

Love 2.0

Check out how couples are upgrading their idea of what makes a happy bond.

By Amanda Woerner

These days, we're redefining relationship conventions left and right. "Women want marriage with room for independence," says anthropologist Helen Fisher, Ph.D., author of *Why Him? Why Her?* Pursue a big career while your man stays home? Spend your money how you see fit? Marry a shorter guy no matter who says it's odd? Yes to all of it. This freeing attitude seems to be good for relationships; 51 percent of pairs say they're closer than their parents were (5 percent feel less so), a study by the Pew Research Center notes. Here's a look at what's working in our new age of romance:

66% of single women would like separate accounts when they partner up, a Match.com survey finds.

Why the preference for my money/your money? "I've seen that some financial separateness reduces fighting, as there's less micromanaging of spending," says marriage therapist Michele Weiner-Davis, M.S.W., author of *Divorce Busting*.

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU Open a joint account for paying bills, and transfer in equal percentages of your earnings. Then separate the rest of your funds, suggests Manisha Thakor, 40, founder of the Women's Financial Literacy Initiative. "My husband and I have complex income situations, so that system makes sense for us," she says. "I think we feel more like a team because we don't nitpick every household bill—we just pay from our joint fund."

11% more women are the taller spouse, compared with 1986,

an analysis of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics finds. "Height has traditionally been seen as an indicator of health and reproductive fitness in men," says Dalton Conley, Ph.D., dean of social sciences at New York University, who crunched the numbers. "Now societal success depends more on intellectual heft." Rachel Lewis, 41, from Columbus, Ohio, realized



Research shows the more your guy chips in with chores, the stronger your bond.

something similar when she fell for a guy a few inches shorter. "I consciously thought about what really matters—that he's smart and a great kisser and our personalities mesh well," Lewis says.

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU If you're feeling anxious about a height disparity, retrain your brain by writing down your fears. *Science* reports that transferring worries to paper can ease stress and clarify your thinking so you can make better decisions. (As in, do I want to let someone's stature ruin my happiness?)

45% of men say they're game to become a househusband,

the Match.com survey reveals. That may explain why the number of stay-at-home dads has more than doubled since 1994. (There has been an 8 percent uptick in the past five years.) Clearly, couples are more open to flipping traditional gender roles. Only 30 percent of adults say marriages function best when the man does the earning and the woman stays at home, compared with 43 percent of people who believed that in 1977, the study from Pew Research Center finds.

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU For smooth sailing, define your spheres. "Breadwinner wives often end up overseeing chores and bills, too, because they worry they'll burden a stay-at-home spouse or bruise his ego," Thakor says. "But this can lead to resentment and tension." Instead, divvy up responsibilities according to your strengths and schedules. Melanie Mannarino, 38, of Springfield, New Jersey, whose husband stays home, says, "He's developed a great laundry system, so he's in charge of that, and I love to cook, so dinner is my thing." Sounds like a recipe for a happy bond. ■