

# Gender, Marital Status, and Hiring Practices in the United States

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Although hiring discrimination on the basis of marital status is not forbidden by federal law, almost half of the United States and Washington D.C. prohibit this form of discrimination. Still, our beliefs about family, gender, and work may influence behaviors in the professional sphere by way of unconscious bias and conscious discrimination. In this paper, we examine primary survey data to determine whether marital status affects male and female candidates differently during the initial stages of hiring.

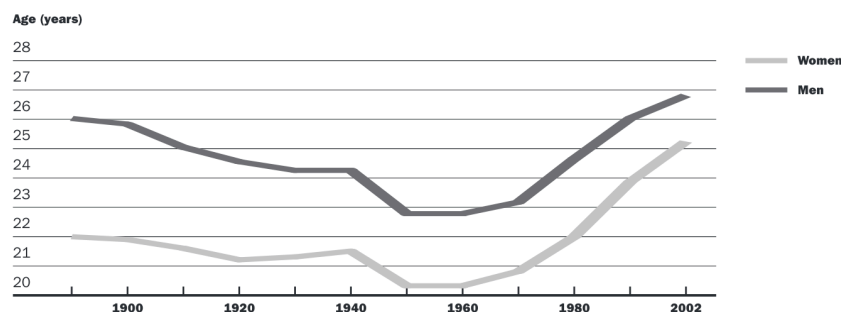
## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Gender*

Gender essentialism is “the view that certain categories (e.g., women) have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly...the underlying reality (or ‘essence’) is thought to give objects their identity, and to be responsible for similarities that category members share” (Gelman, 2005). Gender biases can often be traced to this school of thought. In a study, sociologists found that women face a greater disadvantage when both male and female leaders are portrayed as autocrats (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). The researchers believe that this difference in perception can be attributed to the violation of a stereotype, specifically, a violation of the shared belief that women are more caring than men (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). While there is research to suggest that the actual difference between men and women is small compared to the perceived difference (Hyde, 2014), cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1997) explains that gender stereotypes exist despite these findings because there is “a taboo against the sameness of men and women” (p. 39).

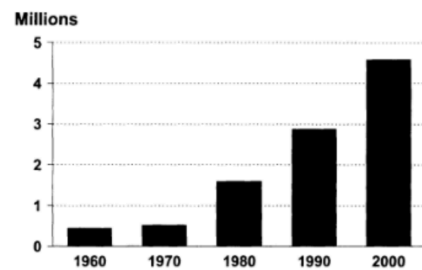
### *Historical Trends in Marriage*

*Figure 1.* Median age at first marriage, 1890 to 2002 (Cherlin, 2005, p. 35).



Women are marrying later today than in the past (see *Figure 1*). Additionally, first marriage rates in America have been declining since the end of World War II (Espenshade, 1985). These marriage trends overlap with a shift in attitudes: up until the late 1900s, remaining single through adulthood was often regarded as impractical and socially suspect. As sociologist Andrew Cherlin explains, “The rewards of marriage today are more individualized. Being married is less a required adult role and more an individual achievement—a symbol of successful self-development” (2005, p. 49).

*Figure 2.* US cohabiting couples, 1960 to 2000 (Seltzer, 2004, p. 922).



While first marriage rates have decreased, cohabitation has increased (see *Figure 2*). Young adults cohabit with partners as either alternatives to legal marriage or, more commonly, as trial marriages. About 4.6 million US households are maintained by heterosexual cohabiting couples, of which half eventually marry (Seltzer, 2004). Interestingly, however, the percentage of cohabiting couples that eventually marry has been steadily decreasing in the United States as well (Seltzer, 2004). Despite these trends, marriage is both more prevalent and more important in America than in most other Western countries (Cherlin, 2005). In fact, Cherlin (2005) even believes that the *symbolic* significance of marriage is increasing and unlikely to disappear soon.

### ***Women’s Labor Force Participation***

Historically, a rigid division of labor existed within each household. Because men were responsible for providing family income, few women worked for pay. If an adult male could not earn enough money to support his family, however, his wife would need to supplement his earnings. In these cases, the husband was perceived as “less of a man” because he could not perform hegemonic masculinity (Matthaei, 1980). Economist Julie Matthaei (1980) suggests that women’s increased labor force participation (“LFP”) did not challenge the ideal of womanhood during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; rather, it reinforced gender roles. Whereas LFP signified adulthood for men, it characterized adolescence, widowhood, or failure for women. Husbands remained the

breadwinners and wives would take on part-time/seasonal opportunities out of necessity. These employed women were not “rejecting homemaking and traditional womanhood, but simply trying to extend or supplement it” because they could not afford to adhere to gender expectations (Matthaei, 1980, p. 201).

