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Gender Biases on Trial: Exposing the Tight-Lipped Tendencies of Human-Kind

Social Psychology

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ABSTRACT

If a teacher is interacting with a classroom of students, then they will treat students of the same sex better than students of the opposite. Throughout this essay, the hypothesis above was proven by collecting data on student-teacher relationships and how teachers view their students. Female teachers scored female students higher than their male counterparts. In addition, male teachers scored male students higher than their female counterparts. On a general scale, female students were averagely scored higher between all teachers that participated. This topic can later be used to be branched out to other facilities such as the workplace or recreation center. The data found can provide future researchers with a foundation when discovering how gender impacts everyday life.

LIT REVIEW/INTRODUCTION

Before reaching adolescence, humans are taught the Darwinistic¹ concept that draws a clear line between male and female. All too often, these lines have deep roots that flourish into biased branches. Do these implanted ideas materialize their way into our everyday lives? Do these mindsets affect how we see our peers or teachers? Conversely, does this affect how our teachers or bosses view us? Does everyone have subconscious gender biases? We, as humans, need to shine a light on the gender biases that affect our daily lives (on the it's purposeful or not).

¹ Darwinistic is used here in the sense that it is a natural, biological line that dates as far back as Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

Frequently, people impose prejudice onto others unwittingly. Implicit biases are buried within the subconscious mind and typically unknown to the person. On the contrary, explicit biases are deliberate decisions made by the person and are easy to self-report. Conscious or not, these influences impact our lives.

Ultimately, what is at stake here is future generations being held back by their biological sex. We are putting our children and grandchildren into a society we created: full of biases, restrictions, and overall subjectivity. Do we want this prejudiced world for the future scientists, engineers, artists, and teachers that we raise? As a society, we need to band together to eliminate these biases within ourselves to create a world we wish to see our future generations thrive in.

These questions are especially important to me, as the researcher, because I feel as if I have been personally affected by these biases. Many times I feel as if my successes and experiences have been restrained by my biological sex/psychological gender. As a female, my achievements have been undermined in comparison to my male counterparts. I feel as though I am pressured to achieve more within the academic field than my male peers, which, in turn, results in my accomplishments being sabotaged by establishing this “normalcy.”

Now a question arises: do teachers treat students of the same sex different than those of the opposite? When placed in a classroom with a female teacher, does the teacher view and/or treat her female students better than their male counterparts, or vice versa? All of these questions pop up, yet scarcely any research has been done to answer them.

This leads to the hypothesis: If a teacher is interacting with a classroom of students, then they will treat students of the same sex better than students of the opposite. Sexism and biases

are evident in everything we do today. Finding an answer to these seminal² questions will provide a basis for all other experiments and studies in the near future, as well as shed light on how deep the roots of this subconscious bias run.

Dr. Faith Koca studied an anonymous female teacher and fifteen students the teacher individually selected. This teacher then rated the students using a Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) and a behavior rating scales (the Social Skills Rating Scale, Gresham & Elliot, 1990). The results showed that the female students had a closer and less-conflictual relationship with the female teacher studied; however, it was determined that the overall quality of the student-teacher relationship was higher for the male students than their female counterparts. This study showed inconsistency overall in the data but had a good start point to the overall picture. These findings correlated with previous research done on kindergarteners and elementary-age students that found the quality of student-teacher relationships had a strong correlation with the students' behavior tendencies and how student-teacher relationships vary with gender.³

Dr. Gregory Lewis Bynum discusses gender biases in women in his scientific paper, *Gender Biases in Women*. Overall biases towards women in general, especially women in power, is generated from women's dominance in early childcare. As a result, it is probable that society's (most likely unconscious) bias towards women in high-status careers stems from resentment towards women's power over us as children. In order to relieve this deeply-rooted misogyny, we need to combat the issue head-on: We in society must place half of the work and responsibilities of males during this crucial early-childhood-education window. In *Gender Biases in Women*,

² Seminal is used in this context to mean groundbreaking and innovative.

³ Koca, Faith. (2016). Assessing Child-Teacher Relationships: A Review Study. *International Journal of Field Education*, 2(1), 96-119.

Bynum argues that the recent generations have been gearing away from sexism and patriarchy more than any generation before. This research and information provides a useful foundation for further research to come.⁴

Does gender have an impact on more than just a student's relationship with their teachers? Dr. Susan Larson conducted a research study to find out what factors influence a student's participation in the classroom. Larson probes into students' gender and its impact on general participation in the classroom. Multiple factors influence a child's participation during class, like classroom dynamics and student-teacher rapport, but also individual characteristics (such as biological sex). Results from Dr. Larson's study indicated that masculinity was associated with more in-class participation, while femininity was associated with less; however, when studying a professor's gender in relation to the students' in-class participation, no solid results formed that indicated the gender of the professor had an impact on participation. According to Dr. Susan Larson, "while professors are able to influence student participation in the classroom, it appears they do by their behaviors, including course design, rather than intrapersonal characteristics such as gender and personality traits." Similar to findings by Pearson and West (1991), students that were more closely related to masculine traits were found to participate more than the feminine. This could be due to masculine participation being rewarded more than the feminine students, or simply that masculine students tend to participate more than the latter.⁵

The quality of student-teacher relationships has long-term implications for students and their futures. In *Assessing Child-Teacher Relationships: A Review Study*, Dr. Faith Koca

⁴ Bynum, Gregory Lewis. (2014). *Gender Bias in Women*, v2014(1).

