



CALIFORNIA STATE SCIENCE FAIR 2013 PROJECT SUMMARY

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Project Title Understanding or Competent? A Study of Gender Stereotypes of Professors	
<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>Objectives/Goals The purpose of the project was to determine if college students display gender stereotypes towards professors.</p> <p>Methods/Materials Three hundred forty-three college students completed the study. Students were randomly assigned to take an online survey from one of three conditions (male professor, female professor, and gender-neutral professor). The conditions (our dependent variables) were identical except for the gender of the professor, which we manipulated by changing the first name of the professor and using gender pronouns. The gender neutral survey did not provide a first name and did not use gender pronouns. After the informed consent, the survey presented a biography of the professor, a short syllabus, and several questions about the syllabus. Next the survey measured the dependent variables by asking the students eight questions about what they think the professor would be like in terms of personality and behavior in the classroom (2 questions each about warmth, understanding, competence, and confidence).</p> <p>Results First, means were calculated for each condition to test hypothesis 1. The data did not support the first hypothesis. College students did not rate the male professor more competent and confident and did not rate the female professor more warm and understanding. Next, separate means were calculated for male students and for female students for each of the conditions to test hypothesis 2. The data did not support the second hypothesis. Female and male students did not rate the professor higher on the dependent variables when the professors were the same gender as the student. However, the female students did rate the male teacher significantly higher in the qualities typically associated with male stereotypes (confident and competent).</p> <p>Conclusions/Discussion Our hypothesis 1 results are surprising and different from previous research. Overall, we did not find that female professors are rated differently from male professors. Perhaps college students are becoming more aware of gender stereotypes. Our hypothesis 2 results are particularly intriguing because they are also inconsistent with previous research and are somewhat discouraging because they indicate female students seem to consider male professors to be more competent and confident. Future research should examine if this finding replicates and if personal experience might affect the results.</p>	
Summary Statement This project uses an experimental design to examine whether college students make assumptions about professors' personalities and behaviors based on their gender.	
Help Received A family friend helped us recruit participants.	