



How Socioeconomic Status and Gender Shape College Pathways

Kaylee T. Matheny

Stanford University

for presentation at

Georgetown University

McCourt School of Public Policy

Agenda

- Research Program
- Motivation
- Research Question
- Data
- Analytic Strategy
- Findings
- Implications
- Upcoming Projects

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Understanding
people's experiences
with social institutions

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The Washington Post
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Religion, Race, and
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The Chronicle of Higher Education
Times Higher Education
Inside Higher Ed (op-ed)

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The Chronicle of Higher Education
Brookings (blog post)

Enrollment Participation and
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Forthcoming. **EdSource** Progress:
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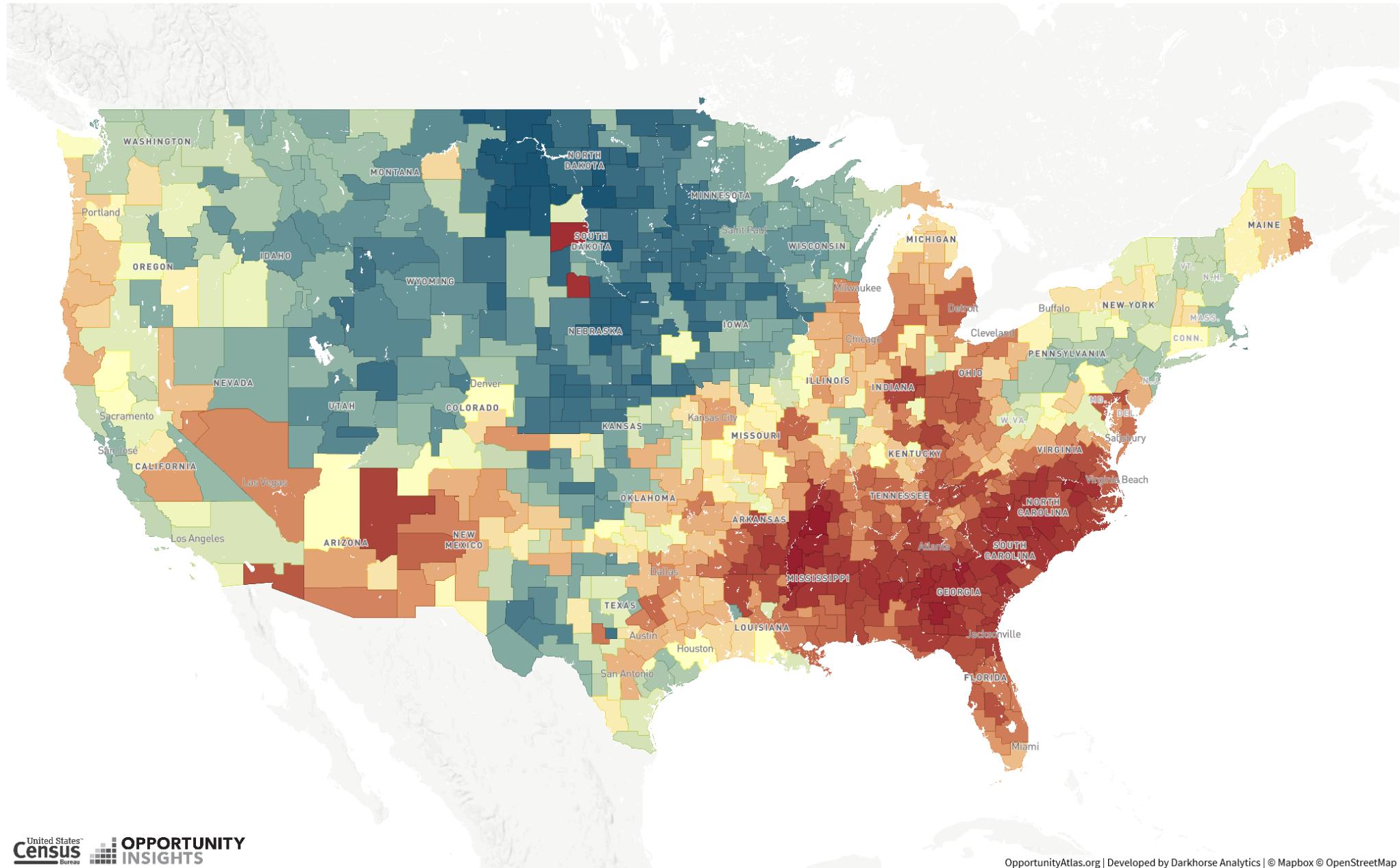
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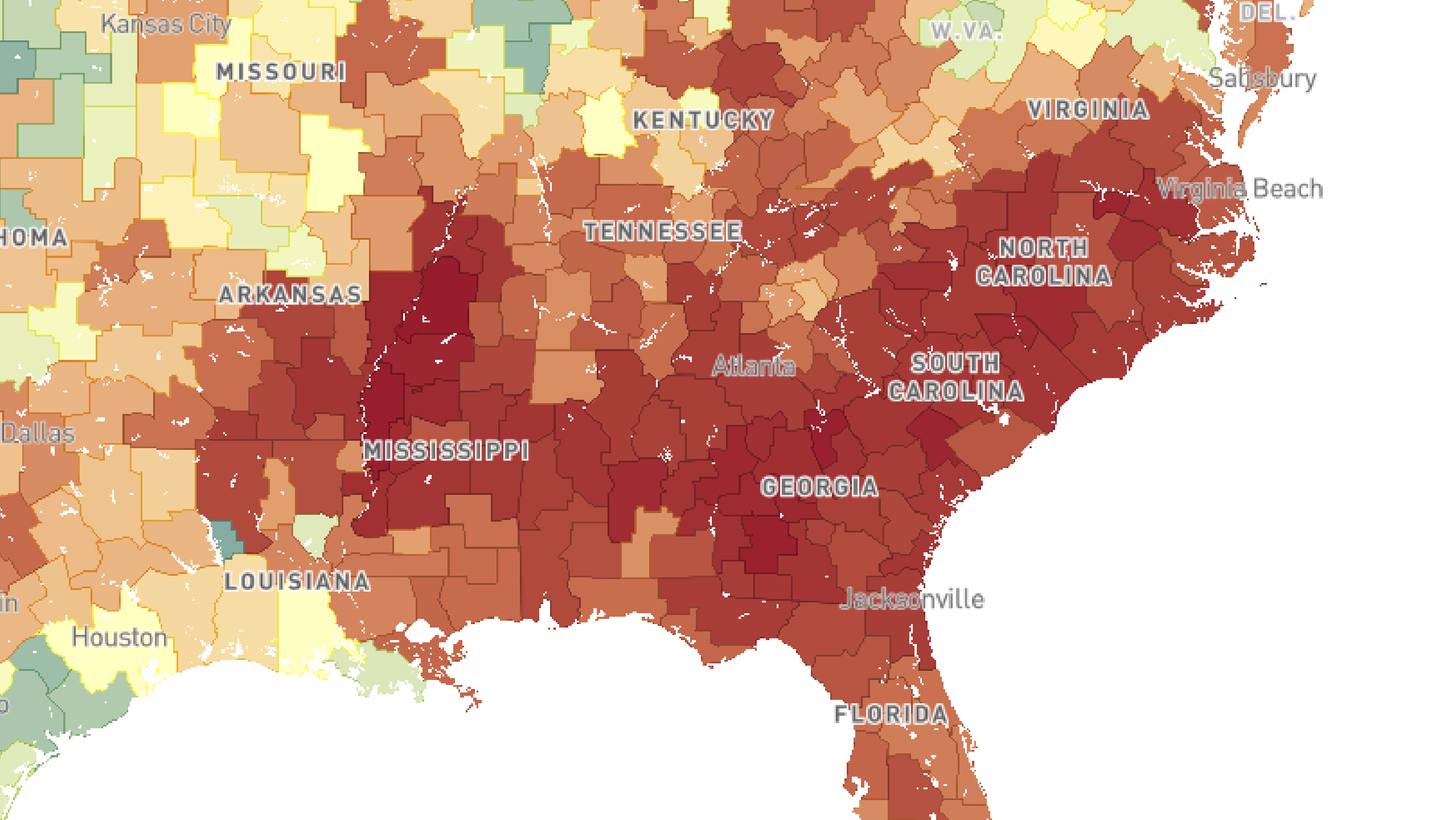
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Household Income at Age 35 for Children of Low Income Parents

<\$20k 27k 29k 30k 32k 33k 35k 37k 39k 44k >\$55k









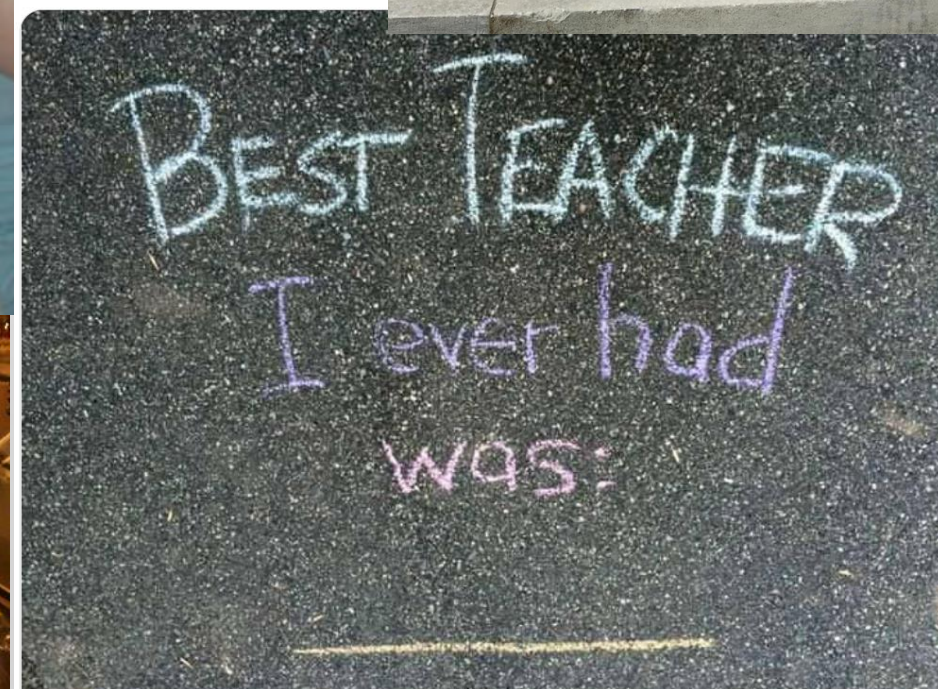








Kaylee Tuggle Matheny 🥰



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Jasmine's Story

Jasmine, Age 16: I work very hard [in school]...It's very important because I **don't work for just that day, I work for my future.** So I need everything that I'm working on to be good. So when I come to the process of applying for college, I don't have to be "Ahh, I should have done this or I should have done that." I don't have to be angry that I didn't do something.

