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AUTHOR Rubin, Rebecca E.
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ABSTRACT

Two studies were conducted examining the sex role stereotyping and status differentiation of college professors by their students. The first study examined student perceptions of college professors' ideal traits to ascertain possible influences of sex role stereotyping. A total of 184 students participated in a three-stage process of selecting the ideal traits. Only slight differences on openness and nurturing traits were found, indicating that students seemed to be more concerned with the role of the professor than the sex of the person occupying the role. The second study investigated the terms of address that 72 college students used with their professors in public and private contexts. Few contextual differences were found; however, female professors, especially those in the 26-33 age group, were addressed by first name more often than their male colleagues. The discussion pointed to possible student perceptions of more equal status with female professors than with male professors. (Author/RL)

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IDEAL TRAITS AND TERMS OF ADDRESS
FOR MALE AND FEMALE COLLEGE PROFESSORS

Rebecca B. Rubin
University of Wisconsin-Parkside

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Abstract

The first study examined students' perceptions of college professors' ideal traits to ascertain possible influences of sex role stereotyping. Only slight differences on openness and nurturing traits were found indicating that students seem to be more concerned with the role of the professor than the sex of the person occupying the role. The second study investigated the terms of address students use with their professors in public and private contexts. Few contextual differences were found; however, female professors, especially those in the 26-33 age group, were addressed by first name more often than their male colleagues. The discussion pointed to possible student perceptions of more equal status with female professors than with male professors.

Ideal Traits and Terms of Address
For Male and Female College Professors

Sex role stereotyping and status differentiation have long been linked to traditional male and female occupations. The two investigations reported herein concern attitudes of "lower status" persons towards their "superiors" in a traditional male occupation, that of the college professor. These studies are intended as initial explorations of ways in which college professors are afforded status, i.e., the terms of address students use, and of ways in which male and female professors are viewed, i.e., ideal traits which students feel they should possess.

The existence of sex role stereotypes has been documented, across the years, by numerous studies (Fernberger, 1948; Komarcovsky, 1950; Sherriffs & McKee, 1957; McKee & Sherriffs, 1959). In general, males are characterized by a straightforward social style, rationality, and action, while females are believed to possess social skills, warmth, and emotional support. Even more recently, women have been categorized as more warm, affable, emotional, over-socialized and unstable, while men were stereotyped as more forceful, dominant, and detached (Benoist & Butcher, 1977). However, it has never been clear if these are also occupation-bound stereotypes.

Rosenkrantz and his colleagues (1968), operating within a college environment, investigated the traits of males and females which were valued by college students. They found that college students could clearly identify valued traits of males and females, and that there were more than

twice as many male-valued traits as there were female-valued traits. They assert that equality of the sexes, in terms of number of valued traits, has not yet arrived.

Problems related to sex role stereotyping have also been investigated in the teaching side of college life. In one study female college students evaluated papers authored by either male or female professors (Goldberg, 1972). The students provided more negative criticism of the data and arguments in the paper and predicted a less than positive future for the women professors, but were much more positive when the authors were men. Similarly, Bernard (1964) found that a male giving a lecture was seen as more authoritative and credible than a woman giving the same lecture. She also reports on the condition of "academic momism" faced by many female college professors where students expect female professors to be more nurturing, more lenient, and more patient than male professors.

Moreover, two studies reported in Human Behavior found sex-role differences in college students' perceptions. In one study ("Sexist Ratings," 1976), Dr. Ellen Kaschak found that female and male students rated female professors lower on the qualities of power and excellence than they did male professors. Male students also rated male professors higher on effectiveness, being concerned, and being likable, and indicated they would definitely take the course from the male professor. The author argues that women who have proven themselves competent do not necessarily receive the same consideration on their evaluations as males do. The second article ("The Beauty Bias," 1976) reported findings that a professor's physical attractiveness affected men and women students differently when

the students were judging competency. Female students who were unfamiliar with young, attractive, male professors, rated them as being less competent. However, both male and female students indicated that looks meant competency for female professors, both young and old.