⁵ Larson, Susan. et al. (2018). *Gender and Student Participation*, 18(4).

discusses these lifelong effects: “Recent studies support the significance of child-teacher relationships for (a) developing skills in peer relations; (b) developing school adjustment competencies including attention, motivation, problem-solving, and self-esteem; and (c) predicting and preventing behavioral problems and psychopathology.” Children are very capable of forming attachments to significant adults other than their guardians, which aide children in socioemotional development. Educational success and quality of student-teacher relationships have a direct line to each other, making these relationships even more important. The idea that these relationships may become forged and manipulated by unintentional biases can have lifelong effects on all children.⁶

Katarina Krkovic is a part of a research team within the University of Luxemburg and studied how teacher gender and student gender affect their interactions within teacher-student relationships. In the study, Krkovic and her research team aimed to see if teacher gender or student gender positively and negatively influenced teacher evaluations of the student’s abilities. At a general scope, the team hoped to discover if the teacher evaluated students of their same-sex better than those of the opposite sex in comparison to the teacher. The studied teachers were asked to evaluate student performance on a set task and answered questions regarding the probability of the student’s future academic success. Overall, they found little results that indicated the student/teacher gender had an effect on evaluations; however, they did find that generally teacher’s scored female students higher in their first-language performance. The conclusion wrapped up that gender was an unlikely bias present in this specific study; however, this study was done in Luxemburg so the results do not directly reflect on the United States and

⁶ Koca, Faith. (2016). Assessing Child-Teacher Relationships: A Review Study. *International Journal of Field Education*, 2(1), 96-119.

teachers within the US. Results may prove different in the United States, but this research study proves useful for other researchers to apply to their own studies and experiments.⁷ This journal is crucial when building a foundation for the research and studies I am personally conducting within Freeport High School, located in the United States.

METHODS

A short survey⁸ was handed out among eight hand-picked teachers at Freeport High School⁹. This survey consisted of fifteen statements that allowed each teacher to evaluate his or her relationship with the students. The chosen teachers were asked to think of four random students (two female, two male) and then evaluate their bond with each of the chosen students. The teachers were also asked to label each survey with only “F1,” “F2,” “M1,” and “M2” to achieve confidentiality and assure honesty within the teachers. If these surveys were not confidential, the teachers would most likely change their responses to protect them from any possible backlash. This discipline of data collection allows the research to show implicit biases that lie beyond the teacher’s comprehension.

RESULTS/DATA

The teacher questionnaire that was featured a basic Likert Scale asking teachers to analyze statements given and rate their relationships with students from “Definitely does not apply” to “Definitely applies.” For example, the first statement given was, “I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.” The teacher would then select (for example) 4, meaning that the statement applies somewhat. When collecting averages, I had to take the

⁷ Krkovic, Katarina. et al. (2014). Teacher Evaluation of Student Ability: What Roles Do Teacher Gender, Student Gender, and Their Interaction Play?. *Gender and Educational Research*, 56(2).

⁸ https://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/STRS-SF_modification_for_staff_wellness_survey.pdf

⁹ Freeport High School is a four-year senior high school located in Freeport, Illinois, USA.

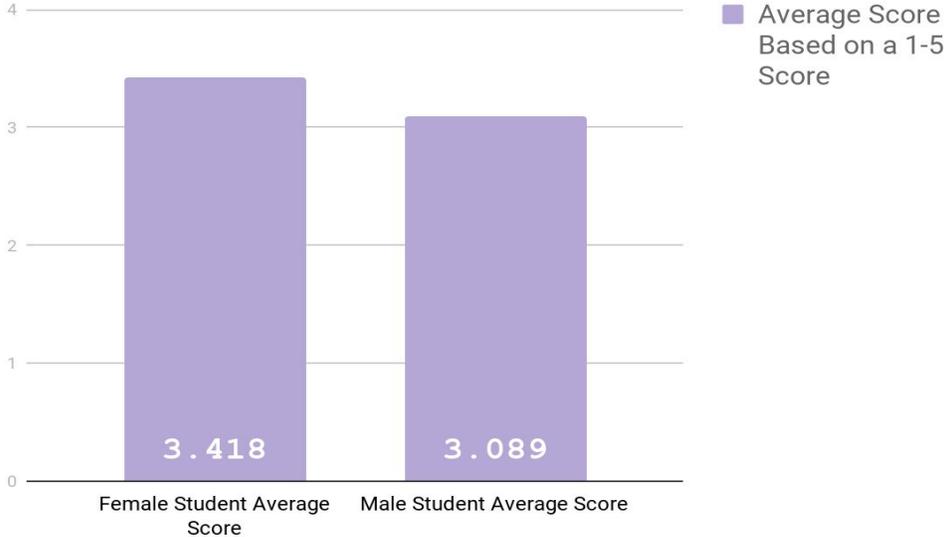
reciprocal answer on the occasional statement to rank everything on a negative-to-positive scale. To illustrate, statement eight states, “This child easily becomes angry with me.” If the teacher responded 4 to that statement, (on a negative-to-positive score) that response would translate to a 2. Shown in Figure A, male teachers tended to score male students higher than their female counterparts. Similarly, female teachers tended to score female students higher than their male counterparts. The average score for both male and female students was taken by adding up the dividing up each teacher’s score and separating how they scored male students versus how they scored female students. The average was calculated for each individual teacher for each gender. Lastly, each average was totaled up for both genders and placed into the chart. As well as collecting the total averages for each gender, the scores were divided even more by analyzing how female teachers ended up scoring female versus male students and vice versa. Those last average scores calculated represent how each teacher scored their opposite and corresponding gender and was placed in a chart for a clear comparison.

