

Wives with more education than their husbands no longer at increased risk of divorce

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For decades, couples in which a wife had more education than her husband faced a higher risk of divorce than those in which a husband had more education, but a new study finds this is no longer the case.

"We also found that couples in which both individuals have equal levels of [education](#) are now less likely to divorce than those in which husbands have more education than their wives," said Christine R. Schwartz, lead author of the study and an associate professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "These trends are consistent with a shift away from a breadwinner-homemaker model of marriage toward a more egalitarian model of marriage in which women's status is less threatening to men's gender identity."

Titled "The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and Trends in Marital Dissolution," the study, which appears in the August issue of the *American Sociological Review*, considers heterosexual U.S. marriages formed from 1950-2009.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, women's college completion rates began to exceed men's, and their educational advantage has continued to grow since then, showing no signs of slowing. According to the study, among couples who married between 2005 and 2009, more than 60 percent of those consisting of individuals with different levels of education featured a wife who was more educated than her husband—an increase from

about 35 percent in the early 1950s. Among couples who married in the 1990s or later, a wife's educational advantage over her husband was no longer associated with an increased risk of divorce.

"Rather than doggedly adhering to norms that wives should have lower status than their husbands, men and women are increasingly forming relationships in which women have the educational advantage—so much so that it is now more common for wives to have more education than their husbands than the reverse pattern," said Schwartz, who co-authored the study with Hongyun Han, a research data analyst in the Feinberg School of Medicine's Health Disparities and Public Policy Program at Northwestern University. "The relationship between one's educational attainment, marriage formation, and risk of divorce appears to suggest that couples are adapting to the demographic reality that women have more education than men."

Regarding the finding that marriages between educational equals are more stable than those in which the husband has more education, Schwartz said perhaps this should not be surprising. "Young people today strongly believe in egalitarian marriage—even if they don't always follow it in practice," she said.

Schwartz and Han found that couples married between 2000 and 2004 in which both individuals had the same level of education were about one-third less likely to divorce than those in which husbands had more education than their wives. By way of comparison, couples married in the 1950s in which both individuals had the same educational attainment were just as likely to [divorce](#) as couples in which husbands had more education.

"Overall, our results speak against fears that women's growing educational advantage over men has had negative effects on marital stability," Schwartz said. "Further, the findings provide an important

counterpoint to claims that progress toward gender equality in heterosexual relationships has stalled."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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