

SOCIAL STYLES OF STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS

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ABSTRACT

In this study, 102 undergraduate students enrolled in marketing and management classes at Seattle Pacific University were asked to rate themselves and their business professors using the dimensions of Social Styles developed by Merrill and Reid (1981): Driver, Expressive, Amiable, Analytical. Twelve business professors also agreed to rate themselves on the same Social Styles Scale. These four Social Styles differ in assertiveness and responsiveness (desire to develop social or emotional relationships with others). Drivers are high in assertiveness and low in responsiveness, Expressives are high in assertiveness and responsiveness, Amiables are low in assertiveness but high in responsiveness, while Analyticals are low in assertiveness and responsiveness. Merrill and Reid provide directions for participants in social situations to adjust their personal style so they can improve the quality of their interaction with others.

Since the Social Styles scale had not previously been applied to an academic setting, the goal of this research was to answer the following questions: What is the Social Style of business students? Do marketing students differ in their Social Style from other business students? Are male students different from female students in terms of Social Style? What are the Social Styles of business professors? How accurately do students judge the Social Style of different business professors? Are there any Social Style clashes between students and professors? If so, what can professors do to mitigate such clashes?

An analysis of the data revealed that the single most likely Social Style among business students is the Expressive style, followed by the Analytical and Amiable styles. Although the sample of marketing students was too small to draw any statistical inferences, three quarters of marketing students were classified as Expressive or Amiable. Thus, the marketing majors in this study had somewhat higher responsiveness ratings than other business students. Students' Social Style was significantly different by gender. Although the most common Social Style for males and females was Expressive, there was a

higher proportion of males who were Drivers, and a higher proportion of women who were Amiable.

The Social Style of most of the twelve professors who filled out the Social Style scale was also Expressive. This indicates there is a match between the level of assertiveness and responsiveness of students and professors. There is a discrepancy, however, between the way some professors rate themselves and the way they are perceived by students. A much higher proportion of students identified business professors as Analyticals than was the case from professor self-ratings. Student perceptions of professors may be partially the result of stereotypes of "typical professor types," as well as gender stereotypes. Female professors are more likely to be viewed as Amiable than Drivers, and the opposite is true for male professors.

Although this study does not address how perception of professor Social Style affects student evaluations of professor performance, other studies (Hersche and Swenson 1991; Kelley, Conant, and Smart 1991) also identify the attributes of responsiveness - helpfulness, caring, and empathy - as desired professor traits.

Further research needs to be conducted to determine the link between Social Styles, classroom activities, and student evaluations. Additional research in other universities needs to be conducted to determine if student social styles at a private university are different from those of students attending public universities.