

For poorer and for
poorer



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How the Economy Affects Work and Family Economic instability, as detailed by Suzy Hansen in *For Poorer and For Poorer*, affects young couples in many ways. This is most noticeable when comparing the idealism of couples in the 1990s against the starker economic realities of the current economic recession. This essay will address how economic instability affects work roles and family roles in young relationships, how these roles have changed since the 1990s, and the differences in how men and women perceive their roles in these changed economic circumstances.

As an initial matter, it must be noted that changing economic conditions do seem to affect both work roles and family roles in relationships. As noted by Hansen, in general terms, the changed economic conditions have resulted in "more fighting, postponed weddings, and less sex" (2003: np). The most immediate effect is the postponement of weddings. Rather than pursuing traditional roles as husband and wife, because of the large expenses associated with formal weddings, couples are delaying marriage while awaiting better economic times. In addition, young couples are hesitant to have children when they are unable to take care of themselves adequately. The family roles are consequently replaced by a more permanent boyfriend-girlfriend role and the relationships assume a less secure status. There is less romance, less self-esteem, and less sex. In addition to the alteration of family roles, there have also been alterations of traditional work roles. Couples are confronted with periods of unemployment and underemployment. Some people have admitted to removing advanced academic degrees in an effort to find jobs for which they are overqualified. In sum, the recent economic instability has affected both family roles and work roles in negative ways.

In addition, a comparison of the idealism of the 1990s with the current period of economic instability highlights the very real financial pressures that young couples are experiencing. The 1990s were characterized by financial security, economic opportunity, and what Hansen referred to as "endless possibilities" (2003: np). Investments in education did translate into better paying jobs and the pre-terrorism era experienced a prolonged period of economic stability and growth. Weddings were able to be financed, romantic honeymoons within the reach of even younger couples, and there was disposable income for extra luxuries. Now, however, with an unemployment rate hovering near 6%, and a recession which is the worst since World War II, young couples find themselves slipping down the economic and social ladder quickly. People are no longer concerned with buying expensive shoes, but with being able to pay off educational loans and credit cards. People are no longer rushing to get married; rather, they are wondering whether their relationships will survive the strains of the financial pressures of the current economy.

Finally, these financial pressures are reinforcing old gender-based stereotypes and gender-based roles rather than alleviating them. As we enter the 21st century in the United States of America, it is rather fashionable to assume that, in many respects, we have moved towards gender equality. People don't openly advocate, for instance, that men or women are better suited for certain types of jobs. People don't openly advocate salary differences or promotion standards based on old gender stereotypes. Nonetheless, these old stereotypes reemerge in periods of economic stability. One man interviewed by Hansen, for example, traced much of his depression to the fact that he was unable to fulfill his male role

as a provider. Another woman lamented being reduced to the role of "cheerleader" for her male partner. In short, old stereotypes have reemerged and deepened the emotional turmoil of both males and females.

In the final analysis, the economy does affect young couples in many ways. The results are largely negative, there is a pervasive sense of pessimism, and family roles and work roles are fundamentally altered. The best that young couples can wish for, it seems, is that the economy picks up and that they will be able to pursue their dreams with a reasonable probability of success.

Works Cited

Hansen, Suzy, " For Poorer and For Poorer." Salon. com: June 4, 2003.

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1