The first aim of the present investigation is to discover possible differences in students' perceptions of the ideal college professor. What is the nature of the professor role? Is it an active, socially uninhibited role requiring rational competence or a nurturing, emotionally supportive role? Are students looking for different traits in their male and female professors and do the ideal traits they identify differ from those identified for an unspecified-sex college professor role?

An over-riding theme of the differences found between male and female college professors is the concept of status. The female professors in these studies were consistently afforded less status than their male counterparts. Another line of research has investigated status by examining forms of address individuals use with others. Kramer (1975) found that more familiar terms of address tend to be used for women than for men and suspects that women, who usually have less power in society, afford men more respect by giving them higher-status forms of address than those they could, themselves, hope to receive. Henly (1973), Brown (1965), and Brown and Ford (1961) argue that status is characterized by asymmetry of address; subordinates use the title and last name to address superiors, but superiors can use first names and nicknames (more familiar forms of address) with their subordinates. Thus women who are addressed by first name in a symmetrical relationship are not afforded the same status as men who are

addressed by title and last name in an asymmetrical relationship. It has also been advanced that unknown others would be treated like superiors, with polite terms of address such as the title and last name of the person (Eakins & Eakins, 1978).

Furthermore, Slobin, Miller and Porter (1968) investigated forms of address in a business organization and included as variables the status, presumed familiarity, intimacy, and personality of the dyads studied. They expected and found nonreciprocal forms of address (with higher status persons receiving title and last name and lower status persons called by their first names) with increased status differences between the individuals. They suspected that mutual increased self-disclosure would tend to reduce status differences and that the situation the individuals were in might affect the forms of address normally used.

The second aim of the present investigation is to examine the forms of address college students use with their professors. Is there a difference between male and female college professors in the terms which students use to address them? Are the terms of address affected by the age of sex of the professor, how well the students feel they know the professors, or the situation in which the students are addressing the professors?

Study 1

Method

The purpose of the first study is to examine students' perceptions of ideal male and female professorial traits. Twenty students enrolled in a sophomore-level introductory communication class at a midwestern university were asked to create a list of ideal traits (and their opposites) of

college professors. A total of 130 ($\bar{X} = 6.5$ per person) traits were generated in this exercise. The list of opposite traits made possible the collapsing of the ideal traits into 34 separate traits; those ideal traits which were mentioned only once by the original twenty students were eliminated. This list of 34 traits was presented to 127 students in another introductory, cross-disciplinary course at the same university. Approximately one-third ($N = 37$) of the students were asked to indicate the five most important traits which an ideal male college professor should have. Approximately one third ($N = 49$) of the students were to indicate the top five traits for a female college professor, and the remainder ($N = 41$) were asked to indicate which traits an ideal college professor (unspecified-sex) should possess. The top ten traits for each condition are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Since the large number of traits tended to confuse the data, 37 students in a separate introductory class were asked to place the 34 individual traits into one of the following five categories:

1. Knowledge/Intellect/Ability--traits which refer to the professor's comprehension of and familiarity with the subject matter; the professor's mental and inventive abilities.
2. Professionalism--traits which professors should possess in order to be respected by students; moral uprightness.
3. Ability to Communicate--traits which refer to speaking skills and communication ability in classroom settings.

4. Openness--traits which refer to a professor's willingness to hear and/or accept students' viewpoints, readiness to meet with students.

5. Nurturing--traits which refer to the personality traits of professors who have a deep interest in students; supportive characteristics.

The investigator determined that two-thirds of these students should agree on the category for each trait in order for the trait to be included in the category. Table 2 presents the traits and percentages of agreement. One trait, "witty," was eliminated from the analysis; it was placed equally into categories 1, 3, and 5 and examination of the data found that not one of the 127 subjects in the study had chosen it as an ideal trait.

Insert Table 2 about here

Thus, the traits were re-coded into the five categories, taking into account multiple response options for each subject, and were submitted to appropriate statistical tests.

