

# Who makes the money? Who raises the kids?

An ex-boyfriend once told me I would make a good housewife. That conversation didn't end well.

I don't remember exactly where the conversation went from there, but he remembers me getting mad at him. He pointed this out one day this summer when I expressed how exhausted I was from always having to market myself and look for the next gig. I said I wanted to stop all the hustling and just wanted someone to take care of me.

He was floored that a woman so independent and self-sufficient would express something so antithetical to her personality. I have to admit it was odd, and my expression of vulnerability was probably more the product of two difficult years and a summer of tests of faith and endurance than it was of a biological clock or deeply embedded impressions of gender

roles, but I said it.

A Facebook post I saw a few weeks later reminded me that no matter the reasons behind them and no matter how momentary they are, I'm not alone in my feelings. A male friend posted that he met a female college sophomore at the library and asked her about her future plans. "She said, 'Don't judge me ... I want to find a good man with money, marry him and raise our kids.' She said lots of women are like that and they don't



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admit it," the friend posting the status update wrote. He went on to ask the ladies for their opinions.

I replied, "If she had stopped at, 'Good man with money,' I would probably judge her, but keep reading! She also wants to be married and be a stay-at-home mom. Rarely a woman's role these days but always a valid option. I don't know that *lots* of women are looking for that, but if you like tradition, love children and want to be an active, available and participatory mom, having one income that's enough for the entire family is necessary."

And there's nothing wrong or demeaning about a family's decision to let that one income be the man's responsibility. Forgetting that societal conditioning tells us a man must be a monetary provider in order to be worthwhile, we can focus on two simple truths: Kids are expensive, and men make more money.

According to the U.S. Department

of Agriculture, it costs about \$286,050 — without accounting for a college education — to raise one child in the U.S., and according to a 2010 Pew research survey, about 46 percent of Americans think the ideal family has two children in it. That's more than half a million dollars.

Is it necessary for two people to work outside the home in order to afford that tab? No. Most individual working adults will gross more than half a million dollars over a period of 18 years and will still net that amount after taxes. Actual living expenses diminish the earnings significantly, however, and since there is still a wage gap — women now earn 83 cents for every dollar that a man earns, although that's changing, too — it would be easier for a family living off one income to afford children if the man makes the money.

Of course, the burden/blessing of parenting doesn't stop at money. It's an emotional, time-consuming commit-

ment, too. It's positioning yourself as an advocate for health, education and safety. It's teaching right from wrong to someone who really doesn't know any better. It's leading by example 24/7.

Are women more equipped than men for that kind of commitment? I don't know. We're definitely more socialized to it and therefore more likely to want it. But we also outnumber men in the work force and on college campuses and earn more Ph.D.s than they do. Young women in large cities are out-earning men. We're even taking less time off during child-bearing years.

But does that mean we can't want another option? Or just that we can't admit it? ♣

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