*Figure 3. Changes in LFP and beliefs in the data, 1880 to 2000 (Fernandez, 2013, p. 473).*

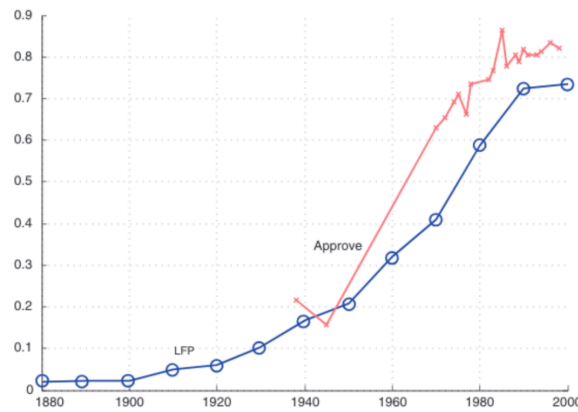


FIGURE 1. CHANGES IN LFP AND BELIEFS IN THE DATA

Notes: LFP of married women (circles) and percent who approve of woman working if husband can support her (stars). See the online Appendix for details of data construction.

Many economic, legal, and social changes have taken place since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, increasing the opportunity cost of staying at home for women. Coupled with a reduced birth rate (due in part to improved contraceptive methods) and the passage of landmark labor laws (e.g., the Equal Pay Act and the Civil Rights Act), increased education began to qualify women for jobs that had previously been unavailable to them.

Married white women’s LFP saw a significant increase between 1950 and 1990 (Fernandez, 2013; see *Figure 3*). More remarkably, mothers have been joining the workforce in swelling numbers: in 1960, 1980, and 2009, the percentages of married women with children under 18 in paid employment were 27.6%, 54.1%, and 69.8%, respectively (BLS, 2010). As a result of these trends, many American families are becoming more dependent on wives’ incomes.

Still, there remains a marked difference between men and women’s experiences in the labor market. Women have moved into male-dominated jobs more than men have moved into female-dominated jobs. Because women’s work has historically been regarded as less prestigious, male workers have had less of an incentive to enter gender-nontraditional industries (England, 2010). Paula England (2010) explains, “There was nowhere near

one man leaving the labor force to become a full-time homemaker for every woman who entered, nor did men pick up household work to the extent women added hours of employment” (p. 151).

Women are still primarily responsible for household duties, despite earning as much as—or sometimes, even *more* than—their male counterparts (Brines, 1994). As Matthaei (1980) explains, “The rise of the two-earner family does not in itself represent the disintegration of the sexual division of labor” (p. 201). One would expect a significant increase in women’s LFP to be paired with a commensurate increase in the number of hours husbands spend on domestic duties; however, this is not often the reality faced by American families.

### ***Household Division of Labor***

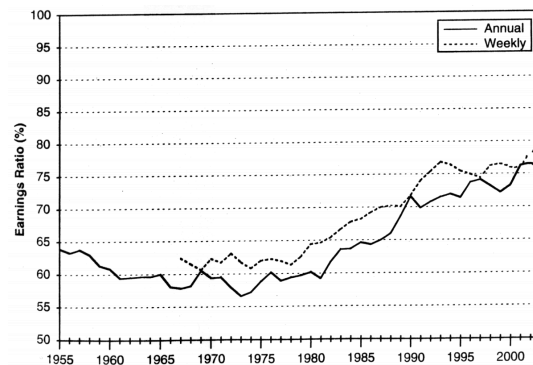
Approximately 20% of 2012 marriages are traditional marriages in which only the husband earns family income (BLS, 2012). American women have historically taken on household *reproduction* because it was believed that they had a natural comparative advantage in childcare. They have also invested less in earnings-specific human capital because they generally do not receive as much support to pursue careers (Badgett & Folbre, 2003). In contrast, men have exclusively carried out household *production* until recent decades. The benefits derived by men and women are unequal in this traditional relationship because housework does not have any exchange value (Brines, 1994). Brines (1994) writes, “This difference in the fungibility of resources allows for the emergence of an unequal exchange relation between two parties” (p. 656). Whereas income can be exchanged for goods/services on the market, housework is illiquid.

For most families—even dual-earner families—gender still determines which duties husbands and wives perform. Women tend to make more accommodations for work and home than their husbands (Brockwood, Hammer, Neal, & Colton, 2002). Additionally, both working women and nonworking women do more housework than men (Brines, 1994; Fetterolf & Rudman 2014). On average, they commit 29 hours each week to domestic duties, whereas men give only 16 hours (Schneider, 2012). While men spend more time on outdoor work, auto maintenance, and other “masculine” housework, the total time spent on these tasks is less than the hours required of “feminine” housework like cleaning, meal preparation, and laundry (Schneider, 2012). When a wife is employed, the family only sees a very slight increase (1-2 hours per week) in the time the husband spends on domestic duties (Brines, 1994). In *The Second Shift*, Hochschild and Machung write, “The more severely a man’s

identity is financially threatened—by his wife’s higher salary, for example—the less he can afford to threaten it further by doing ‘women’s work’ at home,” suggesting that, for some families, an increase in the wife’s income may actually lead to a decrease in the husband’s homemaking hours (2003, p. 221).