Results

Table 3 presents the percentage of traits in the various categories by sex of professor ($\chi^2 = 8.53$, df = 8, n.s.). Further analyses compared the traits assigned to ideal male and unspecified-sex college professors (yielding similar results-- $\chi^2 = 3.35$, df = 4, n.s.) and the traits assigned to ideal female and unspecified-sex college professors. This latter analysis yielded a significant difference ($\chi = 10.00$, df = 4, p < .05, C = .15). It appears that the greatest differences occur in the openness (with female professors assigned fewer of these traits than expected) and nurturing (with female professors assigned more of these traits than

expected) categories. These results seem to indicate that students have very similar perceptions of the traits ideal male and female professors should have and that nurturing qualities are seen as positive traits more so in female professors than in the unspecified-sex college professor. On the other hand, it is possible that those who were asked to indicate ideal traits for college professors only thought of male college professors and these perceptions accounted for the differences found.

Insert Table 3 about here

When the tables were broken down by sex of student, again statistically significant results failed to materialize (see Table 4), but some interesting differences emerged. Female students seem to view professionalism as less important for male professors than do male students, and male students appear to require their female professors to have more nurturing traits than they expect from their male professors; female students did not make this differentiation. Also, female students identified communication skills as the most important trait category, where male students were more concerned with professors' knowledge, intellect, and ability.

Insert Table 4 about here

Study 2

Method

The goal of the second study is to ascertain possible relationships among four variables: sex of professor, sex of student, the degree to

which the students felt they knew the professor, and the terms of address the students use in both public and private contexts. Subjects were 72 students enrolled in a sophomore-level communication class and a junior-level business class at a midwestern university. Students were asked to indicate their sex, their professor's name, how well they felt they knew the professor (on a 5-point scale), and then were given two contexts and asked to indicate the term of address they would most likely use--Mr., Professor, Ms., Mrs., Miss, Dr., or First name-nickname. The terms, "Mr., Miss, Ms., and Mrs.," were later collapsed into one category. The first context was private--"If you were to stop by this professor's office to talk to him/her and your professor was unaware of your presence at the door, which of the following terms of address would you use to gain your professor's attention?" The second context presented a public situation--"If you were to use the professor's name in class (for example, to gain his/her attention or to use it when asking a question), which of the following terms of address would you use?" Each student filled out a questionnaire for each professor he/she had in class at that time. A total of 224 questionnaires were completed representing approximately one-third of all full- and part-time faculty members at the university. A total of 93 faculty members from all academic divisions in the university were represented in this sample.

Results

The first analysis examined the relationship between male and female subjects on the terms they used in private and public contexts. In both the private and public contexts (see Table 5), males tended to use the

Mr./Ms./Miss/Mrs. title and and last name (MLN) and the Dr. title and last name (DLN) more often than female subjects. The females in the study used the Professor title and last name (PLN) more often. About equal percentages of male and female subjects used the first name (FN) of the professor.

Insert Table 5 about here

Earlier research pointed to degree of acquaintance as a possible factor in symmetrical terms of address. There was very little difference between male ($\bar{X} = 2.11$) and female ($\bar{X} = 2.13$) students (measured on a 5-point scale where 1 is "not very well" and 5 is "very well") on how well they felt they knew their professors ($t = 0.13$, $df = 220$, n.s.). Likewise, the degree to which the students felt they knew their professors did not significantly differ between male ($\bar{X} = 2.03$) and female ($\bar{X} = 2.32$) professors ($t = 1.85$, $df = 219$, n.s.). However, closer analysis revealed that in the private and public contexts, students reported greater degrees of knowing the professor for those they addressed by FN than by MLN or PLN (see Table 6). The difference between FN and DLN for the acquaintance variable was not statistically different.

Insert Table 6 about here

In an attempt to determine additional factors which may influence students' use of terms of address, the faculty members' ages and last degree earned were ascertained. By dividing the ages of the faculty at the median (33.83 years) and eliminating all faculty mentioned

without a doctorate, an interesting picture emerges (see Table 7). We find that in the 26-33 age group, females are more often addressed in the private context by first name. Male professors more often receive a title and last name. In the 34-70 age group, similar, but not as striking, results occur. In the public context, parallel, but statistically non-significant, results occur for the 26-33 year old professors. There is little difference in terms of address for those in the 34-70 age group.

Insert Table 7 about here

Thus, we see the greatest differences in terms of address between males and females in the younger age groups. Taking all the results together, we form a picture of younger female faculty (who students think they know better) being called by their first names, while younger male faculty and older faculty are called by some sort of title and their last names. The symmetry in terms of address is found mainly for younger female faculty members.

