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Harmony in Marriage:

2. Husband-Wife Roles and Expectations

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Factors Influencing Marital Roles and Expectations

There are a number of influences that determine a person's ideas of what marriage is like and the roles the husband and wife play in that marriage.

The most important influence is the family. What marriage is like is taught subtly and constantly to children. Children growing up in happy homes tend to develop a more positive, healthy view of family life. They try to emulate this example later in their own homes after marriage. Studies show that the best preparation for family living is to have been brought up in a happy home. Boys and girls from unhappy home situations may develop anxieties and unfavorable views of family life. They have a harder time developing habits that build harmonious family relationships.

The concept of what a husband, father, wife, or mother should be like is learned at home. Boys tend to identify with their fathers and be the kind of husbands and dads they have known their own fathers to be. Girls tend to grow up thinking and acting like their mothers.

Also, youth almost unconsciously seek a mate like the parent of the opposite sex. The old song:

"I want a girl,
Just like the girl,
That married
Dear old Dad."

actually describes what happens in real life. Boys tend to marry (and are usually happier with) girls like their mothers. Girls seek boys like their fathers. In fact, sometimes immature marital partners want a mother or father image to marry more than they want a mate.

The importance of family influences can be illustrated by comparing authority patterns in a parental

family with the patterns in a married child's own family. A man reared in a family where the father was authoritarian and the mother submissive will usually seek to perpetuate this pattern in his own family. He will seek a wife who will be as submissive to him as his mother was to his father. Or, a man whose mother was dominant and whose father was submissive may seek a mate whose role is that of the powerful mother. The woman also has certain role-expectations for herself and her husband. Her expectations too have been determined by the roles played by her own father and mother.

Difficulties arise when a man's wife doesn't meet his expectations. He feels: "She's not at all like my mother; I wish she would try to be." Or, wives are disappointed when their husbands turn out to be completely different from "daddy." Ideally, both men and women need mates whose authority and expectations complement their own.

Peers and friends also influence sex roles and expectations. While growing up, boys and girls are taught by friends what it means to be members of their own sex. Boys may be taught to be he-men, aggressive, courageous, daring, domineering. They may be taught that "a man should wear the pants," and to look upon girls as sissies, inferior, fickle, emotional, or less important than boys. Girls may be taught to be coy, shy, act dumb, be submissive, sexy, flirtatious, or passive. Of course, what views are taught depend upon the culture. Traditional Western views emphasize the man's role as a breadwinner, the woman's role as a mother and homemaker. Every young man and woman enters marriage with firm views on what a successful marriage is, and what a good husband and wife

are like. These views are partially influenced by the attitudes of their friends and acquaintances.

Ethnic factors also strongly influence husband-wife role concepts. Irish, Polish, Italian, Puerto Rican, or other ethnic groups bring different marital role patterns from the old country. In general, these groups emphasize traditional patriarchal family structures. These views include (1) subordination of the wife in affairs outside the home, (2) dominance of the husband, (3) close paternal supervision of the children's education, (4) family control over the earnings of unmarried children, and (5) concepts of fertility that result in large families.

Class and occupational differences in marital role concepts have also been emphasized in recent years. The lower socio-economic groups tend to promote highly differentiated sex roles in the family. The man is considered boss "outside the home" and is in charge of all outside work. The woman is considered boss "inside the home." She's in charge of all child-rearing, homemaking functions. A "real man" is not supposed to do woman's work, so seldom participates in house-keeping, or baby-tending activities, although he does act as a disciplinarian. A farm wife is expected to keep house and rear children. The wife of an upper-middle-class businessman is expected to be a companion and hostess, and represent the family in community functions. Thus the ultimate goal of the middle- and upper-middle-class wife is to enhance her husband's professional and social status so he can advance in his profession.

Modern businesses bring a lot of pressure upon middle-class husbands and wives to fulfill certain roles. The following is a paraphrased list of responsibilities of the wife of an executive as compiled by one company (as published in "Dunn's Review and Modern Industry," Feb., 1957).

