

Chance or Choice? An Analysis of Assumed Biological Sex-Based Differences in Undergraduate Public Relations Course Teaching Distributions

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In this study the authors explore the observed differences among the courses taught by public relations faculty at Carnegie doctoral institutions based on faculty members' assumed biological sex. The findings indicate that rank faculty (assistant, associate, and full professor) females teach significantly more upper division courses than their male counterparts. The rank faculty males are teaching more introductory (100 and 200 level) courses than their female counterparts. If one follows the logic that upper division courses are more time and effort demanding for faculty, then these findings indicate that females are disproportionately represented as the primary instructors of record for the most labor-intensive core courses in the public relations curriculum. Whether this pattern is the result of chance or instructor choice, the authors hope that these findings encourage communication department chairs and other administrators to address what appears to be unequal faculty workloads based upon assumed biological sex differences.

Introduction

Gender and sex often are used interchangeably errantly (Valdes, 1996). In most instances the two have become conflated despite the fact that these two constructs are distinct though related identity facets (Allen, 2011; Valdes, 1996). Sex is a biological classification whereas gender “refers to the cultural norms of femininity and masculinity” and these gender classifications are used to “differentiate humans on the basis of perceived physical, social, and psychological characteristics” (Allen, 2011 p. 42). Conflation of these categories aside, issues of sex and its relative gender have been a topic of communication education scholarship for more than more than 25 years (see Peterson, 1991; Wood & Lenze, 1991). Some scholars have reviewed research on the different ways that male and female students communicate with women and men faculty (Sandier, 1991); some have explored the interaction effects between the gender of college students and their evaluations of male and female faculty (Bachen, McLoughlin, & Garcia, 1999); while others explored why male faculty are asked more questions than female faculty and why female students asked fewer questions than male students in courses taught by males (Pearson & West, 1991). In short, researchers in communication have been exploring the ways biological sex and gender influence various facets of the communication education experience—whether that be how professors are assessed, how students behave in the classroom, or how these dynamics influence the classroom culture and environment.

The authors, in this study, contribute to this body of literature by exploring differential teaching assignments among faculty based on differences in assumed biological sex. Specifically, in this study the authors explore the observed differences among the courses taught by public relations faculty at Carnegie doctoral institutions based on faculty members'

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assumed biological sex. The findings indicate that rank faculty (assistant, associate, and full professor) females teach significantly more upper division courses than their male counterparts. The rank faculty males are teaching more introductory (100 and 200 level) courses than their female counterparts. If one follows the logic that upper division courses are more time- and effort-demanding for faculty, then these findings indicate that females are disproportionately represented as the primary instructors of record for the most labor-intensive core courses in the public relations curriculum. Whether these findings are the result of chance or instructor choice, the authors hope that these findings encourage communication department chairs and other administrators to address what appears to be unequal faculty workloads based upon assumed biological sex differences.

Disparities in Public Relations Faculty Teaching Workloads

Bellas and Toutkoushian (1999), in likely the most comprehensive study of its kind to-date, used the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty to explore faculty time allocations. Specifically, these researchers sampled 14,614 full-time faculty from various disciplines employed at two- and four-year institutions and found that females spent significantly more time in teaching than males and less time in research. Using these findings as a foundation, Waymer (2014) sought to explore if females were teaching one known labor-intensive public relations class more than males: public relations writing. To illustrate the extent of the labor intensiveness of these activities, take, for example, a study conducted by Pompper (2011) where one of her research participants commented specifically about the effort required to teach public relations writing well: “If you want to be a good writing teacher, it’s kind of like a double-edged sword because you get stuck grading a lot of papers. It’s really time consuming . . . 66 students . . . in excess of 900 papers” (p. 461).

