

Men make more extreme choices and decisions, find scientists

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This is the main finding of new research involving more than 50,000 participants in 97 samples, published in the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

The findings show that the more extreme choices and decisions of men can be both positive and negative.

"The question of whether men and women make systematically different choices and decisions is one on the most fundamental (and controversial) questions in [psychological research](#)," Associate Professor Stefan Volk from the University of Sydney Business School said.

"We found men were much more likely than women to be at the extreme ends of the behavioral spectrum, either acting very selfishly or very altruistically, very trusting or very distrusting, very fair or very unfair, very risky or very risk averse and were either very short-term or very long-term focused."

The findings could impact policies aimed at

regulating extreme behaviors such as the recent GameStop trading frenzy after retail traders on Reddit heavily shorted the stock.

"Our research suggests policies aimed at reducing extreme behaviors should be more tailored towards men," said Dr. Volk.

The researchers suggest the differences might have evolutionary roots, but there are also alternative explanations for the existence of what is often referred to as greater male variability.

"Parental investment theory explains that men, in contrast to women, invest less in parenting, are less selective in their partner choice and compete more for sexual partners," Associate Professor Volk explained.

"This evolutionary theorizing suggests that men had to deviate from the average to stand out and be attractive to women to reproduce, while women were able to attract sexual partners without deviating from the average.

"Another explanation could be norms and expectations of acceptable gendered behavior and that men's extreme behaviors are socially constructed and reinforced.

"This alternative theory suggests that the socially constructed patriarchy in many societies has managed to constrain women and the opportunity for them to display the same level of variability as men."

Associate Professor Stefan Volk, worked with an international team to examine [sex differences](#) in altruism, cooperation, trust, fairness and attitudes towards time and risk in economic decision-making. The researchers found systematic evidence for greater male variability.

He added these gender differences in variability are

difficult to detect in research focused on gender differences in average behaviors. This is why they have been overlooked in most previous research, which traditionally focused on mean [gender differences](#) rather than the range of behaviors. But we need to look at differences in extreme behaviors to understand what might be driving those outliers.

The *PNAS* paper is the second in a series by Associate Professor Volk on greater male variability; the first was just published in the internationally leading psychological journal *Psychological Science*.

This earlier research involved two large-scale meta-analyses of economic decision-making studies and studies of organizational citizenship behavior with more than 20,000 participants. While the researchers found no differences in the degree to which men and [women](#) behaved cooperatively on average, they did find strong evidence for greater male variability in cooperation.

More information: Christian Thöni et al., "Converging evidence for greater male variability in time, risk, and social preferences," *PNAS* (2021). www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.2026112118

Provided by University of Sydney

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