

# Rate My Professor: Gender of Professor's Influence on Students' Perceptions

Tara Ferejohn, Mariah Laster, Michele Van Volkom, Janice C. Stapley  
Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ

## Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between gender of professor and students' perceptions of professors. Seventy-six undergraduate women were read a vignette about a fictitious professor by the researcher as they followed along. Participants then rated them on Likert scales included in an evaluation questionnaire. Gender of professor was manipulated, with levels including male, female, and unknown gender. Overall impression of professor, perception of hard grader, and perception of office hours availability for extra help were the dependent variables, each measured by responses to questions within the evaluation questionnaire. Analyses were run to determine if gender of professor had an influence on any of the dependent variables in question, specifically, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted for each variable. These analyses did not yield significant results, suggesting that gender of professor has no effect on overall impression of professor, perception of hard grader, or perceived office hours availability. These results imply that there is not a gender bias among female students in their perceptions of professors. Additional implications of these findings will be discussed.

## Introduction

- Professors' performance evaluations and staffing decisions rely heavily on student evaluations; however, this measure may have low levels of validity.
- Student evaluation biases regarding professors' gender as well as ethnicity have been found.
  - Minority professors were generally rated lower by students than professors who were not minorities (Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl, 2010).
  - Students would rather take a class with a male professor than a female professor (Kierstead, D'Agostino, & Dill, 1988).
  - Male students rated female professors lower than male professors (Basow, 1995; Basow & Silberg, 1987).
  - Overall, male professors had higher student evaluations than female professors (Kierstead et al., 1988).
- Students' perceptions of professors are positivity correlated with the gender role that each professor expresses.
  - Students viewed female professors as less authoritarian, yet more warm and charismatic than male professors (Basow & Silberg, 1987).
  - Female professors who followed the gender role of being warm and charismatic received higher ratings than those who did not (Kishler Bennett, 1982).
  - Female professors were given lower evaluations than male professors when they both had low class participation (Parks-Stamm & Grey, 2016).
- Present Study:**
  - This study investigated the relationship between gender of professor and students' perceptions of professor.
  - Updates the literature and addresses inconsistencies from previous research.
  - Manipulated three levels of the independent variable with the third level being a new addition to research (unknown gender condition).

## Hypotheses

**H1:** The male professor will be rated higher than the female and unknown professor. The female professor will be rated the lowest.

**H2:** The female professor will be seen as a more difficult grader than the male and unknown professor. The male professor will be seen as the least difficult.

**H3:** The female professor will be seen as more available for extra help during office hours than the male and unknown professor. The male professor will be seen as the least available.

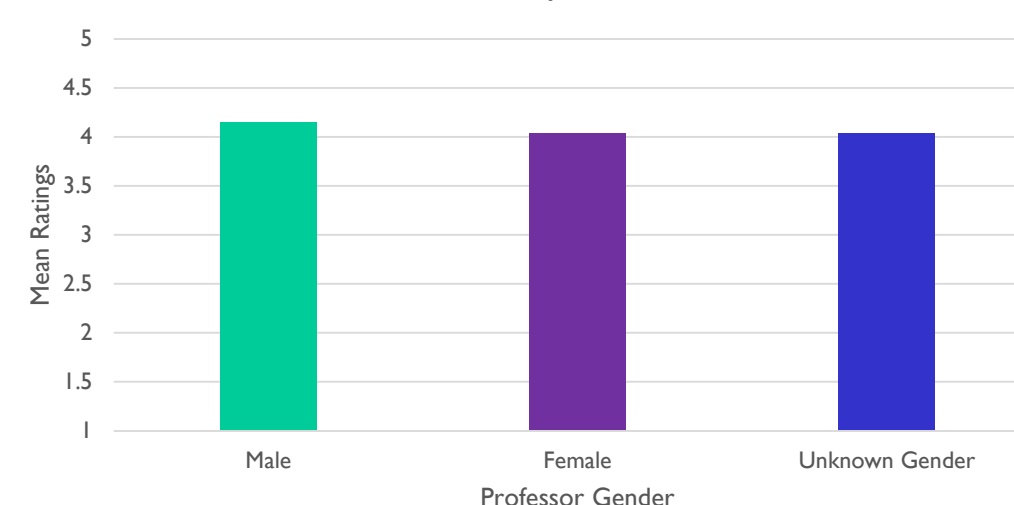
## Method

- 76 Female Undergraduate Participants (Mean age = 19.3)
- Multi-Group Between Subjects Experimental Design
- Independent Variable = Professor's Gender (male, female, or unknown)
- Dependent Variable = Students' Ratings of Professor
- After consent forms were signed, participants read a vignette about a fictional professor's class involvement and career achievements. Participants received one of three vignettes which varied in professor's gender (male, female, or unknown). Gender conditions were assigned randomly. Participants then answered a professor evaluation questionnaire, completed demographics, and were debriefed.

