



Why are there more female singles? When men flounder, it's mainly women who are affected.

Reading time 16 minutes

What could be more exciting than human mate-seeking behaviour? I recently read a lengthy [paper](#) by psychologist Rob Henderson, who you may remember from [BrainCandy 79](#) on Luxury Beliefs. He looked at the effects of different contexts on gender dating behaviour. And before I reproduce the most exciting findings here, I'd better issue a trigger warning. There are a few findings that are likely to collide with one or the other worldview. And this is exclusively about heterosexual patterns. And one more thing, since we live in a time when complexity is often met with black and white thinking and cancel culture: The following is a description of patterns and probabilities. It is not a woodcut classification of female or male behaviour. Of course, there is always deviant behaviour from general patterns.

I focus on the findings and minimise background info on study designs for better reading flow. For academic interest, please click on the link above.

The influence of the contexts 'education' and 'income':

The dating market for women is getting tougher. This is partly because fewer men are studying at universities. Why is going to university important for women when it comes to men? Because on average women prefer educated men.

American researchers studied personal dating ads. They found that two of the strongest variables that predicted how many responses a man received from women were years of education and income.

A study at Ghent University found that women on Tinder were 91 per cent more likely to "like" a man with a master's degree than one with a bachelor's degree. The researchers used the same male profiles, the only difference being the level of education. They also tested how men would react to women with different levels of education and found only a weak preference for the master's degree. In other words, all other things being equal, a man with a Master's degree is almost twice as likely to find a partner among our neighbours as a man with a Bachelor's degree.



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Some women marry men with less education. These women tend to marry men who earn more than they do. Let me put it this way: if you are a less educated man, earning more than your educated male counterparts is helpful - if you want to marry an educated woman. Evolutions psychologist David Buss concludes from his studies: "It turns out that successful women place even more value on partners who have professional degrees, high social status, greater intelligence, and are tall, independent and confident."

**The influence of the context of gender ratios:**

Even seemingly small differences in gender ratios have a noticeable effect on behaviour. For example, in 'The Evolution of Desire', David Buss discusses the student body at the University of Texas. In 2016, the student body was composed of 46 per cent men and 54 per cent women. That doesn't seem like much of a difference. But it is. So there are 17 per cent more women than men on campus. That means that if every student hooks up with someone of the opposite sex, about 4,000 female students will be left without a partner.

In his book 'Date-onomics', Jon Birger shows that 5.5 million American women between the ages of 22 and 29 have a college degree (most comparable to a bachelor's degree), while there are only 4.1 million men in the same age group with a college degree.

In other words: There are 4 women for every 3 men in the dating pool for college graduates. Also, more men describe themselves as exclusively homosexual compared to women. The pool of partners for heterosexual women is probably even smaller.

But how do such imbalances manifest themselves in terms of mating strategies? When there is a surplus of men, men are more likely to adapt to women's preferences. Because then men are more likely to compete with each other to be what women want. For example, on average, women tend to prefer longer-term relationships. In general, women report a greater desire for emotional attention than men. This applies to all cultures, by the way.

Jon Birger describes the dating scene at universities which have an unbalanced gender ratio. At universities with more men than women, such as Caltech, committed relationships are more widespread. Students go on dates, and men show commitment to partnerships. Men are more willing to fulfil women's desires to be with them. On the other hand, if there is a surplus of women compared to men, women are more likely to conform to men's preferences. They compete with each other to be what men want. At universities with more women, casual sex is more widespread. The "hookup" culture is flourishing. Birger describes an interview with a female student: most heterosexual men at her university had no interest in a committed relationship. "Why should they?" she said. "It's like they have their own free harem."

One of my girlfriends got dumped by a guy after they had been together for less than a week. When he broke up with her, he even used the word 'market' - that the 'market' was just too good for him."

If you have ever dealt with young men at elite universities, you will find that many of them talk this way, especially if there are less prestigious colleges nearby. The reason for this is that male students at top universities can attract women to their own university and also to other universities in the vicinity. On the other hand, women at top universities are often only interested in dating men at their own university. For these women, the dating pool is considerably smaller than for their male peers.



Interestingly, women trust men less at universities where there are more women. In a study on campus gender ratios and sexual behaviour, researchers analysed data from female students at various US colleges. The women's responses varied depending on the gender ratio on campus. For example, women at colleges with more women were more likely to agree that "men don't want committed relationships" and that they "don't expect much" from the men they date. They also found that women at universities with higher female-to-male ratios were much less likely to say they had never had sex.

In contrast, in an environment where there are more men, relationships are more likely to expand. Harvard psychologist Marcia Guttentag and her colleague Paul Secord examined census figures, sex ratio data and historical texts going back to ancient Greece and medieval Europe.

They found that in societies where men were more numerous in relation to women, the culture tended to emphasise courtship and romance. Men had to compete for wives and were therefore more willing to make commitments to women. However, according to Guttentag, while women in such societies were more likely to be forced into stereotypical gender roles, they exercised greater control in choosing their romantic partners. She found that in societies with more women than men, the opposite was true. She writes: "The outstanding characteristic of times when women were in oversupply would be that men would not remain committed to the same woman throughout her childbearing years." One can literally hear how she does not like her own insight.

