male counterparts, as said by Muna. She further added that it was easy for her in the master's level because she was a

senior student, but the situation was miserable for new students. Sama, a respondent added the reflection of patriarchal culture from their society could be clearly seen in the college.

From the experiences shared by the female respondents above, this study found that socialization was difficult in the beginning of college life for all students, especially for females. Since male students always demonstrated their pride of male chauvinism towards females, the female students had started to perceive that male students had a more important role. In fact the male students of master's level did not behave so; the overall situation of socialization was not satisfactory for female students in the researched colleges.

### **Relationship with faculty, administrator and male peers**

Although teacher student interactions help to enhance self-esteem, satisfaction and participation among students, the respondents of bachelor's level had the experience of being isolated, disregarded and dominated from their male peers and faculty members. However, the respondents of master's level experienced support and cooperation from the male peers and college officials within the classroom.

Jeena, a respondent from bachelor's level reported that the male students focused their interest on unmarried females than the married ones, and they never considered females as their part in intelligence. Female student respondents reported that their relationship with the faculty and male peers depended on their physical appearance rather than their intelligence. They were worried about the behavior of male students in the classroom because of their (female students') physical appearance and marital status, i.e., if the female students were physically appealing and unmarried, the male students desired to interact with them.

*In the classroom, male peers tease us saying, females are joining college to get only husband, to take advantage of marriage, so how can we improve the relationship with such culprits? They see differently to physically attractive and un-attractive females besides underestimating their intellectual activities and capabilities.”- Reema, a bachelor's level student.*

On the other hand, female students perceived relationship between and among the students of master's level and with the college officials' satisfactory. In comparison with the students of bachelor's level, the master's level female students were getting more support even from the male peers. Both male and female students of master's level were enjoying classroom activities alike. Therefore, the classroom climate was cooperative and a close relationship existed among faculty, and administrator including male counterparts.

*I think the faculty members make no partiality in the treatment of male and female students, but male peers do not accept this. If we visit the faculty members outside of class, then the male students would comment by saying that the female students are trying to get close to them”:-Shikha, a respondent of master's level.*

Relation of belongingness, or the feeling of relatedness to others, has been suggested as an influential factor in academic outcomes owing to its importance in behavioral and socio-emotional development (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan, 1991). However, the experiences of female students revealed that academic relationship between and among peers was not accessible for female students, and they had many examples for such through their male peers on college. They always felt that the faculty members were never there to address such serious issues. In order to address gender equity issues, teachers should incorporate effective, non-biased teaching strategies in the classroom. Since teachers can be a role for promoting gender equality in classrooms, they can exhibit positive behavior by using non-sexist language, as language influences thought development (Cronin and Sawsan, 1995) and can enhance supportive and academic relationship among the entire students.

### **Field works, practical works and assignments**

Evaluation and devaluation between male and female students on field works, practical works and assignments was another factor, which led to different academic performance of the students. The respondents of this study were unfairly evaluated in field works, practical works and assignments. Almost all the respondents reported their dissatisfaction regarding the evaluation system of the college. This information was consistent with Sandler, Silverberg and Hall's (1996) statement that the devaluation of female is not limited to formal evaluation.

Female students, who did not participate in the laboratory work experienced biased evaluation from the faculty members and evaluation in their practical works.

*In the practical class of B.Ed. 2nd year, we all had to make mathematical charts and illustrations. On the collection date of the practical work, the teacher demonstrated one of the best illustrations made by one of the male students, but the poorest illustration from the female students. We felt very ashamed of our work in the classroom. I cannot mention the name of the person who did so, but this person holds an important position in the faculty. This is simply gender discriminations. - Erica, a respondent from bachelor's level.*

In relation to practical and field works, respondents from the master's level had similar experience as that of the bachelor's level. The female students experienced being treated unfairly by faculty members and they perceived female students incapable in several aspects of evaluation.

