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Can we do it?

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You'd think today's modern woman would be happier than ever.

We've got it all — the right to work, the right to not work, the right to sleep with David Letterman — but, surprisingly, a comprehensive new study is pointing to one very disturbing trend.

Compared to 35 years ago, today's modern woman is, in fact, more miserable than ever.

What's even more troubling? According to this new meta-analysis of major data sets available on well-being research, men by contrast are actually growing more content than ever.

"We basically noticed something that hadn't been noticed before, which is that women are becoming less happy relative to men, both in the US and in Europe," says Justin Wolfers, who recently published these findings with his romantic and research partner, Betsey Stevenson (how's that for a "second shift"?). "This study has very big implications for happiness researchers."

So, does Stevenson, a 38-year-old woman, think she's happier now?

That's the wrong question to ask, it turns out. Better to phrase it: Is she happier than her mother or grandmother was? Her answer: Yes. Well, first Wolfers answers for her because she's busy driving the car during our interview while Wolfers speaks for them both. But then she answers: Yes.

And for those who think the research is simply skewed by the rise in single mothers, nope. This applies to those with kids and without.

Essentially, Wolfers and Stevenson, both economists at the University of Pennsylvania, analyzed several happiness studies from the last 35 years. The trend that emerged from the data, which included research related to 1 million men and women, applies to the female gender collectively. Or in the words of the study: "irrespective of the age, marital, labor market or fertility status of the group analyzed."

Think of it as the Sisterhood of the Traveling Misery.

When confronted with the study results, one woman The Post spoke to responded: "Wouldn't it be easier if your man just told you what to do? Are you with me, ladies?" She's kidding, of course, but as a 27-year-old Internet consultant from Brooklyn, she identifies the central conundrum of the study.

Wolfers, who stresses that he's a number-cruncher, not a social commentator, has several theories explaining his results (methodological, environmental). But the most intriguing one is what he calls the "Rush Limbaugh Theory," which is that the women's movement was (and please don't shoot the messenger here) actually a bad thing for women — at least in terms of feelings of well-being and contentment.

"Maybe," Wolfers adds, "we learn that the women's movement was really good for men."

That is to say, what started as opportunities (for education, for work) have become expectations, which have only added to expectations extant 30 years ago (for home and family, for relationships).

"I feel like I am being pulled in 20 different directions," confesses Eleonora Anastasia, 31, from West New York, NJ. She works 12-hour days as a vice president with Manhattan financial services firm AXA Advisors, and is about to get married. "I'm constantly trying to prioritize what needs my attention immediately," she says, "and letting other areas of my life fall to the wayside: eating well, those dance lessons I've always wanted, learning more languages."

And with her life already out of whack, she wonders: What will happen when she has a family?

No doubt, if you go to feminist mother ship the National Organization for Women in New York City, President Sonia Ossorio says: "Let's take a look at the substantive issues that affect women's quality of life. We know that women shoulder the bulk of responsibilities with kids and home, while dealing with workplaces that are often unsupportive."

But barring any immediate systemic societal changes, some women say there is hope.

"Speed Shrinking" author Susan Shapiro talks about the breakthroughs that women can make when they actually put themselves first.

"After I quit all my addictions, I quit guilt," she says. "I love saying no . . . and a lot of women don't know how to do that. They have what I call the Sylvia Plath syndrome — thinking they can have a high-powered career, a high-powered spouse and two babies before they turn 30. That would make anyone want to stick their head in the oven."

Kamy Wicoff, 37, the mother of two young boys and founder of shewrites.com, says our salvation lies in making peace with our reality: "Women are aware modern life is unbearably overscheduled; men are oblivious until they die of heart attacks 10 years before their wives."

Still others say we need to abandon the idea of happiness altogether: "I'm cranky in the morning, mildly annoyed in the afternoon and just plain exhausted at the end of the day," says Annabelle Gurwitch, an actress and author exploring the

topic in her new book "You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up," and also onstage Nov. 5 as part of the New York Comedy Festival. "F - - - happiness."

The thing is, she may be right.

One theory has that women are simply evolving, our brains changing to meet the demands of society. Unfortunately, New York psychiatrist Marianne Gillow says, increased intelligence and creativity have in fact been linked genetically to increased mood disorders. "Women might be caught in the perfect storm of evolutionary, biological and sociological factors," she says.

The bright side? We may be miserable, but we're very clever.

"Based on what I see on the news, it looks like women — and older women in particular — are happier than ever," says Julie Klausner, author of "I Don't Care About Your Band," a comedic book of lessons about romantic failings. "I should mention that what I call 'the news,' Time Warner Cable insists on labeling on their channel guide as 'Cougartown.'"

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