Waymer’s hypothesis was supported; females taught more sections of public relations writing than their male counterparts despite the fact that he found no statistically significant difference between the number of full-time male public relations faculty and full-time female public relations faculty in academic departments at Carnegie doctoral institutions: after defining public relations faculty “as any faculty member who teaches any of the classes in his or her university’s core PR curriculum and/or has published PR research” (p. 410), Waymer (2014) found that there was “no significant difference between the number of full-time men ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(232) = 1.53$, $p = 1.97$, and women” public relations faculty—218 versus 259 respectively (p. 410).

In a related research question, Waymer (2014) also found that females in general and females that held the rank of assistant professor served as Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)—a nationally recognized public relations student organization—advisors almost twice the rate of their male counterparts and more than three times the amount of their male counterparts who held the same rank. Even if faculty determine which courses they teach and which service obligations they wish to undertake, it is still alarming that at research universities, junior rank females are teaching what many consider to be the most time-consuming course (writing) in the curriculum (Pompper, 2011) and advising the student organization at a rate of 3 to 1 compared to their male counterparts at the same faculty rank. If department chairs are making these course load and service decisions, then Waymer’s study serves as a clarion call to those administrators to find a way to distribute the undergraduate teaching and service course loads more equitably. Thus, a pertinent question to ponder is: Do females also teach more of the other upper-division public relations courses (besides writing) than their male counterparts?

The authors, in this current investigation, extend the work in the aforementioned study (Waymer, 2014). In so doing, the authors attempt to provide a more complete picture of teaching efforts in the public relations academic discipline. Specifically, this study is an extension of the aforementioned study inasmuch as the authors explore biological sex-based differences between faculty teaching upper-division “management” public relations classes as well as introductory public relations classes.

Based on works of Bellas and Toutkoushian (1999) and Waymer (2014), we might expect that females would teach more upper-division public relations courses than males. Another perspective, however, based upon decades of public relations scholarship that addresses sex roles in the practice of public relations, suggests that females (possibly due to glass ceiling effects) in public relations tend to enact the technician role disproportionately, as opposed to the manager role, which is usually enacted by males (Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986, 1995). We can make an inference that the finding that indicates females are teaching public relations writing significantly more than their male counterparts and the finding that indicates females are serving as PRSSA more than their male counterparts can be viewed as an academic equivalent of performing the technician role in the practical sense, whereas teaching strategy, campaigns, and management courses might be equated with more managerial functions. Since both perspectives are plausible, we set out to test the second perspective given that it is based upon a longer standing public relations model. As such, some of the following hypotheses set out to test this assumption explicitly.

H1a: Females teach more sections of introduction to public relations than males.

H1b: Assistant, associate, and full professor females teach more sections of introductory courses than assistant, associate, and full professor males.

H1c: Senior faculty females (associate and full professors) teach more introductory sections than junior faculty females (assistant professors).

H1d: Senior faculty males (associate and full professors) teach more introductory public relations sections than junior faculty males (assistant professors).

H1e: Junior faculty females (assistant professors) teach more introductory courses than junior faculty men.

H2a: Males teach more sections of public relations management-oriented courses than females.

H2b: Assistant, associate, and full professor males teach more sections of management-oriented courses than assistant, associate, and full professor females.

H2c: Senior faculty females (associate and full professors) teach more management-oriented courses than junior faculty females (assistant professors).

H2d: Senior faculty males (associate and full professors) teach more management-oriented courses than junior faculty males (assistant professors).

H2e: Junior faculty males (assistant professors) teach more management courses than junior faculty females.

Methods

In order to address the hypotheses, the authors first used the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) website to identify active PRSSA chapters in the United States (N = 329). This action was taken because since 1989, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has issued guidelines for and has granted certification to PR programs (Certification in Education for Public Relations, henceforth referred to as CEPR) based on the Commission of Public Relations Education curricula guidelines.

The authors then used the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education to identify Doctorate-granting Universities where public relations courses were taught (N=132). These universities were selected because one can infer that such universities would have more rigid research-focused tenure requirements in comparison with master's colleges and universities or baccalaureate colleges. Thus, under such pressure for production of scholarship (Musambira, Collins, Brown, & Voss, 2012), differences in teaching based on biological sex and faculty rank status might be magnified in this context.

