

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: The Effects of a Female Instructor's Title on Student Perceptions of
the Instructor

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This study is an investigation of the effects of a female instructor's title on student perceptions of the instructor. The traditional titles "Miss" and "Mrs.," the nontraditional title "Ms.," the professional title "Dr.," and the absence of title (first and last names only) were manipulated. The first hypothesis of this study was that the titles used would affect student ratings and that the title "Dr." would receive the most favorable ratings. A second hypothesis was that the sex of the participants would not have an effect on instructor ratings.

The various titles were presented via a 10-second title screen at the beginning and end of a videotaped lecture given by a female instructor. Participants ($N = 216$) each viewed one videotaped copy of the lecture, although the title screen identifying the instructor was altered for each of the five tapes. After viewing the tape, participants completed a questionnaire consisting of a modified Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), five supplementary questions, and several demographic items.

Mean scores were compiled by group, and two separate unweighted-means, split-plot factorial analyses of variance were conducted. Both analyses used title condition ("Dr.," "Mrs.," "Ms.," "Miss,", and No Title) and sex (men and women) as the between-group variables. An analysis of the supplementary questions showed no significant main effects for title or sex and no significant interaction. A significant main effect did exist for the supplementary questions, however; regardless of sex or title condition, students rated the instructor similarly. An analysis of scores from the masculinity and femininity subscales of the BSRI showed no significant main effects for title or sex and no significant interaction. A significant effect of BSRI category indicated that femininity scores were significantly higher than masculinity scores. In addition, a significant sex X BSRI interaction was found. Female participants rated the instructor significantly higher on the masculinity subscale than male participants did, but no differences between male and female ratings of the instructor were found on the femininity subscale. Both female and male participants rated the instructor significantly higher on the femininity subscale than on the masculinity subscale. Implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

THE EFFECTS OF A FEMALE INSTRUCTOR'S TITLE
ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSTRUCTOR

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication involves both verbal and nonverbal communication. Although messages sent verbally may be more immediately evident, messages sent through nonverbal channels can be equally important. One of the factors influencing interpersonal communication through both verbal and nonverbal routes is stature or authority. Real or perceived authority affects those involved in the interaction in a variety of ways, including body posture, eye contact, amount of time spent listening or speaking, and form of address. Forms of address or titles have been of particular interest to researchers because of the unique issues they present. One's title is generally a reflection of the social situation and of the actors in that situation. Furthermore, while several titles may be appropriate for any given individual, they each differ in the amount of information disclosed about the stature or authority of that individual. This consideration is especially relevant to women, who may be addressed as "Miss," "Ms.," or "Mrs.," with each title depicting something different about the woman's marital status. Even the title "Ms.," which is intended to be a marriage-neutral title, has been shown to trigger certain stereotypes about its user (Dion, 1987; Heilman, 1975).

Interpersonal Communication and Titles

The importance of the social function of titles as applied to interpersonal communication is reflected in the vast amount of information applicable to business etiquette, particularly as related to international or cross-cultural settings (e.g., Bownas, 1988; Glover, 1990; Humphries, 1990; Stuart, 1994). Even within a particular culture, Wood and Kroger (1991) suggest that not only do forms of address play an integral role in politeness, "but they also have special pragmatic functions. They open communicative acts and set the tone for the interchanges that follow; they establish, at least initially, the relative power and distance of speaker and hearer" (p. 145). According to this theory, Wood and Kroger (1991) suggest that the various forms of address are used to create either impersonalization or personalization in the social interaction. Impersonalization techniques include creating "vertical" or "horizontal" distance. Vertical distance is created by acknowledging unequal status or deference (e.g., "Your Majesty" or "Mr. President"); horizontal distance is created among equals by establishing mutual deference (e.g., addressing each other as "Mrs."). On the other hand, personalization is an attempt to signify affiliation between the speaker and hearer (e.g., mutual use of the first name). This view focuses on the situational determinants of politeness and form of address used with a focus on the mutuality

of address.