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...like the careers after college, they're good. [HBCUs] have **good jobs** related to criminal justice. Like crime scene investigator jobs. They're high in those jobs; they rank high in there.

Policy Connection

The college wage
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and 2000s

(Goldin & Katz 2007)

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More than **1/3** of people in the U.S. between the ages of 18 and 35 start college, but exit before earning any credential

(National Student Clearinghouse, 2022)

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Stopping out (or taking time off) is associated with



Student debt



Degree timelines



Probability of BA

(Guth, 2022)

Concern for Boys

Poor Girls Are Leaving Their Brothers Behind

Colleges Have a Guy Problem

A recent viral news story reported that a generation of young men is abandoning college. The pattern has deep roots.

The male college crisis is not just in enrollment, but completion



A Generation of American Men Give Up on College: 'I Just Feel Lost'

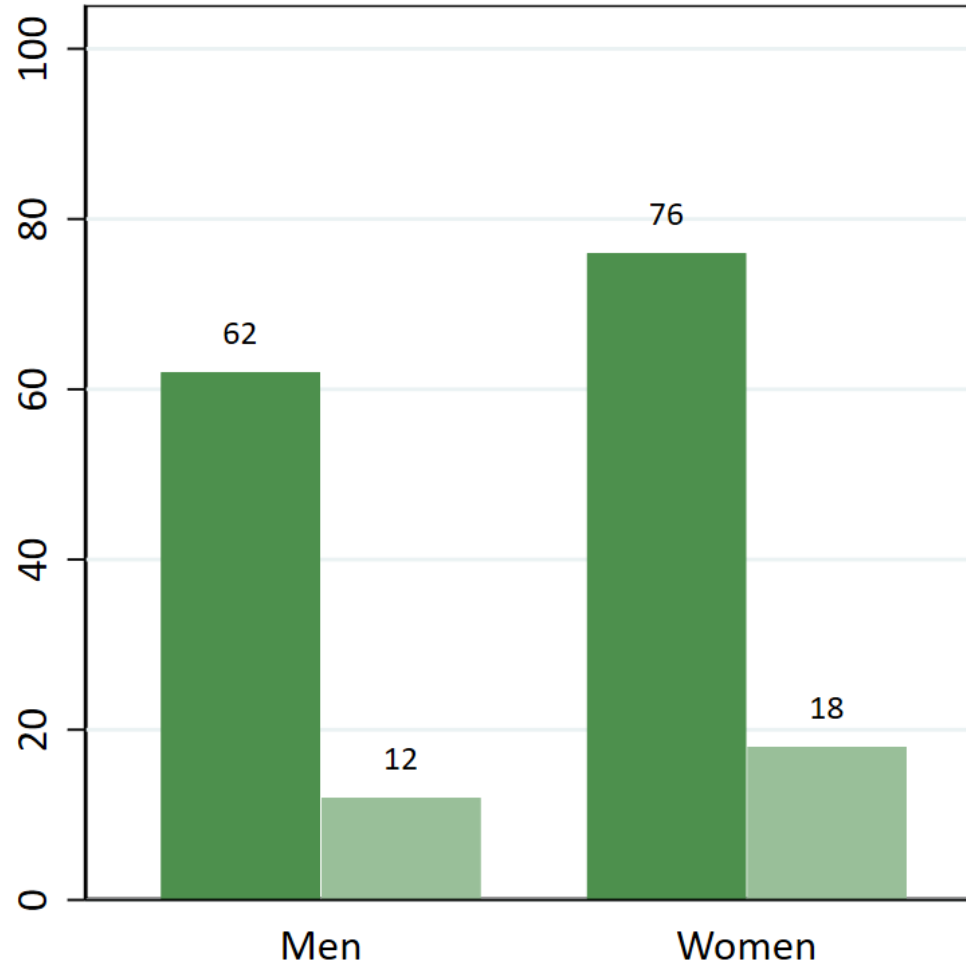
The number of men enrolled at two- and four-year colleges has fallen behind women by record levels, in a widening education gap across the U.S.

