

Effects of Gender and Profession on  
Perceived Job Performance

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ABSTRACT

This experiment sought to investigate how the variables of gender and profession affect how professionals are evaluated in their job proficiency. Subjects were 78 (48 female, 30 male) sociology and Spanish students at a Christian liberal arts university, randomly assigned to six different conditions. Materials included a written scenario, which presented a situation describing a male or female doctor, lawyer, or minister. Subjects were asked to rate their agreement with a statement regarding the professional's effectiveness in the situation. Data were analyzed using a 2x3 between-groups factorial analysis of variance. Ministers were rated significantly higher than doctors or lawyers, and doctors were rated higher than lawyers ( $p < 0.05$ ). Overall analysis revealed that means for females were lower than male means, but only the female lawyer scores showed a significant difference from the male scores. Women professionals may tend to be evaluated less favorably than men in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

### Effects of Gender and Profession on Perceived Effectiveness

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects that gender and profession have on a professional's perceived effectiveness in a given situation. The experiment's specific focus was on the evaluations of women in ministerial positions. The proportion of women entering the workplace has increased dramatically in the past several decades, especially into positions formerly considered appropriate only for men. In 1999, over 40 percent of people recommended for ordination were women (para. 8, 1999).

Accompanying this influx of women ministers is a concern for Biblical and doctrinal approval of the phenomenon. Passages in the Bible, as well as long-held cultural ideas of women's inferiority of men, have fueled prejudices against women ministers that are still active in the Church (Haines).

Due to the relatively novel presence of women in ministry, as well as the issue's controversial nature, it is of interest to know how women in ministerial positions are perceived as they fulfill concrete duties representative of their occupation. If women are consistently judged less favorably than men, their success in attaining previously male-ascribed roles would be severely hindered (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1993). Since this effect could obviously hinder women in any profession, this experiment proposed to measure subjects' evaluations of women doctors and lawyers, as well as ministers, in a written scenario.

This study, as concerns the variable of gender, could have had three different outcomes: First, the subjects could have evaluated men more favorably than women. Second, there could have been no significant difference between the evaluations of the men and those of the women. A third possibility was that subjects could have perceived women as more competent than men. The hypothesis chosen for this experiment was that women in all the occupations surveyed, but especially in the ministry, would be evaluated less favorably than men. However, the studies reviewed here show a variety of outcomes, suggesting that any score distribution could be possible.

The first possibility, that of the hypothesis, was that women would generally be perceived less favorably than men in leadership positions. In a research review with a focus similar to the one undertaken here, Eagly, et al (1993) found only minimal evidence that female leaders may be viewed more negatively than male leaders. One experiment investigating stereotypical attributes of men and women found more conclusive results. This study of implicit stereotyping exposed subjects to stimuli related to dependence or aggression, then asked them to rate male or female targets. The researchers found that

subjects were more likely to perceive females as more dependent and males as more aggressive, after exposure to the relative stimuli. Males were not more likely to be rated as dependent, and females were not more likely to be rated as aggressive (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993). These studies provide evidence that female leaders may be evaluated less favorably, or viewed as having stereotypical gender-linked qualities. However, these differences seem to be small, or restricted to certain circumstances primed by specific stimuli.

Much research was found to support the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the way women and men are evaluated in their job performance. Bartol and Wortman (1975) found that women leaders were not rated differently than men by their subordinates in the areas of leader behavior and satisfaction with the leaders' supervision. The study of stereotypical behavior mentioned above found different results when the neutral stimuli were used in place of stereotype-related materials. Without the prior cues to suggest dependence or aggression, subjects rated men and women as equally dependent or aggressive (Banaji, et al, 1993). Thus, in some studies involving performances as well as characteristics, subjects are found to rate men and women equally. One analytical study involving five different experiments sought to explain the similarity of men's and women's perceived attributes and effectiveness by way of a two-pronged theory. The researchers were able to show that their subjects believed roles of men and women were becoming ever more similar over time. Additionally, the female stereotype has changed more than the male stereotype due to a greater change in the traditional roles of women (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Each of these studies serves to

support the idea that men's and women's roles in the professional arena are hardly distinct, and that the perceived effectiveness of each gender is also very similar.