### ***Gender and Employment***

*Figure 4.* Female-to-male earnings ratios of full-time workers, 1950 to 2003 (Blau & Kahn, 2011).



While the gender wage gap has narrowed in the last half-century, women still make about 80 cents for every dollar paid to men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; see *Figure 4*). Occupational gender segregation is partly responsible for this differential (Reskin, 1988). Because women and men work in different industries, approximately 40% of the labor force would have to change occupational categories to achieve equal representation of both genders in all jobs (Williams, 1992).

Furthermore, masculine industries tend to offer higher incomes, with women constituting a smaller portion of newly hired employees when selection criteria includes masculine characteristics (Gorman, 2005). Barbara Reskin (1988) writes, “Although femaleness is not always devalued, its deviation from maleness in a culture that reserves virtues for men has meant the devaluation of women” (p. 63). This partly explains why the masculinity of a job is generally a strong predictor of salary and status (Jacobs & Powell, 1985; Glick 1991).

Women also hold a smaller number of leadership positions across most industries in the labor market (Williams, 1992). In an experiment in which comparable hypothetical male and female candidates were both described as “masculine,” the female applicant was less likely to be interviewed or hired as a sales manager; on the other hand, female applicants who were described as either masculine *or* feminine were preferred over male applicants for the job of dental receptionist/secretary (Glick, Zion & Nelson, 1988). Managerial jobs tend to be

better compensated than associate-level positions; thus, a large leadership gender difference is likely to also contribute to the gender wage gap.

Discontinuous careers contribute to the gender pay gap as well (England, 2005). Women are more likely than men to move in and out of the labor market based on family considerations like childbirth/childcare (England, 2005). When they exit the professional sphere to tend to family life, they are effectively doing so at the cost of gaining more labor market experience. It is more difficult for women to compete with their male counterparts if they do not spend an equal amount of time employed in the workforce.

Lastly, there is evidence of gender discrimination in the workplace. Researchers found that both male and female recruiters rated male applicants and female applicants similarly for entry-level accountant positions; however, female applicants received less favorable *future* job performance evaluations (Snipes, Oswald, & Caudill, 1998). In a similar study focusing on entry-level auditors, female recruiters offered significantly higher salaries (\$3k+) to male candidates than to female candidates (Hardin, Reding, & Stocks, 2002). When marriage and parenthood are added to the analysis, our understanding of work and gender becomes even more complex.

### ***Marriage and Parenthood Discrimination***

For employed men, marriage tends to have either a neutral or positive impact on wages. In fact, male marital premiums may be responsible for about one-third of gender-based wage discrimination in the United States (Korenman & Neumark, 1991). Husbands tend to receive higher performance reviews than single men when education, race, region, age, work experience, occupation, and industry are controlled for (Korenman & Neumark, 1991). Even when detailed human capital controls are put in place, hourly wage premiums paid to married men are large (Korenman & Neumark, 1991). Additionally, men may also benefit from being parents, unlike women (Kelly & Grant, 2012; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). This premium may be attributed to a number of factors:

1. Wives help perform household duties, thereby lessening the homemaking burden for husbands. Married men may become more productive in the workplace as a consequence.

2. Employers tend to favor married men because married men are associated with loyalty, commitment, and overall positivity (Kmec, Huffman, & Penner, 2014).
3. Employers assume that married men are the primary earners of their households. They may believe that husbands should be better compensated because they are responsible for the livelihoods of others.

For employed women, there is research to support the existence of a *motherhood* penalty (Glauber, 2007; Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). This penalty may be attributed to a number of factors:

1. Women are more likely than their husbands to reduce work hours to accommodate household demands (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2013; Brockwood, Hammer, Neal, & Colton, 2002). This may have a negative effect on wages because career momentum is important for career progression.
2. Mothers face discrimination in the workplace (Benard & Correll, 2010).
3. Mothers, anticipating work/life conflicts, trade higher wages for “family friendly” benefits. They choose to work in lower-paid industries or departments that require less on-the-job training (England, 2005).
4. Mothers may experience more exhaustion and stress compared to non-mothers and men. If fathers do not contribute enough to housework or childcare, mothers are effectively taking on two full-time jobs.
5. Mothers feel less qualified after giving birth (Crowley, 2013). Consequently, they may accept lower-paying jobs instead of the positions they are actually qualified for.

