

## **Course Evaluations: Concerns with Gender and Racial Bias**

Standardized student course evaluations play an important role in the review of faculty for merit raises, reappointment, tenure, and promotion. While research recognizes course evaluations are an imperfect measure, the literature indicates many of the problems with course evaluations are unevenly distributed across men and women and across white faculty and faculty of color.

Social science research has documented gendered evaluation processes in a variety of institutional settings, including the academic workplace. These processes systematically put women and individuals of color at a disadvantage when their performance is being rated. Most recent exploratory studies of students' evaluation of college and university teaching suggest that the same processes at work elsewhere in society are present when students evaluate professors.

For instance, one study (Sprague and Massoni, 2005) shows that when students describe good men teachers, they use many descriptions (e.g., funny) that are different from the ones they use to describe good women teachers (e.g., nurturing). The teaching activities that prompt these gendered descriptions differ. As a result, women may have to engage in more time-demanding forms of pedagogy in order to garner the same global teaching ratings as men who teach according to conventional gender expectations. In another study (MacNell et al., 2014) instructors in an online course presented themselves as both male and female to separate class sections, masking their true gender identities. The study concluded that “regardless of actual gender or performance, students rated the perceived female instructor significantly more harshly than the perceived male instructor.” There is also evidence that younger women are particularly disadvantaged, in comparison to younger men. Mengel et al (2017) used student evaluations from courses where students were randomly assigned to a male or female instructor and found that women, particularly junior women, received worse evaluations, even though instructor gender did not shape student study hours or grades.

Studies have also found that faculty of color received lower course evaluations than their white peers (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005; DiPietro & Faye, 2005). In a study of one university, DiPietro and Faye (2005) found that Hispanic faculty received the lowest course evaluation ratings. Asian-American faculty received slight better course evaluations than their Hispanic colleagues, but their scores were, on average, still worse than the scores of White faculty. Unfortunately, far less is known about evaluations of African American professors; this is largely due to the fact that there are so few African American professors in higher education. And, even less is known about the interactive effects of race and gender biases in teaching evaluations.

If you are interested in better understanding the concerns of bias with courses evaluations, we encourage you to review the archive of classic and recent research on this issue below.

**[Google Drive Folder of Archive of Research on Biases in Evaluations](#)**  
**[Summaries of Articles of Research on Biases in Evaluations](#)**

You can [submit an article or correction](#) to the list here or by emailing Rebecca Kreitzer or [contacting via twitter](#) with any corrections or additions.

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