

What Students Value in Their Teachers – An Analysis of Male and Female Student Nominations to a Teaching Award

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Teaching awards have become a way to acknowledge the importance of high-quality teaching for many higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to investigate which images of the “good educator” emerge in students’ nominations for a teaching award at a Swedish university, and how these images relate to the gender of nominees and nominating students. We want to explore possible bias linked to gender and stereotypical notions of female and male in teaching. All 194 nominations (made in 2018) were analysed and clustered into categories. The results are discussed from a critical theoretical perspective and show qualitative differences regarding the traits and skills used to describe male and female teachers, and that male teachers were nominated more by both male and female students. We believe that becoming aware of possible bias will help decision-makers of teaching awards become more gender sensitive.

Keywords: teaching awards, gender bias, stereotyping, cognitive schema, quality in teaching

INTRODUCTION

Many universities and colleges across the world emphasise good teaching through pedagogical awards. In Sweden, such awards first arose at several universities in the 1990s as a result of student unions stressing the importance of teaching quality in university education. These awards are often administered by a committee consisting of for example student union representatives, former award winners, educational developers and other stakeholders, and are often presented at an official ceremony. The purpose of such awards is to enable the university and students to recognise and reward excellent educational efforts (Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017). In addition, these awards are seen as incentives to encourage pedagogical skills (Butler, 2012; Madriaga & Morley, 2016) because teaching is widely perceived as not being as highly valued or rewarded as research (Carvalho & de Lourdes Machado, 2011). However, as pedagogical skills have gained more space in the discussion of the competencies and become more sought after by university and college teachers (Bolander Laksov, 2018), such awards have been called into question in the literature on several points, including a focus on gender. In this study, therefore, we investigate which teaching qualities students most value, and how these relate to gender.

RESEARCH REVIEW

The research on teaching awards began in the 1990s and early studies focused on different kinds of awards, asking such questions as whether the award was obtained by nomination,

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or a process of application (Warren & Plumb, 1999). Our review of research identified articles that mainly focus on two areas. The first area describes teachers' perceptions of teaching competence in higher education (Macfarlane, 2011; Mackenzie, 2007; Morris & Usher, 2011; Skelton, 2009). Here, it is debated whether to talk about teaching excellence or, as argued by Skelton (2009), to strive for "sufficiently good" teaching. Skelton's argument is that teaching competence is a moral responsibility – something that also appears in Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting's (2019) article on students' perceptions of pedagogical skill. Their article analyses student nominations for educational awards with grounded theory, generating four themes of how pedagogical skill is perceived by students: (1) coordinating efforts, (2) engaging students, (3) breaking down the student-teacher barrier, and (4) providing stability and support (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bunting, 2019). Research on why students nominate teachers for teaching awards is, however, scarce.

The other area is the effect of educational awards on teachers' perceptions of teaching. These articles show that the importance of an award is great for teachers' confidence in their own pedagogical competence (Kalis & Kirschenbaum, 2008; Morris & Usher, 2011) and it can give an increased sense of professional meaning. Teachers' confidence is often based on students' understanding of course content, students' active engagement and positive feedback, teaching a subject where they felt they had good content knowledge, and generally having good pedagogical knowledge (Morris & Usher, 2011).

Several problems with teaching awards have, however, been identified. First, the outcomes of teaching awards seem strongly tied to taking risks in teaching (Willingham-McLain, 2015), and several studies show that only a minority of award winners felt the awards were an incentive to improve the quality of their teaching (Brawer et al., 2006; Madriaga & Morley, 2016). Another criticism is that these awards, contrary to their stated purpose, may even lower the status of teaching (Macfarlane, 2011); those who win awards are considered to be a kind of educational developer, thus developing a new professional identity, which can be at the expense of their research career (Skelton, 2004). In other words, the stated purpose of teaching awards as an award for previous teaching work and stimulate and make visible the quality of teaching is questionable. This argument is strengthened by research which shows, that while award winners often also are active researchers, they usually do not contribute to the development of teaching and learning in a wider sense within the university, e.g. through dissemination of good practice or publishing on education in the area of teaching in higher education (Halse et al., 2007).