A third possible outcome of the research was that women would be perceived as more effective than men in leadership or professional positions. An effect known as the "talking platypus phenomenon" asserts that "when an individual achieves a level of success not anticipated, his/her achievement tends to be magnified rather than diminished" (Abramson, Goldberg, Greenberg, & Abramson, 1977). In other words, each individual has a certain level of achievement that others expect him or her to reach. For some groups, such as women, that level may be lower than for other groups, such as men. Therefore, a woman may have to achieve less in relation to her male counterparts to receive the same level of respect from her peers; more is expected of a man, so he would have to achieve more to earn the same level of respect. Biernat and Kobrynowicz (1997) corroborate this idea. According to their study, the same social stereotypes can affect a person's judgment of another in two opposite ways: Negative stereotypes may depress the evaluation, or they may lower only the expectations, causing the perceived level of achievement to increase (Biernat & Kobrynowicz).

Thus, it was completely reasonable that this study could yield results showing that women were perceived as less effective, more effective, or as effective as men in the same positions.<sup>1</sup> Studies exist to support all three of those possibilities.

The specific purpose of this experiment was to ascertain the differences, if any, in the way that women ministers are perceived as compared to male ministers. Two other traditionally male-dominated professions were included as well: that of doctor and

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<sup>1</sup> As to possible evaluation differences between occupations (doctor, lawyer, and minister), very little professional research could be found concerning these specific occupations. The main focus of the supporting literature, therefore, has to do with the variable of gender in any general leadership position.

lawyer. The inclusion of these other two occupations enabled comparisons to be made between women in ministry and in other professional occupations. The research hypothesis stated that female ministers would be evaluated less favorably than male ministers, and that women doctors and lawyers would also be rated less favorably than men in the same occupations.

After providing evidence that any of three outcomes concerning the evaluations of women would be feasible, an explanation is necessary to justify the actual hypothesis made. The focus of this particular experiment is the perception of a professional's effectiveness in a typical job-related duty, and how gender affects that perception. The literature found describing the "platypus effect" appeared to have more to do with achievement in quantified projects or promotions, rather than simple fulfillment of job duties. Therefore, the hypothesis of lower evaluations for women seemed more probable.

The further hypothesis was that ministers would be ranked lower than either doctors or lawyers. Ministers have traditionally earned less money than both of the other professions, although their jobs often require work outside and beyond the normal business workweek. These job characteristics in some ways place ministers on a lower socioeconomic level than doctors or lawyers, making them susceptible to the same lowering stereotypes as women. It was expected, then, that ministers would be perceived as least effective out of the three occupations, and women would be perceived as less effective than men. The women ministers, therefore, were expected to be evaluated the least favorably out of the six conditions.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 78 undergraduate students (48 women and 30 men) at a small Christian liberal arts university in the Midwest. All were members of a basic-level sociology class or a basic-level Spanish class. Participation was voluntary, and those volunteering were rewarded with extra credit points. Students were randomly assigned to each of six conditions by pre-arranged order of the materials. To equalize all conditions, the responses of some participants were randomly selected and removed from the data pool, leaving thirteen subjects (eight women and five men) in each condition. Thus, the subjects in each condition were controlled in number and gender.

### *Design*

This experiment utilized a 2x3 factorial design. The independent variables were gender (male and female) and profession (minister, doctor, and lawyer).

**TABLE 1**

Experiment Design

	<b>Profession</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	Male Doctor	Male Lawyer	Male Minister
	Female Doctor	Female Lawyer	Female Minister

The dependent variable in the study was the strength of agreement rating given by the subjects to a statement about the hypothetical professional in each condition.

Subjects reported agreement by circling a number on a Likert scale of 1 to 7.

*Materials:*

For each of the conditions, a short scenario was presented to the subjects describing an individual with a combination of the two variables. The scenarios were kept as similar as possible, changed only as necessary to accommodate the professional duties of the different occupations, and to change the gender of the person in the situation. In each scenario, a doctor, lawyer, or minister named either James or Sarah Andrews was enlisted to help a girl dying of leukemia and her family. The doctor provided health care, the lawyer helped prepare a legal case against a factory suspected of contributing to the leukemia by its pollution, and the minister counseled the family through their struggle and grief when the daughter died. In each case, the family made unrealistic claims on the professional, asking him or her to dedicate copious amounts of time toward their case. Also in each case, the professional made generous efforts to give the family as much attention as feasibly possible, but did not fulfill every request made by the family. Much attention was given to each scenario to ensure that every possible word and phrase was kept constant across conditions. Examples of the scenarios can be seen in Appendix A.

To ascertain the subjects' evaluations of the individuals in the scenarios, a simple data sheet was constructed. It contained five statements, each followed by a Likert scale of 1 to 7. Subjects were instructed to choose the number that corresponded with their agreement with the statement, 1 being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree". Four of the questions were distracter questions to guard against possible subject bias effects. The one target statement, the fourth on the sheet, read, "Dr. (or Rev. or Mr./Ms.)

