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## Male Pride And Female Prejudice

By JOHN TIERNEY; NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF IS ON VACATION. (NYT) 803 words

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When there are three women for every two men graduating from college, whom will the third woman marry?

This is not an academic question. Women, who were a minority on campuses a quarter-century ago, today make up 57 percent of undergraduates, and the gender gap is projected to reach a 60-40 ratio within a few years. So more women, especially black and Hispanic women, will be in a position to get better-paying, more prestigious jobs than their husbands, which makes for a tricky variation of "Pride and Prejudice."

It's still a universal truth, as Jane Austen wrote, that a man with a fortune has good marriage prospects. It's not so universal for a woman with a fortune, because pride makes some men determined to be the chief breadwinner. But these traditionalists seem to be a dwindling minority as men have come to appreciate the value of a wife's paycheck.

A woman's earning power, while hardly the first thing that men look for, has become a bigger draw, as shown in surveys of college students over the decades. In 1996, for the first time, college men rated a potential mate's financial prospects as more important than her skills as a cook or a housekeeper.

In the National Survey of Families and Households conducted during the early 1990's, the average single man under 35 said he was quite willing to marry someone earning much more than he did. He wasn't as interested in marrying someone making much less than he did, and he was especially reluctant to marry a woman who was unlikely to hold a steady job.

Those findings jibe with what I've seen. I can't think of any friend who refused to date a woman because she made more money than he did. When friends have married women with bigger paychecks, the only financial complaints I've heard from them have come when a wife later decided to pursue a more meaningful -- i.e., less lucrative -- career.

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Nor can I recall hearing guys insult a man, to his face or behind his back, for making less than his wife. The only snide comments I've heard have come from women talking about their friends' husbands. I've heard just a couple of hardened Manhattanites do that, but I wouldn't dismiss them as isolated reactionaries because you can see this prejudice in that national survey of singles under 35.

The women surveyed were less willing to marry down -- marry someone with much lower earnings or less education -- than the men were to marry up. And, in line with Jane Austen, the women were also more determined to marry up than the men were.

You may think that women's attitudes are changing as they get more college degrees and financial independence. A woman who's an executive can afford to marry a struggling musician. But that doesn't necessarily mean she wants to. Studies by David Buss of the University of Texas and others have shown that women with higher incomes, far from relaxing their standards, put more emphasis on a mate's financial resources.

And once they're married, women with higher incomes seem less tolerant of their husbands' shortcomings. Steven Nock of the University of Virginia has found that marriages in which the wife and husband earn roughly the same are more likely to fail than other marriages. That situation doesn't affect the husband's commitment to the marriage, Nock concludes, but it weakens the wife's and makes her more likely to initiate divorce.

It's understandable that women with good paychecks have higher standards for their partners, since their superior intelligence, education and income give them what Buss calls high "mate value." They know they're catches and want to find someone with equal mate value -- someone like Mr. Darcy instead of a dullard like the cleric spurned by Elizabeth Bennet.

"Of course, some women marry for love and find a man's resources irrelevant," Buss says. "It's just that the men women tend to fall in love with, on average, happen to have more resources."

Which means that, on average, college-educated women and high-school-educated men will have a harder time finding partners as long as educators keep ignoring the gender gap that starts long before college. Advocates for women have been so effective politically that high schools and colleges are still focusing on supposed discrimination against women: the shortage of women in science classes and on sports teams rather than the shortage of men, period. You could think of this as a victory for women's rights, but many of the victors will end up celebrating alone.