Another concern highlighted by several studies is that women are disadvantaged in processes concerning awards (e.g., Marchant & Wallace, 2016). As teaching in higher education in many countries is dominated by women (Marchant & Wallace, 2013), one might think that women would also dominate among educational laureates, though this is not the case. A 40-year-old experimental study (Kaschak, 1981) showed that both female and male students considered male award winners more effective as teachers than female award winners – even though they were teaching the same subjects and methods. In addition, it emerged that the students had stereotypical beliefs about what made female and male teachers excellent: male teachers were appreciated for instrumental qualities, whilst female teachers were appreciated for affective qualities. Similar results came from an experimental study in 2012 (Yamawaki et al., 2012). Together with the body of research that shows that student evaluations of educational quality are biased towards male teachers (Reid, 2010), these findings lead us to explore further the area of gender in relation to teaching awards.

The field of teaching awards is under-researched from a gender perspective, so here we examine whether students' nominations for a teaching award are linked to stereotypical notions of female and male teachers and, if so, how. Stereotyping has been described as an inevitable automatic cognitive process. With such an understanding it has been considered difficult to change stereotypes once they have been formed (Moriizumi, 2020). Stereotypes are to an extent accurate, but they often exaggerate individual or group characteristics (Jussim et al. 2015). The stereotypical way of seeing others has negative connotations and maintain stereotypical images through subjective and selective perception (Moriizumi, 2020). Stereotypes serve the functions of providing knowledge of groups and of justifying rationalisations about others; overgeneralisations that can develop to justify prejudice (Crandall et al., 2011). Even though it is difficult to change automatic stereotypes and prejudice, it has been found that they are influenced by motivation, strategy, attention, and stimulus cues (Blair, 2002).

A more dynamic understanding was proposed by gender schema theory (Bem, 1981; Martin & Halverson, 1981) with roots in the theory of cognitive schemas (Arbib, 1995; Bartlett, 1932; Neisser, 1976). Cognitive schemas provide an understanding of ways in which individuals make meaning out of associations of memories and sensory input that combine into networks of abstract mental structures. Schematic processing is explained as a constructive process where interactions between sensory information and established schemas work selectively to determine what we perceive and how we categorise input from our perceptive system. Gender schema theory provides an understanding about maintenance and power of gender beliefs (Martin & Cinela, 2001). Gender schemas are however not determined to be a one-way process but bidirectional, and can be thought of as multidimensional. They will change and evolve from assimilating or rejecting new information (Leung, 2020).

Bem (1981) asserts that individuals describing themselves on a sex-role inventory scale rate sex-congruent attributes as more self-descriptive than sex-incongruent attributes. She suggests that sex-typing comes from gender-based schematic processing, and her studies show more animated, enthusiastic and interested behaviour towards those thought more attractive members of the opposite sex. Such gender schemas imply that we do not go through a process where we define or categorise sex-types by comparing behaviour to patterns from our memory. Rather, we find the attribute in the gender schema and affirm the attribute as sex-congruent. Gender schema theory focuses on how gender-based schematic processing gives "a generalized readiness to process information on the basis of the sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema" (Bem, 1981, p. 355). Research indicates that we organise and remember information according to gender categories, and that our attention and preferences are likely to be drawn to activities associated with our own gender (Priess & Shibley Hyde, 2011). Gender schemes seems to guide our actions and activities based on our beliefs about what is appropriate for our gender (Meyer & Gelman, 2016). While gender schema theory has been increasingly influential as an overarching theoretical framework for interpreting how cultural gender norms influence human development, the theoretical framework itself has not been empirically explored or tested (Canevello, 2020; Starr & Zurbriggen, 2016).

Gender and teaching in Swedish higher education

When looking at gender differences in senior positions at Swedish universities, women's status is still generally lower than men's, although an equalisation has been seen since 2001. Out of 35,975 employed individuals doing both research and teaching in Swedish higher education in 2017, 45% were female. Out of 10,259 senior lecturers, 47% were female, while out of 6,561 full professors,

women constituted a mere 27% (UKÄ, 2020). One reason that has been argued for this is that academic teaching has lower status than research (Fletcher et al., 2007). Sweden has seen a vast increase in higher education since 2001, when there were 3,599 full professors – of which just 14% were female. This means that the number of male professors between 2001 and 2017 has increased by 54% from 3,100 to 4,785, while the number of women during the same period increased by 256% from 499 to 1,776 (official numbers retracted from UKÄ, 2020). Table 1 describes the gender balance in university teaching staff at the university in question.