Andrews appears to be a competent, reliable physician (or minister, or lawyer). The only differences between the various questionnaires were the changes in the target statement to reflect the gender and profession depicted in each corresponding scenario. A sample data sheet can be seen in Appendix B.

*Procedure:*

Students from an introductory level sociology class signed up for an evening session to participate in the experiment. For convenience in keeping the data separate, only women attended the first session, and only men were in the second session. A third session was run for the members of a basic-level Spanish class. Since this class was smaller and the data was collected at the beginning of a class session, the male and female responses were kept separate by collecting the men's and women's papers separately.

As participants arrived at the experimental session, they signed in and were assigned a seat based on the order of their arrival, and pencils were provided to those who had not brought a writing utensil. (In the Spanish class, students retained their normal class seats for the experiment.) Once everyone was seated, the students were given instructions to read the scenario carefully and then respond to the statements on the reverse side. The scale indicating strength of agreement was explained. After this explanation, students were reminded that they were under no obligation to participate in the experiment, and were told they could leave if they felt uncomfortable or unwilling to continue. Then, the scenario sheets were distributed in the prearranged block randomized order. This block randomization was to ensure that materials from each condition were

distributed equally, but also guaranteed a random order of the materials. Once all the participants had finished reading the situation and responding to the statements, the sheets were collected. The general nature of the experiment was explained, but the specific focus was not outlined to the participants at that time, to avoid possible contamination of other subjects. Students were informed that they could learn specific details and results of the experiment after testing had been completed.

Once the papers had been collected, they were marked “male” or “female” according to the gender of the subject. Each data sheet was also numbered as its response was entered into a data table

## RESULTS

After the data were collected, means were found for each condition, as shown in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 2**

	Doctor	Lawyer	Minister	Overall
Male	5.308	5.231	6.154	5.564
Female	5.077	3.769	5.846	4.897
Overall	5.192	4.500	6.000	

As shown above, ministers were evaluated the highest of the professions, and males were evaluated more favorably than females. The group evaluated as least effective was the female lawyer condition, and the highest scoring condition was the male minister group.

Once means of each condition were obtained, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the data to ascertain the presence of any main effects or interactions between conditions. The results indicated that there was a significant main effect of profession.  $F(2,72) = 12.312, p < 0.05$ . A Tukey test was then conducted to determine the exact nature of these effects. As indicated in Table 2, ministers' evaluations were higher than both doctors' and lawyers', and doctors' scores were higher than lawyers'. The Tukey test showed that all of these evaluative differences were significant.

Besides a main effect of profession, the ANOVA also showed a main effect of gender. In Table 2, it is evident that men overall were evaluated more favorably than women, and the ANOVA showed this difference to be significant,  $F(1,72) = 7.282, p < 0.05$ .

Despite what seemed to be wide variation between scores within the same variable, the ANOVA showed that there was no significant interaction between variables. However, the interaction was shown to be marginally significant ( $p = 0.082$ ). Due to this indication, and since gender comparisons for each profession were pre-planned, simple effects tests were conducted. The results of these tests revealed no significant difference between male and female doctors, nor between male and female ministers,  $F(1,72) = 0.291, 0.517, p < 0.05$ , respectively. However, there was shown to be a significant difference between male and female lawyers,  $F(1,72) = 11.248, p < 0.05$ , as suggested by the means shown in Table 2. It is of interest to note that the means for all three male conditions were higher than the means for the female conditions of the same profession.

## DISCUSSION

Although the results of this experiment did not completely match the expected outcome, the experiment nonetheless yielded interesting and valuable information. The main hypothesis, as previously stated, was that the scenarios of women ministers would be evaluated significantly lower than those describing men ministers. While the mean for female ministers was slightly lower than that for male ministers, this difference was not great enough to merit statistical significance, according to the planned comparisons test.

Another expectation was that female professionals in all three conditions would be evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts. The results of the ANOVA encouraged this expectation by showing significant differences between genders. The only profession with significant differences between genders, however, proved to be the lawyer condition. Both female ministers and female doctors were evaluated less favorably than males in the same professions, but the difference between the means was not statistically significant. The large magnitude of the difference in male and female lawyer scores was particularly intriguing, since it was so much greater than the differences in the other professions.

A third hypothesis stated that, of the three professions, the ministers would score the lowest due to their perceived lower level of income and socioeconomic status. However, this was not the case. Not only did the minister conditions fail to receive poor evaluation scores, but they were also evaluated significantly higher than either of the other professions.