Since Waymer (2014) provided a snapshot of the public relations curriculum by focusing on writing, the authors in this study decided to focus on two other key aspects of the public relations curriculum in this study. The PRSA does not require that a school offer specific courses in order to receive certification; however, the PRSA does require proof that the courses the universities offer address five subject areas: Introduction to Public Relations; Public Relations Writing and Production; Public Relations Research; Public Relations Strategy and Implementation; and a Supervised Public Relations Experience (Internship) (PRSSA website).

From these PRSA requirements the authors derived two categories, managerial public relations and introduction to public relations. As mentioned above, Public Relations Writing and Production has recently been analyzed (Waymer, 2014). Public Relations Research and Public Relations Internships were excluded from evaluation because they lacked consistency across the universities studied. For example, some public relations programs fulfill their research methods requirement by having students take courses from other units within their departments (such as communication studies or advertising) or the university (such as statistics, sociology, or education). Thus, while these classes count as methods courses for the students, the faculty members teaching these courses are not considered among public relations faculty members. In a similar vein, from our initial scanning of the online course catalogs, the way internship credits were managed varied among universities, ranging from all students signing up for internship credit with one faculty who was the director of internships to students having the option to sign up for internship credit with individual faculty. Thus, internships were excluded from data collection.

To gather data, the authors accessed publicly available university schedule of courses information for each Carnegie doctoral university with a PRSSA chapter. All courses reviewed occurred during either the 2014 calendar year or the 2014–2015 academic year depending on schedule availability. Courses were classified as managerial if the courses had the specific words “Cases,” “Campaigns,” “Advanced,” “Strategy,” “II,” or “Management.” This is consistent with interpretations of the strategy and implementation guidelines offered by PRSA. Courses were classified as introductory if the titles included the specific words “Intro,” “Fundamentals,” “Principles,” “I,” or “Beginning.”

To gather data pertaining to faculty member rank status and faculty member assumed biological sex, the authors consulted each department's website. We looked at faculty pictures and read faculty biographies to determine biological sex as well as faculty status. We also used social networking sites such as LinkedIn, which often included a photo, to help determine whether the faculty member was male or female; in some other instances we used RateMyProfessor.com to read students' feedback to determine the pronouns (he or she) used to refer to the instructor. We recognize the flaw of this approach. Based on our method we have no factual evidence that people who appeared male or female in pictures actually identified that way. We, however, argue that discrimination is often based upon how others perceive the individual (Allen, 2007) more so than how individuals perceive themselves (for example, up until 2015, women could not serve in front-line combat positions). Thus, even while recognizing the imperfection of our classifications, we deem them valid. The authors also differentiated between assistant professors (junior) and associate/full professors (senior). Pictures along with names were used to link faculty to the courses taught/offered in the university course schedule.

The unit of analysis is the number of courses taught. The authors focused on this indicator because the teaching load in public relations at research institutions is fairly consistent (and often considerably less than the 4-4 teaching load or higher found at non-Carnegie doctoral designated institutions).

In terms of managerial sections taught by public relations faculty, the authors identified 197 sections taught by males compared to 321 taught by females. Additionally, the authors identified the number of courses taught by instructor-level males ($n=108$) and instructor-level females ($n=148$) as well as the number of managerial courses taught by assistant, associate, and full professor males ($n=89$) and assistant, associate, and full professor females ($n=174$).

The same process was used to determine the number of sections taught by faculty instructors in the introductory courses. Overall, males taught 205 introductory courses and females taught 172 courses; instructor level males taught 88 sections and instructor-level females taught 122 sections. Finally, the authors identified the number of introductory courses taught by assistant, associate, and full professor males ($n=84$) and assistant, associate, and full professor females ($n=83$).