FIGURE A



As proven in Figure B, female students at FHS typically scored higher than their male counterparts. This average was collected by using all teachers’ scores and separating it by student gender (but not teacher gender as well, unlike Figure A).

FIGURE B



DISCUSSION

The hypothesis¹⁰ in question is whether or not teachers have an implicit bias towards their corresponding gender of students. For example, as shown in Figure A, teachers thinking better of the students that are of the same gender the teacher belongs to. All in all, the graphs above show excellent evidence towards the original hypothesis. In Figure A, a correlation is prevalent between teacher gender and student gender. As shown, the Male Student Average Score was higher with male teachers (the blue bar). Similarly, the Female Student Average Score was higher with female teachers (the pink bar) versus the male teachers (the blue bar). It is clear that female teachers scored female students higher, as male teachers scored male students higher (which supports the hypothesis about a bias). This further illustrates the implicit biases that were discussed earlier within the “Introduction” section are prevalent. Implicit biases are often described as attitudes, views, or stereotypes on a certain person or group that The teachers that were chosen for this specific experiment validated the idea that teachers can be biased when dealing with their students.

On a larger scale, this can be expanded to the possibility that everyone could be acting upon biases they are not aware of. As well as being supported by the data collected within this paper (specifically Figure B), this evidence also supports the ideas stated by Dr. Faith Koca¹¹. In Koca’s research, she discovered that female students had better, less conflictual relationships with their teachers. Overall, the anonymous students included in the experiment conducted earlier in this paper expressed Koca’s results. Overall, the female students had a higher score in comparison to their male counterparts.

¹⁰ Specific wording of the original hypothesis: If a teacher is interacting with a classroom of students, then they will treat students of the same sex better than students of the opposite.

¹¹ Refer to the “Introduction” section to learn more about this topic and Dr. Koca’s findings.

Ultimately, this data matters and will affect future generations. Teachers are becoming biased against students' gender and this may result later in a decrease in overall achievements. These biases are taking control over our daily lives and this is proven by the data. If the eight teachers selected at FHS show these results, it is probable that teachers all around the United States are expressing these same biases towards their students.

CONCLUSIONS/LIMITATIONS

Throughout this process, many limitations hampered my research. Firstly, because of a lack of resources, a convenience sample for the survey had to be chosen, rather than a true random sample. This hindered the ability to get one-hundred percent true results.

In addition to that, some teachers failed to accurately complete the surveys they were given. As a result, those responses had to essentially be thrown away and another teacher was chosen in their place. This took up a lot of time and took away time I could be utilizing within other aspects.

Earlier within in the process, surveys were handed out to the students at Freeport High School. These results showed little data and was most likely skewed due to the students giving little care and honesty when filling out their responses. The results would have been utilized; however, I decided to really focus this research on the teacher's perspective and mindset. In that sense, student data seemed pointless to the true intention of the research.

Despite the occasional drawback, this research proved the original hypothesis¹². This data can be used for future research that relates to: what may impact a student's education, what affects student-teacher relationships, or how gender biases run our society. A follow-up of this

¹² Located within the Introduction section

study can be done to further research into the aspect of how female students were scored higher by all teachers that participated.

To future researchers within this topic, certain advice should be given. A larger sample of both teachers and students should be used. Even researching throughout multiple schools and regions would provide the truest outcomes. This larger sample would allow the researcher to exterminate (to a certain extent) the possibility of skewed results. It is easier to find true answers to the hypothesis because biased or altered outcomes.

All in all, this research provided information that I, as the researcher and hopefully you as the reader, will take away from the process. I have achieved a heightened sense of knowledge within this area of psychology. These results have inspired me to further my comprehension of the human mind.

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