ABSTRACT
Students selected pictures of faculty members who they believed would be associated with traits of a good and bad instructor. Photos of more attractive faculty were chosen for positive traits. Past negative findings for female faculty were not found. Students rated male photos as instructors with more knowledge and credibility, but still preferred female photos because they believed that women instructors would be more caring and have more rapport with students than would male instructors.

INTRODUCTION
Research on the impact of attractiveness, age, and gender on the student evaluation of teaching has been limited and contradictory. At the same time, gender roles have been changing, and much of the older research may be dated by cultural changes. This study looks at two issues:
1. Are attractive faculty more likely to be chosen as good instructors by current students in business classes?
2. Does the instructor’s gender and age make a difference?

Literature
Researchers in the past have generally found positive relationships between the perception of attractiveness and the preference that students have for instructors, but the relationship has been complicated by interaction effects with the gender of both the instructor and the students. Hamermesh and Parker (2004) found a positive relationship between perceived attractiveness of faculty and the evaluations they receive. The effect seemed to be stronger for male instructors than for female. In another study, 42 college seniors were given photographs of teachers, accompanied by written statements of the teachers’ instructional approach. No main effects of perceived attractiveness and competence were found, but a significant interaction occurred between attractiveness and gender (Buck & Tiene, 1989). Recently, Bonds-Raache, and Raache (2007) found that professor attractiveness was correlated with overall instructional quality, helpfulness and clarity in the classroom, but gender effects were not noted.

Research on the question of gender effects themselves on the student ratings of instruction has also provided mixed results. Defenders of the student evaluation process generally have denied gender effects with statements ranging from the emphatic, “… there is not strong or regular pattern of gender bias in ratings” (Theall & Franklin, 2001, p. 50) and, “Although conflicting results have been obtained when relating the gender of the student and the gender of the instructor to student evaluations, a majority of the studies reported no differences between faculty ratings made by male and female students” (Aleamoni, 1999, p. 56), to the less emphatic, “… generally … there is little evidence of gender related effects” (Feldman, 1993), while admitting that there may be a difference in the way male and female students rate faculty (Cashin, 1995).

These conclusions were formed by differences found early in gender studies, leading researchers to generally conclude that male instructors were evaluated more highly than females (Bernard, et al., 1981). Others (Bennett, 1982), however, suggested that the existing literature base before the 1980s offered little evidence that women received systematically lower marks from students than men, but that students did seem to prefer same-gender instructors. Generally, it was found that sex-role stereotypes more strongly influenced evaluation of female instructors than those of male professors. This finding was reinforced by a later study (Kierstead, et al., 1988) which reported that women instructors had to work harder to attain the same ratings given to men. Basow and Spielberg (1987) reported that male students gave lower ratings to female professors. These gender interactions have been reinforced by other research. Both male and female students thought that instructors of their own gender showed more “interest in students” (Elmore & LaPointe, 1975). Basow (1998, 2000) showed that female professors were chosen as the “best” instructor more by women students than male students, who chose more males as the “best” instructor. She found no gender differences in selections of the “worst” professors. The “best” female instructors were considered to be much more “helpful” than the “best” male professors, indicating a subtle gender stereotyping by the students.

In a large study of almost 3,000 students, Langbein (1994) found that female instructors were rewarded,
relative to men, for being supportive and displaying “nurturing” behavior. Women instructors were punished, relative to men, for objective and authoritarian behavior. She also found that women were given less of a boost in their evaluation for good grades than were men.

An interesting approach was taken by Sinclair and Kundra (2000). They reviewed the literature that showed that people will judge a member of a stigmatized group, who evaluated them negatively, to be less competent than a person from a group that was not considered stigmatized. They hypothesized that students would evaluate a female instructor more negatively who gave a low grade than they would evaluate a male instructor who gave a low grade. They further hypothesized that there would be little difference between the evaluations of male and female instructors from students who received good grades. In a study of almost 200 students, their hypotheses were statistically affirmed.

