

What happens when wife earns more?

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MIAMI — Whether in a relationship or looking for one, consider this: If you are a woman, chances are rising that you will outearn your man.

Now that women increasingly are graduating with advanced degrees and moving up in the corporate world, their expanding role as breadwinner is altering their role in marriage and companionship. The female outearns the male in one of every three households, a figure that has increased every year since 2000.

The shift in economic power has couples charting new boundaries in areas from money talks to household chores to what goes on in the bedroom.

"Because of these dynamics, the rules of marriage have changed more in the last 30 years than the previous 3,000," says Stephanie Coontz, who teaches family studies at The Evergreen State College and has written books on marriage and gender roles.

The shift requires as much of an adjustment from men as it does for women, who sometimes struggle to cede any control over household duties.

Graham Howland, 48, says giving up his demanding career as a chef has helped his wife, Lisa Landy, 44, excel as a Miami law firm partner while raising a family. "I love taking care of the kids and cooking meals every night for them," he says.

"I'm OK with her being the boss over our finances," Howland says. But he admits the arrangement is more difficult at times for his wife. "If I take the kids to the doctor, she gives me a thorough list of questions I have to ask."

The pitfalls of these relationships: Some men feel emasculated if their wives are the breadwinners and they are asked to take on more household chores and child-care responsibilities. And some women feel resentful if they shoulder most of the household's financial obligations but also are expected to pick up the lion's share of the domestic responsibilities.

To make these modern relationships work, couples say, requires frank discussion early on, frequent communication and marital troubleshooting skills.

"Both have to give up the 1950s definition of masculinity and femininity and focus on how they can be their best as individuals inside a couple," Coontz says.

Questions

1. What else is changing between women and men?
2. What factors make gender role change?
3. Who should be responsible for the quality of family life? Men or women?
4. Should all women have the chance to have a family and career? Why?
5. Pretend that you're a man, or if you're a man already. Can you accept that the salary of your wife is higher than you?
6. What are the stereotyped male/female characteristics?
7. How do women and men communicate in different ways?
8. Are there any differences between men and women that we haven't mentioned?
9. In the future, will women be predominant in the world?
10. Do you want to be the opposite sex? Why?