To All the Girls I've Rejected

**Men are missing from college campuses:
What's being done to bring them back?**

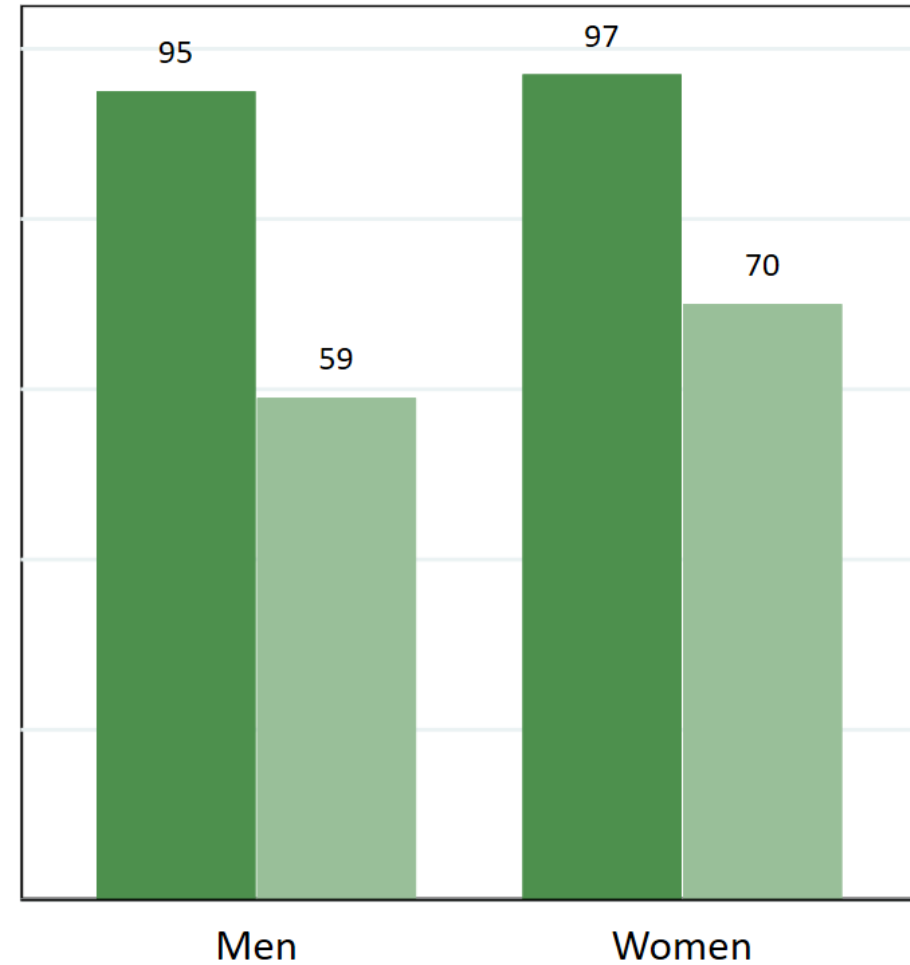
College Attendance by SES

Low-SES



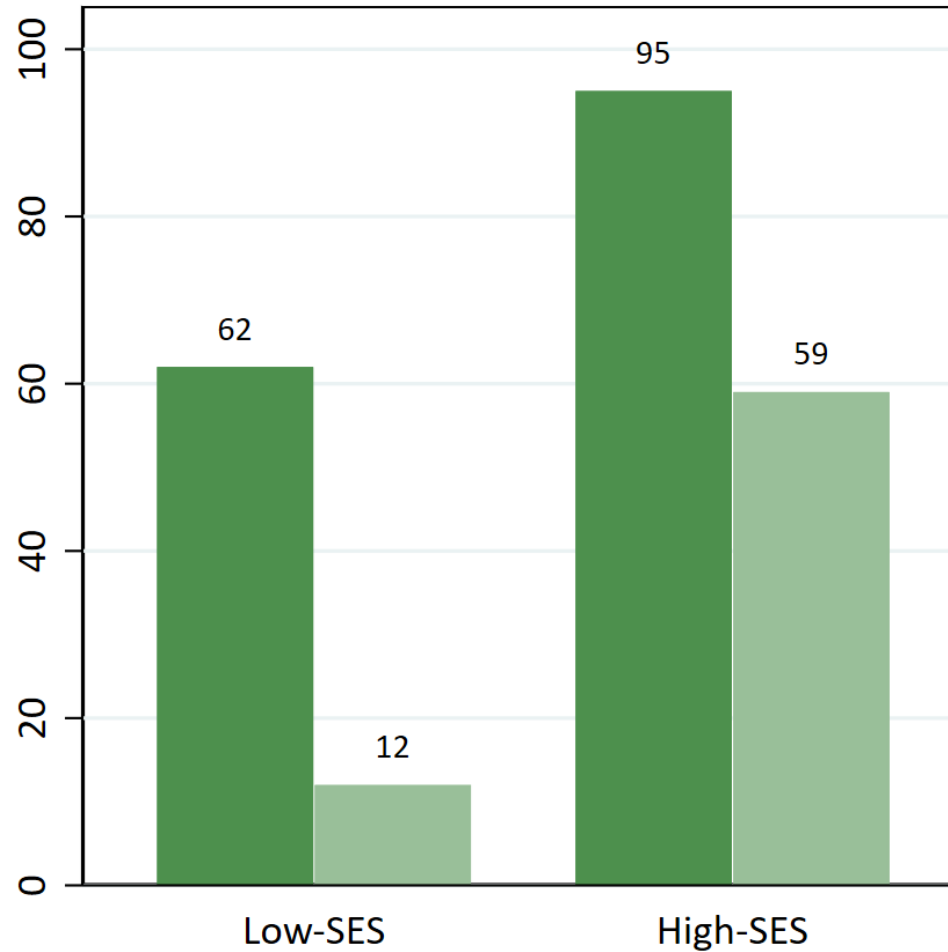
College Attendance by SES

High-SES



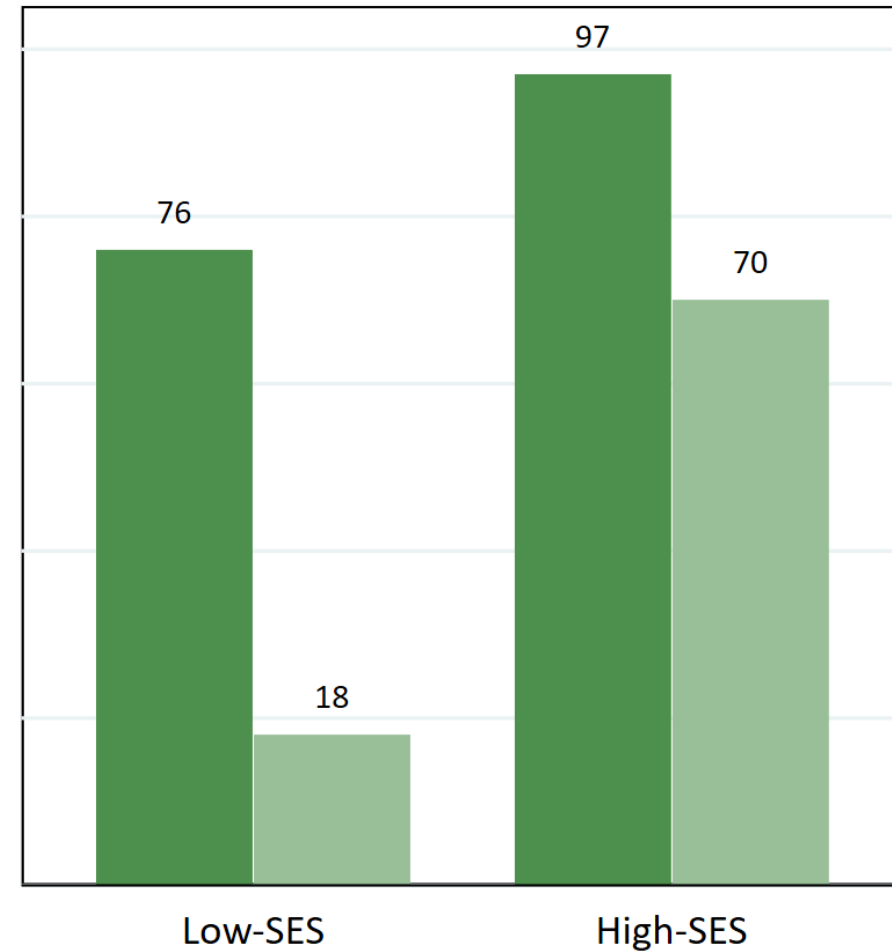
College Attendance by Gender

Men



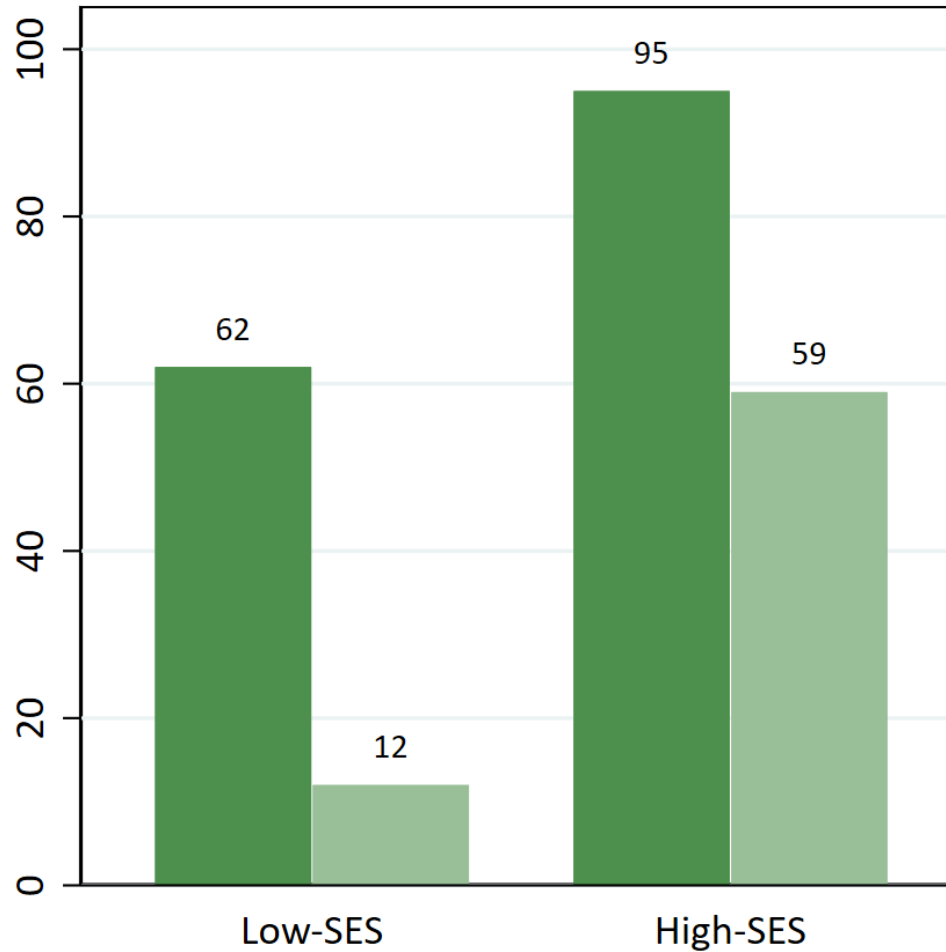
College Attendance by Gender

Women



College Attendance by Gender

Men

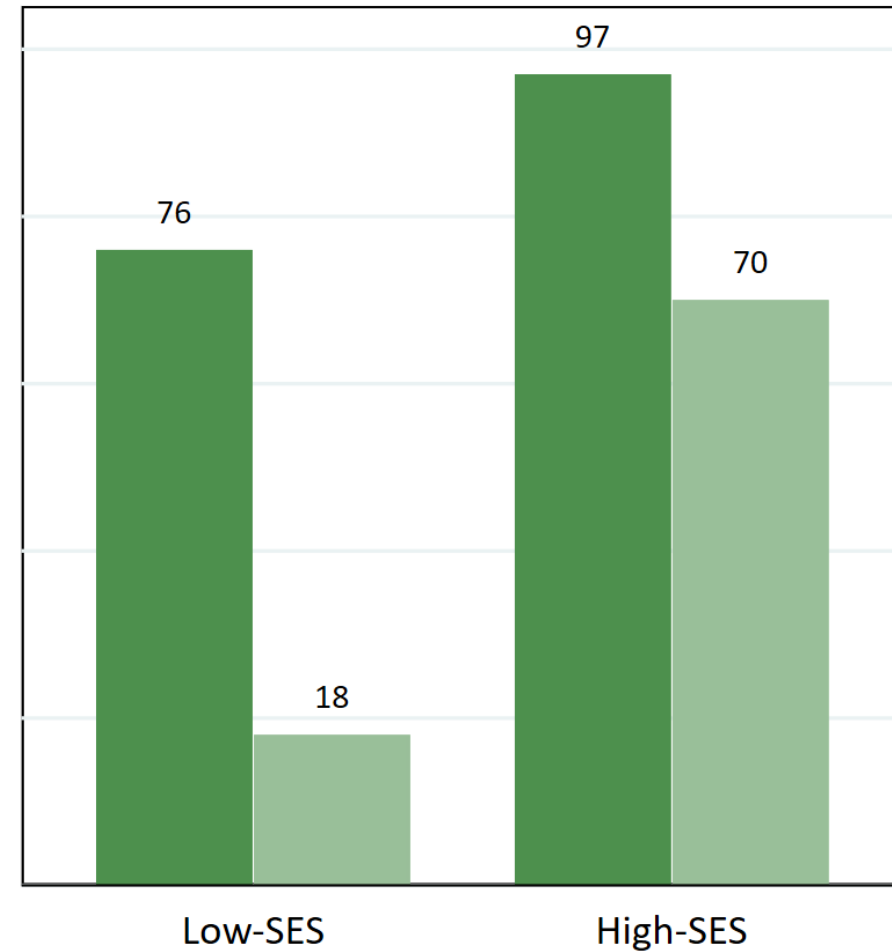


Starting college accounts for **70%** of the SES disparity among men

Persisting accounts for **30%**

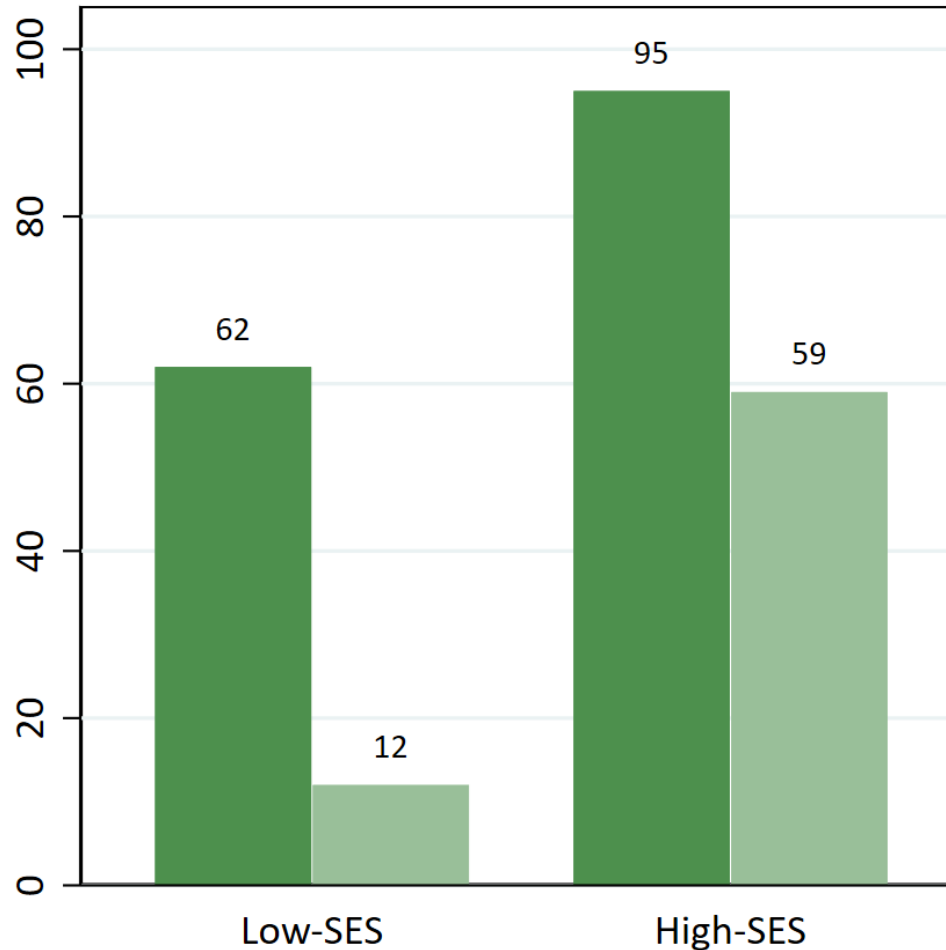
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College Attendance by Gender

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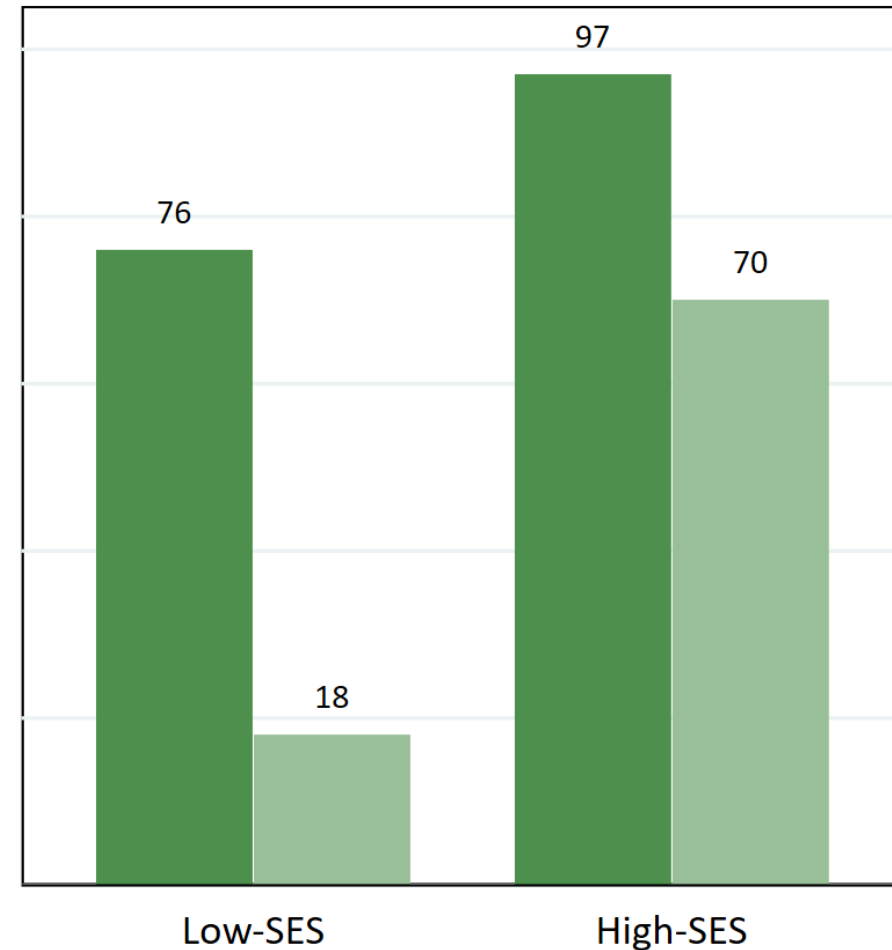


Starting college accounts for **70%** of the SES disparity among men

Persisting accounts for **30%**

College Attendance by Gender

Women



Starting college accounts for **40%** of the SES disparity among women

Persisting accounts for **60%**



Popular discourse and policy interventions are less concerned with low-SES women like Jasmine.

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Although women on average are indeed achieving, low-SES women are overlooked—and are experiencing their own “motherhood penalty” in higher education.

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How do SES and gender shape college persistence?

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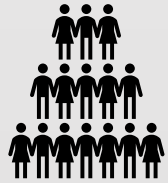