The fact that the women ministers' scores were not significantly lower than the men's refuted the hypothesis that anticipated a significant difference between the

conditions. However, the lack of a significant difference was not particularly surprising. As explained in the introduction, any outcome of scores was plausible, according to past research. Perhaps the this apparent equality in scores was due to the growing similarity of men's and women's roles, as Diekmann and Eagly's theory states (2000). Also, the nature of the pool of participants may have had an effect. The students involved in the experiment all attend a Christian liberal arts university, where many women receive degrees in religion and ministry. This environment could conceivably have had an effect on the participants' responses. However, since the pattern of responses closely resembles the pattern of responses in the doctor conditions, this effect is not believed to have been very great, if it existed at all.

The low evaluations of the female lawyers, relative to those of the male lawyers and the other female groups of the experiment, were surprising. Possibly, the profession of lawyer is one that retains more stereotypes of being a "men's profession" than doctor or minister.

Another unexpected result was the high scoring of the minister scenarios in general. Perhaps the subjects felt that the actions taken by the professionals in the scenarios closely matched the expected responsibilities of ministers, whereas the same actions did not as closely resemble the perceived responsibilities of doctors or lawyers. The pool of subjects may possibly have had an effect here as well, due to the Christian nature of the university. Perhaps the church background of many of the subjects, as well as of the university itself, served to inflate the scores of the ministers in the scenarios.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The consistently lower scores of females in this experiment, though at times only slightly lower, suggests that women professionals may often be viewed as less competent or effective than men in the same occupations. Of course, this experiment took into account only three occupations, and presented them in a very specific situation. To help confirm this effect, this experiment could be replicated using different situations and/or professions in the scenarios. Or, perhaps a different medium, other than a written scenario could be used to present the stimuli to the subjects. A different presentation may increase the realism of the situation, and therefore produce more powerful results.

Should this experiment be replicated, it is suggested that subjects be drawn from a population pool that more closely resembles the population of the entire country. Due to the Christian background of the subjects in this experiment, bias in favor of ministers, especially women ministers, could not be ruled out. By using a more representative subject pool, these results could be shown as more reliable or less reliable.

Overall, the results of this investigation proved very interesting. The presence of a main effect of gender indicates that women may suffer from an evaluative bias in some professions. Also, the type of profession may have an effect on how different genders are perceived, although the ANOVA did not show the presence of an interaction between the two variables. The disproportionately low mean of the female lawyer condition showed evidence for a possible interaction, but that effect may have been overshadowed by the somewhat lower scores of the other two female groups. This suggests that women may have a harder time gaining recognition in some professional occupations than others.

Further research about this subject will be helpful in evaluating more conclusively how women are perceived in the workplace.

## APPENDIX A

### Female Doctor Scenario<sup>2</sup>

The Parker family had always lived in the small town of Arthursville. Gary and Emily Parker had two children, Christy and Nathan. Mrs. Parker was a schoolteacher, and Mr. Parker was employed at the local paint factory, the biggest business in town.

Just after Christy's fourteenth birthday, she started getting very fatigued and even began fainting at school. Her parents took her to the hospital, where it was discovered that she had a very rare and very serious form of leukemia. Mr. and Mrs. Parker were convinced her illness was caused by pollution from the paint factory, which was known to be very lax with its environmental standards. Overcome with concern, the Parker family turned to a local doctor, Sarah Andrews, for help. Dr. Andrews was very sympathetic and pledged to do all she could to help Christy fight her disease. She set up a weekly doctor's appointment and researched the newest treatments. She was a very busy doctor, however, and could not always spend as much time on Christy's case as they would have liked. As their daughter's leukemia progressed, the Parker family requested that Dr. Andrews provide more and more medical attention. She reluctantly agreed to increase their appointments to twice a week. Although the Parkers requested four meetings a week, she told them that she was very sorry, but that she had many other responsibilities to a large number of patients, and had to be very careful in how she budgeted her time.

Christy finally passed away about a year after her diagnosis. Her family continued to seek Dr. Andrews' help, as they grieved their loss and tried to gather enough evidence to convict the paint factory owners of the pollution that had caused their daughter's death. Dr. Andrews remained very sympathetic toward the Parkers, continuing to meet with them regularly and trying to give them the best evidence she could. It became clear, though, that there was not enough evidence to connect Christy's leukemia to paint pollution. The Parkers eventually relinquished their fight against the paint company and had a small statue erected in Christy's memory at the high school she had attended.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Only the female scenarios are included in the appendix. The male scenarios are identical, except for the change of the name of the professional to James Andrews, and the change of applicable prefixes and pronouns.