Table 1. Gender balance in university teaching staff.

Position	Female	Male
Adjunct	149	81
Assisting lecturer	36	43
Lecturer	418	415
Professor	177	379
Other	32	17
Total	812	935

Aim and research questions

In this article, we aim to investigate which teaching qualities students most value, and how these relate to gender by investigating the following questions:

1. What traits and skills are used to describe the nominated teachers?
2. What differences can be seen relating to gender in the nominations?
3. Do the nominations follow any patterns regarding differences in gender?
4. How can we understand gender patterns in the nominations?

Based on these questions, we offer a perspective that expands our understanding of how teaching awards that are used to recognise the value of teaching are in fact reinforcing stereotypical images of how female and male teachers teach.

DATA COLLECTION

This research was conducted at one of Sweden's largest universities, with more than 30,000 students. At this university, 1–4 teachers on average are presented a teaching award each year. Both students and staff are free to nominate teachers and the university promotes the awards via newsletters, emails, social media, etc. The online form used for nominations consists of four open-ended questions:

1. What are the teacher's main professional strengths?
2. In what ways do you think the teacher helps students to progress in their studies?
3. In what ways do you think the teacher creates interest and engagement in the subject and motivates students?
4. Any further comments on the teacher's work?

The nomination process for this award is led by the student union in collaboration with the academic development centre, but the final decision is made by the university's president. Our data

consist of all 194 teaching award nominations in 2018, which were received from all faculties in the university: humanities, social sciences, law and science. The nominations vary in length from just a few words to lengthy accounts of the teacher's excellence. An approximate number of nominations have been around 200 the last ten years.

Table 2. Frequency and percent of total population of teachers and students.

	Frequency population	Percent population
Teachers total	1,747	100%
female	812	46%
male	935	54%
Students total	32,954	100%
female	20,959	64%
male	11,995	36%

The total population of students is 32,954. The total population of teachers is 1,747. The number of nominated teachers is usually around 150, as some teachers are nominated by several students. This is less than 10% of the total population of possible nominees. In the study, we have assumed that the name that the nominee has given when they nominated someone indicates the gender with which that person identifies. Gender was not requested in the nomination form, and therefore, possible non-binary or non-cis-gender nominees have been gendered as either male or female. This can be seen as a limitation in the study. This study was carried out in accordance to the Helsinki declaration on ethics. We used documentation regulated under Swedish law, which is part of the principle of public access to official documents.

DATA ANALYSIS

We used qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2016) and adopted an inductive approach to analyse the data. We used NVivo to conduct the coding of the 194 nominating comments. This was followed by the phases and stages of qualitative content analysis suggested by Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 103). Even though the phases are described here as linear, qualitative content analysis is an iterative and ongoing process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phases and stages of qualitative content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 103):

1. Initialisation:
reading transcriptions and highlighting meaning units, coding and looking for abstractions in participants' accounts, writing reflective notes.
2. Construction:
classifying, comparing, labelling, translating and transliterating, defining and describing.
3. Rectification:
immersion and distancing, relating themes to established knowledge, stabilising.
4. Finalisation:
developing the story line.

To begin with, in the initialisation phase, we read through the data to familiarise ourselves with the respondents' ways of expressing different reasons for nominating a teacher for an award.

During this, we made independent notes of what possible codes we could discern. Then, we discussed our codes and reached consensus about which ones to use. Before coding, we reread the data with the agreed codes in mind and made minor adjustments. Then, one of us coded all the data in accordance with the agreed set of codes. Line-by-line coding was used because everything in the nomination comments was considered relevant to the research questions. Interrater reliability was tested by the other two authors scrutinising the coding, which resulted in redefining a few codes and some minor adjustments of the initial coding. Thereafter, in the construction phase, we defined and named categories that emerged through the interpretation of the coding. We also reflected on the organisation of the codes and labelling, and compared the categories in relation to the research questions. In the rectification phase, we distanced ourselves from the data for a period of time in order to maintain a critical approach towards our data analysis. Due to the inductive approach of our study, the in-depth literature review was first made in this phase and the results of the analysis were related to previous research. In the finalisation phase, a holistic view of the studied phenomenon was created by describing the categories, and the findings were linked to relevant research literature.

