2-2015

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

Pamela L. Bacon
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, pbacon@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/psychology_pubs

Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, Higher Education Commons, Higher Education and Teaching Commons, and the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.
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 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 helpful 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

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

“Egotistical and arrogant like they know everything, insensitive to students’ personal issues, closed-minded, want it their way, confident, hard to approach, unorganized, more relaxed”

“Energetic, lively, always willing to help, never in a bad mood, does typically not get angry, good sense of humor, always smiling”

“Sweet, kind, bubbly”

“Intimidating, less sensitive, less smiley”

“Very intelligent, straightforward…less understanding, realistic and demanding, strictly business”

“Kind, happy, inviting, helping, caring, approachable, generous and helpful, excited to teach”

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


Prentice, D. A., and Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn’t be, are asked to be, and don’t have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26, 263-281.