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Data

National Survey of Youth and Religion

Data

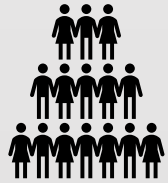
National Survey of Youth and Religion



Nationally
representative

Data

National Survey of Youth and Religion



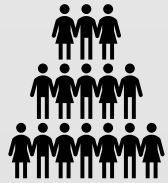
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Longitudinal
(Four Waves)

Data

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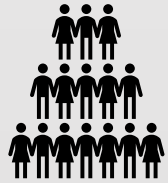
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Timely
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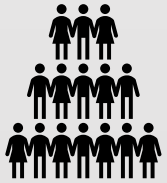
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Matched
Interviews

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Longitudinal
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Matched
Interviews



Matched
Enrollment Data

Data

Full survey sample (n=3,290)

Subset of the longitudinal interviews

- Low-SES women (n=34)
- Low-SES men (n=35)
- High-SES women (n=73)
- Participants: 142; interviews: 356

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Analytic Strategy: Quantitative

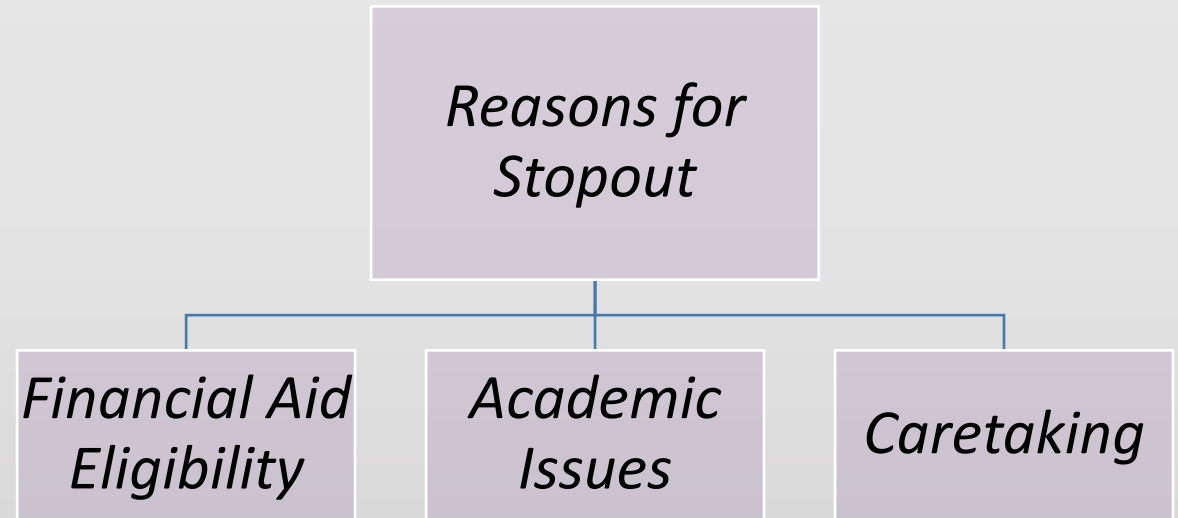
$$\frac{P_i}{1-P_i} = \exp(\beta_1 + \beta_2 SES_i + \beta_3 Woman_i + \beta_4 SES * Woman_i + e_i)$$

Variables:

P_i	Probability of stop-out
SES_i	Continuous measure of SES (composite variable with family income, parent education, parent occupational status)
$Woman_i$	Binary indicator for gender (woman=1)
$SES * Woman_i$	Interaction term indicating the differential relationship between SES and stop-out for women