In a study from marketing classes, the earlier stereotypes appeared to reemerge. When students were allowed to pick professors by looking at their pictures (Clayson, 1992), a male photo was chosen 73 percent of the time as representing the “best professor.” A male photo was chosen 80 percent of the time as representing the person most likely to be making more consulting money, but a female photo was chosen 71 percent of the time as representing a professor who was denied tenure.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sample**

Students in an undergraduate consumer behavior class were surveyed. The class was chosen because it contained students from all business majors, and from several non-business majors. Participation was voluntary, but a minimal amount of class credit was given to those who completed the questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 63 students (70 percent business majors, 30 percent non-business; 67 percent female; average GPA = 3.12).

**Materials and Procedure**

Each participating student received a questionnaire outlining five general themes found in Faranda and Clarke’s (2004) study along with a definition of each term. In this study, the authors used in-depth interviews to identify the characteristics of outstanding teaching as seen by student respondents. Five themes emerged: rapport (mentioned in 36 percent of the responses), delivery (30 percent), fairness (16 percent), knowledge and credibility (10 percent), and organization and preparation (7 percent). In addition to questions on these themes, sixteen statements were included, suggested by the literature, about different levels of faculty achievement and problems (Contact Author for copy of questionnaire).

Sixteen colored pictures of faculty members from another institution were handed to the students along with the questionnaire. The pictures were taken from a public domain site off the internet. Eight of the photos showed female faculty and eight showed male faculty. The age of each person was not known, but the photos were selected to include faculty who appeared to be in their early mid-20s to their late 60s. None of the students would know any of the faculty shown. Each picture showed a smiling instructor against the same background, and all the photos had the person in the same relative position and size (as far as differences in body type would allow). The students viewed the pictures in a counterbalanced fashion.

Students were asked to select one of the sixteen pictures they would associate with each statement on the questionnaire. Two weeks later, the same respondents were asked to look at the pictures again and estimate each faculty member’s age, and to rate their attractiveness on a seven point scale. Again the order of presentation was counterbalanced.

**RESULTS**

There was only one significant difference by gender. Male students believed that a female instructor was more likely to give high grades than did female students. Estimates of attractiveness and age did not differ by the gender of the respondents. The students perceived the age of the faculty to range from 28.3 years to 64.8 years (average 44.6 years). The average attractiveness on the seven point scale ranged from 2.38 to 6.17 (average 4.38). Attractiveness and age were highly and negatively related ($r = -0.71$).

Of the five general themes of the evaluation, four had significant differences in attractiveness between the high and low faculty chosen for each theme; rapport, delivery, fairness, and organization and preparation. In each case, the positive faculty member was perceived as more attractive. Only two of the themes showed a difference by age. The high for rapport was perceived as significantly younger than the low, and the high for knowledge and credibility was significantly older. The pattern of the five themes is relatively consistent except for knowledge and credibility, where older men were chosen over younger men and females. This finding
was reinforced by the selections made for the statement, *Was presented with 'The Researcher of the Year' award at their university*. The three highest pictures chosen for this statement were all males, the attractiveness score was significantly below average and their perceived age was significantly above average. The same pattern was found for the statement, *Every year students could vote on “the smartest instructor I ever had” and this instructor won it twice in four years.*

According to Clayson and Haley (1990), the teaching evaluation scale is essentially a “likeability” continuum. The pictures chosen in response to the statement, *This person is very well-liked by students*, were 59 percent female, and significantly above average in attractiveness, and below average in age. A summary of findings can be found in Table 1.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. The earlier differences in faculty characteristics by the gender of the students were not found in this sample.
2. Female pictures were generally chosen as the best instructors. Primarily because they were perceived as having more rapport with students and better delivery of their courses, the two themes that were chosen most often in students' perceptions of an outstanding professor (Faranda & Clarke, 2004).
3. Age and attractiveness were highly related, with age accounting for over 50 percent of the total variance in the students’ perception of attractiveness.
4. Pictures of attractive faculty were chosen over less attractive for all the positive themes except knowledge and credibility. Likewise, pictures of less attractive faculty were chosen for the same themes when looking at the relative absence of these themes.
5. Men were considered to be better researchers and have reputations for being knowledgeable and intelligent. These characteristics, however, are not considered the most important by students when evaluating outstanding instructors. Only 10 percent of Faranda and Clarke’s sample indicated that this theme was important, while in another study of business students, 96 percent of students did not select “knowledgeable” as a desirable quality of a good instructor (Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002). It appears that if being female was once a negative factor in the evaluation process, that bias is now largely gone. Students believed that female instructors were more caring and had more rapport with students, both characteristics highly prized in instructors. Men were still considered to be the best researchers. Attractiveness was important. All themes and statements that could be considered positive (outside of those related to research) were dominated by faculty judged to be more attractive than average.