The coding was a result of the latent content meaning, which refers to the interpretation of meaning of the text in data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The focus on coding in qualitative content analysis was to extract categories from the data, not to find relationships among categories or build theories (Cho & Lee, 2014), so no cross-analysis between categories was done. However, the different categories were quantified and semantically analysed regarding how their meaning related to the research questions.

FINDINGS

In this section, we first present the 16 categories of traits and skills that emerged in our analysis of the teacher nominations. Thereafter, we present the number of male and female teachers nominated, and the quantitative and qualitative differences between the traits and skills used to describe them. Finally, we explain the gender patterns that emerged.

Categories of traits and skills used to describe the nominated teachers

A number of different categories to describe the nominated teachers emerged from the qualitative data analysis. The 16 different categories are highlighted in italics. In table 3, the traits and skills found in our data are described as different categories, in an order corresponding to the frequency with which they occurred.

Table 3. Categories of traits and skills used to describe the nominated teachers.

Category	Short description of a teacher characterised
Pedagogical and professional	Makes students learn – often by successfully explaining content students find extra difficult to grasp, creates structure and clarity, is well prepared for lectures, and plans the lectures and seminars.
Approach to teaching	The approach to teaching, the subject and the students reveals a true passion for teaching, a genuine interest in the subject and a curiosity about how students reflect, as well as a strong commitment and ability to inspire them. The feeling that the teacher cares about the students and understands the challenges they face in higher education is evident.
Inclusive	Attentive to the students' needs: taking time to help them and make sure everybody is keeping up – especially the underperforming students; makes the students feel like there are no stupid questions; and usually makes a point of learning students' names.

Category	Short description of a teacher characterised
Explains	Makes sure students understand the course content in different ways, adjusting the way of explaining accordingly, and strives to find an appropriate level of difficulty for the students and does not assume they understand everything.
Evokes students' interest	Makes teaching fun and interesting, for example through stories, practical examples, varied language and good body language and is also charismatic and entertaining.
Motivates	Succeeds in motivating students to further study by sharing personal experiences, research and interest in the research area with them, and encouraging them by believing in their ability and expecting high standards of them.
Activates	Activates students by making them read and write, participate in discussions, and develop their reflective and critical thinking, and at times uses specific teaching methods, such as case-based, problem-based learning or flipping the classroom.
Personal traits	Has quite a few personal traits: kind, patient, considerate, happy, helpful, funny, warm, calm and a great sense of humour.
Course design	The teacher's lectures are based on – but do not just repeat the content of – the course literature. Students receive help to prepare for the exam (which reflects the course content), and examinations are made a learning activity as well.
Tools and resources	Mostly uses ICT like Menti, Clickers and the digital course platform, but also relatively simple and traditional aids like PowerPoint and the whiteboard to facilitate learning. The students are provided with study materials, extra assignments and video material.
Approachable	Perceived as approachable, by being available after lectures to answer questions, always answering student emails, and communicates with students outside teaching hours on subject-related and administrative issues – something they interpret as a true sense of really caring about them.
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable in the teaching subject.
Giving feedback	Uses formative assessment as a method for further learning. The students are given immediate and extensive feedback, both to individuals and groups.
Creates a link between theory and practice	Creates a link between theory and practice by connecting current events or examples from professional practice to the theories presented in the course.
Addresses	Addresses the students in a way that makes them feel valued, so that their self-confidence grows. Also, the teacher creates a common platform and a sense of equal value between teacher and student, thus showing them that their thoughts and questions are important.
Role model	Serves as a role model for how to be a subject representative and practitioner.

Much of the content of the nominations (in which excellent teachers are described as motivating, approachable and knowledgeable) is coherent with previous research (Kwok & Potter, 2021; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bunting, 2019). Many of the nominated teachers were characterised by the five most common traits and skills found in the data: *approach to teaching*, *pedagogical* and *professional*, *inclusive*, *evokes interest* and *explains*. The male teachers were more commonly described by the categories: *approach to teaching*, *professional* and *pedagogical*, *activates* and *tools and resources* than were the female teachers. The female teachers were more often described by the categories: *knowledgeable*, *inclusive*, *evokes interest* and *motivates* than were the male teachers. However, the quantitative differences were quite small and are presented in the qualitative descriptions used about male and female teachers in each of the categories, and also in relation to the gender of the nominating student.