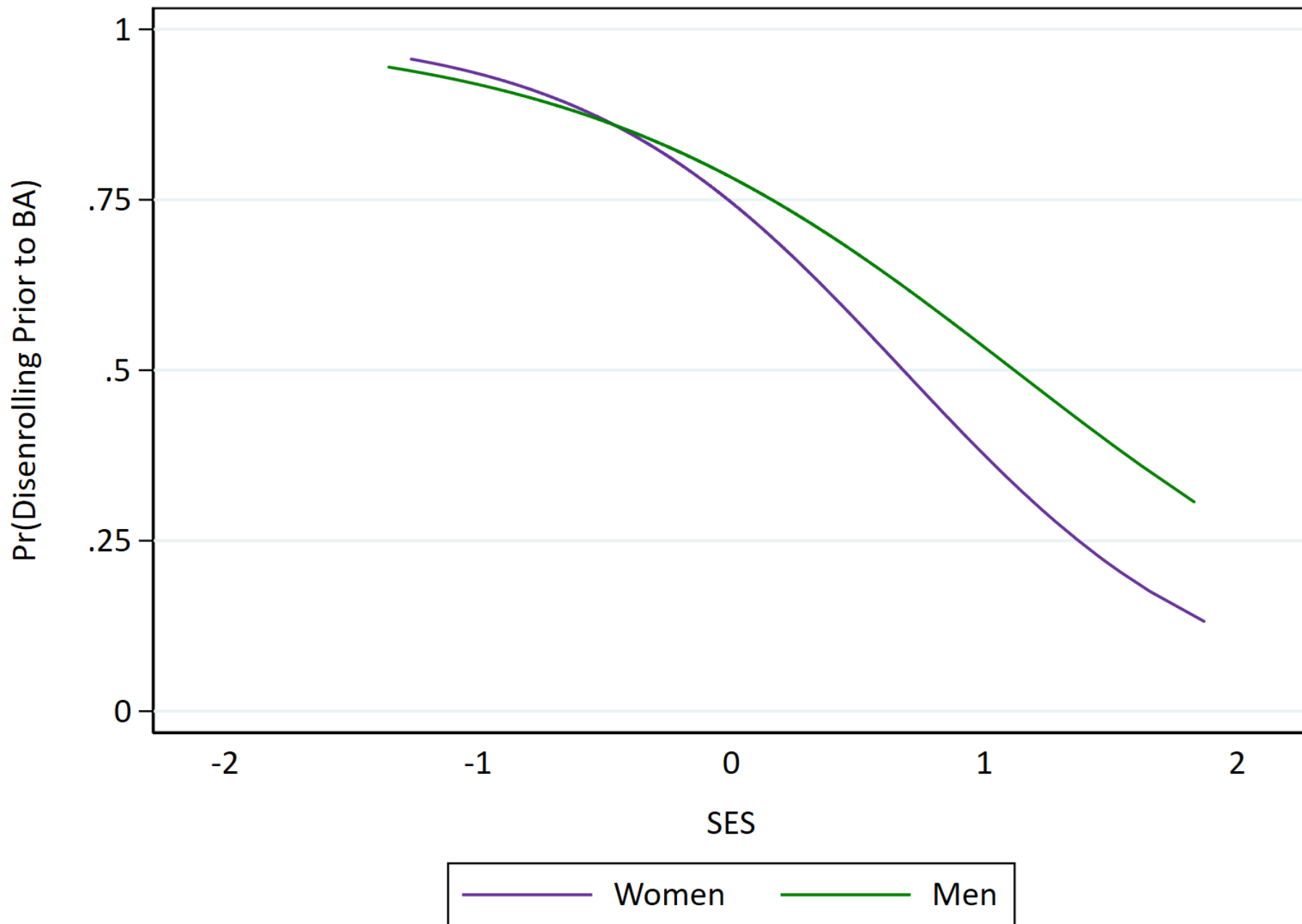
Analytic Strategy: Qualitative

- First Cycle: Descriptive Codes
- Second Cycle: Pattern coding, or disaggregating the descriptive codes (e.g., “caretaking”) into explanatory and inferential codes to identify emergent themes (e.g., “familial care,” “childcare”) (Saldaña 2016)

