

LL08-When The Woman Makes More than the Man

High I'm Doug Weiss,

And I'm Alvean Lyons and this is love life.

Alvean, we've got a really interesting topic this week.

And we're joined by Barbara Hamm Lee again for a conversation about what happens when the woman earns more than the man.

Well I tell you it's an interesting topic because in today's society unlike like long ago, more and more women are working outside of the home and there are a lot more women who are making more money than their husbands and so culturally it causes a lot of problems.

Just the whole idea of manhood and what that's supposed to mean, in terms of how you define it exactly. I don't know if both of you know I used to produce Oprah when she was a talk show host. When she started blowing up and really becoming very famous nationwide and so forth there was a discussion about whether or not she would date a garbage man.

And the consensus of the group was she would never be in the company of a garbage man, and so therefore she would never meet him so therefore she probably would never date a garbage man.

It's so interesting to see to see the dichotomy although I threw it into the mix, but what if the garbage man for example, loved classical music and she and he were adamantly in love together would the money difference be a hindrance to a good relationship?

Well I certainly have thoughts about it. One of them as you sort of referenced previously is in that word defining. For some of us you know, masculinity is defined by the ability to provide at a particular level and if one's inability to do so made a man feel like they were emasculated in some way then it would be problematic inside of the relationship; even if their partner did not flaunt the fact that they made more money because internally I'm having this fight so it really doesn't matter that externally there is no fight. My struggle is on the inside. If that is a factor than it's going to be problematic subsequently. If I as a woman define myself by my husband or significant other's stature and I'm embarrassed to admit the fact that he is a blue collar worker because I am a professional then no matter whether or not he's comfortable in his own right, and comfortable with you in your professional position, you are uncomfortable with his circumstances and his circumstances are such that you find yourself avoiding when somebody says oh John what do you do? Well John is responsible for sanitation for the city. In your trying to change the fact that he's just a garbage man, that's what he does. It's like saying he's a domestic engineer you know, a housewife. A stay at home dad.. You don't want to say those things or you're finding some other way to say it and it's the covert feeling of your embarrassment that is actually unraveling the fabric of our relationship because you're embarrassed.

Some people find it hard to separate what they do from who they are so it seems like you're embarrassed and that is where the problem comes in. It's not actually an issue for people to make more money or woman to make more money than a man if both of them are comfortable in their own right. It's when we define ourselves by the things that we do, in the titles, that we have that we find that those become problematic issues inside of a relationship. So I have to be honest and say that on occasion, Peggy will say "hey I'm going to buy us dinner tonight". And when the check comes and she pulls out her credit card or whatever to pay for a meal I feel a little awkward because that's my job, you know, to take care of her and I want to say that I think that as men we are often conflicted. Two things are at work in this mix, not necessarily to our advantage. One is that we are taught to take care of not just our wives or girlfriends but our families that's part of our obligation. That's a very good thing, that's part of what makes society work. At the same time, and I think that there's a sensibility that many men have, and I'm not sure that I think this is a healthy thing, but I think there is a sensibility of what's right and the man should and the woman should and these stereotypes which play out are not

healthy ones necessarily.

And there's absolutely nothing inappropriate over the the idea of paying for dinner or my paying for dinner these are gifts we're giving each other, if you will, of our company and enjoying this moment together. But let me say that my gender sometimes has a somewhat frail ego when it comes to this.

That's a really nice way to put it.

Yeah there you go, you know I think that that it reflects because so often we confuse ourselves with what we do, and our jobs become us not who we are, but what we do, and that misidentification of the what over the who is the root of this issue for many men, myself included. There have been points in my life where my work was very important to me and frankly too important to me. I obsessed over doing it well and being successful at it. I was an entrepreneur, I started companies, I held significant positions in other companies, and so I had this mental model of myself. The idea of being in an equal relationship where we both had means and we both could contribute, that was OK being in a situation where I was the provider I was perfectly fine with that. I was never in a situation where the other person was the one that had more means and was much more of the provider, so I can't say that I have a personal experience of it, but I have the sense that I probably would have had to work through that and I think not because of an inherent male perspective, but because of this issue of identifying with what I did versus who I was, and it took me a while to learn to accept that it didn't really matter what I did.

