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Here Comes the Breadwinner

Washington, DC, June 12—With wedding season in full swing this month, greater numbers of couples may be committing to nontraditional financial relationships. Nearly one-third of all married women in the US now make more than their husbands, according to the Census Bureau: 25.3% of working wives now earn more than their working husbands, and, if you count working women married to men without jobs, the number jumps to 32.6%—up from 20% in 1983.

If this pace of change continues, within a generation women may be the primary breadwinners in half of America's households, for the trend is strongest among couples in their 20s and 30s.

This is a striking change in the historical gender balance, says futurist John Cashman of Social Technologies, a global research and consulting firm based in Washington, DC.

“The number of women in the primary breadwinner role will likely grow in coming decades, driven by social change and the fact that women's educational achievement is outpacing men's in many parts of the world,” Cashman said, noting that this could reshape gender roles and family life across much of World 1, which includes the US and most of Western Europe. Already, more women are reporting that their husbands do a larger share of routine housework, such as laundry. And a University of Virginia study found that women who out-earn their husbands are more likely to walk out of an unhappy marriage than their male counterparts.

Drivers behind the trend:

- **Education.** In 2000–2001, women in the US earned 57% of all undergraduate degrees, and by 2010–2011, roughly 60% of degrees are projected to go to women. Education has been a major booster of women's salaries: since 1974, the wages of female college graduates have risen an average of 34.4%, versus 21.7% for male grads, according to the research firm Catalyst. Similar figures exist throughout much of the EU. In Portugal, seven women graduate from college for every four men. An exception is Germany, where four women obtain a college degree for every five men.
- **Professional success.** Women are also advancing professionally. In the US, women held 34% of executive and managerial positions in 1983, and nearly 50% in 2001. In Great Britain, women held 25% of all management jobs in 2003, compared with less than 10% in 1990.
- **Shifting societal attitudes.** As a result of the rising economic power of women, men are changing how they feel about women making more money, Cashman added, and the stigma attached to the man who is out-earned by his wife is fading. “One study found that between 1980 and 1990, male college seniors in the US grew increasingly comfortable with the notion that their spouses might out-earn them—so comfortable, in fact, that 59% reported they would not be bothered if they were out-earned by their wives.”

Impacts on business:

Stay-at-home dads and alpha-earning moms are growing market segments that will require study and analysis so that businesses can develop strategies to meet their unique needs, motivations, and purchasing habits. As the trend advances, expect that:



- Household duties will continue to realign. More men will carry primary responsibility for purchasing food, clothing, and other household items.
- Men will be more involved in childcare and in purchasing products and services for their children.
- As they explore these new gender roles, men's preferences will be expressed in the types of products they buy. These could include more gadgetry and high-tech appliances for the home.
- Online dating and social-networking services may become more important for educated, well-paid women who include marriage among their life goals.

About) John Cashman

John Cashman runs Social Technologies' office in Shanghai, China, where he reports on change in one of the fastest-changing countries on the planet. An experienced writer/ analyst, John has researched and authored dozens of reports on a wide range of future-related topics for industry, government, and associations. He also speaks frequently on topics related to lifestyles change.

About) Social Technologies

Social Technologies is a global research and consulting firm specializing in the integration of foresight, strategy, and innovation. With offices in Washington, DC, London, and Shanghai, Social Technologies serves the world's leading companies, government agencies, and nonprofits. A holistic, long-term perspective combined with actionable business solutions helps clients mitigate risk, make the most of opportunities, and enrich decision-making. For more information, visit www.socialtechnologies.com and the blog: <http://changewaves.socialtechnologies.com>.

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