

# Study finds male modesty a turn off for women (and men)

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"Macho, macho man. I've got to be, a macho man. Macho, macho man. I've got to be a macho!" — The Village People

It's more than 30 years since that Disco Era anthem first blared through dance club speakers and into America's consciousness, but does the message still ring true for the 21st century male? Does he still got to be a macho man? Are there penalties for not being macho enough?

Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, a doctoral candidate in Rutgers' Department of Psychology, explored the consequences for men (and women) when they acted modestly in job interviews. She co-authored, with graduate fellow Julie E. Phelan and Professor Laurie A. Rudman, "When Men Break the Gender Rules: Status Incongruity and Backlash Against Modest Men" in the journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*.

According to Moss-Racusin, the applicants in the staged interviews were judged equally competent, but the "modest" males were less liked, a sign of social backlash. Modesty was viewed as a sign of weakness, a low-status character trait for males that could adversely affect their employability or earnings potential. Modesty in women, however, was not viewed negatively nor was it linked to status.

"For men and women, there are things they must and must not be," Moss-Racusin says. "Women must be communal and other-oriented, but they must not be dominant. Historically and cross-culturally, men have been stereotyped as more agentic, that is, more independent and self-focused

than women."

In the study, 132 female and 100 male student volunteers (who earned partial academic credit for their psychology course) viewed videotaped, 15-minute job interviews of either males or females. All the applicants were paid actors rehearsed to deliver similar, "modest" responses for the gender-neutral position that required strong technical abilities and social skills.

The researchers sought to determine which gender stereotype promote backlash. "Women are allowed to be weak while this trait is strongly prohibited in men," Moss-Racusin said. "By contrast, dominance is reserved for men and prohibited for women. Thus, gender stereotypes are comprised of four sets of rules and expectations for behavior consist of both 'shoulds' and 'should nots' for each gender."

The researchers' prediction that modest male applicants would face hiring discrimination was not supported, however, and she speculates that because men's status is higher than women's, meek men are afforded the benefit of the doubt and are less likely to encounter hiring discrimination than dominant [women](#).

Provided by Rutgers University

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