

## **Topic – What are the odds of women becoming the breadwinners in South Africa nowadays?**

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It's a valid question.

Do we actually see more women taking the initiative these days and becoming the primary breadwinners in households in South Africa?

However, I think there's a more fundamental issue at hand. This is an issue that's not localised to a certain country or culture. I therefore have chosen to focus beyond the borders of South Africa. It's an issue that stretches beyond time and space. There are two questions we can ask ourselves that illustrate the depth of this issue.

1. What do women want?
2. What do men want?

When we start thinking about these two questions, we realise that the very fabric of society's functioning is being called into question. What is it really that women and men want to get out of life?

Obviously, the first thought that comes to mind is, "But Gidon, how can you generalise about what women and men want? Surely, it's on an individual basis, as opposed to being a factor influenced by gender or sex?" It's this thought exactly that forms the basis of this article.

I don't profess to have all the answers. I can however, continue the conversation. It's a conversation that's been going on many years, longer than I've been alive. Longer I believe, than even the feminist movement, which has its origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will however give credit to the feminist movement who appears to have been the instrument that brought this conversation to the public eye.

Biologically, we're either born as a female or a male. There are medical exceptions, like those born with both male and female genitals, but by and large we're either a male or female. Does our sex determine what we're capable of achieving in life? Is it true that the man need to be the ones making money for the family, while the woman is the one who looks after the house and the children? (I am speaking in terms of a husband and wife, but the same can apply in a homosexual relationship.)

To my dear reader reading these very words, hi ;)

The topic I've brought up today is probably not new for you. You've all heard it being discussed in some form or another. It can sometimes even get a bit stale if it stays as mere speculation, as opposed to leading to actual positive cultural change. This brings me back to the question I ask myself – what's the point of this article?

I have a dream hiding deep inside my being. It's a precious little dream waiting for the day that the nourishment it needs will bring it to fruition. My dream is that there will come a day in the future where women and men will be able to choose the lifestyle they live, and as opposed to facing potential criticism for certain choices, all their choices will be celebrated and applauded by those around them.

Think about a woman that you know who has chosen to pursue a time-consuming career, making it her primary focus in her life. Even if she hasn't heard verbal criticism, as is common for women in these positions, she's certainly been quietly judged before by both men and women for choosing to abandon her biological inclination for being a nurturer and child-bearer. (It is true that women have a different hormonal structure to men, which some say proves that they have a maternal / nurturing innate ability.)

Think about a man that you know who has made the decision to be a 'stay-at-home' dad, claiming responsibility for all domestic duties such as looking after the children and keeping the household clean and functioning. Perhaps he even has one or two part-time jobs, but has chosen to focus on being with the children whilst his wife can go on and pursue the highest echelons of her career without the worry of needing to care for the domestic duties. I'll guarantee you that people have questioned his decisions on numerous occasions.

Let's take a step back though and analyse just how difficult it gets trying to balance a romantic relationship with a career, forgetting the male-female cultural stigmas for a minute.

Arguably, it's nearly impossible to reach the top tier of a chosen industry if one's focus is not entirely on climbing the career ladder. It follows then that one partner in a marriage, whether it's a heterosexual or homosexual marriage, needs to sacrifice a full-time career in exchange for the time and effort needed to keep a household running, which includes looking after the children, should they choose to have children.

Some might say that a delicate balance can be achieved by both parents / partners choosing careers that allow them to pursue a financially stable career and have time for domestic duties. However, as noted above, this scenario will hamper each partner's ability to trump their competition and become the best in their industry. At best, they will stay as average workers, never having the time or effort to push for the highest positions.

Another option is when both partners choose to pursue full-time careers, and get maids/babysitters/grandparents to raise their children, thereby freeing up the time to pursue their work. This has its drawbacks in the sense that the parents may feel as if they aren't spending enough time with the children, and thereby don't develop as close a bond with the children as they'd like to achieve.

An alternative is where two partners choose to not have children at all, and stay as a couple their entire lives. It's a valid option, since a household of two adults can still function even if both people have full-time jobs. The drawback to this option is that they never experience the joy (and occasional pain) of raising and spending time with children of their own.

Another possible option is staying single one's whole life, choosing to have no partners or children, but that's not relevant to this discussion.

Taking into account all the above, we can safely conclude that it's not a simple business trying to balance business and pleasure in a romantic relationship. Couple this with the pre-feminism male-female stigmas and it becomes a hairy mess.

I once read the below quote, which is so apt, that I thought I'd share it.

"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters." *M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth.*

I understand why the male-female stigmas exist, due to the biological and physical makeups of males and females. Males are physically stronger and can therefore lift heavier objects and more likely hunt animals with ease. Females have bodies designed to carry babies, give birth, and breastfeed the babies. The above physical traits developed into the cultural understanding of what men and women should do with their lives.

We're in a post-industrialist age. We no longer need to hunt animals with our hands. Men can care for babies and feed them with a bottle. Women can go to work while men clean the house and go shopping. I'm not suggesting that men and women need to swap positions. That's just reversing the stigmas.

My humble suggestion is that society aims to bring itself into a new mind-set. Women and men should be encouraged and supported to choose their lifestyles, whether it's shopping or sitting in a boardroom, and feel confident in their decisions.

When will this day come?

Change is slow my friends. But hope lives on.

Oh, and by the way, I think there are more women who are breadwinners in South Africa nowadays, but what do I know? Just type it in on Professor Google and you'll get some reliable answer.