

Why don't girls go into the math pipeline?

Here is one girl's story.

She was a very good math student, despite Miss Wardlow's mistaken belief that she was not being honest when she signaled she had found the square root table in the math book while Miss W was showing us the long way to solve for square roots.

She was in the middle level (Math 182 out of Math 181 and Math 183) of the mathematics offerings at Cornell University when she was a freshman. There were two girls in a class of about 15. The other members were pre-med boys. The professor was from India; his English was typically upper class Indian and difficult to understand (r's and l's were a challenge).

The tension in the classroom was palpable. The 13 were rude and demanding.

At the end of the year, she decided to forego science, and therefore the need for math, as her major and moved to language and literature.

Early the next fall, just after classes got underway, she met the math professor in the quad and he asked her what math class she was in because he hadn't seen her.

She explained that she had dropped math. He responded that it was a shame. He had recommended her to the highest level of the next course (Math 193).

The problem: why didn't he say that to her when she was still in his class? She might have been encouraged to brave it out a while longer...or to be inspired to move in the direction of a chemistry degree which is what her father had wanted.

Too little, too late....