

New research shows men tend to leap to judgement where women see more shades of grey

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An experiment by researchers at the University of Warwick has found the first real evidence that men tend to make black-or-white judgements when women are more prone to see shades of grey in choices and decisions.

The research paper, entitled [Sex Differences](#) in *Semantic Categorization*, is about to be published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Authors Vickie Pasterski, Karolina Zwierzyńska, and Zachary Estes are all from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick.

The researchers asked 113 people whether each of 50 objects fitted partially, fully, or not at all into certain categories. The 50 objects were ones likely to stimulate debate or disagreement about which category they fitted into. For instance:

Is a tomato a fruit?

Is paint a tool?

The researchers found that men were more likely to make absolute category [judgments](#) (e.g., a tomato is either a fruit or not), whereas [women](#) made less certain category judgments (e.g., a tomato can “sort of” belong in the fruit category). The women surveyed tended to be much more nuanced in their responses and were 23% more likely to

assign an object to the “partial” category.

While it has been a popular belief that such a male/female split exists, as far as the researchers are aware, this is the first time such a sex difference in categorization has been shown experimentally.

University of Warwick psychologist Dr Zachary Estes says:

“Of course, simply because we have found a significant sex difference in how men and women categorize does not mean that one method is intrinsically better than the other. For instance, male doctors may be more likely to quickly and confidently diagnose a set of symptoms as a disease. Although this brings great advantages in treating diseases early, it obviously has massive disadvantages if the diagnosis is actually wrong. In many cases, a more open approach to categorizing or diagnosing would be more effective.”

More information: Pasterski V et al (2011). Sex differences in semantic categorization. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*; [DOI:10.1007/s10508-011-9764-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-011-9764-y)

Provided by University of Warwick

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