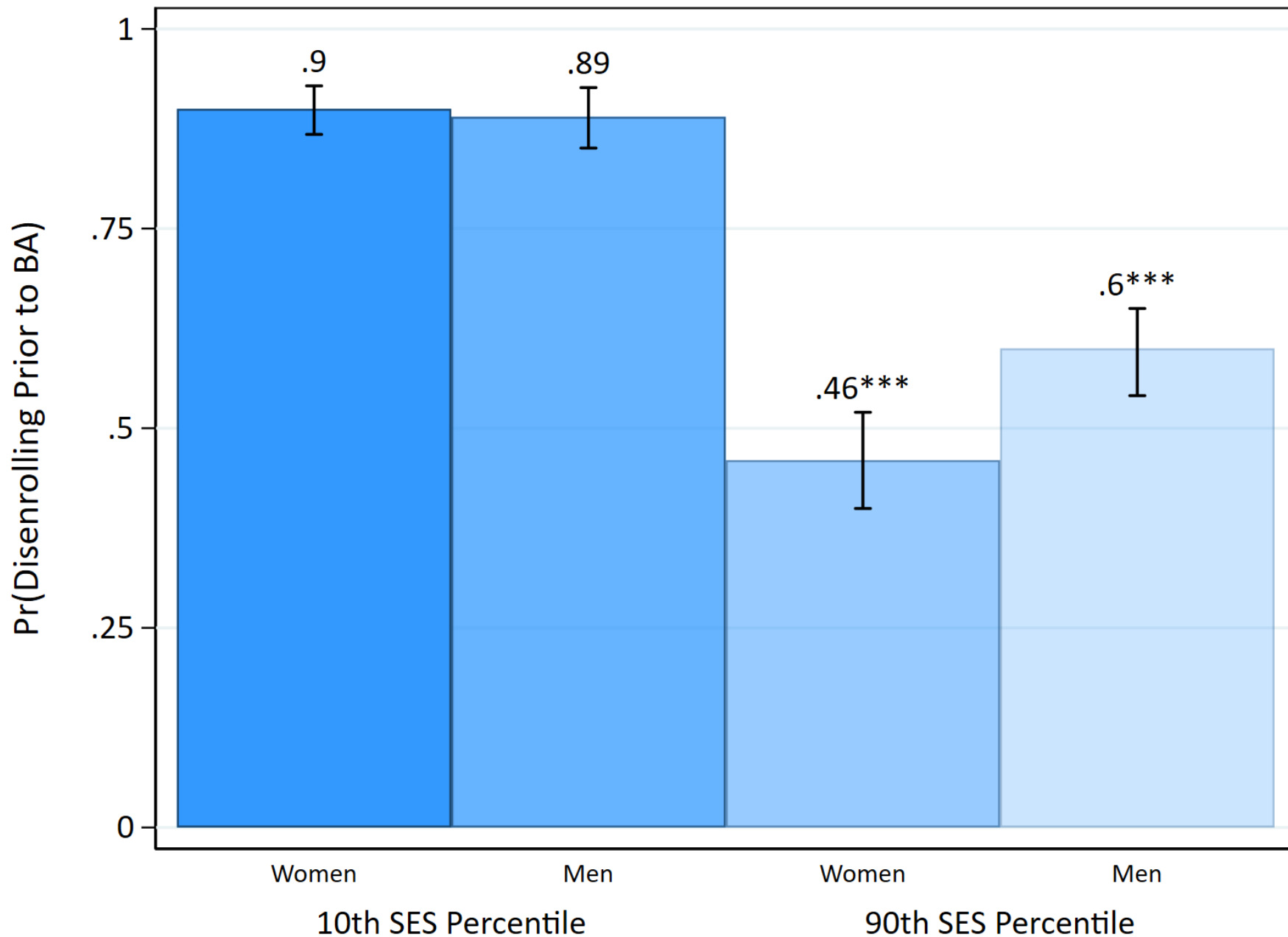


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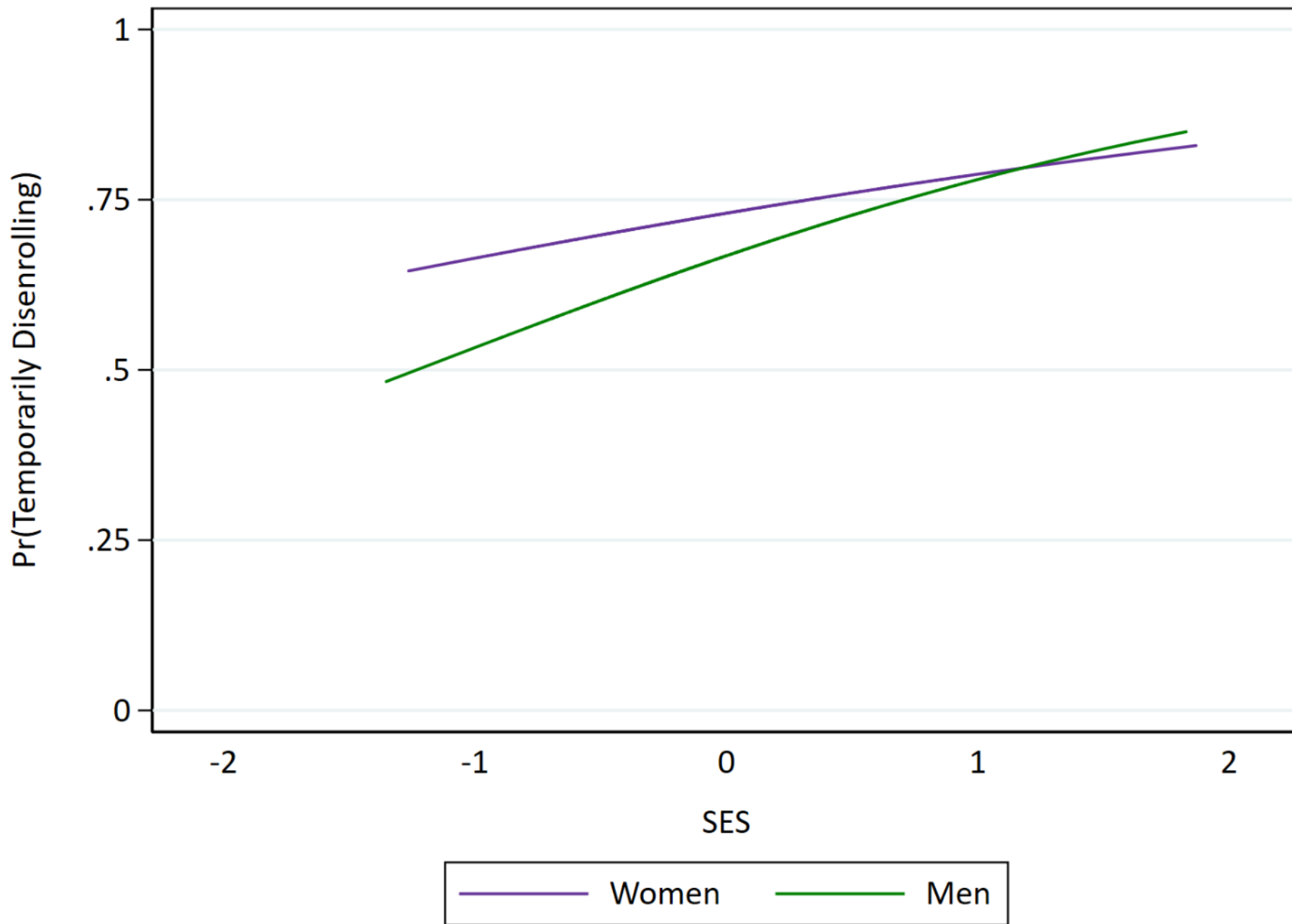
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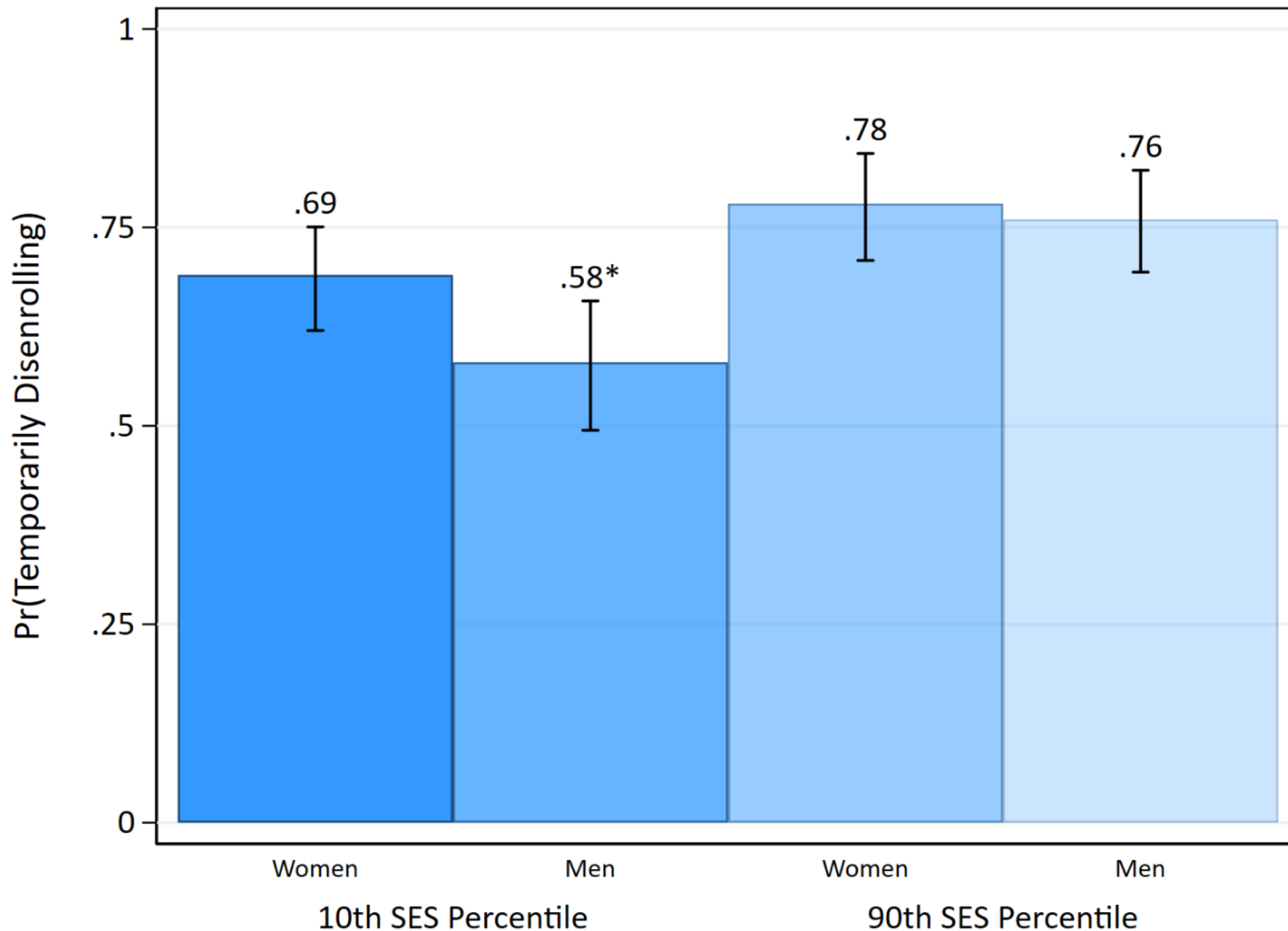
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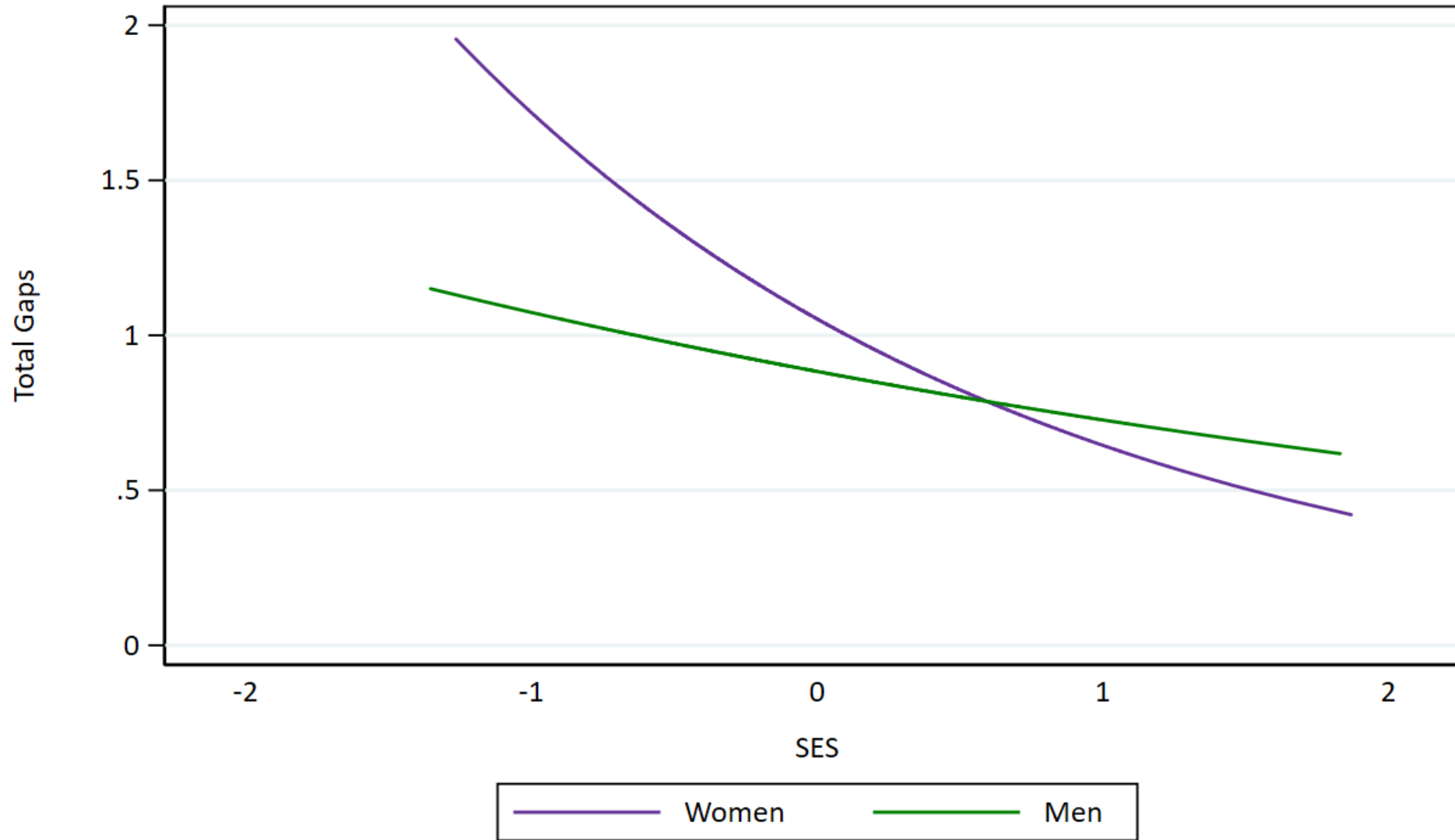
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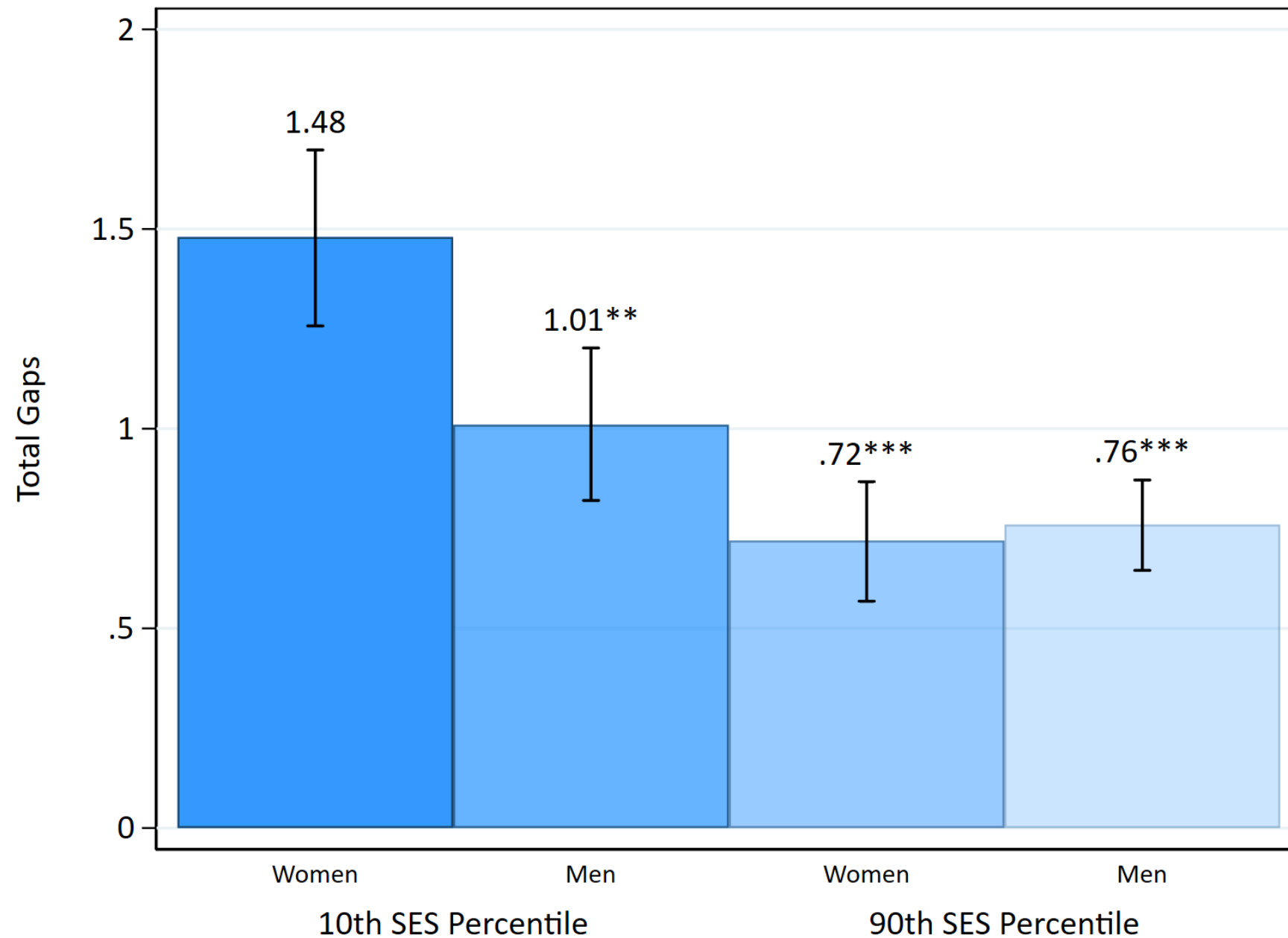
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Low-SES women are more likely to return to school than low-SES men (conditional on disenrolling)



