

Popping the question is his job: When it comes to marriage proposals, young men and women hold fast to traditional views

January 16 2013

Would women rather "pop the question?" Apparently not. With marriage proposals in the air around the new year, researchers at UC Santa Cruz report that both women and men tend to hold traditional views when it comes to marriage proposals.

[Young adults](#) were asked about their personal preferences for marriage traditions. Overwhelmingly, both men and women said they would want the man in a relationship to propose marriage. A substantial majority of women also responded that they would want to take their husband's last name.

In fact, not one of 136 men surveyed believed "I would definitely want my partner to propose" and not a single woman said she "would definitely want to propose."

"I was surprised at the strong the preference was," said Rachael D. Robnett, a [doctoral candidate](#) in psychology at UC Santa Cruz. Robnett surveyed 277 [undergraduates](#) ages 17 to 26. She found that a substantial majority believes strongly that a man should propose marriage and a woman should take her husband's name.

Robnett's findings are reported in "Girls Don't Propose! Ew" published in the January issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Research*. Robnett said she expected some [preference](#) for traditional engagement and [marriage](#)

roles, but not at such a high level, particularly among young people. The survey was conducted in 2009-2010 among psychology majors or intended majors and was limited to heterosexual students.

"Given the prevalence of liberal attitudes among students at the university where data collection took place it is striking that so many participants held traditional preferences," she writes. "Even more surprising is that many [participants](#) overtly state that their preferences were driven by a desire to adhere to gender-role traditions."

Robnett said 68.4 percent of men answered, "I would definitely want to propose. Sixty-six percent of women answered "I would definitely want my partner to propose."

Nearly 15 percent of men answered, "I would kind of want to propose" and 16.9 percent said, "It doesn't matter who proposes."

Among the 141 women surveyed, 22 percent said, "I would kind of want my partner to propose; 2.8 percent said they would "kind of want to propose" and 9.2 percent answered "it doesn't matter."

On the surname question, Robnett found 60.2 percent of women were "very willing" or "somewhat willing" to take their husband's name. Only 6.4 percent were "very unwilling" and 11.3 percent "somewhat unwilling." Another 22 percent answered "neither willing nor unwilling."

She also found the adherence to tradition is linked to "[benevolent sexism](#)," the assumption of traditional gender roles in which "men should protect, cherish, and provide for women."

"On the surface it looks positive," Robnett said. "The problem is that benevolent sexism contributes to power differentials between women and men. The mindset underlying benevolent sexism is that women need

men's protection because they are the weaker gender. Also, people who endorse benevolent sexism tend to support traditional gender roles such as the belief that women should do most of the childcare even if both partners work.

"Both men and women are raised to believe that aspects of benevolent sexism are desirable; it's usually viewed as politeness or chivalry," she said. "This makes it hard for people to challenge, which is unfortunate because research shows it often does a disservice to [women](#)."

Robnett enrolled at UCSC for graduate studies to work with psychology professor Campbell Leaper, the paper's second author, after earning bachelor's degrees in psychology and Spanish at the University of Northern Iowa.

"The psychology department at UCSC has a great reputation for innovative research in developmental psychology," Robnett said. "For someone interested in cutting-edge research in gender studies it was the place for me."

Provided by University of California - Santa Cruz

Citation: Popping the question is his job: When it comes to marriage proposals, young men and women hold fast to traditional views (2013, January 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-job-marriage-young-men-women.html>

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