**Are Female Professors Held To A Different Standard Than Their Male Counterparts?**

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*Organizational leadership behaviors pique my curiosity.*

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Could traits typically attributed to females like accommodating, supporting, nurturing, and caring cause students to rate a female professor differently than a male? If females are viewed as more accommodating, might they be given a disproportionate amount of work? Scientific studies have shown these stereotypical traits cause females to be held to higher standards by students and given harsher evaluation ratings. These same studies found that[female professors outperform males in service](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/12/study-finds-female-professors-outperform-men-service-their-possible-professional) work yet are not acknowledged or rewarded.

A substantial number of studies have revealed that female professors are held to higher standards than their male counterparts by students.  Students steadily give lower teaching evaluations to [women and people of color](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/11/new-analysis-offers-more-evidence-against-student-evaluations-teaching#.XSjG_PjT1fU.link) than white men, even when there are no differences in their quality and effectiveness in the classroom.

In 2019,  [Amani El-Alayli](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/01/180103101125.htm) and her colleagues conducted two studies. In the first study, the team analyzed data from a survey of professors. They concluded that students make more standard work demands and requests for special favors to their female rather than male professors. The study further explored how students treat female professors, how they react to them when the professors stand their ground, and what kinds of students are particularly likely to treat female professors differently from male professors. They found that high academic achievement students were more likely to be irritated when a female professor denied a request and continued to insist upon the accommodation, even escalate it, until the students got their request fulfilled. However, with a male professor, students tended to take a denial and not act upon it. Students also perceived a refusal from a female professor as she didn’t like them. But, with a male professor, they were not concerned about him liking them.

Another interesting study conducted by Lillian McNeill and colleagues titled [What’s in a Name: Exposing Gender Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching](http://affectfinance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MacNell-et-al-Gender-bias-in-teaching-evaluations.pdf) disguised the gender identity of some online instructors. This was done by giving some male instructors female names and vice versus. Then they compared the evaluation results before the gender was changed and after. Students rated the male identity significantly higher than the female identity, regardless of the instructor’s actual gender, demonstrating gender bias. For example, when the instructors posted grades after two days as a male, this was considered by students to be a 4.35 out of 5 levels of promptness. When the same two instructors posted grades simultaneously as a female, it was considered a 3.55 out of 5 levels of promptness. Students rated the perceived female instructors an average of 0.75 points lower on the fairness question, despite both instructors utilizing the same grading rubrics and there being no significant differences in the average grades of any of the groups. Both instructors demonstrated the same level of interpersonal interaction in their attempts to create a sense of immediacy in the online classroom. Yet, the perceived male instructor received higher ratings on all six interpersonal measures, three of them significantly. The researchers concluded that female instructors are expected to exhibit interpersonal traits and therefore are not rewarded when they do so, while male instructors are perceived as going above and beyond expectations when they show these same traits. In other words, students have higher interpersonal standards for their female instructors.

A [research study](https://bestpracticeslegaled.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/09423-omearaetal28201729askedmoreoften.pdf) conducted by KerryAnn O’Meara from the University of Maryland and several colleagues examined if gender bias existed among full-time professors, students, and administration. Three hundred professors across 13 division one universities were asked to keep a daily work time diary for a month. [Each participant](https://bestpracticeslegaled.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/09423-omearaetal28201729askedmoreoften.pdf) recorded the following: the amount of time faculty were spending on different work activities,  the number and kinds of new work requests faculty received each week, who was making those requests, faculty responses to work requests each week, and the reasons faculty provided for their responses to work requests. The results showed that women consistently received a significantly higher number of work activity requests across all four weeks than men, on average 3.4 requests more than men in 4 weeks combined. The types of requests varied by gender, but men received more research requests, and women received more student advising, teaching engagement, and professional services requests.

Interestingly men spent almost twice as much time as women in professional conversations with colleagues in their field. Students and former students were the top requestors, followed by the administration. Although the study found that women were slightly more likely than men to say ‘‘yes’’ to a new request, the differences among gender were found to be insignificant.

One of the major takeaways from the various studies is that female professors teach and work under different expectations yet are measured on the same scale as their male colleagues. This adds a lot of pressure and stress because student and Dean evaluations are used for approving contracts and promotions. [Amani El-Alavli](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/01/10/study-finds-female-professors-experience-more-work-demands-and-special-favor) says, “If students set higher standards for their female professors, it is more difficult for female professors to meet student expectations, perhaps resulting in poorer course evaluations, and putting more work demands and emotional strain on female professors.” This can cause a higher rate of burnout and lower job satisfaction among females than male professors.

 Unintentional and unconscious biases are hard to overcome. Students may have no idea they evaluate faculty differently based on their gender, race, or other characteristics. Universities and colleges need to acknowledge the disparities and work on removing the gender differences. One solution may to eliminate the instructor rating scale and replace it with open-ended questions so specific information can be obtained from the students. This may not eliminate gender bias, but it is in the right direction to remove the disparity.

Training and educating staff, students, and faculty about gender bias is another way towards removing the barriers. If institutions support equality, then the leadership must support training that allows for a fairer work environment. Leadership plays a vital role in the health of the institution. Now is the time to put their words into action.