**Implications**

Students appear to associate characteristics of an ideal instructor with traits associated with female faculty. The effect of attractiveness was more complex. The picture rated as the most attractive was of a female faculty member who was not chosen the most frequently on any of the teaching themes, but at the same time, the female with the lowest attractive ratings was selected most frequently as having traits associated with the worst teacher. Being attractive did not seem to boost a male faculty into the best instructor category, but being unattractive was detrimental. All other factors being constant, it would be expected that physical attractiveness would be a slight plus on evaluations of teaching, but being physically unattractive could be a distinct disadvantage. It also appears that being older than a normative standard to which the students are accustomed may be detrimental.

**Limitations**

The study was conducted with a limited number of students from one school. Findings in other schools in other areas of the country may find more or less of the effects found here. Although there were sixteen pictures available from which to choose, it is still possible that individual differences in the pictures unrelated to attractiveness and gender may have been influential in their selection, thereby confounding the results.

**References Available on Request**
TABLE 1
Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Attractive</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.16 (+0.78)²</td>
<td>39.8 (-4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>F (71)¹</td>
<td>4.54 (+0.16)</td>
<td>44.5 (-0.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>N (41)</td>
<td>4.46 (+0.08)</td>
<td>43.9 (-0.7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>N (62)</td>
<td>4.27 (-0.11)</td>
<td>47.9 (+3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp;</td>
<td>M (27)</td>
<td>4.76 (+0.38)</td>
<td>43.9 (-0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>F (64)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.03 (-1.35)</td>
<td>53.3 (+8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>N (52)</td>
<td>3.74 (-0.64)</td>
<td>43.3 (-1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>M (19)</td>
<td>3.98 (-0.40)</td>
<td>46.9 (+2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
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<td>4.27 (-0.11)</td>
<td>47.9 (+3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp;</td>
<td>M (27)</td>
<td>3.82 (-0.56)</td>
<td>46.0 (+1.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>M (25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Preparation</td>
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Significant Characteristics³

High
- Rapport: Attractive, younger female
- Delivery: Attractive person of either gender
- Fairness: No significant characteristics
- Knowledge & Credibility: Older male
- Organization & Preparation: Attractive female

Low
- Rapport: Unattractive, older person of either sex
- Delivery: Unattractive person
- Fairness: Unattractive person
- Knowledge & Credibility: Older male
- Organization & Credibility: Unattractive male

Statements with Significant Characteristics

- This person is very well-liked by students. Attractive, younger person of either gender

- This instructor was consistently rated by students as “an instructor that really cares.” Attractive female of any age

- Was chosen by students to be the “Best Instructor of the Year.” Attractive person of either gender

- Every year students could vote on “the smartest instructor I ever had,” and this instructor won it twice in four years. Unattractive, older male

- Was presented with “The Researcher of the Year” award at their university. Unattractive, older male

- This instructor had the reputation of giving the highest grades in the major. Attractive, younger person of either gender

- * Male students were significantly more likely to choose a female than were female students.

- This instructor was given an award for “Outstanding Service to the University” for work done outside of class. Attractive female of any age

- This person has high evaluations by administrators, but low evaluations by students. Unattractive, older male

- This person was let go from their teaching position because they had constant disagreements with other instructors and university administrators. Unattractive, older person of either gender

- Students said that this instructor was a nice person but should not really be in the classroom. Attractive, younger person of any gender

- This person was denied tenure at their last university. Younger person of either gender

- This instructor had a reputation of giving the lowest grades in the major. Unattractive, older person of either gender

- Students reported that this instructor, “didn’t really care about students.” Unattractive, older person of either gender

¹ Percent of chosen pictures that were of females.
² Average attractiveness and age along with change from total average of all pictures in ( ); significant changes from average given in bold.
³ Significant Characteristics” indicate whether attractiveness, age, or gender was significantly different from the mean. For example, “Attractive, younger person of either sex” indicates the attractive score was above average, age was below average, and there were no statistically significance differences by gender.