

Report: More men get economic boost from marriage



By DAVID CRARY, AP National Writer
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NEW YORK – Historically, marriage was the surest route to financial security for women. Nowadays it's men who are increasingly getting the biggest economic boost from tying the knot, according to a new analysis of census data.

The changes, summarized in a Pew Research Center report being released Tuesday, reflect the proliferation of working wives over the past 40 years — a period in which American women outpaced men in both education and earnings growth. A larger share of today's men, compared with their 1970 counterparts, are married to women whose education and income exceed their own, and a larger share of women are married to men with less education and income.

"From an economic perspective, these trends have contributed to a gender role reversal in the gains from marriage," wrote the report's authors, Richard Fry and D'Vera Cohn.

"In the past, when relatively few wives worked, marriage enhanced the economic status of women more than that of men. In recent decades, however, the economic gains associated with marriage have been greater for men."

One barometer is median household income — which rose 60 percent between 1970 and 2007 for married men, married women and unmarried women, but only 16 percent for unmarried men, according to the Pew data.

The report focused on U.S.-born men and women aged 30-44 — a stage when typical adults have finished their education, married and launched careers. The Pew report noted that today's Americans in this age group are the first such cohort in U.S. history to include more women than men with college degrees.

In 1970, according to the report, 28 percent of wives in this age range had husbands who were better educated than they were, outnumbering the 20 percent whose husbands had less education. By 2007, these patterns had reversed — 19 percent of wives had husbands with more education, compared with 28 percent whose husbands had less education.

In the remaining couples — about half in 1970 and 2007 — spouses had similar education levels.

Only 4 percent of husbands had wives who earned more than they did in 1970, compared with 22 percent in 2007.

During that span, women's earnings grew 44 percent, compared with 6 percent growth for men, although a gender gap remains. According to 2009 Census Bureau figures, women with full-time jobs earned salaries equal to 77.9 percent of what men earned, compared with 52 percent in 1970.

"The gains that women have made in earnings and education are a notable reflection of a range of efforts to promote equal opportunities," Cohn said in a telephone interview. "But the earnings gap has not yet closed."

The Pew researchers noted that the economic downturn is reinforcing the gender reversal trends, with men losing jobs more often than women.

Deborah Siegel, a New York City writer, said she's living through some of the Pew report's trends as she returns to work three months after having twins while her husband — laid off from his corporate branding job a year ago — helps out with child care amid occasional freelance work.

"For men, being laid off is such a huge ego blow," said Siegel, author of "Sisterhood Interrupted." "The recession may be ending, but we're still working out our dynamics."

Stephanie Coontz, a history professor at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., who writes often about marriage, said

she's been struck by the dramatic loss of manufacturing jobs that in the past had enabled many men without college education to earn high enough wages to raise a family.

The loss of those jobs, said Coontz, "is something no feminist would take pleasure in."

Yet she said the trends also reflected the fact that many husbands no longer feel compelled to be their families' sole breadwinner and are embracing a bigger share of household responsibilities and child-raising.

"If it weren't for the gains of the women's movement, which have produced a steady equalization of women's wages and new incentives for women to get more education ... most families would have stagnated in their living standards even before the recession," Coontz said.

The Pew report found that unmarried women in 2007 had higher household incomes than their 1970 counterparts at each level of education, while unmarried men without post-secondary education lost ground because their real earnings decreased and they didn't have a wife's wages to offset that decline.

Unmarried men with college degrees made income gains of 15 percent, but were outpaced by the 28 percent gains of unmarried women with degrees.

The shifts in earnings capacity coincided with a marked decline in the share of Americans who are married. Among U.S.-born 30- to 44-year-olds, 60 percent were married in 2007, compared with 84 percent in 1970. For African-Americans, the rates were even lower — 33 percent of black women and 44 percent of black men were married in 2007, the report said.

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Pew Research Center: <http://people-press.org/>