

**STUDENT PERCEPTION OF MARKETING FACULTY:
THE EFFECTS OF GENDER, ATTRACTIVENESS AND AGE**

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ABSTRACT

How good a teacher an instructor was perceived to be was found to be dependent on the gender of the student rater. Male and female students of core marketing classes used differing (and in most cases, opposite) physical characteristics of the instructor in making preferential judgments. Implications for marketing education are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Findings in the available literature on the effects of physical characteristics of instructors on student perceptions have been somewhat inconsistent. Bernard et al. [1981] found that male teachers were rated higher than female. Males were rated as more intelligent and more able to motivate students. Bennett [1982] suggested that the existing literature base before the 1980s offered little evidence that women received systematically different marks from students than men, but that students did seem to prefer same gender instructors. Her own study offered no evidence of direct bias by gender, but she did find that sex role stereotypes influenced evaluation of female professors but not those of male professors. Female professors were subject to different performance pressures and criteria, including a higher standard of formal preparation and organization. In an interesting study using over 1,000 students, Baslow and Silberg [1987] found significant differences with classroom teaching variables by "teacher sex" and also in the interaction of teacher's gender by the student's gender. Lower ratings were given to

female professors primarily on the variables of "Overall Teaching" and "Dynamism/ Enthusiasm." The effects were due mostly to the negative ratings given to female professors by male students. Kierstead et al. [1988] also found that in general, males got higher evaluations than women instructors. They found that women instructors had to conform more closely to social stereotypes and had to work harder to attain the same ratings that were given to men.

There is an extensive literature base going back into the early 1970's on the personal benefits accruing to individuals based on physical attractiveness. Physically attractive persons are believed to have greater occupational success, to be more warm, and elicit more positive impressions on initial social contacts. They are considered to be more interesting, strong and poised [see Patzer 1985 for a review].

Goebel and Cashen [1979] studied the effect of age, sex and attractiveness of teachers among students from grade two through 13 on student ratings of teachers. Across all developmental levels, unattractive teachers were rated lower, older teachers tended to receive lower evaluations than younger teachers. The gender of the teacher became more important as the student got older. Their research showed that as early as the second grade, students have internalized cultural norms as to age, sex, and attractiveness standards, and that students will apply these stereotypes to the evaluation process.

The effect of the instructor's personality on students' evaluation of instruction are acknowledged, but are generally downplayed by the educational establishment. Various research projects, however, have shown that between 50% to 83% of the variation in student instructional ratings can be accounted for by personality traits [Sherman & Blackburn 1975] [Erdle, et al. 1985] [Clayson & Haley 1990] [Murray, et al. 1990].

None of these studies involving gender included marketing or business students, nor were any found relating instructor's age or attractiveness in the evaluation process in marketing. The purpose of this study was to investigate gender, attractiveness, and age as they relate to the students' perception of instruction. Further, the study would investigate which personality traits of the instructor are related to any significant differences of these main factors.

METHOD

There were 184 students (52.2% women) that participated in the study. The participants were all students in four marketing undergraduate core courses.

Sex of the student, sex of teacher, age, and attractiveness of the teacher were combined in a 2^4 factorial design. Male and female students were presented a description of either a male or female prospective faculty member who was either 33 (a new PhD with some business experience) or 45 (old enough to be a typical student's parent) years of age and who was described as either physically attractive or physically average. Eight sets of questionnaires were developed that were identical except for the eight possible combinations of sex, age and attractiveness. Participants were randomized over the eight factors simply by handing out the questionnaires sequentially to those who said they

would participate. Along with the description of the faculty member, each questionnaire contained a statement, "Compared with other instructors, I think that this person would be a good teacher." The statement was rated on a five point Disagree/ agree scale. Each questionnaire also contained a list of 20 personality traits summarized by the authors from over fifty studies of instructional ratings as traits that have either been shown to be important or thought to be so. The list was introduced by the statement, "Below are listed a number of personal characteristics. Respond to each in terms of whether you believe the person described would have that characteristic." Each trait was followed by a five point Disagree/Agree scale.