Discussion

These two initial explorations of ideal traits of and terms of address for college professors have yielded some interesting results. Examination of the lists of ideal traits reveals a number of traits students find important in their professors. A professor's ability to be an effective communicator, knowledgeable, caring, well-prepared, understandable, and interesting seem to be of utmost importance to students. It is curious to note the traits which are not common to all three top-ten lists (Table 1).

The trait of open-mindedness while chosen often for male professors and college professors in general, is not present on the list for female professors (it was chosen by only 3.3% of the group). Similarly the trait of caring about students did not appear in the trait list for the unspecified-sex professor while the trait was selected quite often for male and female professors. Thus, there are a few differences found in these lists, but mainly consistency is found among students. It is, indeed, possible that "college professor" occupation is no longer sex-bound, but is viewed moreso as an occupation than an occupation fitting only one sex.

One further mentionable finding deals with the "Academic Momism" concept. The analysis of the data revealed a greater number of selected traits falling into the nurturing category for female professors than for the male and unspecified-sex college professors. This tends to support the notion that the supportive traits of concern, friendliness, and understanding are regarded highly for women professors and traits of openness (being open-minded, open to ideas and questions, accessible, adaptable and a good listener) are more often valued for male and unspecified-sex college professors. The students' choice of traits may reflect their perceptions that female professors are presently less nurturing and male professors are less open with their students than the students think they should be. However, the choices may, in fact, reflect students' needs that their professors fit neatly into the stereotypic sex role patterns they perceive for males and females.

The second study investigated status perceptions based on terms of address students use with their professors. Younger female professors seem to be found in symmetrical relationships with their students in most

cases. This, of course, assumes that the female professors in this study who are called by their first names also use first names when addressing their students; post-hoc interviews with the professors verified this assumption.

What may be in operation is a process of identification and assumed similarity with the younger female professor. The university at which the study was conducted has an uncommonly low mean age for faculty members (41.2 years) and a slightly higher than normal mean age for students (24.1 years). This may indicate that attractiveness is not the only factor which might affect students' perceptions of teacher-student relationships. Age and sex may also be factors. One further interpretation relates to the findings that females are more often addressed with more familiar terms than males (Kramer, 1975). This would, seemingly, be apparent in the present situation where the roles and subsequent status levels differ between student and teacher, but ages are similar.

These studies indicate that sex-role-stereotyping may not be as evident when a role is designated as when individuals are simply identifying ideal traits of males and females. The results also suggest that the plight of younger, especially female, professors must be examined in the future. Decisions affecting the livelihoods of many college professors may be predicated on equal, but unfair, bases; students may be judging male and female professors on separate issues, some of which have nothing to do with competence.

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TABLE 1

TOP TEN IDEAL TRAITS FOR COLLEGE PROFESSORS

Male College Professors	Female College Professors	Unspecified-sex College Professors
1. Effective Communicator	1. Effective Communicator	1. Effective Communicator
2. Well-prepared	2. Caring	2. Knowledgeable
3. Caring	3. Knowledgeable	3. Open-minded
4. Interested in the topic	4. Well-prepared	4. Accessible
4. Knowledgeable	5. Understandable	4. Well-prepared
6. Accessible	5. Interesting	6. Understandable
6. Interesting	7. Interested in the topic	6. Fair
6. Open-minded	8. Intelligent	6. Intelligent
9. Understandable	9. Accessible	6. Interesting
9. Intelligent	9. Fair	10. Consistent
9. Helpful		

TABLE 2

TRAIT CATEGORIES AND PERCENTAGES OF AGREEMENT

KNOWLEDGE/INTELLECT/ABILITY

Creative	89.2%
Informed	100.0
Insightful	78.4
Intelligent	100.0
Interested in topic	81.1
Knowledgeable	100.0
Well-prepared	73.0

OPENNESS

Accessible	81.1%
Adaptable	73.0
Good listener	73.0
Open-minded	100.0
Open to ideas	100.0
Open to questions	91.9

