

Landmark research study finds clear evidence of pro-women/anti-men bias

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A landmark paper has been published. The [paper](#), a series of five experiments involving 5,204 participants found that overall, more than race, age or social class, by far the largest bias we have is “pro-women/anti-men bias”. BOOM! This is surely one of the most significant and controversial results of recent years.

But wait... you haven't heard of this paper? Really? It's been out for over a year, first as a pre-publication in March 2022 and then the final version published in a major journal in January 2023. So why has this extraordinary finding not been discussed on all the major news outlets and opinion platforms? Why are influencers not trying to influence you about what we need to do to reduce this bias, and why are psychologists not falling over each other to replicate this study? Perhaps the reason this is such a massively invisible landmark is implicit in the topic of the paper itself: people struggle to recognise that bias against men is real.

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Let's take a closer look at this new study. It tested implicit bias, measuring how long it took for participants to associate either positive or negative words (e.g. 'good' / 'bad', 'pleasant' / 'unpleasant') with pictures of men or women, randomized either for order of presentation of picture or for type of demographic presented. Here is an outline of the 5 phases of the study:

Study 1 measured evaluations by US adults recruited via MTurk of 130 full-body photographs of males varying in race (Black or White) and social class. In Study 2, this format was expanded to include pictures of Asian people, and included pictures of men and women of different ages, social classes and ethnicities. Study 3 was similar to Study 2, except it showed upper-body photos as well as full-body photos, and swapped around the faces and bodies in the photos. Study 4 used the same procedure as Study 3, but with two nationally representative samples of US adults, recruited via Prolific. Study 5 analysed the data from Studies 2-4 to see how much the demographic characteristics of participants was related to their evaluations of the photographs.

In brief, the pictures in the research showed men and women of different races and ages, and dressed to reflect different social classes. The researchers found a small but consistent effect of class – smarter clothes were linked to more positive attributes. There was a small and inconsistent effect of race, and no effect of age. There were no consistent interaction effects between any of these demographic categories e.g. evaluations of older black women were much the same as evaluations of younger black women. But the main finding was that no matter what the race, class or sex of the participant making the ratings, there was a strong tendency to associate women with positive attributes and men with negative attributes.

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students are taught these views, and then spreading to government, the law and the media, where the graduates earnestly put into practice what they have been taught."

For those of you who [know about male psychology](#) in general, and [gamma bias](#) in particular, this finding won't come as a surprise. Although research into bias against men is uncommon, there is evidence that women are favoured over men in various ways, such as [moral typecasting](#), [STEM jobs](#), and [health promotion](#). It's been known for two decades that not only do women favour women over men, but even [men favour women over men](#). The surprising thing is that the present research so clearly 'says the quiet part out loud' and that the paper was published in a major journal of social psychology, a field not known for its interest in men's issues. It's surprising because our culture has become disinterested in problems impacting men, so disinterested in fact that virtually no research has been done on this important aspect of sexism. Yet as it turns out, the bias against men is so large that – as predicted by gamma bias theory – your perception of the world needs to be distorted not to see it.

It is worth noting that although tests of implicit bias have been widely used and have been widely [criticised](#), mainly because they fail to predict whether someone's unconscious reactions will predict their behaviour; in other words, unconscious bias is in no way evidence of discrimination. The same criticism might be applied to the present study, though as John Tierney said in his recent [excellent article](#) stated: *"when it comes to detecting misandry, we don't need to probe the unconscious to find it. There is overwhelming evidence of conscious, blatant, and widespread discrimination against boys and men in modern societies"* e.g. the popular narrative about toxic masculinity, the lack of empathy gap for boys falling behind girls in education, Title IX etc.

So why do people rate men so negatively compared to women? There are several reasons that transcend culture (e.g. the [male disposability](#) hypothesis), but I think it's important to highlight here the influence of our present culture. We have, arguably, for the past several decades been stewing in a soup of increasing distrust of men. For example, in the field of psychology, [research into masculinity](#) took a sudden negative turn in the 1980s, becoming fixated on ways in which masculinity might be harmful. Similarly, the rise of ideas like 'patriarchy theory' (which is an [ideology rather than a scientific theory](#)) have stereotyped men as privileged oppressors. Although these ideas began in sociology departments in the 1970s they have become of staple of many topics throughout the social

sciences and beyond. Despite the empirical weakness of ideas like patriarchy theory and the deficit model of masculinity, these notions have had enormous influence, starting in academia where students are taught these views, and then spreading to government, the law and the media, where the graduates earnestly put into practice what they have been taught.

It is probably no coincidence that of all members of the research team who conducted the present study – which included academics of an impressively high academic calibre – none of them had a background in masculinity research. True, they were all social psychologists and as such will have been exposed to ideas about patriarchy theory and negative views of masculinity, but that just makes it all the more encouraging that they transcended these notions and produced such an important study.

In terms of academic excellence, one unique achievement of this study was that it is the first of its kind to systematically vary race, sex, social class and age of the pictures presented to participants. However, given the great import of this study, the paper has received remarkably little attention, either from the media or academia. For example, although the average number of citations of the other papers published in that edition of the journal is 11, there have been only 7 citations of the present study in Scholar at the time of writing (Sept 27th 2023). One can't help speculating that if the results had shown that women or ethnic minority people were the victims of bias, the media and academia would be eagerly agonising about misogyny, patriarchy, toxic masculinity and white supremacy. Nonetheless my hope is that this paper will get even a fraction of the recognition it deserves, and inspire replications and further exploration of this crucial but overlooked topic.

The full text of this paper, *Intersectional Implicit Bias: Evidence for Asymmetrically Compounding Bias and the Predominance of Target Gender*, by Dr Paul Connor, Dr Matthew Weeks, Dr Jack Glaser, Prof Serena Chen, and Prof Dacher Keltner, can be accessed [here](#).

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