### Female Lawyer Scenario

The Parker family had always lived in the small town of Arthursville. Gary and Emily Parker had two children, Christy and Nathan. Mrs. Parker was a schoolteacher, and Mr. Parker was employed at the local paint factory, the biggest business in town.

Just after Christy's fourteenth birthday, she started getting very fatigued and even began fainting at school. Her parents took her to the hospital, where it was discovered that she had a very rare and very serious form of leukemia. Mr. and Mrs. Parker were convinced her illness was caused by pollution from the paint factory, which was known to be very lax with its environmental standards. Overcome with concern, the Parker family turned to a local lawyer, Sarah Andrews, for help. Ms. Andrews was very sympathetic and pledged to do all she could to help the Parkers fight the paint company. She set up a weekly appointment and began to research the case thoroughly. She was a very busy lawyer, however, and could not always spend as much time on Christy's case as they would have liked. As their daughter's leukemia progressed, the Parker family requested that Ms. Andrews try to move the case along as fast as possible. She reluctantly agreed to increase the amount of time she was spending on their case. Although the Parkers requested that Ms. Andrews spend at least 15 hours a week preparing their argument, she told them that she was very sorry, but that she had many other responsibilities to a large number of clients, and had to be very careful in how she budgeted her time.

Christy finally passed away about a year after her diagnosis. Her family continued to seek Ms. Andrews' help, as they grieved their loss and tried to gather enough evidence to convict the paint factory owners of the pollution that had caused their daughter's death. Ms. Andrews remained very sympathetic toward the Parkers, continuing to meet with them regularly and trying to build the best case possible. It became clear, though, that there was not enough evidence to connect Christy's leukemia to paint pollution. The Parkers eventually relinquished their fight against the paint company and had a small statue erected in Christy's memory at the high school she had attended.

### Female Minister Scenario

The Parker family had always lived in the small town of Arthursville. Gary and Emily Parker had two children, Christy and Nathan. Mrs. Parker was a schoolteacher, and Mr. Parker was employed at the local paint factory, the biggest business in town.

Just after Christy's fourteenth birthday, she started getting very fatigued and even began fainting at school. Her parents took her to the hospital, where it was discovered that she had a very rare and very serious form of leukemia. Mr. and Mrs. Parker were convinced her illness was caused by pollution from the paint factory, which was known to be very lax with its environmental standards. Overcome with concern, the Parker family turned to the local minister, Sarah Andrews, for help. Rev. Andrews was very sympathetic and pledged to do all she could to help the family deal with Christy's illness.

She set up a weekly appointment for informal counseling and prayer. She was a very busy minister, however, and could not always spend as much time with Christy and her family as they would have liked. As their daughter’s leukemia progressed, the Parker family requested that Rev. Andrews provide more and more counseling and support. She reluctantly agreed to increase their appointments to twice a week. Although the Parkers requested four meetings a week, she told them that she was very sorry, but that she had many other responsibilities to her large congregation, and had to be very careful in how she budgeted her time.

Christy finally passed away about a year after her diagnosis. Her family continued to seek Rev. Andrews’ help, as they grieved their loss and tried to gather enough evidence to convict the paint factory owners of the pollution that had caused their daughter’s death. Rev. Andrews remained very sympathetic toward the Parkers, continuing to meet with them regularly and trying to provide the best support she could. Eventually, it became clear that there was not enough evidence to connect Christy’s leukemia to paint pollution. The Parkers relinquished their fight against the paint company and had a small statue erected in Christy’s memory at the high school she had attended.

**APPENDIX B**

Sample Agreement Statements  
Female Doctor Version<sup>3</sup>

Please carefully consider the statements listed below. Circle the number that corresponds to the strength of your agreement or disagreement with each statement. Note that higher numbers represent stronger agreement with the statement.

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1) Illnesses like Christy’s are often caused by industrial pollution.

strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2) The Parkers should have continued to fight for a case against the paint company, even though there appeared to be a lack of evidence.

strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
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<sup>3</sup> Again, only one set of statements is included here for the sake of expediency. The only changes in the other sets of statements were the changes of gender and profession in statement #4, the target statement. Also, in the original form, all statements were located on a single sheet.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

3) It was appropriate for Christy's family to have the statue erected at the high school in her memory.

strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4) Dr. Andrews appears to be a competent, reliable physician.

strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5) Although the legal investigation did not yield sufficient evidence for a strong case against the paint factory, the Parker family should have filed a complaint with the government, in order to ensure that no one else had to suffer like Christy.

strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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