1. Personal—good wife, mother, well adjusted, adaptable, sense of humor, desire to grow and mature with husband.
2. Background similar to husband, some business experience.
3. Knowledge of husband's business, its products and services.
4. Intelligent listener, sounding board when he shares problems, experiences.
5. Understands his career demands much of his time and attention. Never nags or demands too much of him in his career.
6. Keeps business confidences.
7. Stays away from husband's office except in emergency.
8. Trusts husband when he works with other women.
9. Builds happy social life for family without letting it interfere with business.

10. Gracious, willing, and capable hostess whether guests expected or not.
11. Encourages husband to take part in community and church affairs. Does so herself.
12. Keeps the home attractive, neat, inviting.
13. Keeps home well organized, relaxing, and problem-free as possible.
14. Makes sure husband finds time for relaxation he enjoys most; subtly cautions him when his pace is too rapid.
15. Family spends some time each day or weekend working on home projects or playing together.
16. Maintains a happy relationship with his family.
17. Sees to it that family lives within income.
18. When transferred, takes lead in establishing family in new community.
19. Helps discipline children.
20. Assures that husband is chairman of the board in his home and family.

Education is having a marked effect on role concepts, particularly on the roles of women in the family. Lack of education tends to perpetuate traditional roles, for the uneducated person suspects change. Uneducated husbands often are suspicious of any change that will affect their dominant status in the family. Conversely, higher education changes the roles of both sexes. The fiction of male superiority is difficult to maintain when women sit beside men in the classroom and often excel them. Also, college women are oriented toward careers and tend to rebel against traditional roles.

Furthermore, those with more education tend to have fewer children. In one survey, women college graduates had on the average half as many children as women who had not completed the seventh grade. Thus, more educated women are freer to pursue activities outside the home.

Children in the family tend to influence their parents in their activities. A child who cannot reconcile his mother's outside activities with the concepts of motherhood he sees represented in homes of playmates puts enormous pressure upon her to change. Mother often feels considerable guilt and anxiety if the children make her feel she is failing them or neglecting them. Children tend to pressure the father into keeping up with the Joneses by providing the many things for the family that "Mr. Jones buys" or by playing with the kids, or taking them camping, or to baseball games the way Johnny's father does.

Personal preferences usually are one of the most important factors in determining husband-wife roles. Husbands and wives can't continually try to satisfy their families, relatives, friends, neighbors, the husband's boss, the social or class group, the school teacher, and the children in the roles they assume in the family, especially if the concepts of the pressure

groups conflict with theirs. Each husband and wife has to learn to be true to their own feelings and inclinations, although just being individualistic and independent doesn't solve all the problems. A husband and a wife must at least learn to please one another. To do so requires some sacrifice of personal preference and freedom. Unity is built not necessarily on uniformity, but at least on consensus, which means husbands and wives have to come to some agreement on what to expect of each other in the marriage.

Individual Expectations

What do husbands and wives expect of each other in marriage? There is no generalized answer that summarizes the views of all husbands and wives, since everyone is different. However, what an individual expects and what he actually finds and experiences in marriage, need to be reconciled. Unless the individual's marriage or his marital partner lives up to expectations, disappointment, conflict, and even separation may result.

The following examples illustrate instances where expectations were never realized.

A young husband: "I always wanted a wife that liked to stay home, keep the house, and look after the kids, but my wife is never home. She is always running around or over at her girl friend's house."

The wife of a surgeon: "I was brought up in a family where everyone was warm, demonstrative, and affectionate. But my husband is cold as ice. I think that is why he is such a successful surgeon. He doesn't get emotionally involved with his cases. Sometimes I yearn so for some real warmth, for closeness with him. I wish he would just hug me, and hold me close, but he never does."

A new bride: "In my family we used to discuss everything. Of course everyone talked at once, and we had some real arguments sometimes, but it was fun. Harry hardly ever says anything. He doesn't like to discuss things, especially when I get mad, so I never know what he is thinking."

