

## **Counterpoint: Don't Marry A Lazy Man**

By Elizabeth Corcoran

**Studies aside, modern marriage is a two-way street. Men should own up to their responsibilities, too.**

Girlfriends: a word of advice. Ask your man the following question: When was the last time you learned something useful, either at home or work?

If the last new skill your guy learned was how to tie his shoes in the second grade, dump him. If he can pick up new ideas faster than your puppy, you've got a winner.

I'm not usually a fan of dipstick tests, particularly when it comes to marriage and relationships. But a downright frightening story written by my colleague, Michael Noer, on our Web site today drove me to it. According to the experts cited by Michael, marrying a "career girl" seems to lead to a fate worse than tangling with a hungry cougar.

OK, call me a cougar. I've been working since the day I graduated from college 20-odd years ago. I have two grade-school-aged children. Work definitely takes up more than 35 hours a week for me. Thankfully, I do seem to make more than \$30,000. All of which, according to Michael, should make me a wretched wife.

In spite of those dangerous statistics, my husband and I are about to celebrate our 18th wedding anniversary. You'll see us snuggling at a mountain-winery concert this month, enjoying the occasion. I don't think I'm all that unusual--so it seemed like a good time to test Michael's grim assertions.

The experts cited in his story think that professional women are more likely to get divorced, to cheat and to be grumpy about either having kids or not having them. But rather than rush to blame the woman, let's not overlook the other key variable: What is the guy doing?

Take, for instance, the claim that professional women are more likely to get divorced because they're more likely to meet someone in the workforce who will be "more attractive" than that old squashed-couch hubby at home.

Women have faced this kind of competition squarely for years. Say you marry your college heartthrob. Ten years later, he's working with some good-looking gals--nymphets just out of college, or the more sophisticated types who spent two years building houses in Africa before they went to Stanford Business School. What do you do? A: Stay home, whine and eat chocolate. B: Take up rock climbing, read interesting books and continue to develop that interesting personality he fell in love with in the first place.

Note to guys: Start by going to the gym. Then try some new music. Or a book. Or a movie. Keep connected to the rest of the world. You'll win--and so will your marriage.

There is, of course, the continual dilemma of who does the work around the house. But if

both spouses are working, guess what? They've got enough income to hire someone else to fold laundry, mop floors, etc.

Money is a problem? Honestly, the times money has been the biggest problem for us have been when we were short of it--not when one of us is earning more than the other. When we have enough to pay the bills, have some fun and save a bit, seems like the rules of preschool should take over: Play nice, be fair and take turns.

In two-career couples, Michael frets, there's less specialization in the marriage, so supposedly the union becomes less useful to either party. Look more closely, Mike! Any long-running marriage is packed full of carefully developed--and charmingly offsetting--areas of expertise.

For us, the list starts with taxes, vacation planning and investment management. My husband likes that stuff, and it leaves me yawning. Bless him for doing it. Give me the wireless Internet system, the garden or just about any routine home repairs, and I'm suddenly the savant. Tear us apart, and we'd both be pitiful idiots trying to learn unfamiliar routines.

Michael is right that longer work hours force two-career couples to try harder to clear out blocks of family time. When we do, though, we get to enjoy a lot more. We understand each other's career jokes and frustrations. We're better sounding boards on what to do next. And at dinner parties, we actually like to be seated at the same table.

The essence of a good marriage, it seems to me, is that both people have to learn to change and keep on adapting. Children bring tons of change. Mothers encounter it first during the nine months of pregnancy, starting with changing body dimensions. But fathers have to learn to adapt, too, by learning to help care for children, to take charge of new aspects of a household, to adapt as the mothers change.

So, guys, if you're game for an exciting life, go ahead and marry a professional gal.