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## ***Gold-digging men a turnoff for high-earning women***

By Sue Shellenbarger

It wasn't until her engagement party that Genine Drozd realized her fiance was a little too interested in her paycheck.

"I'm going to quit my job next year and just hang out," Drozd says she overheard her fiance, then 24, an accountant, boasting to friends. Drozd, who at 21 already had a successful career as a public-relations manager, says the notion nauseated her. "At that exact moment I felt like I was going to throw up. I looked at him and thought, 'Who are you?'" She soon broke off the engagement.

Now that women are snaring a majority of both college degrees and professional jobs, they're getting a taste of something else that used to be a male-only province: gold-digging dates. Many women are surprised to find their earning power has become a magnet for the opposite sex. And based on my e-mails, some high-earning women worry that their slacker dates will always be just that: slackers who want to be supported. It's a growing concern for people in their 20s and 30s, not just because young women are earning more but because young men feel less compelled to fit the mold of the traditional solo breadwinner.

Research by Megan Sweeney, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, shows a trend toward higher-earning women marrying at higher rates. Among white women, a \$10,000-a-year increase in income predicted a 6.8 percent increase in the likelihood that a woman will marry in a given year. Among black women posting a \$10,000-a-year income gain, the increase in the likelihood of marriage was 8.2 percent. This is a change from the past, when women's earnings affected their chances of wedlock far less, Sweeney found.

Match.com, a dating Web site with 15 million users, is seeing a rise in men who specify that they want to date only women above a certain income level. In 2004, more than half, or 51 percent, of men specified a minimum income for dates, up from 37 percent in 2001, a spokeswoman says.

More men are going a step further, insisting on women who make more than they do. More than one-third, or 35 percent, of male users of True.com, a dating Web site with 2.7 million users, are seeking females with higher incomes, says Herb Vest, True.com's CEO. Only 20 percent of male True.com users want a woman who makes less.

Some high-earning women fear attracting a live-in couch potato. Michelle Demus, 31, an account manager for a fashion wholesaler, won't discuss her income. But she is doing well enough to rent an apartment in a fashionable Manhattan high-rise. On dates, she says, "I've had the sugar-mama conversation" with guys who fantasize aloud about her supporting them. "Some guys say . . . 'These ladies have it right'" in staying home, says Demus.

Her reaction? "It's not a positive one," she says. "I think, 'Ah. You're already looking to stop working?'" She breaks off such encounters quickly. Demus doesn't rule out guys who make less, but they must enjoy their work. "For me the question is, are we intellectually compatible? Are you passionate about what you do?"

The pattern isn't limited to young singles. In a recent e-mail, a 41-year-old divorced mother frets that her fiance, who lives with her, feels no obligation to help pay the bills and seems offended when she asks, saying his income is needed for his real estate investment business. "He's not

supporting his fair share of the household budget, and I worry about future entanglements," she writes.

For some women, the answer is to keep their incomes to themselves. Nicole Harris, 32, a partner in a Cincinnati real estate firm, once dated a mortgage broker who knew her substantial income and assets and must have boasted about it to friends. "When we broke up, all of his friends were shocked" that he let her slip away, because of her money, Harris says. Now, she is more private about money. Her current fiance, owner of two small businesses, doesn't know what she makes. She doesn't know his income, either. They each know the other works hard, and that's enough for now, she says.