Using this method, the authors were able to identify all faculty members. Schools with more than one incomplete data category (such as no course schedule or no list of course offered) were excluded from analysis. Five institutions were removed from the study because two or more items of information could not be retrieved. The final number of institutions that were included in this analysis was 127.

Results

A one-sample t test was used to analyze each of the hypotheses. The t test compared means for males' and females' teaching assignments in each faculty category to the mean number of introductory and management-oriented courses taught at each university ($M = 2.98$ for introductory courses, $M = 4.07$ for management-oriented courses). Table 1 shows the results. All differences were significant at the $p < .05$ level. But the analysis supported only half of the 10 hypotheses. Effect sizes were consistently small.

Table 1

Comparisons of Means for Courses Taught by Each Instructor Category

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Introduction to public relations (H1a)				131	.000	.16
female	1.55	1.71	-9.59			
male	1.30	1.48	-13.04			
PR management (H2a)				131	.000	.37
male	1.49	2.24	-13.22			
female	2.43	2.88	-6.54			
Introduction to public relations (H1b)				131	.000	.00
ranked-level female	0.63	1.14	-23.80			
ranked-level male	0.64	1.06	-25.29			
PR management (H2b)				131	.000	.38
Ranked-level male	0.67	1.42	-27.54			
Ranked-level female	1.32	2.00	-15.80			
Introduction to public relations (H1c)				131	.000	.04
senior-ranked females	0.30	0.82	-37.55			
Junior-ranked females	0.33	0.86	-35.44			
PR management (H2c)				131	.000	.15
Senior-ranked females	0.75	1.58	-24.08			
Junior-ranked females	0.57	1.17	-34.48			
Introduction to public relations (H1d)				131	.000	.29
senior-ranked males	0.42	0.88	-33.24			
Junior-ranked males	0.21	0.58	-54.83			
PR management (H2d)				131	.000	.23
Senior-ranked males	0.45	1.12	-37.04			
Junior-ranked males	0.22	0.76	-58.61			
Introduction to public relations (H1e)				131	.000	.17
Junior-ranked females	0.33	0.86	-34.44			
Junior-ranked males	0.21	0.58	-54.83			
PR management (H2e)				131	.000	.36
Junior-ranked males	0.22	0.76	-58.61			
Junior-ranked females	0.57	1.17	-34.48			

H1a

H1a said females would teach more sections of introduction to public relations than males. The t test supported this hypothesis. The H1a line in Table 1 shows results. Females taught more introductory courses ($M = 1.55$) than males ($M = 1.30$). The difference, compared to the mean for introductory courses offered at each school ($M = 2.98$), was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .16$).

H1b

H1b said ranked-faculty females would teach more sections of introductory courses than ranked-faculty males. The t test did not support this hypothesis. The H1b line in Table 1 shows results. Ranked-faculty males taught slightly more introductory courses ($M = .64$) than ranked-faculty females ($M = .63$). Although the difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), the effect size was non-existent ($d = .00$).

H1c

H1c said associate and full professor females would teach more introductory sections than junior assistant professors females. The t test did not support this hypothesis. The H1c line in Table 1 shows results. Junior faculty females taught slightly more introductory sections ($M = .33$) than senior faculty females ($M = .30$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was very small ($d = .04$).

H1d

H1d said associate and full professor males would teach more introductory public relations sections than junior faculty assistant professor males. The t test supported this hypothesis. The H1d line in Table 1 shows results. Tenured men taught more introductory courses ($M = .42$) than junior faculty men ($M = .21$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .29$).

H1e

H1e said junior faculty females would teach more introductory courses than junior faculty males. The t test supported this hypothesis. The H1e line in Table 1 shows results. Junior faculty females taught more introductory sections ($M = .33$) than junior faculty males ($M = .21$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .17$).

H2a

H4a said males would teach more sections of public relations management-oriented courses than females. The t test did not support this hypothesis. The H2a line in Table 1 shows results. Females taught more management-oriented courses ($M = 2.43$) than males ($M = 1.49$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), compared to the mean for introductory courses offered at each school ($M = 4.07$), but the effect size was small ($d = .37$).