Interestingly, mothers are penalized more in states where motherhood is perceived to be the woman’s personal decision (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). Unlike gender, motherhood is increasingly considered a “status of choice.” When study participants are told that a woman *chose* to leave the labor force, they are more likely to believe that gender discrimination no longer exists in the workplace (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). Whereas women’s earnings decrease by approximately 5% for each child, men’s earnings increase by 5% per child after a 12% earnings boost from marriage (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). In a study, both male and female parents were perceived as less committed to work than non-parents; however, fathers were held to more lenient standards than mothers and childless men (Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004). Mothers are also less likely to be hired and promoted than non-parent female candidates (Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004).



All in all, there appears to be strong support for fatherhood premiums, male marital premiums, and motherhood penalties. Although a significant number of women—and more specifically, mothers—have entered the workforce in the last half century, cultural expectations for male and female roles within a family may still be contributing to gender inequality in today's labor market.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

While there exists a wealth of research around the relationships between marriage and wages, parent status and wages, and gender and wages, there is less literature available on the relationship between marital status and hiring. Some may argue that such research is unnecessary because marriage discrimination is explicitly illegal in many states; however, an applicant's personal and professional lives do not exist in separate spheres. An unintentional slip of the tongue or flash of a wedding band can unveil one's marital status. On the other hand, some candidates even go out of their way to discuss their personal lives to build rapport (Bennington & Wein, 2002). Regardless of how this information exchange takes place, marital status may be revealed or uncovered during the hiring process. When it is, it may color the employer's perception of the candidate.

This paper examines 341 respondents' evaluations of eight hypothetical applicants. These applicants are male or female, married or single, and applying for a masculine-type job or a feminine-type job. For each type of position, the credentials are identical. My hypotheses are as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Men will benefit from being married in the hiring process. Employers will give married men higher ratings than single men, all other things equal.

*Hypothesis 2:* Women will benefit from being single in the hiring process. Employers will give single women higher ratings than married women, all other things equal.

Based on the literature, women take on most homemaking duties (Schneider, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Brines, 1994). Employers may believe that women are less hireable than men because they are encouraged by social norms to take on housework. Additionally, employers may anticipate the possibility of childbirth for married candidates with ambiguous parenthood statuses. Upon learning that a candidate is married, it is possible that recruiters are already thinking about the differences between motherhood and fatherhood roles.

## EXPERIMENT METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

This factorial design includes Applicant Gender (male, female)  $\times$  Applicant Marital Status (married, single)  $\times$  Job Type (feminine, masculine). A sample of 341 respondents participated in this study, which was created on NYU Stern Qualtrics (“Qualtrics”) and distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk (“mTurk”). Each participant was randomly assigned to one of eight versions of the survey and then asked to answer demographic questions. After completing the survey, respondents were given a code as proof of completion.

62.5% of the sample identified as male and 37.5% identified as female. The age breakdown is as follows: 20 and younger (5.9%), 21-30 (59.5%), 31-40 (24.0%), 41-50 (6.7%), 51-60 (2.9%), and 61 and older (0.9%). 208 respondents were single (61.0%), 110 were married (32.3%), 13 were divorced (3.8%), and 10 selected “Other” for marital status (2.9%). A large majority of the sample identified as White (71.6%) and approximately one-tenth identified as Asian (12.6%). There was an equal percentage of Black/African-American respondents and Hispanic/Latino respondents (6.5%), as well as an equal percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native respondents and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander respondents (0.3%). 138 respondents indicated that they hold professional degrees (40.5%). 27.3% hold bachelor degrees and 12.6% have received trade/technical training. About half of the respondents have total household incomes ranging from \$20,000 to \$59,999. The sample skews more liberal than conservative: on a scale of 0 (very conservative) to 100 (very liberal), the sample mean was 61.79 with a standard deviation of 26.193. Lastly, only 2.9% of the total sample worked in Human Resources and only 7.3% worked in Finance, although we do not know which roles these individuals hold in these departments.

### *Independent Variables*

*Male-typed vs. Female-typed job* – For the male-typed job, job descriptions for the role of Senior Finance Manager (“SFM”) were created using sections of various SFM job descriptions from LinkedIn.com. For the female-typed job, the same process took place using sections of Senior HR Manager (“SHRM”) job descriptions from LinkedIn.com. Whereas the SFM job description included responsibilities like “creating financial forecasts,” “modeling and quantifying financial risk,” and “acting as a financial lead supporting sales division VP,” the SHRM job description focused on responsibilities like “increasing employee engagement,” “improving employee

relations and workforce planning,” and “improving organizational and individual capabilities.” The former is male-typed because it focuses on analytical/mathematical competencies that are stereotypical of men but not of women. The latter is female-typed because it emphasizes the nurturing, communal “nature” of women.

