

A scarcity of college men leads women to choose briefcase over baby

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American women today are more likely to earn college degrees than men with women receiving 57 percent of all bachelor's and 60 percent of all master's degrees. But are there consequences to having more women than men in college?

Research from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and University of Minnesota has found the ratio of men to women dramatically alters women's choices about career and family. When men are scarce, women delay having children and instead pursue high-paying careers.

"Most women don't realize it, but an important factor in a woman's career choice is how easy or difficult it is to find a husband," said Kristina Durante, assistant professor of marketing at the UTSA College of Business. "When a woman's [dating](#) prospects look bleak – as is the case when there are few available men – she is much more likely to delay starting a family and instead seek a career."

In one study, the researchers examined the ratio of single men to single women in each U.S. state and Washington D.C. They found that as bachelors became scarce, the percentage of women in high-paying careers increased, women delayed having children, and had fewer kids when they finally decided to start a family.

In another study on college campuses, the researchers led women to believe that there were either more men or less men on campus by

having participants read one of two news article about the student population. When women read that there were fewer men than women on campus, they became more motivated to pursue ambitious careers rather than start a family.

"A scarcity of men leads women to invest in their careers because they realize it will be difficult to settle down and start a family," said study coauthor Vlad Griskevicius, assistant professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. "In fact, the strongest effects were found for women who are least likely to secure a mate."

"Women who judged themselves to be less desirable to men—those women who are not like Angelina Jolie—were most likely to take the career path when men became scarce," added Durante.

This research highlights a sexual paradox associated with women's economic and educational advancement. "As women pursue more education and more lucrative careers when they can't find a husband, the ironic effect is that it will only get harder to find a husband as women become more educated and earn higher salaries," said Durante. "This is because a woman's mating standards keep increasing as she becomes more educated and wealthy, which further decreases the number of suitable mates. More than ever before, modern [women](#) are increasingly forced to make tough choices such as choosing briefcase over baby."

More information: "Sex Ratio and Women's Career Choice: Does a Scarcity of Men Lead Women to Choose Briefcase Over Baby?" was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Provided by University of Minnesota

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