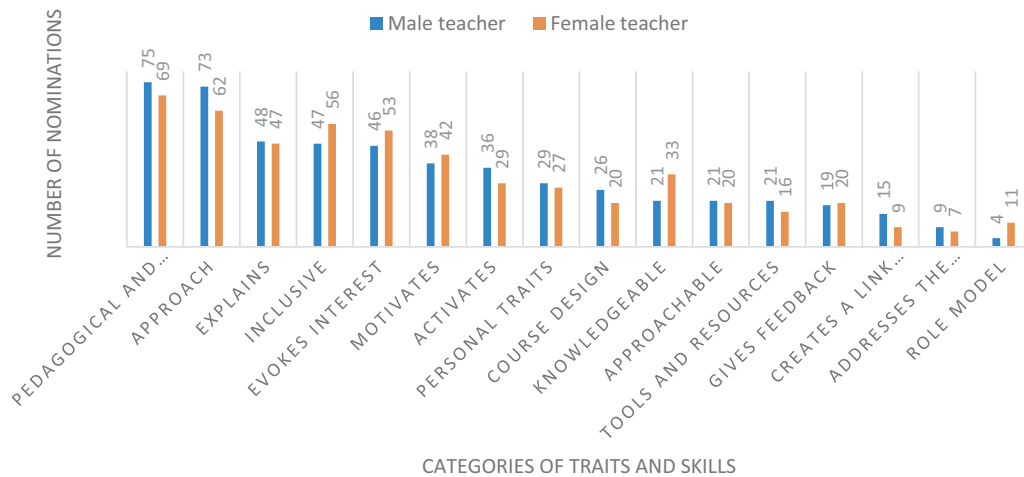


Figure 1. Traits and skills mapped against gender of the nominee.

There were no substantial percentage differences between male and female teachers nominated regarding the extent to which these categories were used to describe them. However, in relation to the overall pattern of same-gender and opposite-gender nomination distribution, we will exemplify the differences as they emerge in the nominations in the following section.

Nominations and gender

A total of 194 teachers were nominated, but the nominations were unevenly distributed between female and male teachers. Three times as many male teachers were nominated, with many more female than male students nominating a teacher of either sex. In table 4, the gender distribution of all nominations is presented. Of the nominations by female students, their nominations of female teachers (FF, 28%) were far less than their nominations of male teachers (FM, 72%). The discrepancy between same-gender nominations and opposite-gender nominations was even larger among the male student nominations. Of the male student nominations, the vast majority was for a male teacher (MM, 82%) and a meagre part for a female teacher (MF, 18%).

Table 4. Frequency (percent) of nominating students' and nominee's gender.

	Female teacher	Male teacher	Male and female teacher
Female nominating student	35 (28%)	89 (72%)	124 (100%)
Male nominating student	12 (18%)	58 (82%)	70 (100%)
Mean average	47 (24%)	149 (76%)	194 (100%)

The figures also show that a majority of both male and female students have nominated male teachers. Of all the 194 nominations combined, the 89 FM nominations constituted the largest category in our data (46%). It was almost twice as likely for a female student to nominate a male teacher as a female teacher (odds ratio of 1,90). The 12 MF nominations constituted the smallest category (6%), where it was almost half as likely for a male student to nominate a female teacher compared to nominating a male teacher (odds ratio of 0,52). Our data thereby differs from previous research where same-gender nominations (FF and MM) were overrepresented

(Kwok & Potter, 2021). However, our results are consistent with previous research in that MF nominations were the most underrepresented.

Differences in male student nominations

There were some differences regarding the categories used in the MM and MF nominations. In the MM nominations, the teachers' *personal traits* were often highlighted and they were described as *professional and pedagogical*.

NN is incredibly good at building up knowledge in a way that makes you constantly feel confident in your learning and not overwhelmed by the final amount of knowledge. Instead of pouring information on us, he always takes the time to explain things in easy-to-understand steps, whether it's formulas, codes or financial reasoning. His lectures are easy and to the point and he is good at noticing when the students start to lose their focus – or their energy. Professional and pedagogical, MM

Male students also tended to describe male teachers (MM) using the categories: *explains, motivates* and *approach to teaching*. In male nominations overall, the categories giving *feedback, role model* and *linking theory and practice* were rare, but when they occurred, they were only used to describe male teachers. In MF nominations on the other hand, the male students used the category *addresses* to describe the female teachers more than twice as many times as they did when describing male teachers.

