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# He's Sarcastic and She's Caring: Students' Stereotypes of the Typical Male and Female Professor

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## Introduction

### Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes

- People's beliefs about the qualities men and women possess become required of men and women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).
- Failure to live up to a gender prescription can result in social punishment.

### Contrast Effect

- If behavior varies considerably from expectations, the perceived difference may be magnified.
- When a male professor was nurturing (unexpected), he was rated much more positively than a female professor who was nurturing (Meltzer & McNulty, 2011).
- When a man was helpful in one study, he was rated much higher than an equally helpful woman. When the man didn't help, he was rated much higher than an equally unhelpful woman (Heilman & Chen, 2005).

**Hypothesis: Students will describe the traits and behaviors of typical male and typical female professors in gender-stereotyped ways.**

## Method

### Participants & Procedure

- 91 students (69 women and 22 men)
- 40% first years, 45% sophomores, and 15% juniors/seniors
- Students recruited from introductory psychology and math statistics courses
- Participants randomly assigned to describe the typical male professor of the typical female professor

### Materials

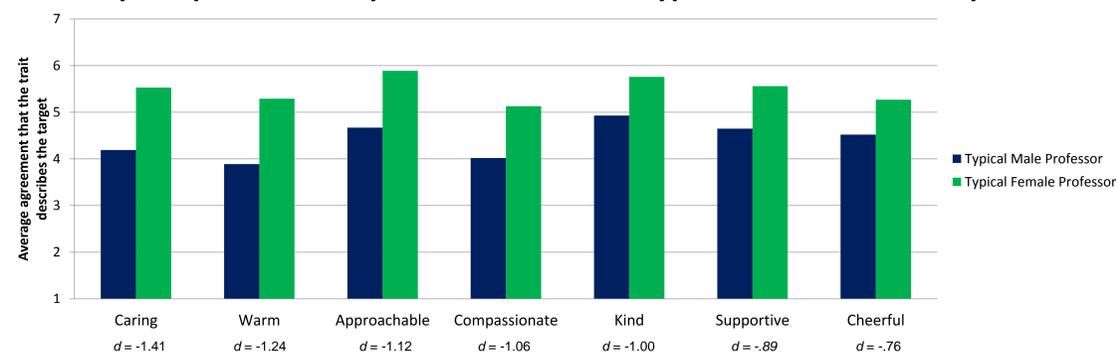
**Open-Ended Question.** Participants were asked to describe the typical male/female professor's characteristics, appearance, and behavior.

**Trait Ratings.** Participants indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement "The typical male/female professor is [trait]" using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants evaluated 66 different traits.

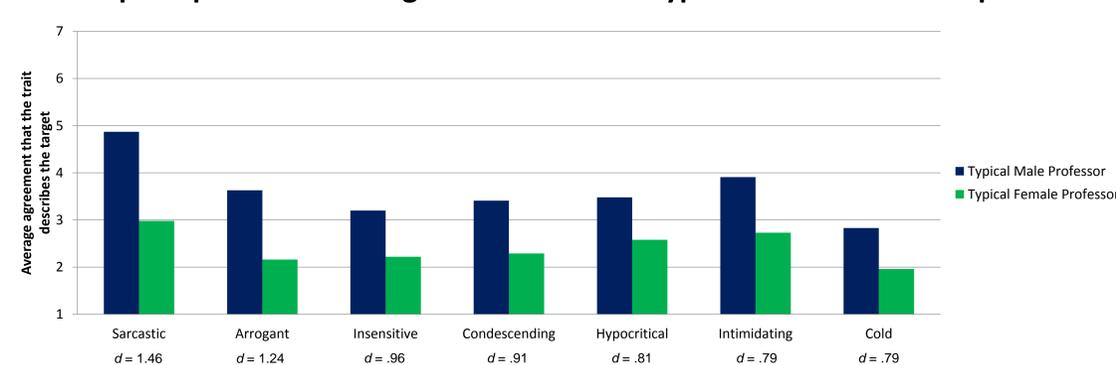
**Behaviors.** Participants indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement "The typical male/female professor [engages in a particular behavior]" using the same 7-point Likert-type scale. Participants evaluated 19 different behaviors.

## Results

### Students' perceptions of the positive traits of the typical male and female professor



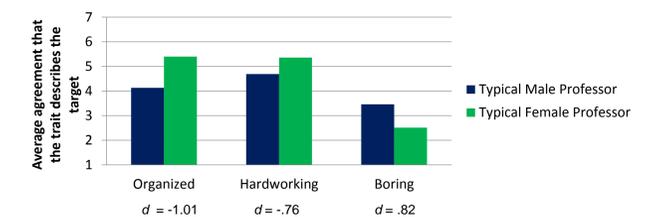
### Students' perceptions of the negative traits of the typical male and female professor



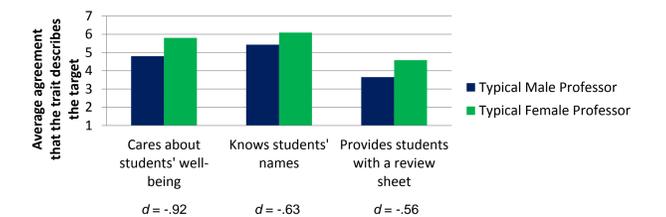
### Sample of students' descriptions of the typical male professor (blue) and the typical female professor (green)



### Students' perceptions of the instructor traits of the typical male and female professor



### Students' perceptions of the levels of positive instructor behaviors of the typical male and female professor



## Discussion

- Students expect female professors to possess higher levels of positive interpersonal traits and lower levels of negative interpersonal traits, which could lead to gender discrimination.
- Female professors who fail to meet students' gendered expectations may be judged much more harshly than male professors for the same behavior.
- Because students have higher expectations for female professors, female professors may be hurt by the contrast effect. When female professors live up to students' high expectations they may not receive "credit" and when they fail to live up to students' high expectations they may be punished.
- Because students have lower expectations for male professors, male professors may benefit from the contrast effect both by receiving higher evaluations when they exceed students' low expectations and not being punished if they fail to exceed the low expectations.

### References

- Heilman, M. E., & Chen, J. J. (2005). Same behavior, different consequences: Reactions to men's and women's altruistic citizenship behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*, 431-441.
- Meltzer, A. L., & McNulty, J. K. (2011). Contrast effects of stereotypes: Nurturing male professors are evaluated more positively than nurturing female professors. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 19*, 57-64.
- Prentice, D. A., and Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26*, 269-281.