Low-SES
women leave
and return
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Qualitative Findings

Familial Care Work

- Caring for parents, siblings, and other relatives who require supervision and/or support

Parenthood

- Leaving for birth and/or parenting care work

Child Well-Being

- Moving school districts; moving to live near family

Findings: Familial Care Work

Amelia

Amelia, Age 21: “My mom had a baby in 2005 [who] has a heart condition, so...she’s really low on oxygen and stuff. **And so she can’t go to regular daycare, and I’ve been watching her since she was three months old, and she just turned three (years old) in June (2008).** So that’s the main thing. I’ve been watching her every day. I graduated high school in 2006, and now I’m going to college, taking night classes so I can watch her during the day. She’s actually having open-heart surgery in July, like in the 17 of this month. ... I think college [is] so stressful. **And if you’re living on your own you have to work and to do anything you have to have money. So you have to work and go to college.** So it’s really challenging sometimes.”

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Amelia

Amelia, Age 21: “My mom had a baby in 2005 [who] has a heart condition, so...she’s really low on oxygen and stuff. **And so she can’t go to regular daycare, and I’ve been watching her since she was three months old, and she just turned three (years old) in June (2008).** So that’s the main thing. I’ve been watching her every day. I graduated high school in 2006, and now I’m going to college, taking night classes so I can watch her during the day. She’s actually having open-heart surgery in July, like in the 17 of this month. ... I think college [is] so stressful. **And if you’re living on your own you have to work and to do anything you have to have money. So you have to work and go to college.** So it’s really challenging sometimes.”

Amelia, Age 26: “I have been trying to go to school since I was nineteen, and **I had to do it off and on at [the local community college] because of money, and then um, because of classes that I had to drop because of family issues back in 2008** before I had financial aid, it affected my completion percentage at [the local community college] which then affected whether I could get my financial aid or not there. And so I stopped going there because I couldn’t afford the 20 credit hours that they wanted me to pay out of pocket to get my financial aid back.”

Findings: Parenthood

Dani

Dani, Age 23: “Never wanted kids. I wasn’t—I’m very good with children, **I just never wanted [kids] personally for myself...**I wanted to get married before I even thought of kids, if that even happened, move into a place, it was all like mixmatched backwards. I wanted to finish college, you know what I mean? It’s all different, but still doing it.”

...

Dani, Age 23: I started [college] during my pregnancy, actually. I believe it was in August of 2010, I’m pretty sure. And, then **I did two semesters throughout my pregnancy and then I did one more after [my daughter] was born. And then it was like I need to take a break, ‘cause this is too much right now...** I’m like sponge, I love going to school, I do. It’s just when I’m in school I need to be one hundred percent focused, like I don’t like half-assing, you could say, because then I feel it’s pointless, ya know?

Findings: Child Well-Being

Carmen

Age 26, describing her move from New Orleans and Tulane:

“[I moved to have **b]etter opportunities for my kids to....ya know....get an education**. You know....the schools in New Orleans aren't so favorable.”

“Yes....**the schools are much better**, I mean....they're not 100 perfect but much better than where I come from. So I- I like the schools and being out here....it's like....you actually get the opportunity to see what the American Dream is.”

“I paid my way through college. I....got my Associate's degree. You know....I'm able- I found a career that I love and I fought until I FINALLY got in to it! You know....finally someone gave me the opportunity....a chance. ... **cause I'm tryin' to enroll in school now- to get through college and- finally just- finish....you know....just get my bachelor's.**”

Jasmine's Story

Age 23:

I: On the whole do you think your mom is happy with how you turned out?

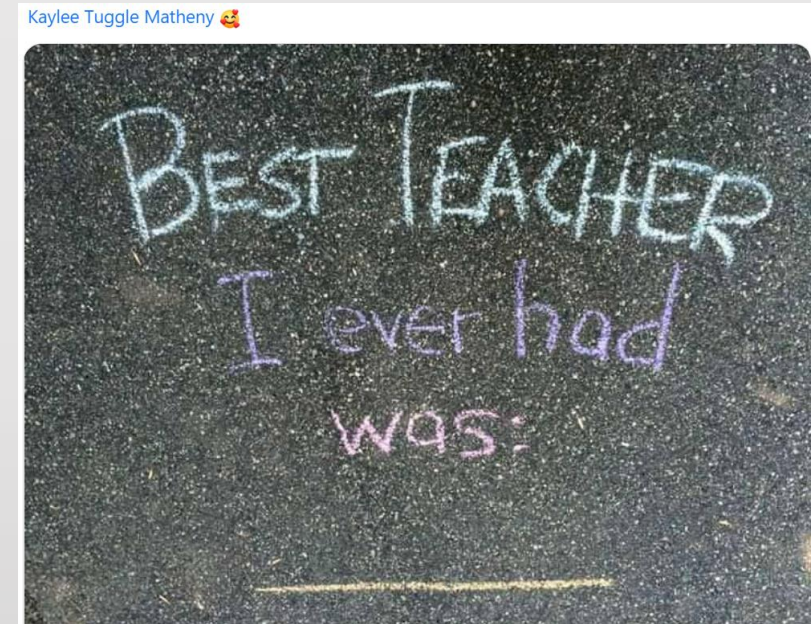
R: Um, I think she-I think she's happy with the maturity level that I have and my ability to take on any, um—any task or any problems that come my way. She knows I can hold my own and I know she's happy with that. I think **she would have wished that I would have finished college before I had kids**, but on— all in all she's happy that even though I have so much responsibility at a young age I still take care of the things that I have to take care of. My children, I know that—I've never been kicked out, never got a late notice, I don't get red flags on my-my-my rent and I don't—and my lights but I don't ask her for anything either. So she is definitely proud of me growing up when I needed to.

