

New study shows why women have to be likeable, and men don't

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A new study in *The Economic Journal* finds that likeability is an influencing factor in interactions between women, as well as interactions between men and women, but not in all-male interactions.

The researchers conducted experiments where participants rated the likeability of other participants, based on photographs. The participants were divided in to pairs, shown the photograph of their partner

beforehand, and learned how their partner rated them. The pairs then played games with each other where rewards depended on the degree of cooperation.

In one version, participants chose to contribute any integer value out of an initial endowment of 6 euros to a joint project. Overall, men contributed on average 4.05 euros, and women contributed 3.92 euros. Researchers found that in same-sex pairings, men in low as well as high mutual likeability teams contributed similar amounts, suggesting likeability was not a factor in determining contribution. However if mutual likeability in all-female teams was low, women contributed 30% less on average.

In mixed-sex pairings for the cooperation game, [female participants](#) contributed on average 4.70 euros in high mutual likeability teams, and about 37% less in low mutual likeability teams. In contrast to same sex teams, the likeability effect for men factored in mixed sex teams. If mutual likeability was low, men's contribution was 50% lower than if mutual likeability was high.

In the ten round coordination game, researchers found that women in same-sex pairings chose significantly lower numbers in low mutual likeability teams than in high mutual likeability teams in each round of the game. Male participants in same-sex pairings chose high numbers from the start, regardless of the level mutual likeability. In mixed sex teams, mutual likeability was on average positively associated with the number chosen for both women and men.

"Our results hint at the existence of a likeability factor that offers a novel perspective on [gender differences](#) in labour market outcomes," said Leonie Gerhards, the paper's lead author. "While likeability matters for women in every one of their interactions, it matters for men only if they interact with the opposite sex."

Researchers concluded that for [women](#), likeability is an asset in all interactions. For men, likeability matters only in interactions with the opposite sex. Results suggest that the likeability factor leads to considerable advantages in terms of average performance and economic outcomes for men.

More information: Leonie Gerhards et al, I (Don't) Like You! But Who Cares? Gender Differences in Same-Sex and Mixed-Sex Teams, *The Economic Journal* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/ej/uez067](https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/uez067)

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