Generally, title usage in a classroom setting is not mutual. According to the assumptions of Wood and Kroger's (1991) theory, the use of any title would establish deference in the classroom. Only when a first-name basis is established would the student-teacher interaction verbally avoid such deference. This view is supported by those instructors and institutions that encourage disuse of titles in an attempt to personalize the classroom and create a supportive, student-focused environment that fosters student growth and learning. Are these instructors actually seen as more supportive and approachable by the students? Even when a mutual, first-name basis exists, the classroom environment by its very nature reflects deference on the part of the students. Seating arrangement, speaking order, and note-taking all illustrate the students' acceptance of the instructor's superior role. The functions titles serve in establishing the classroom environment need to be explored.

Women's Titles. Denoting status or politeness is certainly not the only function of titles. As mentioned previously, women's titles are particularly interesting because of the information they convey about gender and marital status. Perhaps less obvious, but equally important, is the information titles may convey by triggering certain stereotypes underlying these two pieces of information. In

other words, titles intended to provide information about gender and marital status also give information that has little or nothing to do with gender or marital status. For example, Kasof (1993) suggests that because marital status varies with age, titles of address denoting marital status may also be conveying impressions of age. In the absence of other information, the title "Miss" connotes youth. However, when paired with old age, the title "Miss" "summons the image of a woman who has remained single long past the culturally approved age for marriage--the so-called 'spinster' or 'old maid' stereotype, with its various unfavorable connotations" (Kasof, 1993, p. 151).

A small but growing body of research investigating the effects of the title "Ms." shows that while the title does not imply any information about marital status, it still has distinctive stereotypical connotations. One study found that high school and college students of both sexes were more willing to subordinate themselves to authoritarian leaders titled "Ms." than to equally authoritarian leaders titled "Miss," "Mrs.," or "Mr." (Anderson, Finn, & Leider, 1981). Dion (1987) found that a woman preferring the "Ms." title "gives the impression of being more achievement oriented, socially assertive and dynamic, but less interpersonally warm, relative to her counterparts with traditional titles of address" (p. 21). A follow-up study found that adults perceived young women who

preferred the "Ms." title to be more competent, masculine, and achievement-oriented but less likable and warm than women who preferred the titles "Mrs." or "Miss" (Dion & Schuller, 1990). Another study found that people rated an achieving woman described in a paragraph and given the title "Ms." as less honest than women who were titled "Miss" or "Mrs.," or who were given no title at all (Connor, Byrne, Mindell, Cohen, & Nixon, 1986). Finally, Holmes and Kixmiller (1989) found that college students rated a female therapist lower on personal warmth, degree of comfort, and likelihood of consultation when her title was given as "Ms.," although they caution that the magnitudes of the differences were so small that they precluded any meaningful significance.

Although a number of cautionary implications about women's title usage can be drawn from these studies, the evidence could be interpreted to show that women actually have an advantage due to the flexibility their choice of titles presents. Dion and Schuller (1990) suggest

the different titles of address for women in our society give them an advantage in being able to choose the title of address that accentuates the image or expectations they may want to convey in a particular situation. Where competence or leadership is called for, the Ms. title may be preferable for a woman who wants to project that aspect of her personality. . . . However, if a

woman wants to highlight her warmth and expressiveness, which may encompass other aspects of her life, a traditional title of address may serve better. (p. 576)

Therefore, in fields or careers that are stereotypically male, the use of the title "Ms." may actually become an image enhancer as opposed to a detriment (Anderson et al., 1981; Dion & Schuller, 1990).

Absence of Title. Another consideration for women is the option of using first and last name only with no title. Although this condition was included in the previously mentioned studies, the results were varied. McAteer (1974) suggests that students who address their instructor by first name without a title are crossing a boundary in the relationship. More generally, Kasof (1993) investigated sex bias in the naming of stimulus persons and concluded the types of discrepancies represented in title research can be explained by the fact that names themselves may trigger certain stereotypes (e.g., attractiveness, ethnicity, intelligence, and socioeconomic status) which may confound the results. This conclusion was consistent with Willis, Willis, and Gier (1982) who found a relationship between given names, social class, and professional achievement. Therefore, avoiding titles will not avoid triggering stereotypes. The mere fact that the choice has been made to use no title imparts some information about a person; the person's name itself

creates an entirely new set of issues. Furthermore, the complex interaction between title and name creates a "Pandora's Box" waiting to open (Kasof, 1993). Recommendations for name selection that controls for some of these extraneous variables include using moderately common, age-appropriate, gender-linked names, such as "Kathleen" (Kasof, 1993; Willis et al., 1982). In contrast, "Swoozie," "Ethel," and "Alex" would be poor choices for women in name research because these names do not meet the recommendations listed above.