She is always in a good mood and is happy to help out extra without ever making you feel like it is a bother. Addresses, MF

Differences in female student nominations

In the female students' nominations, male and female teachers (FM and FF) were equally described as being *professional and pedagogical*, but they described the female teachers more often as *subject knowledgeable*. Among the female student nominations of both male and female teachers (FM and FF), the category *inclusive* was used quite a lot, but more often when nominating a female teacher, whereas the male students used this category more often when nominating a male teacher.

During seminars, NN answered our questions in detail and double-checked so that we understood the answers, gave us time to reflect and helped us back on track if we got it wrong and explained how we should think instead. Inclusive, FF

The female teachers were also more often described by female students as having an appreciated *approach* to teaching and to the students. Although no male student described a female teacher as a *role model*, the female students described both male and female teachers as role models.

Nominations were stereotyped

The results show how nominations from both male and female students favoured male teachers over female teachers. The award system in this study seemed to reproduce stereotypical patterns; typically, the descriptions of male teachers contained lengthier statements with a richer variation in expressions of appraisal, while female teachers were described in shorter and less varied statements, as illustrated in the citations above. The results could indicate that the teachers' efforts

were attributed to stereotypes congruent with the students' preconceptions and expectations. Therefore, students tended to perceive teachers' strengths in somewhat different ways: male teachers were often strong role models for female students, while female teachers were seldom regarded as role models for male students.

DISCUSSION

The findings showed differences in the nominations relating to gender, which may be explained through stereotyping. The traits and skills used by students in their nominations in this study were in line with earlier studies showing gender bias in evaluations of teachers (Kaschak, 1981; Marchant & Wallace, 2016; Reid, 2010; Yamawaki et al., 2012). Student nominations were similar to how others have categorised student perception of pedagogical skill, and in terms of what they thought supported student learning (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bunting, 2019). As such, the nominations express students' thoughts about quality of teaching (e.g., Entwistle, 2018).

Stereotyping steers the attention to things consistent with what we expect, and so it tends to be self-fulfilling. This means that the award system is less effective at rewarding efforts by individuals who fall outside the stereotypical vision of what a good teacher should be like and how "he" should teach. The stereotypically good teacher seems to be a male who can explain the subject and makes students active and motivated to learn by a course design that prepares them successfully for the examination; this image seems to have stood the test of time and still represents a respected leader with the students playing a subordinate role. But it stands in contrast to current understandings of teaching and learning that focus more upon the interactions between students and between students and teachers, and how knowledge is built through such interactions. This could to some extent explain why new pedagogical techniques and technologies seem hard to implement on a broad scale (Englund et al., 2017).

The nominating students used mostly the same traits and skills to describe both male and female teachers, but male teachers were nominated more often. This bias may be explained simply as a result of unintentional oversight of female teachers. By adding information in the nomination form about the gender discriminating situation regarding nominations for the award, or by giving a description of what is today considered excellent teaching qualities in higher education, nominating students would be able to make a more informed decision on who they should nominate which in turn may subvert the stereotype. The committee handling the nominations should consider modifying the way the nomination questions are asked to counterbalance the stereotype, but they also need to look into their own possible bias against female teachers.

In order to explain the reason for the discrimination there are a few unknown factors that need to be further investigated. The nominations lack relevant background information about the nominated teachers, such as what level they teach at and how many students they typically have in their classes. These factors might be significant since it emerged in the findings that students appreciate teachers who address them and are approachable. The nominations also lack relevant background information about the nominating students, such as how long they have been studying. It might be the case that students don't nominate their teachers until later on in their studies, when they have experienced different teachings and have become aware of the existence of the award. Another important factor is the promotion of the award in different departments and units within the university, which might vary. There are many different aspects that are not accounted for in the studied nominations, that could possibly have an impact on who is nominated. This area needs further research.