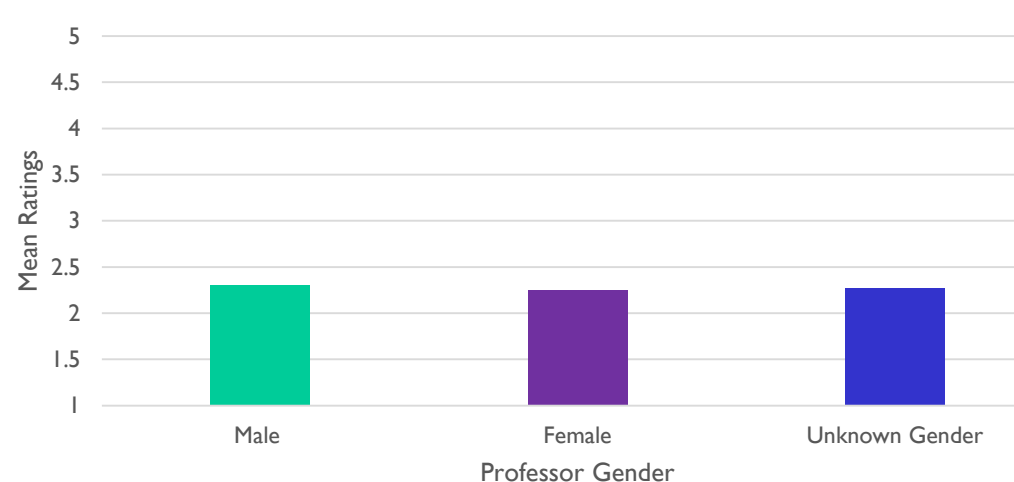
## Results

- Manipulation Check**
  - To confirm that the gender of professor manipulation was effective, a frequency analysis was conducted. The analysis found that the majority (70%) of participants answered correctly (30% of participants answered incorrectly). The manipulation was effective,  $\chi^2(2, N = 76) = 34.65, p < .001$ .
- Overall Impression**
  - A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test if any of the three conditions differed in overall impression of professor. The analysis revealed no significant difference between the groups,  $F(2, 73) = .30, p = .74, \eta = .01$ . The gender of the professor had no effect on the overall impression of the professor.
- Hard Grader**
  - A one-way ANOVA was used to test if any of the three conditions differed in perception of hard grader. The analysis revealed no significant difference between the groups,  $F(2, 73) = .05, p = .96, \eta = .00$ . There was no significant effect of professor gender on perception of hard grader.
- Office Hours Availability**
  - A one-way ANOVA was used to test if any of the three conditions differed in perception of office hours availability. The analysis revealed no significant difference between the groups,  $F(2, 73) = 2.21, p = .12, \eta = .06$ . There was no significant effect of professor gender on perception of office hours availability.

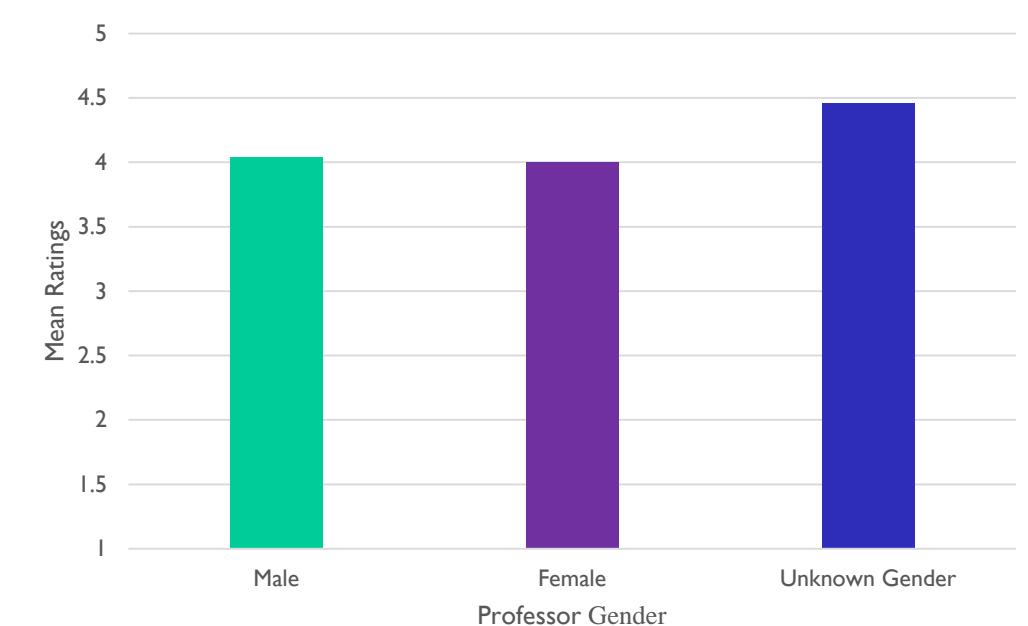
Overall Impression



Hard Grader



Office Hours Availability



## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between gender of professor and students' perceptions of professors. The results did not support any of the hypotheses, finding that gender of professor does not have a significant impact on students' perceptions. These results imply that there is not a gender bias amongst students in regards to perception of professors, at least not in female students. The present study finding no significant impact of gender of professor on students' perceptions may be due to a few different factors. There was not much diversity within the sample. It is possible these participants, who shared so much in common, may also share opinions that affected evaluation responses. Social desirability may have come into play as well; participants may have rated professors positively in order to be perceived positively by the researcher. Any subsequent research should focus on discovering other variables that may play a role in students' perceptions, such as race or years of experience. It is crucial for a topic of this importance to be researched further and the knowledge on it expanded, as student evaluations hold significant weight in the world of academia and can make or break the careers of professors.

## References

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