Student-Teacher Perceptions

A large amount of research investigating the many variables that affect student-teacher perceptions exists. Seemingly obscure facts such as the instructor's height (Hensley, 1993), dress (Butler & Roesel, 1989; Chowdhary, 1988), accent (Rubin & Smith, 1990), and attractiveness (Romano & Bordieri, 1989) have been studied in addition to the more obvious factors such as expertness (Freeman, 1988) and faculty status (Goldberg & Callahan, 1991; Schuckman, 1990). Research shows that all of these factors have significant effects on student perceptions and evaluations of the instructor. Curiously absent from this vast array of research on teacher characteristics affecting student perceptions is the issue of instructor title. Considering the fact that titles are so frequently and consistently used in the academic setting, this omission is surprising.

In a more traditional vein, research on faculty evaluations consistently shows that delivery of instruction, subject matter mastery, and availability to students are three important factors affecting students' perceptions (Cashin, 1989). Interestingly, these three areas are essentially the same areas that are influenced in some way by title usage in other fields. This link warrants further investigation. Again, the apparent separation of title research from research into teacher characteristics and student perceptions is curious.

The existing research in student-teacher perceptions is important because the bulk of it reflects a fairly consistent bias toward male instructors regardless of student sex (e.g., Kierstead, D'Agostino, & Dill, 1988; Sidanius & Crane, 1989). Since the field of higher education is traditionally male-dominated, factors influencing student perceptions of female instructors, such as title, become vitally important research topics. Harris (1976) suggests the key to positive student perceptions is not the male gender itself but the possession of a stereotypically masculine teaching style (e.g., independent, dominant, and assertive). In other words, the lack of these desirable, stereotypically masculine traits are what damage teacher ratings, not the fact that the instructor is biologically a woman. In fact, some stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., concerned, warm, and supportive) are rated as desirable by students. Masculine characteristics appear to be generally

viewed as positive, but feminine characteristics can be either positive or negative. These characteristics create complex interactions, especially when combined with other factors such as appearance, age, and status. Freeman (1992) agrees that the instructor's gender role is more important than the instructor or student gender. This finding is important, particularly when paired with the findings of research on "Ms." stereotypes. Since the traditional gender-role stereotypes of men and the stereotypes of women who use the "Ms." title are strongly associated, using "Ms." could help female instructors enhance student perceptions by emphasizing male-stereotypical characteristics (Dion & Schuller, 1990; Heilman, 1975). Some research even suggests that androgynous teachers (those combining the best of both stereotypically male and female traits) produce the most positive student attitudes (Wheless & Potorti, 1989). This finding again suggests that female instructors who use the title "Ms." could have an advantage over their female peers using the traditional titles.

Titles and Student-Teacher Perceptions

As noted, the separate bodies of research on interpersonal communication and student-teacher perceptions should be linked through a common focus on the use and function of titles. While various research findings could be extrapolated to hint at the effects a female instructor's title has on student perceptions, only one

study to date has specifically investigated this link. Heilman (1975) compared college student ratings of fictional instructors and found students expected the same amount of enjoyment and intellectual stimulation from "non-technical" courses taught by "Mr." Erwin or "Ms." Erwin. Furthermore, these ratings were significantly higher than those made when the instructor was titled "Miss" or "Mrs." Finally, ratings of the course when taught by the untitled "J.R. Erwin" did not differ from the higher "Mr." and "Ms." ratings.