Beyond stereotyping

In order to see past stereotypes and make our preconceptions accessible for change, we suggest a more dynamic understanding of the observed gender patterns. Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) help us make sense of the complex flow of information we encounter and enable us to generalise about groups of people to ease our cognitive load by categorising them into stereotypes or social schemas. Such stereotyping is useful when we process new information and it steers our attention to details that fall within an already existing schema. This means that we appreciate more the details that are consistent with our existing stereotypes, and thus the stereotypes are sustained. When a schema is activated, we even add information from earlier experiences that go beyond what is actually perceived in the situation at hand.

Schemas support one's own cultural identity by assimilating, accommodating or rejecting certain things. However, schemas for cultural understanding are more than a stereotype about the members of a culture. Stereotypes tend to be rigid, while a schema is dynamic and subject to revision. "Whereas stereotypes tend to simplify and ignore group differences, a schema can be quite complex" (Renstch et al., 2009, p. 3). Shifts in society will consequently shift gender schemas, and consecutively how we think about ourselves and others with regard to gender, gender roles, and beliefs about various gender constructs (Leung, 2020).

Thus, the gender schema perspective can provide us with a conceptual understanding of how gender-related differences in award nominations could be rooted in cultural gender schemas and work to confirm or challenge stereotypical categorisations. Such a dynamic understanding of gender-related patterns could make them more accessible for revision and change.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When interpreting the findings, it is important to keep in mind that research on students' nominations for teaching awards is scarce. Therefore, we cannot know for certain whether the students in our study nominated teachers they considered to be pedagogical, as per the purpose of the award. They might have used the nomination as an opportunity to reward a teacher they appreciated for other reasons, such as a strong commitment to their students, which is in fact indicated by some of the traits and skills used to describe the teachers in the nominations. We are also aware that the online form used for nominations with its precise questions possibly highlights certain aspects of the teacher's teaching that might not otherwise have been as prominent, such as *tools and resources*. On the other hand, if the form had instead been an open-ended question, they might have emphasized other aspects and qualities than the ones requested. However, Kwok and Potter (2021) identified very similar categories when analysing student-submitted online forms for an excellence award with an open-ended question. It is also worth pointing out that, despite the award being promoted amongst students throughout the university, the uptake by students was minimal. Only 194 out of ca 30,000 nominated a teacher.

CONCLUSION

We argue that the process of teaching awards discriminates against women and does not help in the development of teaching in higher education as it is supposed to. We also see that the focus on teachers' individual performance overlooks the institutional conditions and collegial collaboration between administrators and teachers in the planning and implementation of a course, because the nominating students usually have no insight into the ways in which the teacher is involved in such overall institutional and important pedagogical work. Instead, we believe this award model ought to be replaced by a model that challenges our schemas and traditional

conceptions of teaching ideals in higher education. Such a model needs to recognise the value of teaching without reinforcing stereotypical images of how female and male teachers teach.

In Sweden, several universities have adopted a different approach, implementing different models for the acquisition of educational qualifications with the overall goal of contributing to educational development (Olsson & Roxå, 2013). Such models, i.e. formal award schemes implemented in many universities (Winka & Ryegård, 2021), have the advantage of being more transparent in that they specify certain criteria for qualifications, and the assessment of the applicants is made by professional educational developers. Moreover, they acknowledge the collegial aspect of educational development by promoting the dissemination of practice and research in teaching and learning in higher education. However, the effect of these models is under-researched. When substituting one model for another, we need to make sure the new model meets the desirable criteria that the current model lacks, as well as not introducing new and unforeseen shortcomings. We conclude there needs to be more research on the effects of models of acquisition of educational qualifications – especially regarding their potential bias against female teachers.

AUTHOR PRESENTATION

Jeanna Wennerberg is a senior lecturer at the Department of Swedish and Multilingualism at Stockholm University. She is interested in academic reading and writing in higher education.

Klara Bolander Laksov is professor of Higher Education and the director of Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching at Stockholm university. She has worked with academic development at several Swedish universities since 2001. In her research she explores academic teachers' conditions for engaging in educational development and the scholarship of teaching and learning through educational leadership.

Tore West holds a position as professor of education at the Stockholm University since 2014, formerly at the Stockholm institute of Education, and the Royal college of Music. He is interested in the institutional conditioning and communicative character of learning within formally as well as informally organized institutions where knowledge and knowing take shape.

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