*When we participated in the bachelor level's third year teaching practice/placement, my friend Nanu (name changed) and other two female students participated in a secondary school in Bhunpare (name of the place where the school is located, there were three females only from the bachelor's level and other twelve students from the proficiency certificate level. The college selected a male student as a group leader from the proficiency certificate level, when there were three female students from the bachelor's level, who would have been more qualified for this position. This selection is nothing but gender disparity."- Rekha, a master's level student.*

A point worth mentioning concerning some practical and field work in the college is that female students can choose the placement to their nearest location and male students raised voices against the college's decision that females were given such preference. This clearly showed that male peers were not supportive of female students, but the faculty members and administration were supportive in these issues. However, female students still perceived practical work to be difficult for them. While the faculty members and the administration supported them in terms of cultural context and field work more than the male students, in terms of evaluation, they (faculty members and administration) were still unfair to the female students. As reported by the female students, the faculty members thought that the female students were less capable than the male students and therefore were given lower scores despite their intellectual capacity.

### **Interaction with faculty, administrator and peers**

This study intends to uncover female students' experiences about communication and interaction within the classroom and out of the classroom with faculty, administrator and peers. Female student respondents reported that there was more interaction among male students and faculty members. Comments and issues made by female students were occasionally considered for discussion. Academic information and instructional materials were not distributed equally among male and female students. Some students shared that the male students in fact handled faculties.

Female students reported that to participate in classroom discussions/interactions they needed to have great courage, because when they dared to ask questions, the male students would laugh at them and some would even irritate them. This finding was consistent with the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women in the year 1992, which says that a girl's self-esteem may also be negatively affected by degrading or negative comments made by their male peers. When girls are teased for making intelligent remarks, their participation level in the class drops (Owens and Cooney, 1998).

Indu, a respondent from bachelor's level, noted that faculty members did not give them a chance to share their ideas either. According to Thome (1992), an important source of gender bias in classroom is the type of feedback that teachers give to students. Patterns of praise and criticism are different for boys and girls. Boys are more often scolded for misbehavior and praised for their academic work, while girls are more often chastised for poor academic performance and praised for appearance, neatness and being polite (Owens and Cooney, 1998). Faculty members also did not give a chance to the female students to share their ideas, which impact their academic performance.

*How can we show our performance to faculty officials and peers when we are forced to be isolated and we are considered second-class citizens in the institution? In the classroom, the male peers tease us saying, "females are joining college just to get a husband, to get married. Therefore, communication and interaction is limited, because of this discrimination. - Jeena, a bachelor's level student.*

Due to situations reported above by some of the respondents, female students were forced to feel ashamed and considered themselves as second-class citizens and would almost stay like statues in front of the faculty members and male peers in the classroom. They were not confident enough in the classroom to share their ideas and demonstrate their performance due to a lack of support by the faculty members and male peers. This situation is consistent with Weaver and Qi's findings (2005) that a strong perception of faculty as an authority might undermine students' confidence in the contribution they might be able to offer. Confidence probably relates to fear of peer disapproval or professors' criticisms as well (Weaver and Qi, 2005, p. 579). Therefore, interaction between and among students, faculty members and other officials were not supportive and academic in bachelor's level.

Experiences of master's level female students were found to be different than that of bachelor's level. Classroom environment improved as students' matured and their academic qualification enhanced. Rekha said, "I have a very different experience. As a master's student, I am treated well, whereas this was not the case in bachelor's level". Female students reported that the academic environment of master's level was supportive and encouraging, as faculty members and classmates were equally helpful and communicated in all academic aspects inside and outside the classroom. Weaver and Qi (2005) suggest that out-of-class interaction between faculty members and students also encourages student development and learning. Master's level female students enjoyed their classes and equally participated in the learning process. Weaver and Qi (2005) found that students who actively participate in the learning process learn more than those who do not.

The findings reveal that the bachelor's level female students did not feel a sense of motivation to participate equally in the learning process of the classroom and the general academia, because they were very often ignored and kept isolated in many institutional activities. According to Jacobson (2000), teacher-student relationship could promote student motivation and increase students' values for success through positive rapport and establishing supportive learning environments, as felt by the master's level female students, but not in the case of the bachelor's level female students.