Although the implications of Heilman's study are consistent with the inferences drawn previously in the literature, these particular results should be taken with caution. First, the study is nearly 20 years old; hence, results could be different today. Second, the sample population consisted almost exclusively of men so the findings could reflect some unspecified sex differences. Third, while the name "J.R." does not denote gender, it is much more commonly used for men than for women, so this usage could have contaminated the results (Kasof, 1993). The fourth limitation of this study is that, like the majority of title research to date, the perceptions being reported are based on a brief descriptive paragraph provided by the researchers; this artificial "exposure" is fundamentally different from that which would occur in an actual classroom setting. More extensive exposure to the instructor could modify the stereotyped perceptions reported. These problems

notwithstanding, Heilman's (1975) conclusion that "the results provide evidence that the titling of women faculty members as 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' can have powerful negative effects on evaluation of the courses they are to teach and on the projections made about what it would be like to attend them" (p. 518) is certainly worthy of further consideration.

Rationale for the Present Study

In summary, titles are used to reflect etiquette and status but also may convey a number of other bits of information, many of which are unintended. For women, the issue becomes particularly salient because of the range of title options available. Female instructors choose a title based on their educational background, the school's social environment, their marital status, or their personal preference (Gunter, 1992). However, these instructors generally do not take into consideration the effects the different titles have on others' perceptions. Clearly, certain stereotypes still exist for different titles that have little or nothing to do with marital status, gender, or competence; these effects become further complicated by the interactions created by the addition of first and last names and their ensuing stereotypes. Because titles are used regularly in the academic arena and because student perceptions play an important role in teacher evaluations, assessing the effects of female instructors' titles on student perceptions warrants

further investigation.

Introduction to the Present Study

This study is an investigation of the effects of a female instructor's title on student perceptions. The traditional titles "Miss" and "Mrs.," the nontraditional title "Ms.," the professional title "Dr.," and the absence of title (first and last names only) were manipulated. The various titles were presented via a 10-second title screen at the beginning and end of a videotaped lecture given by a female instructor. Each group of participants viewed one videotaped copy of the lecture, although the title screen identifying the instructor was different for each tape. After viewing the tape, participants completed a questionnaire consisting of a modified Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Wheless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981), a brief instructor rating scale, and several demographic items. Mean scores for each title condition by sex of respondent were computed and analyzed for significance.

Based on previous research, the titles used were hypothesized to affect student perceptions of the instructor. Specifically, "Dr." would receive the most positive ratings because the title conveys information on masculine characteristics, while the instructor herself may convey more feminine characteristics. This hypothesis would be consistent with the theory that androgynous instructors would receive the most positive ratings. A second hypothesis was that the sex of the

participants would not have an effect on instructor ratings. Findings from this study would benefit female instructors by enabling them to counteract stereotypes triggered by the form of address they employ, thus enhancing student-teacher perceptions.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 216 (87 men, 129 women) undergraduate students drawn from a subject pool of students enrolled in Introductory Psychology and Developmental Psychology courses at Emporia State University. Students volunteered by signing up for a particular session and received credit for participation. The participation procedure and all other aspects of the study met the criteria established by Emporia State University's Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects.

Instruments

Videotape. In order to decrease the likelihood of instructor recognition, a 20-minute lecture given by a female faculty member was videotaped at a small, private, midwestern college. With one exception, five identical copies of the videotape were made. At the beginning and end of each tape, a 10-second title screen was added. The content of the respective title screens is as follows. Tape 1 identified the instructor as "Miss Kathleen Penner," Tape 2 as "Mrs. Kathleen Penner," Tape 3 as "Ms. Kathleen Penner," and Tape 4 as "Dr. Kathleen Penner." Tape 5 simply said "Kathleen Penner" with no title and served as the control.

Questionnaire. The Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) modification of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem 1974) was used to measure sex-role orientation of the instructor as perceived by the student participants (see Appendix A). The BSRI modification consists of 20 items, 10 for femininity and 10 for masculinity. The modified BSRI's use as a measure of perceptions of others has been previously validated by Wheelless and Wheelless (1982) and Wheelless and Potorti (1989). The scale's internal reliability is very good; studies using the modified BSRI (Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981) reported coefficient alpha scores ranging from .86 to .91 for masculinity and .76 to .95 for femininity (Jordan, McGreal, & Wheelless, 1990; Wheelless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981). The resulting masculinity and femininity subscale scores can be used to divide perceptions of the teachers into feminine (high in femininity, low in masculinity), masculine (high in masculinity, low in femininity), androgynous (high in both), and undifferentiated (low in both) categories.

