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Harmony in Marriage: 1. Love and Marriage
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Harmony in Marriage:

1. Love and Marriage

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Getting Married and Being Married

There is a world of difference between getting married and being married. This difference was recognized by the young husband-to-be, who said, "We aren't going to have much of a wedding, but we are going to have a wonderful marriage."

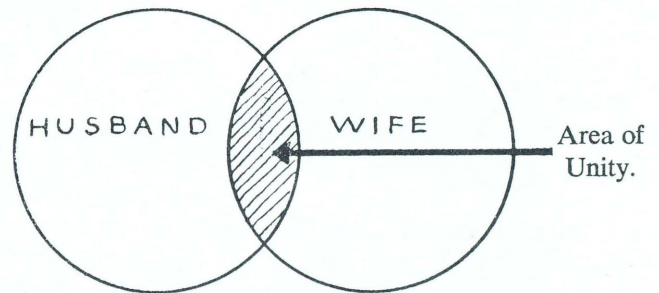
People get married by fulfilling legal and religious requirements and then by participating in a wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony, although rich in meaning and significance, marks only the formal beginning of wedded life. It gives a couple a chance to declare their intentions, to exchange vows of love and faithfulness, and rings which are eternal symbols of the promises made. The wedding gives the parents of the bride a chance to "give their daughter away" in marriage to the bridegroom and to consent to the marriage. If performed by an ordained clergyman, the ceremony reflects the church's views of marriage. It expresses the couple's need for spiritual blessing and grace if they are to be "truly joined in the honorable estate of marriage according to the ordinances of God."

But a wedding ceremony does not necessarily mean that the marriage is complete. For marriage is a process by which two separate, distinct individuals are united. Marriage involves the blending and joining of two personalities, so that a couple is completely married only when they are united physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. The process of achieving unity may take months or years. It begins when the couple first begin to share their home, ideas, emotions, work, money, and social life. The process probably never ends for, as the years pass, they find new things to share, so the marriage bond

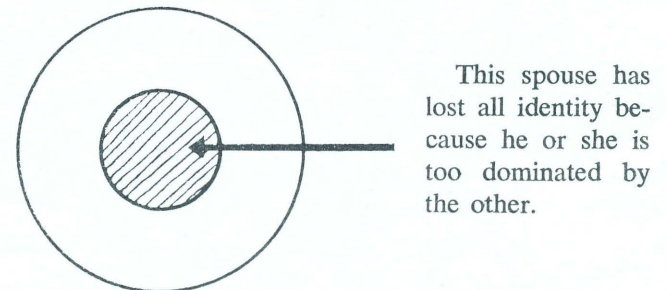
tightens. Some couples say they still are finding ways to grow closer after many years of marriage.

To be really married is difficult. In a sense, marriage attempts the impossible: to make one plus one equal one without destroying the identity of each individual.

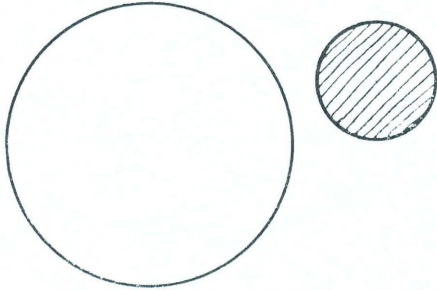
This process can be illustrated by the following diagram. If each circle represents the individual's personality—then marriage must achieve some overlapping of these personalities if unity is to result.



According to most American ideals the marriage should not result in one personality completely dominating the other, as illustrated in the next diagram.



Also, American philosophers of marriage usually emphasize that marriage should not result in one person becoming only a satellite revolving around the other.



Rather, the task of marriage is for the husband and wife, each of whom is of equal worth and importance, to work for a satisfying degree of union, so that they can fill the needs of each other.

Of course, some countries have marital ideas that conflict with these views, so one cannot say there is only one right view of marriage. But the views outlined are fairly representative of much American culture and thought.

Marriage Involves The Whole Personality

The most complete marriage involves the total personality. Certainly it involves the physical body, so that two bodies become united in the act of sexual intercourse, an act that symbolizes as well as builds the union.

Marriage also involves the intellect. While no two couples ever think alike on everything, the husband and wife must find "a meeting of minds" so that they think alike on some things, and learn to understand and accept differences in ideas about other things.

Marriage involves the emotions. Couples try to find a common bond of feeling for one another. They must learn how to give and receive love, appreciation, sympathy, and other important feelings, so that the deepest emotional needs of the two people are met.

Marriage involves a social adjustment as couples learn how to share living quarters, work, responsibility, financial resources, leisure-time activities, friends, and group experiences.

And finally, marriage involves a spiritual union, a sharing of mutual faith and trust, spiritual and moral values, and philosophies of life.

