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Be honest, guys: Do you do housework?; Claims of a 50-50 split are more like 80-20 -- in favour of women

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OK, a question for the men. How much housework do you do? Do you, for instance, do the dusting? The ironing? The vacuuming? The laundry?

Not just now and then -- but on a regular basis. Ask most younger men -- say, in their 30s -- that question and they will answer that housework is about 50-50. This is because they're lying. Or deluded.

Ask their wives or partners and they'll say it's closer to 80-20 and, really, he's useless at it anyway, always mixes the darks and the colours, and frankly the only thing he ever dusts is the plasma TV so he can see the hockey game.

I asked a couple of younger guys around my office how much housework they did. These were young guys who had kids and whose wives had significant jobs.

They all tapdanced around the issue. But essentially they all said they did some housework, but they said it quietly so the other guys in the office couldn't hear. Jocks don't do dishes. Or do they?

I then asked one of the older guys in the office. His significant other also has a big job. Do you do the vacuuming, I asked?

"In your dreams," he said. Why not? "Well, I don't know how the vacuum works." Yeah, well, you need to be a Nobel laureate for that.

This is not a new issue. Couples have been arguing over who does what in the home for the past 30 years or so, ever since women returned en masse to the workforce, tried to juggle home and family and a job, and grew more and more frustrated as they were left to pick hubby's socks off the bedroom floor.

But new research suggests it might be time for hubby to do those dishes and dust that coffee table a little more often (well, that's my extrapolation). Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers,

economists at the University of Pennsylvania, have produced a report saying that in the early 1970s women reported being happier than men.

Now the two have switched places. And the happiness gap, says the researchers, seems to be widening. Men are getting a whole lot happier than they used to be. And women aren't nearly as happy as they used to be.

I read much of the report this week, and though it is hugely dense and academic and made my eyes glaze over (hey, I'm a guy), there's a troubling conclusion at its core: Women at the beginning of this century aren't as fulfilled as women of the 1970s.

This is the conundrum. Women now have big careers, they have earned equality, Hillary may be the next U.S. president, but there's too much for the ordinary -- or extraordinary -- woman of this century to get through every day.

There's such a long to-do list that most women can't do it all. So they become frustrated and unhappier. Single mothers? How do they do it?

One of the authors of the report recently told the New York Times she had drinks with a business school graduate who said her mother's goals in life were to have a nice, well-kept house, a beautiful garden and well-adjusted children who did well in school.

"I sort of want all those things, too," the student said, "but I also want to have a great career and have an impact on the broader world."

The report suggests, somewhat cautiously, that the women's movement may have decreased women's happiness. Because women are now expected to succeed, many will feel their life is not measuring up.

Where the report doesn't help too much is explaining why men are getting happier. Maybe -- and this is just me talking -- women are shouldering more of the financial burden than in the past. That's part of it.

Maybe coming home to June Cleaver every day just wasn't the pretty picture it appeared to be, for the men at least. Who, really, wants a Stepford wife -- robotic and one-dimensional?

But here's my real theory: The Haysom Housework Index, if you will. Women today are shouldering an unacceptable burden. And though men are, yes, doing a little more of the chores at home, most of us are still living the 1950s, Betty Crocker-esque model. We're letting women do the work in and out of the home. No wonder we're happier.

When a woman vacuums the living room, it's part of the everyday nature of things.

When a man vacuums the living room it's because it's July and it's time to get rid of that one-inch layer of Christmas tree needles on the carpet.

So, men, we need to make our women a whole lot happier. This means we can a) all do a lot more of the housework. Or b) try and convince her that the men's way of doing things is the only way. Dirty dishes on the counter. Socks on the floor. Streaks on the window. Dust everywhere.

I plump for the second option. What game's on TV tonight?

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