In addition to the modified BSRI, five 7-point Likert-type questions were completed. Questions 2, 4, and 5 were reverse-scored to prevent response-set bias. These supplementary questions were included to reflect the participant's view of the instructor in areas not covered by the BSRI (see Appendix B).

Participants were also asked to respond to demographic questions of age, gender,

class standing, and whether or not they recognized the instructor in the video. One participant indicated that she recognized the instructor, so that participant's questionnaire was deleted from the data pool since her perceptions could be biased.

The details mentioned above were the same for all questionnaires administered except the instructions for completing the rating scale were altered to match the name and title appearing on that group's videotape. For example, the instructions on the questionnaire for the groups watching Tape 1 said, "Please rate Miss Kathleen Penner's performance as an instructor by circling your response on the following questions." This instruction was given to ensure that the participants remembered and focused on the name and title when completing the rating scale.

Procedure

Using a table of random numbers, the five experimental conditions ("Miss," "Mrs.," "Ms.," "Dr.," and Name Only) were randomly assigned to each of 10 experimental sessions such that each condition appeared twice. After completion of these 10 sessions, a sharp discrepancy between the number of men and women participants appeared. In an attempt to remedy the situation, five additional sessions were scheduled for men only. The randomization procedure was repeated to assign one of the tapes to each session.

All data were gathered during the 15 scheduled group sessions. The following instructions were read to each group:

You are going to be participating in the evaluation of an instructor.

You will see a 20-minute videotaped segment of a lecture given by this instructor. After viewing the tape, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire.

The experimenter then distributed the Informed Consent Forms for the participants to complete (see Appendix C). After the forms were collected, the group was shown its randomly pre-assigned tape on a 20-inch color television located in a central location at the front of the classroom. When the tape was over, the television was turned off, and the questionnaires were distributed. The following instructions were read:

This questionnaire consists of 20 items and several demographic and supplementary questions. Be sure to complete both the front and back of the paper. Read the instructions carefully and give the response that best represents your own personal impressions. Take your time and answer honestly. When you are finished, you may leave the room. Thank you for your participation. You may begin.

Because the data were gathered over several weeks, the participants were not fully

debriefed in an attempt to prevent unnecessary communication concerning the nature of the project. However, students were provided with information on how to obtain a full explanation and complete results of the study following its completion. Each experimental session was completed within 30 minutes.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

After all experimental sessions were completed, the scores were compiled by group and two separate unweighted-means, split-plot factorial analyses were conducted. Both analyses used title condition ("Dr.," "Ms.," "Mrs.," "Miss," or Name Only) and sex (men or women) as the between-subjects variables. The scores from the five supplementary questions served as the within-subjects variable in the first analysis, and the masculinity and femininity scores of the BSRI served as the within-subjects variable in the second analysis.

Supplementary Questions Analysis

The mean ratings and standard deviations for each supplementary question by title conditions and participant sex are shown in Table 1. Scores above 4 represent a favorable rating whereas scores below 4 represent an unfavorable rating. An analysis of the supplementary questions showed no significant main effects for title or sex, $F(4, 206) = .46, p > .05$, and $F(1, 206) = 1.46, p > .05$, respectively, and no significant interaction, $F(4, 206) = .61, p > .05$, between these factors. A significant main effect, $F(4, 824) = 51.95, p < .001$, did exist for the questions factor, however. This significant main effect was probed through the use of the Newman-Keuls procedure which showed that participants consistently

Table 1

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations for Each Supplementary Question by Title Condition and Participant Sex