*Male vs. Female applicant* – The male applicant is Daniel L. Hubbard and the female applicant is Sarah L. Hubbard. Respondents are first made aware of the applicant’s gender when they read the cover letters, which were constructed using experiences from bona fide Indeed.com resumes. The credentials in both male and female SFM cover letters are identical, just as the credentials in both male and female SHRM cover letters are identical. We did not include a resume because resumes delineate accomplishments on a line-by-line basis, making it easier to compare resume bullet points against job description bullet points without focusing on demographic information.

*Married vs. Single applicant* – After reading through the job description and cover letter, respondents were given a candidate Information Sheet with demographic information about the applicant. This is where marital status was revealed to the respondent, along with information about the candidate’s age, race, location, and education.

### ***Dependent Variables***

All eight job candidates were rated on three measures on a scale of 1 to 9: (1) interview chances, (2) competency, and (3) job fit. Asking respondents to rank how likely they would be to interview a candidate is the primary objective of this paper; however, there is less risk associated with interviewing than there is in *hiring*. Whereas the decision to hire may involve several considerations, the decision to grant an interview may only be based upon whether or not the candidate appears qualified at first glance. Because we expected ratings for “interview chances” to be skewed toward higher numbers, measures (2) and (3) were also included in the study.

### ***Hypothetical Candidates***

Age, race, location, and education were held constant across configurations. The hypothetical candidates were all 33 years old. Generally, American students graduate with bachelor’s degrees when they are 21-23. Assuming that these students enter the workforce shortly after graduation, it is not unreasonable to believe that professionals at this age would be pursuing management roles. Furthermore, the marital expectations of a 33-year-old vary more than the marital expectations of a 20-year-old (Single or Never Married) or a 65-year-old (e.g.,

Married or Divorced) across respondents of different backgrounds and political orientations; this is useful in mitigating any interactions that may exist between age and marital status expectations.

Furthermore, every hypothetical candidate graduated from UPenn with a grade point average of 3.7/4.0. A prestigious school and high GPA were selected to direct participant attention away from education and towards the content of the cover letters. While the school and GPA were held constant, candidates applying to the SHRM position held degrees in Communication and candidates applying to the SFM position held degrees in Finance.

### ***Survey Design***

A pretest was created on Qualtrics and administered through mTurk before the distribution of the finalized survey. 284 respondents comprised the pretest sample. Here, we created a  $2 \times 3$  study with only six hypothetical candidates. These candidates were applying for a Senior Marketing Manager (“SMM”) position at Visa. Their marital statuses were married, single, or unspecified, and their genders were either male or female. The findings from this pretest showed that ratings for single applicants and applicants with an unspecified marital status followed similar patterns, suggesting that the latter were assumed to be single. As a result, “unspecified marital status” was removed for the finalized study, reducing the options for marital status from three to two.

An SMM position was selected for the pretest because marketing/advertising tends to be a gender-neutral branch of business (BLS, 2018). Since there were no significant interactions between gender and marital status for any of the three measures (interview chances, applicant competency, and applicant job fit) for the SMM position, a “job type” variable was added to the finalized survey to capture any differences that may exist between relatively masculine jobs and relatively feminine jobs.

The final survey consists of the following: (1) brief description of task, (2) job posting, (3) candidate’s cover letter, (4) candidate demographic information, (5) measure of applicant’s interview chances, (6) measure of applicant’s competency, (7) measure of job fit, (8) measure of perceived job masculinity/femininity, and (9) questions about respondent demographics.

## RESULTS

### ***Job Perception***

On a scale of 1 (job is best for men) to 9 (job is best for women), the SFM position received an average rating of 5.88 (std dev=0.938) and the SHRM position received an average rating of 6.15 (std dev=0.930). After running an Independent Samples T-Test, we determined that the difference between the two means is statistically significant ( $p=0.008$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). On average, both positions are perceived as more female-typed than male-typed. This allows us to compare differences between only *relatively* masculine and *relatively* feminine positions.

### ***Job Type, Gender, and Marital Status***

After running ANOVA tests for measures (1) interview chances and (3) job fit, we determined that there were no statistically significant interactions between job type, applicant gender, and applicant marital status. While we cannot explain why we did not find significant differences for these measures, we believe that perhaps the measures themselves are inherently flawed. As mentioned previously, allowing a candidate to interview for a position is less risky than actually hiring the candidate. In contrast, when respondents rate each candidate on measures (2) competency and (3) job fit, they are considering the *hireability* of the applicant, which entails a greater commitment of company resources. On average, respondents were more likely to recommend candidates for interviews than they were to consider them highly competent or extremely good fits for the jobs.