RESULTS

There were no significant main effects for either sex of student, sex of teacher, age, or attractiveness on the variable "good teacher." The two way interaction between sex of student and sex of teacher was marginally significant and the interaction of sex of student with age and attractiveness of the teacher were significant. No other interactions were found.

Since significant interactions by student sex were indicated, further analysis was done to determine if male and female students differed in their perceptions of a "good teacher." Male students gave highest scores to males, to 45 instead of 33 year olds, and to attractive teachers. Female students gave highest scores to females, to 33 instead of 45 year olds, and to average teachers over attractive teachers. The Spearman rho for the rankings of the eight combinations by sex of student was negative (-0.708, $p < .05$).

An analysis of the personality traits were made for the significant interaction effects. Males and females each gave the teacher of their own sex higher

scores on the selected personality traits.

A multiple regressions (step-wise) for each of the sex of student by sex of teacher combinations using personality traits as independent variables was run to predict "good teacher." Of the 20 personality traits, "effective" was the only one that was significant across all conditions. The correlation between effective and "good teacher" for the entire sample was 0.647 ($t(182)=11.45$, $p<0.0001$). An analysis of covariance showed that the perception of "effectiveness" did not alter appreciably the students' perception of a "good teacher" by age or attractiveness. Students, however, felt that instructors of their own gender were "effective" and that perception almost totally accounted for the sex of student, by sex of instructor interaction.

The traits that are predictive of "good teacher" for each of the four combinations of sex of student by sex of instructor with the gender related variable of effective removed is given in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION

The lack of significant main effects indicate that males were not perceived as being better teachers than females, and that neither attractiveness or age (by themselves) influenced the perception of a faculty member's ability to teach. There were, however, significant interaction effects by the gender of the student rater. Students did perceive instructors of their own gender to be better teachers. Other research has found the same pattern of gender preference [Elmore & LaPointe 1975]. Male and female students, moreover, did not share the same perceptions of faculty personality traits relative to teaching ability. The results of the study indicate that male and female students use differing physical criteria in the perception of who would be a good teacher.

This conclusion was reinforced by the findings with the personality traits. Male students perceived male faculty members to be more creative, concerned, fair, patient, poised, experienced, intelligent, and effective than female faculty members. Female students expected female faculty members to have more of exactly the same traits.

However, when personality traits were used to predict "good teacher," the students use different combinations of these characteristics for evaluative purposes. Five personality traits (experienced, approachable, likable, direct, and hard working) account for almost three fourths of the variation in "good teacher" when male students were evaluating male instructors. Male students perceived a female instructor as being a better teacher if she was confident, fair, and not talkative. A female student perceived a male instructor as a good teacher if he was ambitious yet sensitive and concerned. Female students found a female instructor to be a good teacher only on two social interactive variables; concerned and likable. The same mixed predictive pattern was evident in the sex of student by age and attractiveness.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that certain physical traits generally outside of the control of a person may influence how students would rate that individual as a teacher. The results also indicate that even if two physically disparate teachers received the same evaluation average from students, the reason for that evaluation may vary greatly by the sex of the student rater.

More effort needs to be devoted to the cultural and social orientations of students in the evaluative process. To assume that students make these evaluations purely objectively independent of their sex, age and the society to which

they belong is naive. Somewhere in the study of the evaluation process, it will become essential to do more research not only on the biases of this group, but also on their legitimate needs.

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APPENDIX I

PERSONALITY TRAITS:
PREDICTORS OF "GOOD TEACHER"

Step Wise Regression with
"Effectiveness" Removed: Listed in
Order of Inclusion

Student:	MALE	
Instructor:	MALE	FEMALE
	Experienced	Confident
	Approachable	Fair
	Likable	Talkative
	Direct	
	Hard Working	
R ²	0.748	0.521

Student:	FEMALE	
Instructor:	MALE	FEMALE
	Ambitious	Concerned
	Sensitive	Likable
	Concerned	
R ²	0.595	0.519