Question	Title	Men			Women		
		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Knowledgeable	"Dr."	18	5.44	1.42	25	5.44	1.39
	"Mrs."	19	5.11	1.37	26	4.80	1.48
	"Ms."	16	4.94	1.00	24	5.33	1.40
	"Miss"	17	5.29	1.10	27	4.96	1.60
	No Title	17	5.47	.94	27	5.11	1.55
Interesting	"Dr."	18	3.17	1.82	25	3.64	1.58
	"Mrs."	19	2.95	1.39	26	3.15	1.46
	"Ms."	16	3.31	1.62	24	3.00	1.38
	"Miss"	17	3.18	1.47	27	3.37	1.80
	No Title	17	3.71	1.90	27	3.44	1.97

Table 1 (cont.)

Challenging	"Dr."	18	4.11	1.57	25	4.96	1.21
	"Mrs."	19	4.42	1.39	26	3.73	1.37
	"Ms."	16	4.75	1.34	24	4.25	1.57
	"Miss"	17	3.88	1.45	27	4.04	1.22
	No Title	17	4.59	1.12	27	4.30	1.49
Approachability (Academic)	"Dr."	18	4.22	2.13	25	4.32	2.04
	"Mrs."	19	4.11	1.79	26	4.58	1.98
	"Ms."	16	4.19	1.76	24	3.71	1.94
	"Miss"	17	3.47	1.84	27	4.04	1.99
	No Title	17	4.35	1.97	27	4.19	1.84
Approachability (Personal)	"Dr."	18	4.56	1.50	25	3.92	1.78
	"Mrs."	19	4.11	1.52	26	3.38	2.02
	"Ms."	16	3.75	1.91	24	3.29	1.99
	"Miss"	17	3.12	1.93	27	3.44	3.97
	No Title	17	4.00	2.03	27	3.26	1.05

rated the instructor significantly ($p < .05$) higher on Question 1 (Knowledgeable; $M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.33$) than on any of the other four questions. Mean scores for Questions 3 (Academically Challenging; $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.37$) and 4 (Approachable for Academic Help; $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.93$) did not differ, but were significantly higher than mean scores for Question 5 (Approachable for Personal Help; $M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.97$), which in turn was significantly higher than Question 2 (Interesting; $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.64$). The title by question, $F(16, 824) = .73$, $p > .05$, the sex by question, $F(4, 824) = 1.15$, $p > .05$, and the title by sex by question, $F(16, 824) = .83$, $p > .05$, interactions were not significant.

BSRI Scores Analysis

The mean ratings and standard deviations for the masculinity and femininity subscales of the BSRI by title conditions and participant sex are shown in Table 2. An analysis of these data showed no significant main effects for title or sex $F(4, 206) = 1.66$, $p > .05$, and $F(1, 206) = 2.66$, $p > .05$, respectively, and no significant interaction, $F(4, 206) = .29$, $p > .05$. A significant effect of BSRI category indicated that femininity scores ($M = 49.66$, $SD = 10.60$) were significantly, $F(1, 206) = 42.65$, $p < .001$, higher than masculinity scores ($M = 42.83$, $SD = 12.08$). In addition, a significant sex by BSRI interaction,

Table 2

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations for BSRI Masculinity and FemininitySubscales by Title Condition and Participant Sex

		Men			Women		
	Title	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masculinity	"Dr."	18	44.94	12.78	25	48.52	10.67
	"Mrs."	19	40.05	11.45	26	40.58	10.30
	"Ms."	16	39.88	9.89	24	44.21	12.13
	"Miss"	17	39.12	14.22	27	46.37	12.00
	No Title	17	39.12	12.92	27	45.52	14.47
Femininity	"Dr."	18	48.33	11.00	25	51.92	10.91
	"Mrs."	19	48.11	9.96	26	47.38	9.95
	"Ms."	16	48.81	9.97	24	49.38	11.19
	"Miss"	17	49.65	11.25	27	47.81	11.83
	No Title	17	54.71	10.02	27	50.52	9.94