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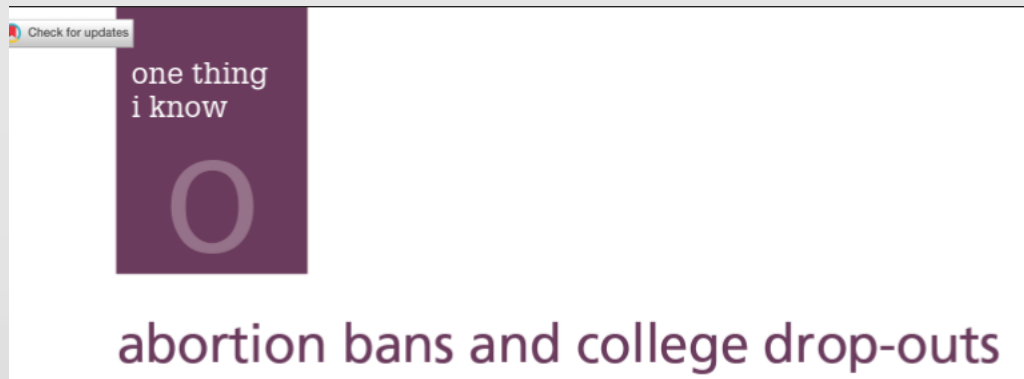
Agenda

- Research Program
- Motivation
- Research Question
- Data
- Analytic Strategy
- Findings
- **Implications**
- Upcoming Projects

Theoretical and Empirical Work

- I argue **the motherhood penalty begins in college**
 - Motherhood (and other caretaking responsibilities) delays entry to degreed careers and extends the timeline (and costs) of higher education
- I add to arguments suggesting **it is important to consider multiple axes of marginalization**
- I offer evidence substantiating that **emerging adulthood is a classed stage of the life course**

Policy

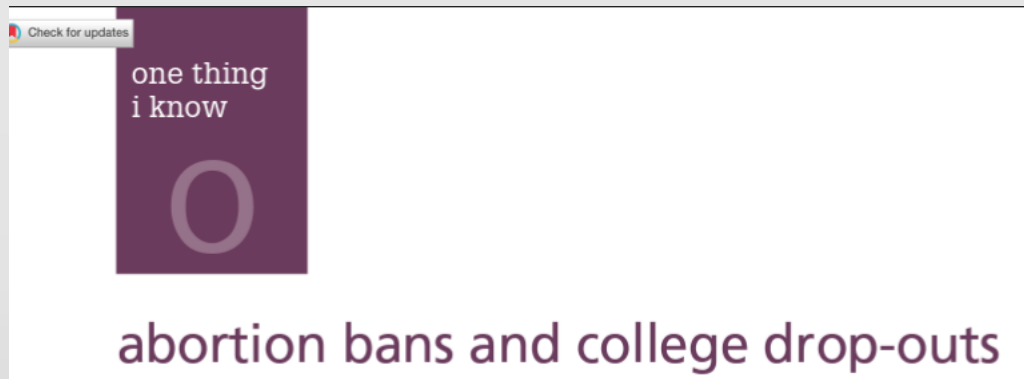


The Motherhood Penalty Begins in College

With abortion access under threat, more women, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, will be at risk of stopping out, Natalie Milan, Kaylee T. Matheny and Ilana M. Horwitz write.

By Natalie Milan, Kaylee T. Matheny, and Ilana M. Horwitz • Published June 22, 2022

Policy



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If 'Roe' Falls, More Female Students Could Face the 'Motherhood Penalty'

By Nell Gluckman | MAY 16, 2022



US abortion ruling 'another blow' to women's educational chances

JAH CHIKWENDIU, THE WASHINGTON POST, GETTY IMAGES

Policy

- It is essential that people, especially people who can give birth and for whom social norms imply caretaking, have as much agency as possible in that process
- Childcare is essential for women's equal participation not only in the labor market, but also in education
- Colleges can better accommodate student parents through the following:
 - Implementing excused absence policies and emergency medical grants that can be used for abortion access and services
 - Implementing parental leave policies that make educational transitions more seamless and maintain students' financial aid eligibility

Agenda

- Research Program
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Research Pipelines

Equitable Policies

- Do school funding reforms improve equity?
- What constraints impede equitable policies from having their intended effects?
- Why do teachers leave low-SES schools?

Low-SES Perspectives

- Linking to patterns of social mobility, how does place inform parents' perspectives of college?
- How do structural racism and classism shape low-SES Black parents' college narratives?
- How do parents make sense of college admissions?

SES and Other Structures

- How do low-SES men make sense of pathways toward economic stability and mobility?
- How do first generation, low-income students at an elite university construct and pursue “mobility projects”?
- Social class impacts college admission essay construction, but does that impact admission?

Thank You!

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Appendix:

Theoretical Framework

One Hypothesis:

- Low-SES women are more likely to complete a BA, which is associated with fewer interruptions (Cabrera et al. 2012; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; U.S. Department of Education 2016)
- Men are more likely to experience interruption (Ewert 2010; Goldrick-Rab 2006)
- Low-SES folks are more likely to experience interruption (Goldrick-Rab 2006)
- No observed difference in the impact of having children on men's and women's likelihoods of degree completion (Taniguchi and Kaufman 2005)



Interruptions
compared to
low-SES men



Interruptions
compared to
high-SES women

Notably, these studies do not look at the *intersection* of social class and gender.

But maybe...

- Low-SES women are more likely to experience competing demands between work and family, impeding their labor market participation
- Low-SES women responsible for a greater share of physical housework than low-SES men and high-SES women (David and Greenstein 2014)
- Low-SES women are more likely to provide direct care to ill family members (Heymnan 2000)

→ Lower workplace productivity, increased tardiness and absenteeism, and greater psychological distress (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton 2000; Ferber et al. 1991; Pleck 1985)



Interruptions
compared to
low-SES men

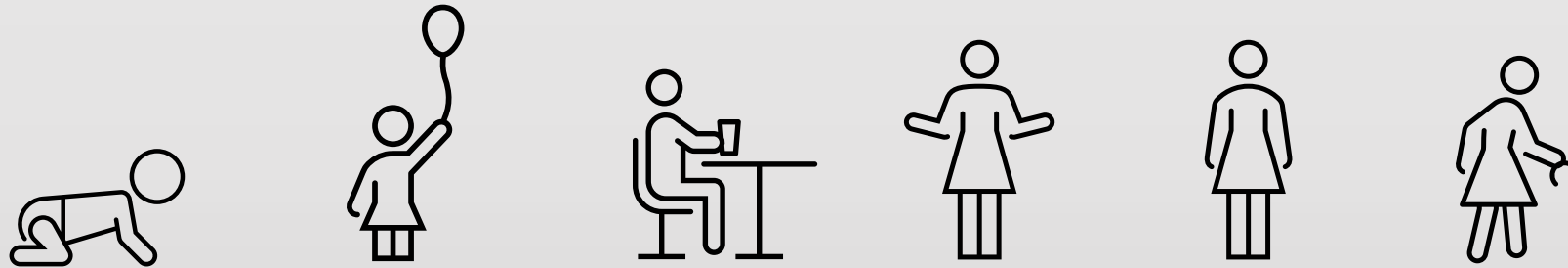


Interruptions
compared to
high-SES women

Theoretical Framework



Theoretical Framework



Theoretical Framework

Life Course Theory

- “Emerging adulthood”
- Familial and economic dependence
- Independence in social roles and expectations



Life Course Theory

- New stage in the life course: “Emerging adulthood”
 - Familial and economic dependence
 - Independence in social roles and expectations
- The development principle:
 - For low-SES women, higher education unfolds in young adulthood
 - For high-SES women, it unfolds in their emerging adulthood
 - **different experiences of role strain and opportunity for self-actualization**
- The interdependence principle: Lives unfold **interdependently**, with one person’s development, choices, and constraints affecting others’

**“Although the ‘inoculation’ approach to higher education—get it early in life and you are good for life—may have worked in an earlier time, it seems ill-suited to lives today.”
(Settersten & Schneider 2018)**

Theoretical Framework

Life Course Theory

- “Emerging adulthood”
- Familial and economic dependence
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Theoretical Framework

Life Course Theory

- “Emerging adulthood”
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Intersectionality Theory

- Social class and gender constitute axes of “multiple marginalization” and **disconnect low-SES women from multiple sources of power**
- Intersectionality can also help **explain responses to restrictions** from power (e.g., Randles 2021)

Intersectionality Theory

- Originating in Black Feminist paradigms, this approach urges scholars to see how people are simultaneously burdened by multiple disadvantages in society (Crenshaw 1989)
- Social class and gender constitute axes of “multiple marginalization” and disconnect low-SES women from multiple sources of power
- Intersectionality can also help explain responses to restrictions from power (e.g., Randles 2021)

**“Organizational studies dealing with gender intersectionality have commonly found that ‘compound oppression’ or multifaceted marginality makes it more difficult for women to negotiate organizational adaptations to their unique needs.”
(Frenkel & Wasserman 2020)**

Intersectionality Theory's Utility

- In Ruppanner et al. (2021), in costly childcare contexts, **high-SES women's labor force participation depended on local gender norms; not so for low-SES women**, whose “structural constraints outweigh normative expectations among those with few resources to overcome structural barriers”
- Gimenez-Nadal and Sevilla-Sanz (2011) show that **looking across gender, without taking into account SES, underestimates the gender disparity in leisure time**; within social strata, the gender differential in free time favoring men increases “from approximately three hours to almost five and a half hours per week”
- Randles (2021) shows **processes of innovation in response to resource scarcity that are unique to low-SES women** (due to both their lower economic resources and their disproportionate share of childrearing)