A middle-aged businessman: "For some reason or another, my wife always criticizes me. I never seem to do anything right in her eyes. She even seems resentful that I am successful. One day I'd like to come home and describe an important business transaction and have her congratulate me, or at least to act pleased. A man needs a wife who encourages him, and appreciates him, but Becky is jealous of everything I do."

A housewife: "If Don had to stay home just one day and take care of four screaming kids and keep this dilapidated house looking decent he would go out of his mind. He thinks I don't do anything around here. The other day he came home after I had scrubbed and waxed all of the floors and asked me: 'Don't you get bored around here with nothing to do? Why don't you get yourself a job?'"

A politician: "In politics you have to get out and meet people, go to parties, be seen in the right places, and be sociable and friendly to everyone. I wish I could bring important contacts home to dinner but my wife says she doesn't know what to say. She gets so upset when company comes that it isn't worth it."

A serviceman's wife: "Bill is away so much, sometimes for months at a time whenever his ship sails. I get terribly lonesome. I don't see why he can't do some job that keeps him home like all of the other husbands."

In each of these examples, either the husband or wife is dissatisfied because the marital partner is not being the kind of mate that he or she wants and expects. There is dissatisfaction with the role that the other is assuming in the family. Over a period of time, any one of these problems could have serious consequences. It is therefore important for husbands and wives to work out their differences about what is expected of each in the family.

The following check list can be used by husbands and wives, or by those about to be married, in taking inventory of what is expected of them at home. Check each item that applies to you.

WHAT KIND OF A MATE ARE YOU?

For Husbands To Answer

What Kind of A Mate Does Your Wife Want?	What Kind of a Mate Are You?
..... A good provider
..... Neat and clean husband
..... Handsome and attractive husband
..... A good handyman who can fix things
..... Man with a sense of humor
..... Thoughtful, considerate husband
..... Husband who is sociable, enjoys people
..... One who likes sex
..... Is an adequate sex partner
..... Warm, affectionate
..... Interesting conversationalist
..... Interested in the family
..... Home most of the time
..... Helps with housework
..... Appreciates her
..... Remembers special occasions
..... Generous with money
..... Responsible in his work
..... Good disposition, happy, even temperament
..... Helps with children
..... Husband who will be the boss
..... Trustworthy, honest, truthful
..... Good manners, gentlemanly
..... Likes some of same things she does
..... Not a fussy eater
..... Kind, sympathetic
..... Wise in use of money
..... Intelligent
..... Is domineering
..... Tolerant, understanding of her
..... Loves her
..... Approves of her
..... Makes her feel like a woman
..... Is a real man
..... Like her father
..... Religious
..... Drinks in moderation
..... Good with children
..... Self-confident
..... Interested in community affairs
..... Good education

For Wives To Fill Out

What Kind of A Mate Does Your Husband Want?	What Kind of A Mate Are You?
..... Beautiful, attractive
..... Good cook
..... Careful housekeeper
..... Fine mother
..... Neat, clean appearance
..... A wife who helps him all she can
..... Reasonable disciplinarian with children
..... Takes an interest in his work
..... Good money manager
..... Good sex partner
..... Loyal, faithful
..... Loves him
..... Appreciates him
..... Like his mother
..... Encourages him in his work
..... Good hostess
..... Friendly, sociable
..... Interested in some of same things he is
..... Religious
..... Does volunteer community work
..... Happy, even disposition
..... Sense of humor
..... Warm, affectionate
..... Interesting conversationalist
..... Intelligent
..... Good education
..... Practical, wise
..... Home most of time
..... Works outside of home
..... Domineering
..... Honest, truthful
..... Good manners, ladylike
..... Kind, considerate
..... Sympathetic, understanding
..... Makes him feel manly
..... A wife who drinks in moderation

On the basis of the above inventory, what roles in marriage does your mate wish you were fulfilling which you are not fulfilling to his or her satisfaction? What roles do you wish your mate would fulfill which he or she is not fulfilling to your satisfaction? Can the discrepancies be talked about calmly, positively, and helpfully? What can you do to live up to your mate's expectations of you? Are your demands of him or her unreasonable and unrealistic? Sometimes concepts of roles need changing more than couples need to change the roles they play.