H2b

H2b said ranked-faculty males would teach more sections of management-oriented courses than ranked-faculty females. The *t* test did not support this hypothesis. The H2b line in Table 1 shows results. Ranked-faculty females taught more management courses ($M = 1.32$) than ranked-faculty males ($M = .67$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .38$).

H2c

H2c said associate and full professor females would teach more management-oriented courses than assistant professor females. The *t* test supported this hypothesis. Senior-ranked females taught more sections of management-oriented courses ($M = .75$) than junior-ranked females ($M = .57$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .15$).

H2d

H2d said associate and full professor males would teach more management-oriented courses than assistant professor males. The *t* test supported this hypothesis. The H2d line in Table 1 shows results. Senior-ranked males taught more management courses ($M = .45$) than junior-ranked males ($M = .22$). The difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), but effect size was small ($d = .23$).

H2e

H2e said junior-faculty males would teach more management courses than junior-faculty females. The *t* test did not support this hypothesis. The H2e line in Table 1 shows results. Junior-faculty females taught more management-oriented courses ($M = .57$) than junior-faculty males ($M = .22$). The difference was significant ($p < .001$), but the effect size was small ($d = .36$).

Discussion

This study is exploratory in nature, and its findings contribute to communication education, public relations education, and communication administration literature by determining that public relations faculty course distributions are different when taking assumed biological sex into account. If department chairs are making these course load decisions for faculty, then this serves as a clarion call to those administrators to find a way to distribute more equitably the undergraduate teaching load. If faculty, themselves, are choosing these courses to teach, then a logical follow-up question is why faculty are choosing to teach the courses that they are teaching. Regardless, these findings have direct implications for communication administrators because at this exploratory level, it appears that these teaching responsibilities are not distributed equally across the biological sexes.

While only half of the original hypotheses were supported, it is noteworthy that all results were significant. What our findings suggest is that teaching the upper-division courses in management is not viewed the same way as practicing management in industry; rather, what is noteworthy is that all labor intensive pedagogical activities (from this current study, upper division courses such as public relations campaigns, public relations strategy, and public relations management—and from the 2014 Waymer study, public relations writing and

advising PRSSA chapters) appear to be undertaken in majority by females. What this suggests is that the research of Bellas and Toutkoushian (1999) and Waymer (2014)—that would lead us to expect that females would teach more upper-division public relations courses than males—better explains our findings than the public relations roles research of Broom (1982) and Broom and Dozier (1986, 1995)—which states that females (possibly due to glass ceiling effects) in public relations tend to disproportionately enact the technician role, as opposed to the manager role, which is usually enacted by males. While true in practice, Broom and Dozier’s work does not translate into the public relations education arena as the authors of this study originally assumed—unless we view all undergraduate teaching as a technician role and that role is placed on a continuum where more labor intensive teaching activities are linked to and viewed by faculty as a job task being classified as a more technician role and less labor intensive teaching activities are being linked to and viewed as a job task being classified as a lesser technician role. If viewed this way, then our findings would be consistent with the work of Bellas and Toutkoushian (1999) and Waymer (2014).

Logic would suggest that upper-division and capstone courses should be challenging (for both faculty and students). Simply stated, curriculum is expected to become more difficult the higher the course designation (100 level versus 300/400 level). Based on this logic, if we were to make a degree of difficulty assessment, what we see is that senior faculty males taught more sections of introductory courses than junior faculty males, and males overall taught more sections of introduction than females. Further research is needed to explore if chairs are consciously or unconsciously (with a sex-based bias) making these teaching allocation decisions or if faculty are consciously or unconsciously (uncritically accepting hegemonic industry sex roles where labor-intensive teaching equates to the technician role) self-selecting these particular teaching assignments.

