

2013/038 The impact of anxiety on job selection decisions

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This study aimed to investigate the effect of anxiety on the use of gender stereotypes in a job selection context. It also aimed to test whether any connection between anxiety and gender-based bias in job selection was influenced by the extent to which people pay attention to how they present themselves to others. Based on an anxiety questionnaire, people were divided into high and low anxiety groups. The participants then rated the suitability of a fictitious job applicant for a leadership position – leadership positions are stereotypically associated with men. It was expected that if anxiety increased stereotyping more anxious participants would rate a male job applicant as more suitable for the leadership position than a female applicant. The participants in this study who had higher levels of anxiety did not rate the candidate's suitability for the position in a more gender stereotypic way than did people with lower levels of anxiety. Whether anxious or not, the participants rated male and female applicants as equally suitable for the leadership job.

Although the overall findings are consistent with recent studies that suggest that anxiety does not always increase stereotyping, the extent to which people pay attention to how they present themselves to others influenced the results. People who tend to be anxious *and* who pay little attention to how they present themselves to others, rated female job applicants as being less suitable for the leadership position. This suggests that anxiety may increase the use of stereotypes in judgments of other people, but that people who pay attention to how they present themselves to others over-ride this tendency to use stereotypes in order to appear unbiased.