The Division of Responsibility

One of the chief jobs of the husband and wife is to work out the division of responsibility in the family. First of all, what are the many jobs in the home? Once these are understood, then the division of responsibility between the husband and wife can be more intelligently discussed.

According to Floyd Martinson in his book, *Marriage and the American Ideal*, the principal functions of the family can be divided into two major groupings:

1. Outside Functions—those functions carried on outside the house.
 - a. Occupational role—producing income.
 - b. Community role—representing the family in the community and society.
2. Inside Functions
 - a. Sex functions—sex expression, bearing and rearing children.
 - b. Home management—maintenance, coordinating family activities, management of persons, time, and material resources, decision-making.
 - c. Sustaining, supportive role—giving affection, sympathy, emotional support, building morale, building empathy, spiritual leadership.

Who should perform each of these functions in the family? Actually, only one role is biologically determined—that of child-bearing. In the past, the woman's child-bearing confined her to the home. Menstruation, pregnancy, birth, nursing an infant, restricted her outside activities. This fact alone was largely responsible for the woman taking the leadership role inside the family, while the husband earned a living.

Modern women are more mobile. The menstruation cycle can now be regulated so the woman can plan her activities accordingly. Adequate health and medical care have helped alleviate some of the discomforts of pregnancy. Pregnant women are no longer embarrassed in public. Bearing a child no longer confines a woman for long; many women are back to the office six weeks after a child is born. The majority of women bottle-feed rather than nurse their babies so they are free to leave their infant with a baby-sitter. Many working wives have housekeeping help. Community organizations expect the women to take as much or more interest in community affairs as men. Many industries prefer female workers for many types of jobs. Some husbands now insist that the wife get a job to supplement the family income. Thus, many of the pressures and reasons that formerly kept women at home no longer exist. In fact, there is tremendous pressure on her to be out of the home, even though society still condemns her if she neglects her house or children. Her husband complains if she neglects him, and she feels guilty if she does not adequately perform the feminine roles she demands of herself.

But the fact still remains: the family must still function. Income must be earned, community obligations must be met. Sex demands to be expressed, babies need to be born and reared. The house and yard must be kept, clothes and personal belongings cared for, decisions made, and social relationships developed. All family members need to be loved, appreciated, helped, supported, cared for, and befriended.

Who is responsible? How family members divide responsibilities will depend upon their own prefer-

ences, feelings, habits, and desires. What division of responsibility is satisfactory to both the husband and wife and assures the physical, mental, social, moral, and intellectual growth of the children? The important question is not who should do what? Rather: are the necessary family functions being performed to the satisfaction and for the welfare of all?

In every marriage, husbands and wives act out individual variations of traditional cultural roles. Some husbands do most of the shopping, take an active part in the cooking, and clean the house. Others act like permanent guests at a well-run hotel where all they do is pay the bills and appear for meals and bed with reasonable regularity. In some households, emptying the ashtrays is all the male contributes to the home-making process. In others he may act as virtual substitute housekeeper. Thus, each couple has to develop and maintain its own pattern of dividing responsibilities.

Couples must be careful, however, not to compete with each other in fulfilling family functions. When husbands and wives start competing to see who can earn the most income, bake the best biscuits, or spoil the children the most, then the family is in trouble. There are enough things that need doing in every family without mates trying to out-do each other. A husband should carefully consider the consequences before assuming a role that his wife feels is hers. Similarly, a wife is foolish to take over an important masculine function against her husband's wishes.

Once family members develop a feeling that "This is *our* responsibility. Let's all cooperate in making the family function, and let's decide who we want to do what so that each person assumes a fair share of the total burden," then the major problems can be solved.