$F(1, 206) = 5.57, p < .05$, was found. The significant interaction was probed through the use of simple main effects analyses which found that the women rated the instructor significantly higher on the masculinity subscale ($M = 45.04, SD = 11.91$) than the men ($M = 40.62, SD = 12.25$) did, $F(1, 206) = 74.23, p < .01$, but no differences between men's ($M = 49.92, SD = 10.44$) and women's ($M = 49.40, SD = 10.76$) ratings of the instructor were found on the femininity subscale, $F(1, 206) = .95, p > .05$. Both men and women rated the instructor significantly higher on the femininity subscale ($M = 49.66, SD = 10.60$) than on the masculinity subscale ($M = 42.83, SD = 10.60$), $F(1, 206) = 90.84, p < .01$, and $F(1, 206) = 275.59, p < .01$, respectively. The title by BSRI, $F(4, 206) = 1.14, p > .05$, and the title by sex by BSRI, $F(4, 206) = 1.01, p > .05$, interactions were not significant.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis of this study, that the titles used would affect student ratings, was not substantiated by the data. Therefore, the related hypothesis that the title "Dr." would receive the highest ratings was also unsupported. Contrary to the second hypothesis of this study, the sex of the participants did affect instructor ratings.

Supplementary Questions Analysis Results

Regardless of title or sex, participants consistently rated the instructor significantly higher on Question 1 (Knowledgeable) than on any of the other four questions. Mean scores for Questions 3 (Academically Challenging) and 4 (Approachable for Academic Help) did not differ and were significantly higher than mean scores for Question 5 (Approachable for Personal Help), which in turn was significantly higher than Question 2 (Interesting).

Some comments voluntarily written by participants on their questionnaires may help interpret these significant findings. In response to Question 4 ("How likely would you be to approach this instructor for academic help if you needed it?"), one participant wrote, "If it was in my field, yes; if not, then I wouldn't." In

response to Question 5 ("How likely would you be to approach this instructor for personal help if you needed it?"), another participant wrote, "I usually don't go to an instructor for personal help--nothing against her." Taken together, these two comments suggest that the participants were relying on their past experiences and predetermined scripts for student-teacher interactions. Perhaps these pre-set biases outweighed any factors manipulated in the experimental setting.

BSRI Analysis Results

As noted above, in addition to the main effect showing higher femininity scores, female participants rated the instructor significantly higher on the masculinity subscale than did male participants; however, no differences in male and female ratings of the instructor were found on the feminine subscale. Because these significant differences were not related to the experimental treatment, other explanations are needed.

Participants entered the experimental setting with pre-existing biases and criteria for determining "masculine" and "feminine" behavior consistent with past research (Bem, 1974). The negative results of this study suggest that these pre-existing biases seemed to override any factors being experimentally manipulated. The most plausible source of these biases stems from society's general expectations for gender-roles and appropriate behaviors, which is the

theoretical foundation of the BSRI (Bem, 1974). Therefore, the fact that these biases exist should come as no surprise. That the various titles used in this study had no effect on the biases is somewhat surprising, however. Past research demonstrated that a woman using the title "Ms." was rated as more competent, masculine, and achievement-oriented (Dion & Schuller, 1990) and more likely to teach enjoyable and intellectually-stimulating college courses (Heilman, 1975) than her traditionally-titled counterparts. She was also seen as less honest (Connor et al., 1986), less likable, and colder (Dion & Schuller, 1990). The present study did not support any of these previously demonstrated title effects.

Implications

The initial interpretation of the results of this study is that the title a female instructor uses has no effect on student perceptions of her. The implications for female instructors lacking a doctorate are positive then, because using a title other than "Dr." should not be detrimental to student-teacher perceptions. Before unquestionably accepting this piece of good news, however, several cautions are in order.

Past research on title usage has demonstrated significant effects when the title is made salient (e.g., Dion, 1987; Heilman, 1975; Holmes & Kixmiller, 1989) and when the title is said to be preferred by the stimulus person herself as opposed to

arbitrarily assigned by the experimenter (Dion, 1987; Dion & Schuller, 1990). The present study may be lacking in these two regards. The videotaped lecture lasted 20 minutes; only 20 seconds of that time contained the instructor's title. Through informal observation, many participants did not visually attend to the television screen unless the sound and action of the lecture itself was present; these participants may not have been aware of the title's salience. Placing the instructor's name and title on both sides of the questionnaire was done so that the participant's attention would be re-focused on the title before the rating process was initiated. Even if the title was salient to the participants by this point, they had no way of knowing whether or not the title used was actually chosen by the instructor. Indeed, the title used could have been seen as more of a reflection of the experimenter's preference than that of the instructor's.