Conversely, some might argue that introductory courses need senior teachers—for these courses are the gateway to the discipline. As plausible as that proposition may be, such a proposition would not explain then why more junior-rank females are teaching introduction than senior-rank females unless senior-rank females just collectively desire to teach upper-division public relations classes more than their junior-rank female counterparts. A specific breakdown of the courses taught are as follows: Ranked-faculty males taught more sections of introduction courses than ranked-faculty females; senior-faculty males taught more sections of introduction courses than junior-rank males; senior-rank females taught fewer sections of introduction courses than junior-ranked females; and junior-ranked females taught more sections of introduction courses than junior-ranked males.

Others might argue that these course allocations highlighted in this study are a mere reflection of the common practice that there is a hierarchy of courses and that more senior faculty have their more freedom in selecting which courses they teach. This would be consistent with the previously mentioned view that all undergraduate teaching can be viewed as a technician role and that role is placed on a continuum where more labor intensive teaching activities are linked to a job task being classified more clearly as a technician role and less labor intensive teaching activities are being linked to a job task being classified less clearly as a technician role. If we accept this perspective, then we must then begin to question why, according to Waymer (2014), females teach writing more than males, why assistant professor females serve as advisors to 35% of all PRSSA chapters at Carnegie-doctoral institutions, why assistant professor females serve as PRSSA advisers just slightly less than associate and full professor females combined, but why associate and full professor males serve as PRSSA chapter advisors more than assistant professor males. We must also begin to question, based on this current study, why senior females teach more sections of the capstone courses than

senior males if longer tenure comes with freedom of choice in courses and we view courses on a continuum of preference. Looking at these findings holistically, one sees that females are shouldering the undergraduate teaching load in public relations overall, and one can infer that assistant professor males are the most protected class of faculty in the discipline. Again, we do not know if these findings are the result of faculty choice or administrative choice, but we argue that this is not by chance. Regardless, administrators must be cognizant of these findings and try to determine the extent that they play, via their administrative roles, in these unequal course allocations.

Limitations of this study are present. First, this study provides a snapshot in time (the 2014/2014–2015 academic year). Thus, it is not clear if these results are typical of the field or if this year is an anomaly. Longitudinal data are required to see if trends can be detected. However, the study is attempting to provide baseline data for analysis by extending the previous scholarship that assessed faculty biological sex disparities in public relations writing and advising responsibilities. Another limitation is the fact that faculty could be taking on additional course overloads for extra pay. Even though this is plausible and could skew data, this possibility does not completely explain the observed differences between junior track males (teaching more introduction classes and less management classes) and females. A final limitation is that we did not approach this study with the purpose of predicting interaction effects; thus, the data were collected and coded in a manner that makes regression analysis difficult. To be more specific, we focused on the volume of introduction and management classes being taught. As such, we only counted the aggregate number of introduction and management sections being taught in a given academic year, and then we counted how many of those sections were taught by males and females, respectively. Thus, while a Levene's test indicated that variance in male and female groups was unequal, t tests could be quite robust despite this violation.

In closing, while there is no statistically significant difference between the number of full-time male and full-time female public relations faculty at Carnegie research institutions, rank faculty females continue to teach higher-level courses (and assumedly more labor-intensive core courses) such as strategy, campaigns, and implementation significantly more than their male counterparts. The rank faculty males are teaching more introductory courses than their female counterparts. One could argue that females are carrying a larger service responsibility than their male counterparts at all academic level ranks in the discipline of public relations. Females, if this disparity is the result of their own choices, might find themselves in a precarious situation as they seek to balance (possible) satisfaction derived from serving and teaching key courses that give students necessary skills (writing, campaigns, and cases) to be successful in industry with the competing tension that investing in these labor intensive courses (without adequate research time) can directly impede career advancement (if career advancement is their ultimate goal). No communication administrator hires a faculty member with the intent of jeopardizing that faculty member's success. Given that there are numerically more female public relations faculty than males, these findings suggest that communication department chairs should give greater attention to workload allocation to help ensure academic success for all faculty—especially their female faculty members.

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