Marriages sometimes fail because only a fraction of the total personalities is involved. Thus, two people that found a marriage only upon sexual or intellectual attraction, emotional dependency because of neurotic need, or common religious faith, are achiev-

ing only limited union. Only a small fraction of their whole person is joined, but other parts have never been wedded. Thus, the bond is more easily broken by many forces that pull the two people apart.

In gluing two pieces of material together, the strongest bond is achieved by overlapping large portions of the material and spreading glue over a wide surface. Similarly, if two lives are to be held together they must be overlapped and cemented by a common bond that reaches a wide area of their personalities. Otherwise the bond may weaken under strain.

Love and Marriage

Ask almost any two people in America why they want to get married and they will say, "Because we are in love." Apparently the important criterion for marriage in our society is love. If a boy and girl believe they are in love, they may consider marriage. The task of choosing a mate in American culture involves a sorting of prospects until one finds a mate with whom one can be in love.

This emphasis upon love as *the* basis and reason for marriage places a heavy obligation upon a couple to know what love is. Love may mean one thing to one person and another thing to another. When a man tells a woman "I love you," he may mean "I think you are pretty. I like the way you dress. I think you are an attractive person and I would like to take you out." The woman may *think* he means: "He thinks I'm wonderful, adorable and his only girl, so he wants to marry me." What the man *means*, and what the woman *thinks* he means will depend upon their own interpretation of what it means to be in love. Similarly, a girl may tell a man: "I love you," when what she means is: "I like and respect you as a fine person."

Some people confuse love with infatuation, yet the two things are different. The following two columns compare love with infatuation.

Love

Broadly involves the total personality

Tends to occur over a long time and be long-lasting

Based upon reality with full knowledge of problems, barriers to be overcome

Associated with feelings of joy, self-confidence, trust, security

Accompanied by kindlier feelings toward other people

Infatuation

Based upon narrow aspects of the personality, mostly physical thrill

May happen after very short acquaintanceship and be brief in duration

Problems and barriers disregarded, person and situation over-idealized

Stimulates emotional upset, anxiety, fears, insecurity, guilt, frustration

Makes one more self-centered, restricted, harder to get along with

Brings new energy, ambition, more interest in life

Object of affection more likely a suitable person

More slowly develops again after a love affair has ended

Seldom involves deep attachment simultaneously to more than one person

Less frequently accompanied by ambition, wide interests

Friends and parents more likely to disapprove of relationship

More quickly recurs soon after one involvement has ended

May frequently involve simultaneous attachment to two or more persons

Love may also be confused with other things—such as good times. Certainly a person should enjoy being with the person he is in love with, but because two people can have fun together does not necessarily mean they are in love. A person can have fun with one of the same sex, a relative, or a person of the opposite sex who is quite unsuitable in other ways as a mate. But he is not romantically in love.

Love may be confused with sex. Sex is a part of love, but people can be sexually attracted to many different persons without loving them.

Love is sometimes confused with glamour and prestige. A girl may think she is in love with a glamorous movie star, a football hero, class president, singing idol, or any male she associates with social prestige. But she may never have even met him or may never get to know him well enough to know if she would like him.

Love may be confused with gifts and money. Is it easier to love a generous, wealthy person? Probably. At least it is easier to believe one does. A girl may be so impressed by the boy from a wealthy family, or by the one that showers her with gifts, that she may be convinced she really loves him, only to discover after marriage that he has many unadmirable traits.

Love may be confused with gratitude. It is easy to feel grateful to someone who is sympathetic, kind, and helpful. Gratitude can be mistaken for real love.

Love may be confused with hatred or a desire to hurt someone else. Thus, Charles married Joan after a brief friendship, not because he loved Joan, but because he wanted to hurt Barbara who had turned him down. Susan became pregnant by Joe and married him in order to hurt her parents for whom she felt little affection.

Love may be confused with a desire to escape or as an expression of rebellion. Some youth seek marriage out of rebellion against parents and because of a desire to get away from an unhappy home situation.

Love may be confused with possessiveness. The girl who marries the man who is insanely jealous of her may do so because she believes that he is showing his love. Actually, he may be showing only a desire to dominate a person for whom he really has little regard, or for whom he has only contempt.

Love may be confused with pity and sympathy. Many women experience a deep maternal feeling of pity and sympathy for the underdog, the misunderstood, the abused, the failure, the sick, the alcoholic, for the member of a minority group, for the delinquent, or misfit. Some may be moved by their feelings of pity and sympathy to believe they are in love because "he needs me to help him." Unfortunately, the desire to reform one's mate is an impossible basis for marital happiness because it involves rejection rather than true acceptance, which should be a part of love.

The Meaning of Love

Certainly some of these feelings or situations are a part of love but none is love. What then is love? One way to define love is to use three substitute words for it. These words are Greek, but form the roots of English words.

Eros—from which comes our English word erotic. Eros is romantic, physical, sexual love. It is the feeling one gets for a member of the opposite sex to whom one is especially attracted sexually. Certainly married love should have eros as a basis. Most such romantic love has a biological foundation and is an expression of the sensual feeling one gets when in the presence of the other person.

