

IS THIS WHAT THEY BURNED THEIR BRAS FOR?

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I have no doubt that 2010 will be the year of the American Woman.

She will take on more government roles, increase how much she earns and continue to lead in education – being the majority sex earning bachelor's and master's degrees.

It seems we've come a long way from the days of Donna Reed and June Cleaver. But what's the flip side of the coin?

FINANCIAL

Due to the "Great Recession," women now make up more than half of the work force, up from 38 percent in 1970. Nearly one-third of working women nationwide now out-earn their husbands and men are the majority of the unemployed. According to a survey by GfK Roper for NBC Universal, today there is a whole new meaning to the power of the purse: 65 percent of women reported being their family's chief financial planner and 71 percent called themselves the family accountant. Together, women control more wealth than ever in history.

However, according to a recent article in The Washington Post, "The American workplace is transforming, but women's lives aren't necessarily improving." Women still earn 77 cents on the dollar compared to men and saw their earnings fall twice as much as men's in 2008 – and the trend continues. Additionally, research shows that although men with working wives are taking on more housework than before, they still do up to five hours less housework than the women. In couples with kids, that increases to 17 hours when combined with childcare.

POLITICAL

From a political standpoint, for better or for worse, this is the first time in our history that women are leading the headlines. Sarah Palin, Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton get more ink than their male counterparts, and yet they can't seem to take the top jobs. Hillary couldn't seal the deal and take the top seat, Sarah Palin became a joke within her own party and Michelle is making more headlines on her wardrobe choices than on her impact on the healthcare debate. We even have celeb radio personalities like Rush Limbaugh asking listeners during the '08 election if America really wants to watch a woman grow old.

BEAUTY

And, of course, from an aesthetic perspective, we are working hard on changing the perception that all women must fit into the stereotypical perception of "beautiful." From the Dove campaign and the National Organization of Women's "Love Your Body Day," to the success of shows like "Ugly Betty," we have made great strides in the past decade. At the same time, a Ralph Lauren model was recently fired for being too fat (she's 5-foot-10 and 120 lbs!) and the lovely Kelly Clarkson had her image photo shopped for her Self magazine cover.

So what does this all mean to us as we look into marketing in 2010?

- We've got to reach her through a multitude of channels – she has more on her plate and on her mind than ever before, and her attention span is growing shorter
- Women are struggling with balance, but in a different way than before – brands have the opportunity to support her and believe in her
- Don't take anything for granted – we must continue to re-evaluate and further research our target audience – looking at “action-graphics” that might span gender, taking audience segmentation a step deeper and more focused

Perhaps modern day feminists will rejoice in the progress that has been made since those “Betty Draper” days – a time where women were rarely seen in universities and could aspire only to jobs as secretaries and teachers. However, I think that Gloria Steinem would say, “We still have our work cut out for us.”