

Women and the Economy: Why Women's Economic Empowerment Benefits Men

By Maddy Dychtwald
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The recent "mancession," in which [82 percent of job loss was felt by men](#), has been touted as a victory for women. But does a job held by a woman necessarily mean one lost by a man?

As part of my research for my latest book, "[Influence: How Women's Soaring Economic Power Will Transform Our World for the Better](#)," I conducted discussion groups with men of all ages to get a sense of how they really felt about the economic empowerment of women. Amid the general discussion, one particular comment stands out in my mind. It was from a twenty-something teacher who said, "I'd love to marry a woman who's really rocking her career, because it would give me the opportunity to stay home and take care of our kids."

He didn't want to sponge off a rich spouse, he was quick to add, but if he were ever to have children and a choice, he wanted to be a stay-at-home parent. "Kids are my comfort zone," he said. "I love teaching. If I could, why wouldn't I want to devote my teaching skills full-time to my own kids?"

He and many like him may have that option, and sooner than he thinks.

All over the world, we're seeing signs of the economic empowerment of women. The developing world has taken note of the fact that educating and employing girls and women increases their GDP and are making efforts to move in that direction. The [earning power of women globally is projected to reach \\$18 trillion by 2014](#). Zeroing in on our home turf, the United States, [women make up almost half of the U.S. workforce](#) and more than half of professional office workers. Although women have yet to reach economic parity overall, a full third of working married women out-earn their husbands.

This has not materialized out of thin air, but is the result of both our economy morphing and women pursuing education with a vengeance. Our economy has become one where brains outrank brawn in terms of getting a job and more women than men are graduating from college: [3 out of 5 college grads today are women](#). Women also [outpace men in the number of master's degrees](#) and are closing in on parity in law and medical degrees and MBAs.

In our modern, post-industrial, services-oriented society, the jobs will go to those not with the strength but with the right skills -- and that often means women. In fact, it's already happening. According to the 2010 U.S. census, [37 percent of employed women have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 35 percent of men](#).

Furthermore, the person signing your paycheck will likely be a woman. Although American women are still struggling to achieve parity in corporate suites -- despite the hard evidence that companies with more gender diversity in their senior leadership perform better financially than if there are only men at the top -- women are starting their own businesses at nearly double the national average. Already, about 40 percent of U.S. private firms are women-owned, compared to only 26 percent in 1997.

As a woman who came of age in the flush of the feminist movement, I can only cheer. But what if I were a man? How would I feel? Are we really facing what a cover story in *The Atlantic Monthly* called "[The End of Men?](#)"

Of course not. Economic empowerment isn't a zero sum game. Just because women can -- and do -- go into space, perform brain surgery and run multi-billion-dollar corporations doesn't mean that men are automatically shoved aside. Instead, the bar is being raised for everyone, which can only be a good thing. As women move into fields once closed off to them, men's horizons are expanding beyond what they might have dreamed. Standing side-by-side as equals, both men and women have more choices, including the chance to swap roles if they so choose.

I'm not talking about some revolutionary "feminization" of men, where they simply swap roles with women, putting on aprons while women don suits. What's happening isn't role reversal: It's role reinvention. It's a full-blown paradigm shift that gives both men and women more options when it comes to pursuing their careers, providing for their families and expressing their own talents and strengths.

In this new social order, both genders are less shackled by a narrow, gender-oriented vision of success. A case in point: When [Myra Strober](#), an economist who teaches at Stanford's Graduate School of Business, started offering her course on "[Work and Family](#)" in the early 2000s, only a handful of men signed up. Today, men represent nearly half of her class. "More and more men are interested in being good dads," Strober explains. "They also want to be good husbands and be supportive of their wives."

Many are already reshaping their lives and careers to satisfy these priorities. The U.S. Census data found that [a third of fathers with a wife in the workplace were a regular source of care for their children under age 15, up from just over a quarter in 2002](#). Among those couples with preschool-age children, 20 percent of the fathers were the primary caregiver. And according to a just-published article in *The New York Times*, more and more men are eagerly integrating what was once the sanctum sanctorum of the stay-at-home mom: the PTA.

Looks like that young man in the focus group will have plenty of company on the playground.

This article can be found at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maddy-dychtwald/women-and-economy_b_1321495.html.