The Changing Role of Women

One hundred years or more ago, a woman's place in the family and community was clearly understood. A woman knew her place and was trained for it. Only the rebellious and unconventional objected, or felt thwarted because roles were so well established.

The following comment, made in 1800, describes the direction followed in the education of women (from: *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, by Hannah Moore).

"The profession of ladies, to which the bent of their instruction should be turned, is that of daughters, wives, mothers, and mistresses of families. They should therefore be trained with a view to these several conditions. . . . It

is of last importance to their happiness in life that they should early acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit."

The role of women in the family and in the world has obviously changed. The American woman has become the symbol of the new woman of our day throughout the world, thanks to the wide advertising of her freedom, her attractiveness, and her daring as displayed by Hollywood. This new image of the American woman is challenging marriage patterns, child-rearing practices, work roles, and standards of living. It is also causing conflicts within the woman herself and in some families. American women are no longer submissive, retiring flowers of femininity, confined to the home, dedicated only to the care of husband, house and family.

Over 60% of all married women work full- or part-time outside the home. After a woman competes with men at work, she is likely to find the role of wife and mother most frustrating.

Secondary and higher education for women emphasizes vocational training or preparation for a profession other than homemaking. Girls who take the college prep course in high school get no training in homemaking unless they elect the senior special course. Furthermore, they tend to look down upon those in the commercial or the home economics programs. These feelings are then carried over into adult life. The girl who looks down upon homemaking as a student is likely to look down upon the job of homemaking as a wife.

American women today need to learn more about home management and child care. Many women enter marriage completely unprepared to be either housewives or mothers. One study by LeMasters shows that young mothers had no conception of what they were getting into with their first child. As a result, motherhood was a real crisis for them.

Some men are having trouble accepting the new role of women. Many cannot reconcile the traditional roles of mother and housekeeper with the diversified roles wives claim for themselves today. As a result, conflict and tension arise. Either the woman has to try to satisfy her husband's image of what a woman should be, or he has to recast his values, philosophy, and behavior to fit her new role.

Every woman has to reckon with the male ego. Most American men today do not consider women inferior. But many still tend to think of women in the traditional way. Some husbands want their wives to be ornaments and clinging vines. They miss the honor

and respect that once were considered their right. The shock to the male ego has been great. Many men cannot take it. Still the trend is toward a greater equality of the sexes, and men and women both need to grow in their understanding of each other's philosophy.

Most studies indicate that when a woman works outside of the home her employment can have a happy or adverse effect upon the marriage. Many women feel they are better wives when they work. They like the additional income, and the fact that they can apply their education. Many like the social contacts outside the home; others find a sense of personal worth and accomplishment so they are more contented. Others work to escape the home and children, or because they want to be more independent.

However, the woman does have a problem if she feels guilty about working, hates to work, or has a husband who objects to her working. If she has trouble fulfilling dual roles at home and work because of the demands upon her time and energy, she may do everything haphazardly and not feel satisfied with anything she is doing. So her own sense of well-being and fulfillment suffers.

What are the effects upon the children of a mother working? The fact that mothers of even preschool children are going to work in increasing numbers (over 25% of such mothers now work outside the home),

is causing concern for many. Thus, the report of the Mid-Century White House Conference on Children and Youth stated:

"It may well be questioned whether most mothers can, without undue strain, carry a full-time job and still give responsive and attentive care to the physical and emotional needs of small children. The first six years have been shown to be crucial years for the child who would seem to need a substantial share of the mother's time and attention during this period."

It should be added, however, that just because a mother works does not necessarily mean that this is "bad" for the children. How long a mother is with her children is not as important as the quality of her relationship with them. Some mothers have a very adverse effect upon children and ought not to be with them so much. Others need to be with their children more, and the children need and miss them. There are many factors to consider: the kind of mother, the kind of family, the age and needs of the child, the reasons why the mother works, how much she works, what work she does and when, the children's age, what provisions are made for the children while the mother is at work, and the role of the father in relationship to the children.

When there is a choice, the primary consideration of whether the mother should work is: "What will be best for the children?"

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