

## **MALE STUDENTS PREFER MALE PROFESSORS: Evidence from a top French university of gender bias in student evaluations of teachers**

Students at a top French university consistently give higher evaluation scores to male professors despite no evidence that the quality of their teaching is any better than that by female professors. That is the central finding of research by **Anne Boring**, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Mannheim in August 2015. The gender bias she detects is primarily evident among male students, though female students also express a small bias in favour of male professors.

Her study looks at scores for student evaluations of teachers (SET) at a French university specialising in social sciences. She finds that the average first year male student is 40% more likely to rate a male professor as 'excellent' compared with a female professor, while female students are only 10% more likely to do so. Among the other findings:

- Students perform equally well on final exams whether they had a man or woman as a professor.
- Male students tend to rate male professors as better in every metric: from class leadership skills (79% more likely to rate as 'excellent') to their ability to relate to current issues (70%).
- Female students also rate male professors as better on stereotypically male qualities. But they rate female professors better in areas such as preparation, clarity and the quality of feedback, but are only 4-14% more likely to do so.
- Female professors have an incentive to raise grades to receive better SET scores, but they do not act on it (either due to lack of awareness or because they would rather improve their teaching).

The author comments:

'Student evaluation of teachers scores create incentives for women to focus on the more time-consuming dimensions of teaching, which can unfairly harm their careers in academia if they are left with less time for research activities.'

### **More...**

Male professors receive on average higher student evaluations of teacher (SET) scores than female professors, mainly because students express gender biases when they evaluate professors.

In her analysis of student evaluations of teacher (SET) scores at a top French university that specialises in social sciences, Anne Boring finds that an average male first year undergraduate student is approximately 40% more likely to rate a male professor as excellent compared with how he would rate a female professor, despite no evidence of differences in the quality of instruction of male and female professors.

Female students also express a small bias in favour of male professors: they are 10% more likely to rate a male professor as excellent on overall satisfaction scores.

Anne Boring's main findings are as follows:

### *Men and women are equally effective professors*

Exam results show that the education provided by women is as good as that provided by men. Students perform equally well on final exams whether they had a man or a woman as a professor. The data indicate that there is no reason to believe that men's teaching styles are a better match for male students' learning styles.

### *Male students rate male professors higher along all dimensions of teaching*

Male professors on average benefit from a strong male student bias in overall satisfaction scores and in all dimensions of teaching. An average male student is most likely to rate a male professor as excellent on: class leadership skills (79% more likely); the course's ability to relate to current issues (70% more likely); and contribution to the student's intellectual development (54% more likely).

### *Female students apply gender biases*

Female students also tend to evaluate men more favourably on stereotypically male criteria, but give better evaluations to women on other teaching dimensions, including: preparation and organisation of classes; quality of instructional materials; clarity of the assessment criteria; and usefulness of feedback.

For these teaching dimensions, female students are slightly more likely to rate women as excellent compared with how they rate male professors (4 to 14% more likely).

### *Female professors have an incentive to increase grades to obtain higher SET scores*

Women could obtain similar SET scores as men if they decided to act strategically and gave higher continuous assessment grades than their male colleagues. If women increased students' continuous assessment grades by 11% on average, they could obtain similar percentages of 'excellent' overall satisfaction scores as men.

Yet women do not act on this incentive (men and women give similar continuous assessment grades), suggesting that female professors may be unaware of students' gender biases or that they may hope to increase their SET scores by improving their perceived teaching skills.

SET scores create incentives for women to focus their efforts on the more time-consuming dimensions of teaching, which can unfairly penalise women's careers in academia, especially if they are left with less time for research activities.

In this research project, which she conducted for the European Union's FP7 project called Effective Gender Equality in Research and the Academia (EGERA), Anne Boring argues that universities must take account of and correct the biases that students express in SET scores, for example, by weighting the evaluation criteria, so as not to discourage or unfairly penalise women.

ENDS

'Gender Biases in Student Evaluations of Teachers'

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