Philia—from which comes such English words as Philadelphia—"city of brotherly love." This love is friendship, companionship, the love one can feel toward anyone who is a close friend, or who shares common interests, concerns, and with whom one likes to be. People "in love" certainly should have a deep friendship based upon a sharing of common ideas, tasks, pleasures, and experiences together.

Agape—is self-giving, self-sacrificing love in which an individual wants and does what is the best for the other person, not because he wants to, or because the other person deserves it, but because he feels he should as a human being who values another person.

Married love should contain elements of all these three types of love: eros (sexual attraction), philia (friendship and companionship), and agape (self-giving). If one type of love exists in the marriage without the other types, that love is narrow and incomplete; it is harder to build a lasting marriage upon it.

How Love Grows

Love grows with effort. Of course love cannot be forced, but it can be strengthened by deliberate action and concern. If a husband discovers that his wife enjoys little remembrances on her birthday or wedding anniversary, he has to exert time and effort to remem-

ber. He is helping their love to grow and deepen. A wife who makes a special effort to cook her husband's favorite dishes is helping to make love grow.

Some couples feel they shouldn't have to *try* to do things for each other. They feel that when people have to *make* themselves do things then all spontaneity and sincerity in their relationship is lost. As one wife expressed it: "If you really loved me, you wouldn't have to force yourself to do some things to please me." Love feelings cannot be forced, but actions that express sincere feelings, and that stimulate loving feelings may, at times, have to be deliberate. A husband who really dislikes going to the movies may have to make himself go with his wife, who enjoys them. He would rather not go. But, because he loves his wife and wants to please her, he goes for her sake.

Love grows as needs are fulfilled. Couples who strive to meet one another's physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs, build a mutual dependency, a feeling of "I need you and appreciate you for what you do to help me." A husband who needs reassurance, ego-building praise and recognition, and who finds these met in his relationship with his wife, will love her because she satisfies these deep longings and makes him feel adequate. A wife who has always wanted to be considered beautiful, alluring, and feminine, will love her husband much more if he recognizes and meets these needs.

Love cannot grow on frustration. Some wives feel they will "spoil their husbands" if they give them too much physical love, brag about them too much, or are too concerned about their feelings. Actually, husbands are spoiled only when they are not expected to assume their share of responsibility. Similarly, wives are never spoiled by husbands meeting their needs for tenderness, companionship, interesting conversation, or consideration. Wives are only spoiled if they are not expected to fulfill the duties normally required of them in our culture. When husbands and wives meet one another's needs, the marriage is strengthened.

Love grows when two people can truly admire one another. It is easier to love someone who has admirable qualities of character and personality. Of course, each person emphasizes and admires different qualities. One woman may admire a man who is very neat and clean; another may like a man who speaks correct English; another may want a husband who has gentle manners; another admires the athletic, he-man type; another admires superior intellect; another admires a man who is especially friendly, sociable, and poised. One man may admire a woman who is beautiful; another wants certain qualities of moral character;

another admires an efficient housekeeper and mother. The old saying, "What is one man's meat is another man's poison," certainly is true in marriage. But when each is willing to discover what qualities of character or personality traits the other most admires, and then to exhibit them, then love grows.

Of course, no wife or husband should ever try to change or reform the other. But the wife who discovers certain personal traits that her husband most admires, can try to strengthen these in herself. The husband who discovers that his wife most admires a gentleman, for example, can himself strive to be gentlemanly, not because she pushes him into a role, but because he wants to please her and be admired by her. She will love him for his efforts.

Love grows as mutual trust grows. It's wonderful to know that you can depend upon another person in troubled times. It's fine to feel secure enough in your relationship so that you are certain that misunderstandings or hardships will not pull you apart. Thus, it is important that the husband and wife each develop the feeling that "I care about him and our relationship," and "I'll always do what I can to help him and to build our marriage." When a husband or wife stops caring, dissatisfaction and doubt begin to grow. They fear they can no longer trust and depend upon each other.

Love grows through sharing. Unity is built by sharing bed, board, ideas, conversation, recreation, social life, work, crises, memories, children. The saying: "The family that prays together stays together" might be changed in many different ways and still be true. "The family that (talks, works, plays, reads, eats, etc.) together, stays together." Even a crisis shared by the whole family builds family solidarity, unity, and dependency.

Love grows through working toward common goals. The goals may be little or big, short-term or long-range, but goals that help individuals to forget about themselves and think about the other family members. They may be goals that help the whole family to unite in service outside the home or enable the family to find and preserve itself by fulfilling larger purposes. Couples who become involved in building or furnishing a house, establishing a business, clearing some land, paying off a mortgage, raising children, or overcoming an illness, become united and more in love as they work toward a common goal. A family that engages in community service forgets its own selfish desires, and so finds unity and love in worthwhile endeavor.

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