### **Scholarship, free ship and assistantship**

Scholarship, free ship and assistantship are important factors that motivate and assist students to continue their academic program: all respondents expressed great dissatisfaction towards this issue. Majority of the respondents reported that scholarship and free ship schemes were not distributed to students. The female participants emphasized on distributing scholarship, free ship, and assistance ship to promote female students participation in tertiary education, but they also disclosed that such schemes were conducted just for motivating the member students of political parties. In fact, the scholarship scheme in one (affiliated) college was managed and provided properly, but in another (constituent) college, there were no special rules for scholarships. Alternatively, the free ship distribution was not fair in either of the colleges.

*Due to high influence of politics, all the programs were very badly affected in college, as point of discrimination was high. The college announced that scholarships would be distributed to intelligent students depending upon the achievement of their previous exam, and free ships would be distributed through the categorization in terms of rural, poor, intelligence, female, minority etc. However, such norms and criteria were never practiced. Instead, they were distributed to either students close to the college officials or according to political influence- Suja, a bachelor's level student.*

On the contrary, as stated by the respondents of the other college, the above-mentioned situation did not exist in their college. The scholarship was distributed fairly, but there was definitely political influence on free ship distribution.

*Every year, as far I know, scholarship is distributed to one male and one female, which is fair, but free ship is always distributed unfairly. Applications were selected of only those who were close to the administrator and those who were related to the college officials. So there wasn't any provision of distributing free ships to unfamiliar females" - Erica, a bachelor level student.*

Due to these malpractices, intelligent students were frustrated. Master's level female students expressed that scholarship was one of the most helpful motivating factors for increasing the participation of female students in the tertiary level education, but there were no special rules to promote them through these schemes. As a result, they felt deprived of such schemes in college.

### **Access to source of knowledge and institutional policy**

Female students' access to source of knowledge, as available in the college community, is another motivating factor to promote female students in tertiary education as well as their personal and academic development. But the colleges selected for this study had no provision for academic and knowledge enhancing resources, although both of these colleges are the biggest college in the western region of Nepal.

Female students shared that they had no experience related to the various source of knowledge, such as the internet, resource centers, and searching for books in libraries. They had had no opportunity to study academic reports, research reports, journals, newspapers and other academic and intellectual resources within the college premises. Faculty members were not able to provide new and important documents to students. Therefore the students relied only on manual books available in the library with aged editions. There were no computer lab and internet for electronic resources. They were compelled to confine their knowledge to the limited old books of the library.

Sikha said that except some books and some local newspapers, the college had no other provision for their academic enhancement. Even those books available in the library were mostly torn and marked with pens, pencils and markers. This was because there was hardly any budget for the library. In both colleges, there was only one library, as a source of

knowledge. Writing a thesis was mandatory work in the master level, but as there were not sufficient guidelines and related literature in the library, it took more time than required for all students to complete their thesis.

According to Hamilton (1983), the college climate is comprised of faculty members, students, administrators, along with individual values and expectations, directed by policy and practices. The policy and program plays a crucial role to handle the overall environment of any institution. Like any other environment, gender bias within a college environment is influenced by such policy and program. However, most of the respondents were not aware about the institutional policy and program to prevent gender bias in the college. There were no guidelines and prospects and no events like, seminars, workshops and training to promote and support female participation in tertiary education and to reduce gender bias in education. Although there were no authentic guidelines and/or policy document to promote gender equitable environment, student unions distributed very attractive posters demonstrating gender equitable college climate. Female participants expected that if the college took out authentic guidelines or policy document to prevent gender bias, then violence against women would surely minimize and they would have their own identity in the institution.