Asking respondents to rate how well they believed the candidate would fit the job also raises several possible issues, as more considerations are involved in determining this rating. Whereas measure (2) only asks respondents to consider competency and qualifications, measure (3) asks respondents to make assumptions about the personality of the applicant, as well about the culture of the company. As we did not provide information beyond what was necessary to determine competency, respondents may have made very different assumptions that consequently affected their ratings in unpredictable ways.

Figure 5. Competency Ratings by Job Type and Marital Status

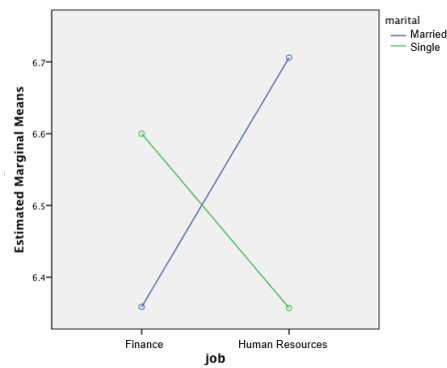
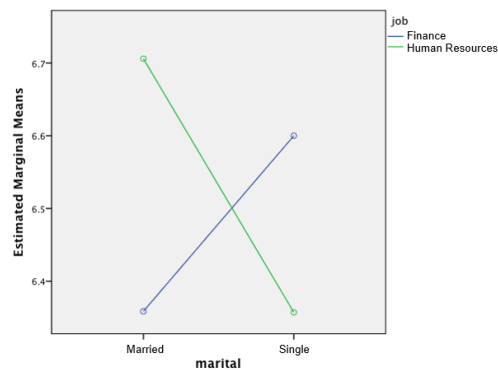
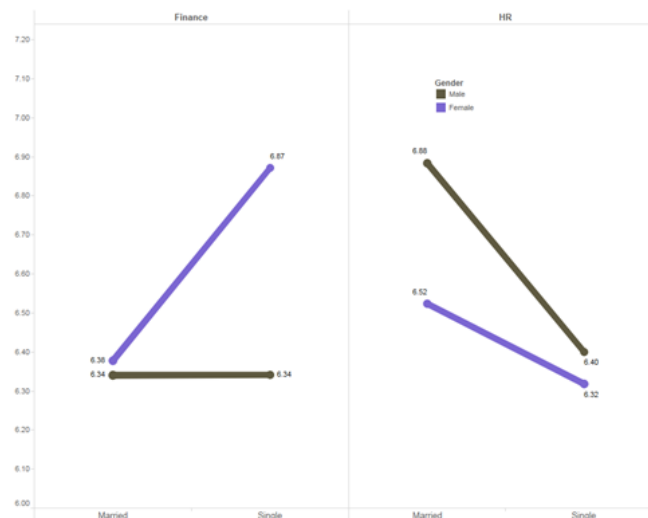


Figure 6. Competency Ratings by Marital Status and Job Type



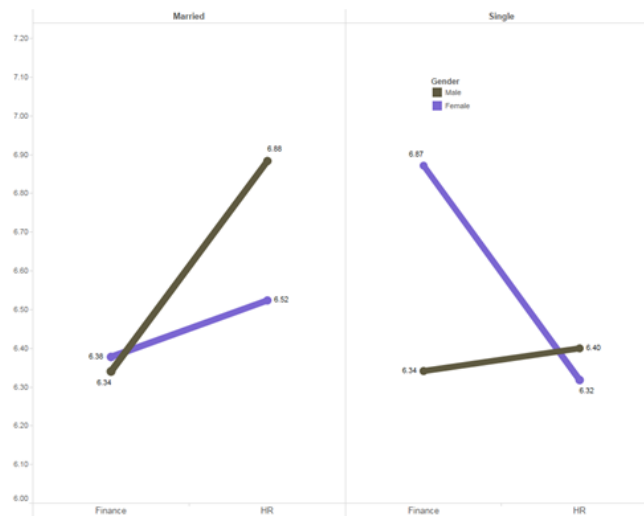
For measure (2) competency, we find a statistically significant interaction between job type and marital status ( $p=0.026$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), shown above in *Figures 5* and *6*. Although the interaction between job type, marital status, and gender was not statistically significant for this measure ( $p=0.685$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), the figures below will segment the data by gender for increased clarity.

Figure 7. Competency Ratings – Gender and Marital Status (by Job Type)



For the Finance position, single candidates received higher average ratings than married candidates. For the HR position, married candidates received higher average ratings than single candidates. Whereas men applying for Finance did not appear to be rated differently across marital statuses, women applying for Finance saw higher competency ratings when they were single instead of married. For HR, both women and men received higher ratings when they were married, although the effect appears to be more pronounced for men (see *Figure 7*).