Unfortunately, whether the salience and preference "requirements" were adequately met in the present study cannot be ascertained without relying on anecdotal reports. One participant who came to the experimenter for debriefing directly after the final experimental session was surprised to hear that the instructor's title was an important part of the study and could not even recall what title she had been exposed to. Clearly, she had not found the title salient. On the other hand, one student voluntarily wrote on his questionnaire some negative

comments about the instructor and said those things were "surprising for a doctorate level professor;" clearly, he found the title salient. Furthermore, his statement indicates that his predetermined expectations for doctorate-level professors influenced his perceptions of the instructor. This consideration supports the study's initial hypothesis that the titles used will affect student perceptions of the instructor.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Although the data for this study showed no significant effects of title, the results should be considered tentative at best. Several recommendations for future studies include the following: (a) clarify that the title is the instructor's preferred form of address; (b) use a fact sheet or job application in lieu of the videotaped lecture; (c) use a briefer video to make the title and initial impressions more salient; (d) manipulate the instructor's personal characteristics such as age, attractiveness, or clothing to look for additional finding or interactions; and (e) repeat the study with upperclass students and with graduate students, both of whom have had greater exposure to a variety of instructors.

All of the above recommendations create laboratory situations which do not necessarily occur in real-life settings. In fact, interacting with the instructor in the real-life setting (even more realistic than a videotaped lecture) may attenuate

preconceptions based on name, title, and appearance only. Nevertheless, additional studies may help researchers discover which factor(s) must be present (or absent) for the title effects to occur. Because of the power of first impressions and the importance of interpersonal communication, especially as applied to the classroom setting, additional information in this area is needed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Modified Bem Sex-Role Inventory

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Questionnaire

Instructions:

This questionnaire asks you to indicate how well each of the 20 characteristics listed below fit with your perceptions of Ms. Kathleen Penner. Each item has a scale ranging from 1 ("Never or almost never true") to 7 ("Always or almost always true") Circle the number best representing your perception of the instructor for each item.

Scoring Guide

	1=Never or almost never true						7=Always or almost always true
1. Gentle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Willing to take a stand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Has leadership abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Forceful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Independent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Tender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Dominant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Sincere	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Helpful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Acts as a leader	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Eager to soothe hurt feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Assertive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Compassionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Sensitive to needs of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Strong personality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX B

Supplementary Questions

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate Ms. Kathleen Penner 's performance as an instructor by circling your response on the following questions.

1. How knowledgeable about the subject matter do you think this instructor is?

Not at all							Very
Knowledgeable							Knowledgeable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. How interesting do you think a class taught by this instructor would be?

Very							Not at all
Interesting							Interesting
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. How academically challenging do you think a class taught by this instructor would be?

Not at all							Very
Challenging							Challenging
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. How likely would you be to approach this instructor for academic help if you needed it?

Very							Very
Likely							Unlikely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. How likely would you be to approach this instructor for personal help if you needed it?

Very							Very
Likely							Unlikely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

Your Sex: M F Your Age: _____ Your Classification: FR SO JR SR
 Did you already know the instructor in the video? YES NO

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

The Department of Psychology and Special Education supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and that if you do withdraw from the study, you will not be subjected to reprimand or any other form of reproach.

In an effort to add to the body of knowledge surrounding student perceptions of teacher characteristics, you will be asked to view a 20-minute videotaped lecture and complete a brief questionnaire.

"I have read the above statements and have been fully advised of the procedures to be used in this project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions I had concerning the procedures, and am willing to participate despite any risks which I may incur. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to reproach."

Signature

Date

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The Effects of a Female Instructor's Title on
Student Perceptions of the Instructor
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