

Aquarius

Love rules for alpha females

She's strong, successful and wouldn't be caught dead slaving over a hot stove. But could your alpha streak ruin your relationship?



By Catherine Langley

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Source:Corbis

As little girls we're taught to daydream about Prince Charming-type characters rescuing us from enchanted towers or poison-induced slumbers. Courage, bravery and valor are perceived as male traits and rarely does the fairy tale deviate enough to allow the princess to don a cape and save the day. It's fortunate then that life isn't a fairy tale, because from *Homeland* to *The Good Wife*, for some time we've been inundated with fantasies of alpha women who run their own lives, generate their own incomes and make their own decisions.

With feminism well into its second generation this fantasy has become a reality and in many parts of the world it's no longer unusual for women to out earn their husbands or be the main breadwinners. A recent study* showed that women in the US are the main source of income in 40 per cent of households with children, and 19 per cent of mothers aged 47 to 65 out earn their husbands. Likewise, UK research in 2012 showed that x of women are in management positions, while here in the UAE government statistics reveal that 77 percent of Emirati women go to university and three quarters of students are female, which undoubtedly will increase their future earning potential.

Liza Mundy, author of *The Richer Sex: How the New Majority of Female Breadwinners Is Transforming Sex, Love and Family*, calls this 'The Big Flip'. She is of the belief that within a generation, the majority of married households will feature wives who out earn their husbands. "Women's earning will bring about new liberation for women but also for men," she writes. "Women will marry down; more men will marry up."

Result? The uptight, super-ambitious female finds love with a charming, malleable chap who seems everything she's not: laid-back, nurturing and fun? It sounds like the makings of a good rom-com. But realistically, once the haze of love burns off could this potential power shift have wreak havoc for our relationships? After all, if he's been hardwired to bring home the bacon, he might not be too excited about the prospect of a woman who brings home wagyu steak. "It can lead to resentment," admits Mundy. "I have interviewed women whose husbands and partners have felt eclipsed by women's success and earnings."



For Carys*, a real estate consultant from the UK, it was her ex boyfriend's insecurities over her success that signaled the death knell of their four-year relationship. "In the last year of our relationship I was earning almost double what he was bringing in as a web designer. He never sponged off me or spent money that wasn't his, but he became very insecure of what I had. If I wanted to go away for the weekend or out to dinner at a nice restaurant, he would say he couldn't afford it, but was too proud to let me pay. I found myself playing down my own success

in order to massage his ego, which was counterproductive for my own confidence and happiness."

According to Mundy these feelings are quite common. "Hardwired expectations are difficult to get over," she admits. "It springs from a long-standing, deep-seated notion that a man's role is to provide for his family. This is not a band thing, but it does mean that when the woman becomes the provider, then the man must find a new rationale."

April Masini, author of *Date Out Of Your League* agrees. "Starting with cavemen, men were the people in the family who went out and physically killed animals to feed and clothe the family. They fought off intruders and were protectors. This concept still exists, so men feel uncomfortable with the fact that their women are doing what traditionally men did."

And it's not just the men that mind, says Mundy. "Many women today are brought up with the awareness that they need to be self-sufficient and able to support themselves. But the idea of supporting someone else, especially a male partner, is not something women have been led to expect. I've met women who feel aggrieved because women often have an ingrained expectation that the man will be the provider."

This was the case for Priyanka*, a marketing director from India, who experienced the breakdown of her marriage, after she became more successful than her husband. "When we first met he was a junior accountant at a software firm," she recalls. "In the beginning it wasn't an issue because we were both on small salaries, but as I rose through the ranks the disparity in our success became more apparent."

Priyanka is quick to point out that it was less about money and more about get-up-and-go. "When I married him I knew he wasn't a go-getter. He was never going to be the guy who commanded the boardroom. However, as time went by I began to find it difficult to respect him. The salary was one thing, but it was also about his progression. I found his lack of aspiration a bit pathetic."

Family planning

And of course, these feelings can intensify when children are involved. “Women can’t delegate pregnancy and birth to men,” says Masini. “So if they marry and have kids with a man who is unambitious or less successful financially, and then realise that there is just way too much on their own plates, they may become resentful. After all, it’s easy to hand off child care duties and housework, but he can’t have your morning sickness for you, or end up on bed rest if a challenging pregnancy requires that.”

When mother-of-two and full-time architect Samantha* was pregnant with her first child, she says she was met with a rude awakening about the reality of being the main breadwinner. “My husband Paul* is a retail manager and while he makes a decent salary, it isn’t enough to sustain us as a family – I earn the lion’s share. When it first dawned on me that being a full-time mother was never going to be an option for me and that I would have to return to work as soon as my maternity leave was up, I felt a lot of bitterness towards my husband,” she recalls. Fortunately Samantha and her husband weathered the storm and today consider their marriage to be rock-solid. “Having children really made me appreciate Paul for all his amazing qualities. Because his job isn’t as high-powered as mine he is the one who takes care of house chores, does the school run and pays the bills. While I sometimes have pangs of regret about not being at home more, realistically I love my job and being with someone like Paul allows me to continue to rise in my career.”

Alpha Vs Beta

Samantha’s epiphany is, according to Mundy, all part of a new definition of masculinity that is emerging, which embraces a whole range of male behaviours. “I’ve interviewed many men, particularly younger ones, who celebrated their wife or girlfriend’s ambitions and achievements, and crucially were willing to make sacrifices to help her get ahead. Likewise I have interviewed women who were happy about, and grateful for, their partners’ support, realising that this would help them achieve their dreams.”

Mundy notes that the 20th century stereotype of the alpha female has also shifted. “For a long time many women feared that they would be unattractive and unmarriageable if they were too well-educated and too successful. But in the United States, for example, it is the highest earning women who have seen their marriage rates rise in the past decade. So our ideas about femininity are also changing. Men increasingly understand that having a successful partner is a plus not a minus.”

* Names have been changed



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