If you are in a relationship or in a marriage you may start out equally in terms of income and your job levels and so forth and then somebody changes, somebody gets really high, and I wonder because society still unfortunately for the most part expects that the man takes care of the woman as opposed to the woman taking care of the man financially so that if it's the guy whose career just takes off well great. But what happens if it's the woman whose career takes off? Does she become this kind of other person?

I've got to say here that I think a lot of this rests on one fundamental and that's how you look at what that success is about. If you look at it as isn't this wonderful what just happened for us and this is ours and what it's enabled for our family, for us, for our lives together, then that contention goes away. But if it's mine and yours you know and I'm making a gift of all this, my success, to you little woman... Yeah you are headed for disaster. Now let me say that I have met many women who be perfectly happy to be kept in the manner to which they would like to become accustomed. And I'm not here to pass judgment on that but simply to say that I think that more and more intelligent, capable women don't want to be in a situation that in any way is unequal. It doesn't mean that we have differences between us, of course we do, and those are delightful and should be celebrated, but the kind of equality I'm talking about here is our equality in relationship to one another.

Well I certainly I live that experience so. I have over the last couple of years I've gotten to the point where I actually make more than my husband does and he makes you know a good amount of money, but things have just gone really well for me.

But what's interesting about our relationship, and this really speaks to what the foundation of the relationship is, is that he put me through school. So there's a different orientation when the foundation of your relationship is this person who was sacrificing to help make this thing happen for you. So it really is as Douglas referenced, it's ours. So Matthew will tell you in a heartbeat I'm hoping you retire me within the next four years. I don't want people to ask me what I do for a living and I say I do what I do.

He is fine with that but I mean twenty plus years into this thing and you know he's been such a champion of me being able to come into my own. One of the lies that we women tell each other is that you can have it all, but the truth is you can but not at the same time. So if you're really going to be an incredible mom you're not going to be able to have an amazing career and be an incredible wife. wife

Barbara Walters said pick two and she's right about that, you could probably do two of those things really well. The other one's going to have to take a back seat, so for us being an incredible mom was my priority so I worked on my education and I put my career sort of on hold. But as my kids have gotten older it's freed me up to be able to do more of what I wanted to do and all of the investment he made over the years to take great care of us and provide for

us we see it as the return on his investment at this point. The stock that started out as penny stock is now blue chips.

So it really it really is based on what is the foundation of that relationship, how you deal with your success.

Do you use your success as a sword to cut down the other person or do you use your success as a sword to try to chop down the trees that are in the path of the other person that we may take this Greater Journey someplace else together because of what we are armed with.

So then the other portion of this is when one person or the other is suddenly in the company of others who are on that level you are now at, and your spouse may or may not feel comfortable in those spaces, at the rubber chicken dinners.

I mean I relate to this having dated a guy who absolutely you know was a charming fellow but he just could not deal with the rubber chicken dinners that I would have to go to and then I mean he was just there. You know something else, it was just not his world and we broke up because of it.

I'd submit that that has little to do with the question of means, though it has a great deal to do with how. How you support the person that you care about. If you love them, and you honor them, and you respect them, and you want them to be successful at what they do then man up. I'm sorry man or woman up and you know it's incumbent upon you to find a way to support them and don't do it grudgingly, do it lovingly and happily that you can do that for them and be an aid and support. Because really, at the end of the day it's not how much we make, it's how much we love the person that we're making this money with or for. It is how we define ourselves that really defines what the relationship is going to be. It's not about the money.

That's our show for today. We hope you'll reach out by writing to us at how alvean@lovelife.digital or doug@lovelife.digital. We're so happy to be here today with you Barbara and with our recording engineer and partner in crime, Todd Washburn.

We'll be back next week with another intriguing topic of the day until then, bye.