PROFESSIONALISM

Consistent	75.7%
Ethical	94.6
Fair	86.5
Honest	86.5
Impartial	83.8
Leader	91.9
Responsible	89.2

NURTURING

Caring	97.3%
Concerned	97.3
Down-to-earth	67.6
Friendly	100.0
Helpful	81.1
Merciful	89.2
Personable	94.6
Understanding	86.5

ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE

Articulate	86.5%
Effective Communicator	100.0
Easy to Understand	94.6
Inspiring	70.3
Interesting	75.7

TABLE 3
TRAIT CATEGORIES X SEX OF PROFESSOR

CATEGORY:	Male (N=185)	Female (N=245)	Unspecified (N=205)
Knowledge/Intellect	27.0%	26.5%	26.8%
Professionalism	11.9	13.9	14.6
Ability to Communicate	25.4	23.7	23.4
Openness	18.9	15.5	22.9
Nurturing	16.8	20.4	12.2
	$\chi^2 = 8.53, df = 8, n.s.$		

TABLE 4
TRAIT CATEGORIES X SEX OF STUDENT X SEX OF PROFESSOR

CATEGORY:	<u>Male Students</u>			<u>Female Students</u>		
	Male (N=80)	Female (N=160)	Unspecified (N=115)	Male (N=105)	Female (N=85)	Specified (N=90)
Knowledge/Intellect	28.8%	26.9%	28.7%	25.7%	25.9%	24.4%
Professionalism	15.0	14.4	14.8	9.5	12.9	14.4
Ability to Communicate	20.0	23.8	20.9	29.5	23.5	26.7
Openness	22.5	15.0	20.0	16.2	16.5	26.7
Nurturing	13.8	20.0	15.7	9.0	21.2	7.8
	$\chi^2 = 4.88, df = 8, n.s.$			$\chi^2 = 10.85, df = 8, n.s.$		

TABLE 5
TERMS OF ADDRESS X SEX OF SUBJECT X CONTEXT

TERMS OF ADDRESS:	Private Context		Public Context	
	Male (N=129)	Female (N=90)	Male (N=129)	Female (N=91)
Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss	33.3%	18.9%	32.6%	16.5%
Professor	17.1	36.7	20.9	44.0
Doctor	23.3	16.7	20.9	16.5
First Name	26.4	27.8	25.6	23.1
	$\chi^2 = 13.32, df = 3$		$\chi^2 = 15.30, df = 3$	
	$p < .005, C = .24$		$p < .005, C = .26$	

TABLE 6
MEAN DEGREE OF PERCEIVED ACQUAINTANCE*

TERMS OF ADDRESS:	Private Context	Public Context
Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss	1.78 _a	1.80 _a
Professor	1.98 _b	2.03 _b
Doctor	2.11	2.10
First Name	2.59 _{ab}	2.57 _{ab}
	$F = 5.72, df = 3/216$	$F = 4.65, df = 3/217$
	$p < .001$	$p < .005$

*When asked how well they felt they knew the professor, students responded on a 5-point scale where 1 = Not very well and 5 = Very well.

Means within columns sharing common subscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$, Tukey B).

TABLE 7

TERMS OF ADDRESS X CONTEXT X SEX OF FACULTY X AGE OF FACULTY*

TERMS OF ADDRESS:	PRIVATE CONTEXT				PUBLIC CONTEXT			
	26-33		34-70		26-33		34-70	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss	19.0%	0.0%	24.6%	17.6%	16.7%	9.1%	21.5%	11.8%
Professor	35.7	36.4	38.5	11.8	38.1	45.5	44.6	29.4
Doctor	38.1	9.1	29.2	41.2	35.7	9.1	27.7	41.2
First Name	7.1	54.5	7.7	29.4	9.5	36.4	6.2	17.6
	$\chi^2 = 15.92$		$\chi^2 = 9.02$		$\chi^2 = 6.66$		$\chi^2 = 4.30$	
	<u>df</u> = 3		<u>df</u> = 3		<u>df</u> = 3, n.s.		<u>df</u> = 3, n.s.	
	<u>p</u> < .005		<u>p</u> < .05					
	C = .55		C = .31					

* Represents only faculty with doctorates