

Gender Bias During Essay Assessment: Still There Or Finally Gone?

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Background & Aims

The objective of the present research was to explore underlying gender biases that may affect essay assessment. A review of previous research (Goldberg, 1968; King, 1998) reported that essay assessors typically graded female-authored essays lower than their male-authored counterparts, despite both essays consisting of the same content. However, a recent research study (Birch et al, 2016) did not corroborate with the earlier findings, and found no such bias. This could be explained by the change in attitudes towards women within the educational realm, or the lack of power due to only having ten participants.

Method

Participants: A hundred and fifty-two participants were recruited, (74 were males and 76 females), comprised of 54 male and 56 female students. The mean age score for males was 25 and for females 24, the age ranged between 18 to 58 years of age. Students were obtained from Oxford Brookes University.

Qualtrics



Measures: An independent groups design was used, consisting of two groups; both grading the same essay but that was either authored by a female or male name. Participants were randomly assigned to their group via Qualtrics and asked to read and complete the essay grading online. The dependent variables were the overall grades awarded to the essay using a five-point scale scoring rubric from Francis et al (2003). Demographic information was also collected from participants including age, gender and familiarity with the essay content.

Results

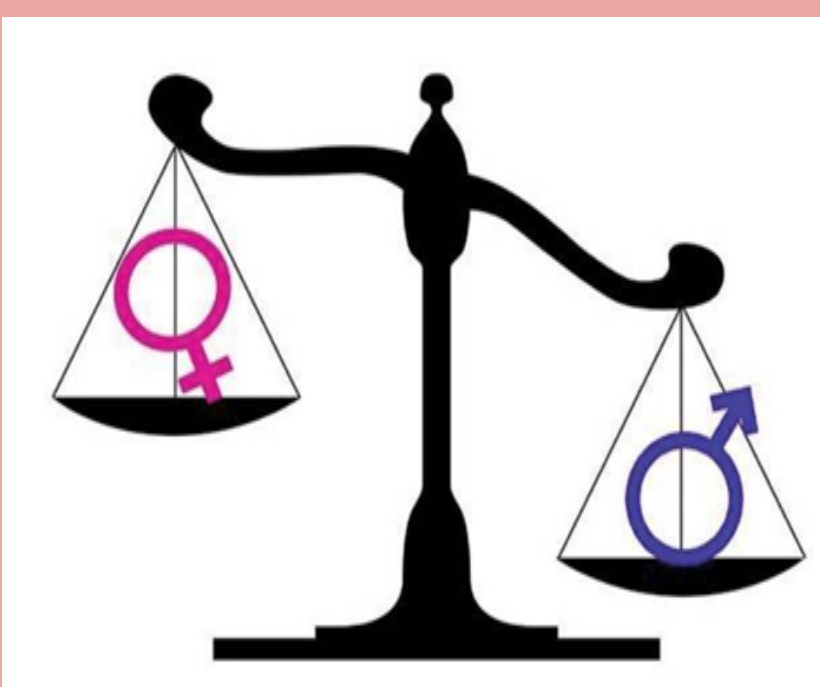
Results were analysed using ANCOVA, no significant gender bias was found ($F(1,97) = .93, p = .336, \eta^2 = .01$), nor a significant interaction between the gender of participant and the gender of the author. Age was found to be statistically significant; older individuals attributed an overall lower score than younger participants ($F(1,97) = 5.42, p = .022, \eta^2 = .05$). Women were found to score the criterions 'well written' $F(2, 103) = 4.44, p = .014, \eta^2 = .07$ and 'clarity and consistency of the argument' $F(2,103) = 5.57, p = .005, \eta^2 = .09$ lower than men.

Gender of the Participant	Gender of the Author	
	Male (n = 75)	Female (n = 77)
Male (n = 74)	2.99 (.50)	3.19 (.53)
Female (n = 76)	3.06 (.49)	2.93 (.66)

'Over the years, psychologists and psychiatrists have shown that both sexes consistently value men more highly than women. Characteristics considered male are usually praised; those considered female are usually criticized' (Goldberg, 1968)

Discussion

The results infer that gender bias may no longer exist within the assessment realm, corroborating with recent research findings (Birch et al, 2016). However, it is important to consider other possible explanations, such as the insufficient number of participants and the reporting of not having seen the authors name. Age may be a proxy for other variables such as experience, previous findings have shown a relationship between experience and lower marking (Stanton, 1978). Women have been found to be more likely to take essay based subjects including English and Psychology (Higher Education official statistics, 2017). The said increased experience in writing women have in comparison to men within education may explain why women were found to be harsher when grading the presentational aspects of the essay. Based upon the findings of this study, non anonymous marking should be considered. Research has found that with the identity of the students being known, motivation and performance may increase (Brennan, 2008). Further research should perhaps look into replicating this study, but instead utilizing a separate page that informs the participant of the author's gender. A larger cohort would also be beneficial for higher statistical power.



References

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