



Gender Bias and Student Ratings of Instructors

Several studies suggest that an inherent flaw in student opinion of teaching surveys is bias. Bias is defined as a preconceived opinion of someone or something, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Studies of gender bias have thus far produced complicated and conflicting results. (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000, p. 18; MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015) While bias can never be eliminated, it's a natural occurring part of life, (Kagetsu & Gunderman, 2017, p. 1253; Linse, 2017, p.98) it is wise to be aware of it given the importance of the use of student opinion of teaching for tenure, promotion, and pay decisions (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000, p. 17).

Research findings include both positive and negative bias toward female instructors. There have been a few studies that found that male instructors received higher ratings on student opinion of teaching surveys than female instructors, but conflicting studies find that female instructors receive higher ratings. (Benton & Cashin, 2012, p. 6) Then there are studies that find neither. (MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015, p.294). Still other studies show a student-gender by instructor-gender interaction, where female students prefer female instructors and male students prefer male instructors.

Findings also include the expectation of female instructors to show traits of warmth and accessibility and males the traits of professionalism and objectivity. When female instructors exhibit these traits, they are viewed comparably to male instructors. But when female instructors do not exhibit their gender assigned traits they are viewed more harshly than male instructors who do not exhibit the male assigned traits. But other studies have found no interaction between the gender of instructors and students (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000, p.18; Elmore & LaPointe, 1974, p. 368).

While there may be bias, either positively or negatively, in student ratings of teaching, these ratings do provide valuable feedback but should not be the only method used to assess an instructor's teaching effectiveness. Self-assessments, peer reviews, and teaching portfolios, to name a few, should all have a place in evaluating teaching.



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