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More women in the workforce make bigger bucks than husbands

By Petula Dvorak
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Things are sweeter than ever for the recliner kings of America's four-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath castles.

Contemporary American husbands are working less, going to school less, living longer and are reaping the benefits of wives who are bringing home the big bucks more than any of their dapper "Mad Men" counterparts of the 1960s.

It continues to be a man's world, only a little more comfy these days.

So say a barrage of new studies in the past few months that show women in America are just about to make up the [majority of the U.S. workforce](#), are dominating universities and now, in ever-increasing numbers, are the better-educated, more handsomely paid half of American marriages.

Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but all these recent studies are pointing to an interesting trend -- marriage is increasingly becoming a better deal for the male of the species.

The [study](#) released today by the Pew Research Center shows that in one out of five married couples, the wife earns more than the husband. That's a huge shift in 40 years, when this was the case in just 4 percent of American marriages.

It used to be that marriage was one of the big ways in which women got an economic boost, according to Pew researchers. Outside of fairytales where the scamp snags the baron's daughter, it was rarely the other way around.

But today, more men than ever better their lot by marrying a smart, career-driven woman.

This is a big change for a growing number of men whose dads were expected to support a cast of dependents after they walked down the aisle.

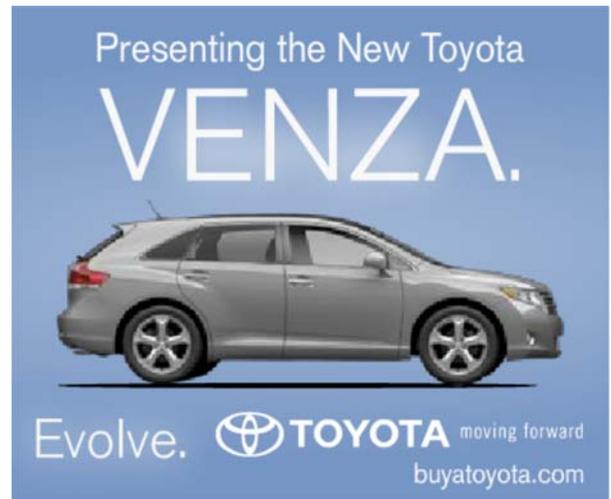
So on the whole, there's a little less pressure on men to financially carry the entire household today. That may not offer much solace to the men who have borne the brunt of the layoffs in this recession. In some marriages, those layoffs are the reason a woman is the principal breadwinner.

But women have been making gains in the workplace for four decades -- a shift that ought to be an indicator of fantastic social change. Only, in reality, women's increasing success is not so rosy up close.

The counterpoint to what Pew calls "the rise of wives" is another [study](#) entitled "The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness," which says that women, despite their huge social and economic leaps, aren't feeling all zippity-do-dah about life these days.

And that one should be pretty easy to figure out.

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While earning more and working more, most women still have to do most of the stuff at home that they did before they got the corner office and the corporate bonus. Even those who can afford to hire help still work two or maybe two-and-a-half jobs.

[Time-use surveys](#) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that women still carry the bigger load of chores, household duties and child care and get less personal time than men.

Husbands are picking up more of the household duties, as authors Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers of the women-are-depressed study noted.

But they also pointed out that when men load the dishwasher, many people still say they are "helping out" at home (do you ever say a woman is "helping" when she does the laundry?). And when a husband takes care of the kids, most folks (my husband included) call it "babysitting."

We are a generation of working women trapped between two extremes.

There is the 1950s uber-mom, with the apron, the after-school cookies, the costumes sewn for the school play and the tucking in with a kiss every night. She couldn't be a career woman, that just wasn't done.

And then there's the 1980s power-mom, who was taught never to bring baked goods into the office, wore the woman-suit with the floppy bow tie, carried the briefcase and the tied the house key around the kid's neck with scratchy yarn. No need for a pot roast in the oven -- they'd just invented the microwave!

So millennial mom is now expected to be both.

There is no excuse for her not to succeed at work, all those doors have been kicked open, right?

And millennial mom has to feed her kids all organic, homemade food. No more frozen chicken patties and Hamburger Helper late, late at night, right?

And the school keeps asking us to volunteer on the board, and we go on field trips while answering our BlackBerrys and sit at our desks while calling the preschool.

Whew.

Honey, can I get a turn on the recliner?

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