There is also something to be said for the fact that educated men prefer educated women. And for long-term relationships, they do. Compared to women, however, men are more willing to date less educated partners. And less educated women are more willing to date men who are more educated than they are. So this means that educated women are not only competing with other educated women for educated male partners, but also with less educated women. So in the dating environment for educated men, there is an oversupply of women.

In an essay titled 'The Mating Crisis Among Educated Women', Buss states that it is no coincidence that the rise of dating culture on college campuses has coincided with the growing proportion of female students. Even Tinder, he believes, is part of the same phenomenon. Fewer desirable men translates into more hookups.

Unfortunately, other factors do not bode well for long-term relationships either. According to the Pew Research Center, almost 80 per cent of unmarried women say that a partner with a steady job is "very important" to them.



Picture credits: istock.com / insta_photos



Working men are more attractive to women. And considering that successful women tend to value economic success even more in prospective partners, it stands to reason that working women place even more value on a job when choosing a partner. However, Pew also found that among unmarried adults, there are only 84 employed men for every 100 women. If all the employed men were suddenly gone, one in six women would be without a partner.

Why are men falling behind in education? One reason may be video games. In a paper entitled 'Cutting class to play video games', economist Michael Ward examined a dataset of more than 6,000 high school and college students. He found that students spent less time on class and homework and more time playing video games. Moreover, this crowding-out effect was more pronounced among male students and students with lower incomes. For males, the average time spent playing video games was three times higher than for females.

Hurst: " In our culture, where we are constantly connected to technology, activities like playing Xbox, browsing social media, and Snapchatting with friends raise the attractiveness of leisure time. And so it goes that if leisure time is more enjoyable, and as prices for these technologies continue to drop, people may be less willing to work at any given wage." This could be the reason why fewer young men than women are employed or studying.

Many young men have decided to devote more of their time to playing and less to education or work. Interestingly, these young men do not report being unhappy. However, the men interviewed are still quite young. It is possible and perhaps even likely that their feelings will change when these men reach middle age.

Right now, many young men understand that women want educated and successful partners. Why don't they work harder to conform to this preference? In their book *The Demise of Guys*, psychologists Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan suggest that the answer lies in two areas: fake war and fake sex. They argue that many young men have a natural desire for conflict, struggle and accomplishment. Video games satisfy this desire. They are designed to provide a sense of gradual success in the face of obstacles. In addition, young men also have a natural desire for sexual partnerships. Digital porn satisfies this desire.

Let's summarise again before describing one last little nugget: There are many more educated women than educated men. Women generally prefer men who are at least as successful as they are. This pool of men is small and shrinking.

And in couples where the woman has more education, they tend to prefer men who earn more than they do. However, the reality is that fewer young men than women are graduating from university, fewer men are in employment and fewer men are seeking employment. In such an environment, the culture of hooking up becomes more popular, which women tend not to enjoy as much as men.



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The romantic landscape is rosy for educated and successful men, who are more open to dating both successful and less successful women. Research suggests that in such an environment, sexual competition between women increases. A recent study found that the prevalence of "sexy selfies" may be partly due to the imbalance, as women compete for the attention of the shrinking number of economically successful men. If you are an educated man, your chances of getting sexy selfies increase. Please don't take this as encouragement to frisk your partner's phone.

In a deregulated market, the laws of power prevail. This applies not only to the economic sphere, but also to romance. At no time in history have all men in a given society been equally desirable. Today, however, the gap between men is particularly pronounced. And there is no sign that this gap is narrowing or closing. The polyamory movement may be a reaction to the shift in the sex ratio of attractive people.

Many people who do not consider themselves polyamorous probably practice some form of polyamory, consciously or unconsciously, as the famous case of [West Elm Caleb](#) demonstrates. Most desirable young men who use dating apps almost certainly have at least three women in their rotation, if not more, like the infamous 'Caleb'.

The good news, however, is that romantic couples where both people are educated tend to be happier. The divorce rate is lower and satisfaction with marriage is higher. But as incentives continue to shift, expectations of monogamy fade, and imbalances continue to affect the dating pool for the educated, we may see fewer such couples.

And what do we do with it now? Maybe you have someone who could get an "aha" out of this BrainCandy, then just pass it on. It might also help our daughters to better understand certain experiences or to be more aware when it comes to dating experiences. I wonder if I could have used this information to motivate my son more with the equation 'more education = more romance' before he left school? Because all my attempts at the time showed subsignificant effectiveness.

Fortunately, his knot burst after he left school. If we succeed in giving our sons more motivation for education, everyone will benefit. Our sons themselves and their potential partners.

A note in conclusion. Marketing and especially market research usually assume that human behaviour is controlled from 'inside' (attitudes, personality, drives, etc.). However, modern behavioural science shows that our decisions are primarily situational, i.e. context-dependent. The 'outside' usually explains our behaviour better than our 'inside'. We are not stimulus-response machines. Because we learn through life experience which behaviour has worked for us in which contexts. And when contexts change, our behaviour changes. See people's experiences when looking for a partner.



Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#).



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