

Marriage makes men seem less competent, study shows

May 9 2014, by Elizabeth Mitchell



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(Medical Xpress)—Single men are perceived to be significantly more competent than their married counterparts, according to new psychology research presented today.

Despite the familiar "young, free and single" adage often associated with the unattached bachelor, research shows that when presented with an unmarried individual, we are more likely to recognise him as being reliable than if we know he is married.

The revealing study, carried out by psychology researcher Mariana Pinho from the University of Lincoln, UK, was conducted to shed light on the gender belief system and its implications for the [social judgement](#) of individuals, based on their [marital status](#) and sexual orientation.

During the research, more than 150 participants were shown a photograph of the same individual male, but the description of his marital status and sexual orientation accompanying the image differed on each occasion. By collating and analysing the results, Mariana and her co-researcher were able to reveal how this description affected perceptions of the subject, and how this varied depending on whether the participant was male or female.

The results also revealed that women are much more likely than men to show positive emotions towards an unknown individual. In whatever manner he was described, female participants were more likely to perceive the subject as friendly, be curious about his character, interested in his background and express fewer negative emotions towards him.

Mariana carried out the study as part of her Master's thesis at the University of Porto, Portugal, alongside Professor Gabrielle Poeschl. She is now completing a PhD on the division of family roles in the School of Psychology at the University of Lincoln, UK, where she also teaches.

Mariana said: "I was extremely surprised to see the significant influence that marital status has on the attribution of competence. When our participants were advised that the subject was single, regardless of his sexual orientation, their replies revealed that marriage made him seem less competent. I believe that research in this area is highly important, because it is vital to understand the impact our internal preconceptions can have on the way we approach other members of society."

As well as exploring the effect that marital status has on the perception of an individual, the study also delivered important results which highlight the impact a person's sexual orientation might have on the way in which they are perceived.

Mariana added: "We also found that participants who responded to a description of the subject as homosexual were more likely to attribute feminine traits to him, independent of his marital status, and those who perceived themselves to be more masculine showed a greater tendency to express fewer positive feelings towards him. These findings are important in helping us to understand the belief system that surrounds [sexual orientation](#), and by highlighting the social judgements we make about individuals we are making a crucial step in helping to reduce bias and discrimination."

Mariana will present her research findings at the British Psychological Society (BPS) Annual Conference on Thursday 8th May 2014.

Provided by University of Lincoln

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