Female students suggested that the faculty members themselves were involved in gender bias activities. Therefore, the college should prioritize in designing a favorable environment for the female students. Muna, a respondent from master's level said that they had requested the college administration to establish a woman help desk in the college, adhering to many female friends facing serious problems every day, but no one took it seriously. Instead, their response was- "master's level females do not feel safe in college but have been studying in this college for the last six years." In response to Muna's concern regarding the unequal treatment of female students, the college administrator, Ojesbi (a male), said,

*Some female students wear stylish dresses and are fashionable in academic institutions. Such females may affect the relation of other females towards their male peers, faculty members and administration, because they are not following the college rules and regulations. Therefore, these females might have been differently treated within college. I think the faculty members do not bother to differentiate students by gender or physically, but it is possible that their male peers might have been differently treated. It's not our concern but our assumption is that both male and female are our students, they should be treated equally and we also do so- Ojesbi a male college administrator.*

Analyzing Ojesbi's statement, one could argue that the college administration perhaps without realizing or intentionally reflects victimization of females. Therefore, the females perceive the college environment to be discriminating towards them.

## Conclusions

From the detailed accounts of seventeen participants of this study, it can be concluded that female participants of this study had piles of negative stories about their existing college climate. Feelings of isolation, lack of favorable community, unacceptable behaviors from

faculty members, administrators and male peers were the common concerns of female students. These feelings have been further exacerbated by frustration due to reasons such as: the unfair evaluation system; reinforcement and feedback; unmanaged institutional policy; and monopoly of college administrators and students unions in the distribution of free ships, scholarships and assistance ships.

From the voices of the respondents, it makes sense to the researcher that colleges are good in advertising gender equality just for the sake of formality, but do not practice it in reality. For example, they have advertised the concept on their website, flyers, prospectus and posters, but have not taken any measures to change the existing hostile climate towards females.

Further, the fact that they are excluded from several decision making processes, as well as their lack of involvement (not by choice) in many aspects of the institutional programs, has led the female students believe that the college does not support to provide a gender equal environment, where they can enhance their academic skill set in higher education.

Another major factor that has prevented gender equality in the colleges studied is the limited infrastructure and furniture. For example, due to lack of desks and chair in the classrooms, some male students intentionally sit next to the female students and exhibit discourteous and unacceptable behavior towards them. This resulted in the female students feeling extremely unsafe and unsecured. Additionally, in my observation, many parts of the college were not well lit and the buildings were unlocked on the weekends and late at night. The colleges seemed to have overlooked a genuine issue that the lack of security guards or measures to escort female students for evening classes can be putting their persona safety at risk. In my observation, the colleges could improve the physical infrastructure by maintaining the premises, setting up street lights, and allocating extra furniture (desks, benches, chairs), particularly to ease the environment for evening classes for female students

This study further concludes that female students did not feel safe and the environment for them in the college community was not congenial. Except for some cultural/ ethical issues, female students were always discouraged and treated differently by most of their faculty members, administrators and male peers. There was a lack of accountability in the distribution of scholarships, free ships and assistance ships. Female students did not have equal access to institutional resources, as males had a way of accessing resources beforehand, and therefore, female students felt left out in this regard. Further, they experienced a sense of fear and consequently felt timid about reporting negative things. The impact of such situation to students who view their academic institution as having a serious violence problem may also develop a host of other negative feelings and attributes toward the institution (Astor, Benbenisthy, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002). The desire of male students and faculty member to interact with female students solely depended on their physical appearance and marital status. As a result, their level of intelligence did not matter. Additionally, this heightened sense of insecurity and isolation among married and pregnant female students, or female students that were perceived unattractive. The voices of female students were very often ignored in



important classroom discussions and other curricular activities. These situations were more severe for female students in bachelor's level in comparison to master's level.

Considering the numerous personal and social hardships many female college students in Nepal face because of gender insensitive and biased environments, it is imperative that an education institution take all the necessary measures to establish and promote a healthy, safe and congenial environment, where female students can be a part of the learning process and enhance their academic skill. Not only will this increase female participation in higher education, but help Nepal achieve gender equality in higher education.

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