*Figure 8. Competency Ratings – Gender and Job Type (by Marital Status)*

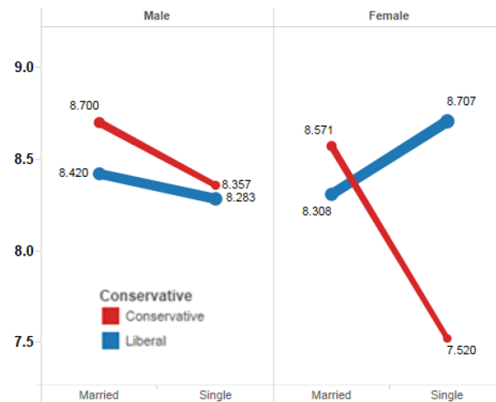


*Figure 8* divides competency data into ratings for married candidates and ratings for single candidates. Married candidates fare better in HR than in Finance across both genders. For single candidates, women are rated more highly in Finance than in HR. Single men, on the other hand, are rated similarly across both job types.

### ***Respondent Political Orientation***

When asked to describe their political orientation, participants were given a 0-100 point scale in which 0 represented “very conservative” and 100 represented “very liberal.” These scale values were then coded into two nominal categories: values 0-50 were coded as “conservative” and values 51-100 were coded as “liberal.” There were statistically significant interactions for two measures (interview chances and job fit) between applicant gender, applicant marital status, and respondent political orientation.

*Figure 9. Interview Chances – Respondent Political Orientation and Applicant Marital Status (by Applicant Gender)*



As shown in *Figure 9*, both conservative and liberal respondents rated married men as more likely to obtain interviews than single men, although the difference for liberal respondents appears smaller in magnitude. In contrast, patterns for female interview ratings seem to have been more influenced by the political orientation of the respondent. Whereas conservative participants rated married women (mean=8.571) higher than single women (mean=7.520), liberal respondents rated single women (mean=8.707) higher than married women (mean=8.308).

*Figure 10. Interview Chances – Applicant Gender and Applicant Marital Status (by Respondent Political Orientation)*



*Figure 10* shows the same data divided by respondent political orientation. Conservative participants rated married men (mean=8.700) and married women (mean=8.571) similarly on interview chances. While they preferred married men to single men and married women to single women, this “marital premium” in ratings was more pronounced for female candidates. The results for liberal respondents illustrate a different picture: while married male candidates (mean=8.420) received a slight advantage over single males (mean=8.283), single female candidates (mean=8.707) received a more noticeable advantage over married female candidates (mean=8.308).



## ANALYSIS

### ***Job Type, Marital Status, and Competency***

As the introduction of applicant gender does not generate a statistically significant interaction, we will focus only on the influence of job type and marital status on perceived competency for this analysis. The two job positions were perceived differently in terms of masculinity and femininity; however, we do not know *why* respondents rated the jobs as they did. A participant may believe that Finance is more masculine because the listed duties correspond with gender stereotypes. The position may have also been rated as more masculine because finance has a reputation for being time-consuming (Leonhardt, 2009). When we remove gender from the picture and only consider differences in marital status, single candidates may be more readily available than married candidates because they are not bound to anyone else (e.g., a spouse, children). They may also be perceived as more geographically mobile and flexible for the same reason. Respondents may have believed that Finance is an industry best suited for those with less rigid lifestyles.

For the HR position, the skills that often come to mind (e.g., conflict resolution, teamwork experience, and “people skills”) may be more characteristic of married men and women who, by virtue of being married, are collaborative teammates within the private sphere. While we cannot confidently attribute average competency ratings to the above reasons, we acknowledge that these differences are significant for this sample.

### ***Marital Status, Gender, and Political Orientation***

There is a significant interaction between applicant marital status, applicant gender, and respondent political orientation for measures (1) interview chances and (3) job fit. For interview chances, conservatives assigned both men and women marital premiums; they were more likely to recommend married male candidates and married female candidates for interviews compared with single male candidates and single female candidates, respectively. This difference in average ratings was larger for female candidates being evaluated by conservative respondents (see *Figure 11*). As these trends were significant, they warrant further investigation.

Although all eight hypothetical candidates were assigned identical attributes except for gender, marital status, and major (which corresponded with job type), perhaps respondents from different political backgrounds

assigned different *meanings* to these identical attributes. Age, when taken into consideration with marital status, may generate different assumptions depending on whether the respondent identified as conservative or liberal.

