

WHY ARE WOMEN UNHAPPY?

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A little over a decade ago, two

researchers at Wharton published a paper showing that, despite women's increasing work and educational opportunities, their self-reported happiness was in steady decline. Back in 1970, women were on average happier than men; they are now less happy than men.

Broadly, since 1970, *everyone* has gotten more miserable. But the decline in women's overall happiness has outpaced men's, and the happiness curve inverted sometime in the early 1990s. The paper also documents increasing anxiety and neuroticism, as well as decreasing social cohesion among women.

The researchers couldn't come up with a good explanation for their observations. The best they could venture was that women might be measuring happiness differently than they used to—happiness in the home has become happiness in the home *and* at work, and the latter is (inexplicably) harder to achieve.

The august periodical *Vox* has rehashed the Wharton paper in a recent article, which, rather than relying on the traditional paragraph form, presents its arguments as a lengthy comic strip. (Not a joke; the article is a cartoon.) In addition to parroting the explanation offered by the original paper, the author-cartoonist suggests women are unhappier today because they're more aware of "persisting limitations" imposed on them by men.

I am not a scientist (nor am I a cartoonist). But I was taught at an early age that the simplest explanation is most likely the correct one when all other things are equal.

And, since neither the authors of the original paper nor more recent commentators have been willing to discuss the simplest explanation, I am going to offer it here, as nothing more than a hypothesis to be considered:

Maybe women *don't want* to fill traditionally male roles. Is it conceivable (or is it inconceivable) that women have traditionally lived a certain way and derived happiness from certain things not because they were weak and forced into it by men, but because that is what they actually preferred? Who knew?

For 50 years, if we date this phenomenon from the sexual revolution, women have had a continuously increasing share of traditionally male opportunity—and responsibility—and an increasing share of unhappiness has come with it.

Correlation does not prove causation, but it would be foolish (or, I think, cowardly) to suggest this correlation is not only meaningless but undiscussable.

Here's the thing: Work isn't fun. It isn't supposed to be fun. It's *work*.

And—this will surprise many feminists—traditionally, men have not worked because they loved going to the office or because it made them feel empowered and justified their existence. *Men worked to support a family*.

It was the *family* that justified their existence and made the work worthwhile. It gave men a reason to leave the house every morning and, crucially, it gave them something to come back to every night.

Feminists implicitly admit this when they talk constantly about the need for greater female representation among the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, but never complain about the gender ratios of those who work as garbage collectors to support their family.

Apparently not *all* jobs are worthy feminist battlegrounds. Yet my experience suggests the average garbage man is more likely to be a good and decent fellow than the average Fortune 500 CEO.

Contrary to what feminists seem to believe, traditional women have made ample contributions to society. It turns out that managing a household is difficult and even all-consuming. *It's hard work*.

And I don't see why one must demean those women who thought it was a noble undertaking to raise a happy family and make sure that the husband had a warm and welcoming home waiting for him at day's end. Now that women increasingly have stopped doing that job, now that *no one* is doing it, it's obvious just how important the work actually was.

As an added bonus, two incomes have become necessary where formerly one sufficed, due to government tax burdens. So children see their parents less, both husband and wife are exhausted at the end of the day, and then they get to split the housework (another complete job in itself) which now gets done grudgingly because it's treated as an afterthought.

Each spouse now works a job-and-a-half *for a lower standard of living*. And we struggle to explain why happiness is declining.

If you are a woman—or man—for whom career means more than anything else, have at it. Knock yourself out. I myself am one of those idiot-men who works because he needs to and not because it's such fun. In my traditional, evil, sexist frame of mind, I want to stake my sense of achievement on something deeper than my own career.

I would like to have a family for whom I can work. That would mean more to me than the dollars or the job titles I'm likely to earn.

And I know perfectly well that, if I found a woman willing to fill the role of a traditional wife, she would have a much harder job than mine. So it's not as though I expect every woman to be willing to do housework instead of office work. All I suggest is that we, as a society, should stop telling women that housework is demeaning and that it's *wrong* for them to do it.

It should be up to the individual woman. I personally would value a good housewife ten million times more than a good office-worker: Anyone can work in an office, but I don't think just anyone can manage a household. And it's possible—just possible—that happy homes might make us happier people.

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