

Women have never striven more for less

Globe Life

Females are willing to do more work than men for less credit, a reality that will always keep our daughters down no matter how diligent they are in school and work. And it isn't a new story

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Published on Friday, Oct. 30, 2009



Good news, girlfriends: It was a banner week for women.

According to the University of Alberta, the salaries of recent female business graduates narrowly exceeded those of their male counterparts for the first time. In the U.S., a recent study called the Shriver Report found that half the American work force is now composed of women.

Women, the report said, currently make up an amazing 40 per cent of the country's breadwinners. On this side of the border, Statistics Canada also reports a dramatic increase in primary female income earners over the past four decades.

So, my sisters, it's time to pop the champagne, put on the Beyoncé and do the *Single Ladies* dance until ... hey ... wait a second. If you stop the pelvic-thrusting long enough to read the fine print of the 400-odd-page Shriver Report, which was conducted by California first lady Maria Shriver with the help of a think tank, the Center for American Progress, the news is actually not so great.

Despite working harder and in greater numbers than ever before, women are still earning less than men in the same jobs over all and taking most of the responsibility for housework and child care.

In essence, the plight of women is like that old morale-boosting management trick: the no-compensation promotion (also known as the non-raise raise). It's all very flattering until you realize that you have just taken on twice as much work and responsibility for no extra pay or respect.

It's a raw deal. And here's another bitter pill: Working harder than men is not going to help us renegotiate the terms.

If you want proof, just look at the plight of women in the developing world. Of the roughly one billion people who live in extreme poverty, 70 per cent are women and girls. It's a situation that has prompted Plan International to launch its new Because I am a Girl campaign, a global initiative to change the lives of women through education and community development work. According to the mission statement, "investing in girls is the key to wiping out the cycle of global poverty." This is because women are the donkeys of the developing world. You don't need a statistician to tell you that African women on balance work much harder than their male counterparts and have far less to show for it.

Of course, there are fewer opportunities in the developing world – it's estimated that 20 million poor women never go to school or learn to read. But when we do get a chance at education, we work our tails off. For every 100 women enrolled in a U.S. university, there are only 77 men. In Canada, a similar gender gap exists.

The question is: Where is all this hard work actually getting us? As one perennially exhausted breadwinner/mother of three young children recently said to me, "As the mother, you just have to work harder at everything. You might as well accept it; otherwise you'll just be miserable."

No wonder the Shriver Report found that women “feel increasingly isolated, stressed and misunderstood.” We have cast off our patriarchal shackles, but in exchange for enforced hard labour.

In this new world order, women get to support their partners, remain the primary child-care givers and earn less money for doing the same jobs as men. See? Promotion without compensation.

At least in the 1950s, middle-class women got to stay home and drink martinis like on *Mad Men*. Maybe they were miserable, but they could wallow in it. Most working mothers I know wouldn't even have the time to register if they were on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

While women around the globe are working more in exchange for less, what are we worried about here in Canada? Boys. Apparently, they're struggling so badly that we need to dismantle the public education system to accommodate them. In Ontario, experts are recommending extra recesses and special “active learning” classrooms where boys can swing from the rafters while learning long division. We're concerned not enough of them are going to university and that, by extension, girls are going to take over the world.

But don't fret, all you protective parents of hyperactive boys, that will never happen. Because what the Shriver Report really tells us is that women are willing to do more work than men for less credit, a reality that will always keep our daughters down no matter how diligent they are in school and work. And it isn't a new story – just ask any African woman.

I'm not saying that men don't work hard – just that, when they do, they are much better at reaping the benefits of success. While men work toward outward status – the double brass ring of power and success – women tend to be driven by intrinsic reasons: duty, loyalty, the need to be “good.”

Joanne Lipman, the former deputy managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal* and editor-in-chief of *Portfolio* magazine, recently wrote an op-ed piece for *The New York Times* responding to the Shriver Report. In it, she revealed that, during her years as an editor, “many, many men have come through my door asking for a raise or demanding a promotion. Guess how many women have ever asked me for a promotion? I'll tell you. Exactly... zero.”

Maybe while we're letting the boys out at recess, we should take the girls aside and teach them how to demand a raise. If our daughters are going to get a promotion, they might as well get compensated for it.