Conservative participants may be more likely to champion a traditional division of household labor wherein the married woman does not work. This expectation leads us to believe that conservative participants would give married women lower ratings than single women. As we observe in our responses, however, the opposite is true: conservative participants rated married women higher than single women. This gap between our expectations and our survey results may be attributed to how conservative participants perceive age 33.

To conservative respondents, 33 may be too old for both men and women to be single. Applicants who remain single through this age may, through the eyes of conservative participants, have an inherent character flaw; perhaps these candidates are unable to find spouses because they are unlikeable, uncooperative, or unreliable. These very same negative personality traits can be translated into negative employee characteristics.

In contrast, liberal participants provided responses that more closely mirrored our initial hypotheses: female candidates benefited from being single and male candidates benefited from being married. For liberals, age 33 may be perceived as the *beginning* of marriage and family formation. It is not unreasonable to assume that newlyweds may be thinking about beginning families approximately 2-4 years after marriage and, given existing trends in household work division, married female candidates may be taking on more housework once they settle down (Brines, 1994). Unlike conservative respondents, perhaps liberal participants were less concerned with *when* women should get married and more concerned with *how* their availability will be affected once they are.

There is evidence to suggest that women are more likely than men to take time off for family (England, 2005). This may partly explain why both liberals and conservatives assigned higher ratings to married men than to single men. Whereas husbands are assumed to have wives who take care of cooking, cleaning, and childcare, bachelors are assumed to be responsible for these tasks themselves; as such, single men may be perceived as less accessible than married men. In addition, respondents may have also assigned positive traits to married men (Kmec, Huffman, & Penner, 2014).

## APPLICATIONS

While we were unable to find sufficient evidence to support either hypothesis, we identified a statistically significant relationship between marital status and job type for measure (2) competency. Assuming that hiring married candidates brings forth legitimate concerns regarding accessibility and job commitment, it is nonetheless important to remember that American marriage rates are declining alongside the rise of cohabitation (Seltzer, 2004). A candidate who is legally single may actually be involved in a relationship that closely mirrors legal marriage. Therefore, assigning this candidate a competency premium or penalty based upon marital status becomes even less reasonable given cohabitation trends.

When respondent political orientation was added to the analysis, we did find interactions between applicant marital status and applicant gender for measures (1) interview chances and (3) job fit in support of both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. Specifically, liberal respondents rated single female candidates and married male candidates higher than married female candidates and single male candidates, respectively. In order to better understand these relationships, further research must be conducted to understand the political differences across companies/industries. If conservatives or liberals tend to hold organizational gatekeeping roles, the effects of employer political orientation on candidate screening could be more systemic.

## LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

### ***Threats to Internal Validity***

*Maturation Effect* – While the survey should have taken no more than 20 minutes to complete, it is unlikely that all 341 subjects were fully focused for the entire duration of the study. Further, whereas real HR representatives are invested in candidate screening decisions, survey respondents may be more easily affected by boredom.

*Testing Effect* – A pretest was created and administered via mTurk before the finalized survey questionnaire was distributed through the same channel. While we were able to prevent the same participants from taking the finalized study more than once, we could not, through Qualtrics and mTurk, prevent a participant from taking the finalized survey after s/he has already taken the pretest. Subjects who took the pretest may have anchored their later responses in what they had rated previously. Instead of carefully reading through the finalized study materials, respondents could have simply recalled the structure and general content of the pretest.

### ***Threats to External Validity***

*Non-representative Sample* – Only 2.9% of survey participants work in HR. As such, the sample is not representative of the target population. Ideally, the experiment participants would be real HR employees working at the company being studied.

*Reactive Bias* – As we did not reveal the experiment objective, ratings may have been influenced by what participants believed the survey was testing. When asked to leave comments at the very end of the survey, one respondent wrote, “Pretty sure you can’t legally ask for marital status.” Another wrote, “I think all jobs are for both sexes and it should not be a consideration in a hiring scenario.” These comments suggest that some participants were aware of the fact that individuating information was provided. In order to appear nondiscriminatory, participants may have adjusted their ratings to what they believed were “correct.”

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper builds on an ever-growing cosmos of literature on gender, marital status, and hiring. According to this study, respondents rated single candidates and married candidates differently depending on the types of jobs they apply for; specifically, married candidates are perceived as more competent for the female-typed position and single candidates are perceived as more competent for the male-typed position. There are also significant interactions between applicant marital status, applicant gender, and respondent political orientation that warrant more exploration in future studies. While both conservative and liberal participants rated married men higher than single men on measure (1) interview chances, ratings for female candidates varied across respondent political orientations. By leaving biases unchecked, HR departments may run the risk of shrinking applicant pools unnecessarily, making it more difficult to source the best possible talent. If we want to hire the most qualified people for our companies and organizations, we should continue to study the effects of marital status hiring bias on employee sourcing.

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