

EXPECTATIONS & ASSUMPTIONS

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Discussing your marriage expectations and those of your partner's is a crucial step in committing oneself to a lifetime of intimate and independent living together. Expectations and assumptions you hold about married life shape your perceptions of how you and your partners will act and relate towards each other. During the courtship period it is not uncommon for couples to look at their planned future together through rose colored glasses and share their romantic dreams and idealistic expectations. Broad basic expectations are agreed upon; such as, where to live, how many children, what kind of car to buy and of course wedding plans. Though very important these factors fall short of the goal to ensure a successful marriage. There are other major expectations we hold but too often do not address in a timely or appropriate manner. Instead, our daunted expectations may simmer and then explode. The results are disappointment, distress, disillusionment and divorce if not a long unhappy marriage. Preventing such a downhill course rests in discovering and discussing your expectation differences in a supportive fashion. If the differences are irreconcilable, marriage would not be recommended.

When we do not discuss our expectations they become assumptions and unspoken requirements we set for our partner's actions and attitude. We fall into a habit of taking our partner for granted. Its like writing a role in our minds for our partner to play and take for granted that they know and agree to play the role without actually discussing the script with you. We all have ideas about how a couple "should" relate. We develop these ideas from previous personal experiences and/or from various models of family life we observe in others: television and other media, parents, friends and society at large. However, these models only give us a glimpse of the surface or a superficial picture of real life marriage. In reality, most marriages do not turn out to be the idealistic models we see on TV. Nevertheless, we unwittingly digest parts of these models and store them in our minds, serving as a reference point for what we hope or anticipate will or will not happen in our marriage.

Whatever picture you have in your mind about marriage, your reference point is different from your partner's. You will, therefore, have different expectations. Have you discussed your ideas with your partner about In-Law involvement, managing money, maintaining friends and outside interests? How about sexuality, parenting techniques and responsibilities? Discussion of each others expectations provides a pathway for couples find to a happy, fulfilling and growth producing marriage.

TWO VIEWS OF MARRIAGE EXPLORED: HIS & HERS

From a New York Times article: April 1986

Every marriage, researchers are discovering, is actually two marriages: his and hers.

Psychologists say that couples who openly acknowledge these differences improve their chances of avoiding strife.

One of the great gaps between husbands and wives is in their notions of emotional intimacy and how important they feel it is in a marriage. Ted Huston, psychologist at the University of Texas at Austin who has studied 130 couples states, "For the wives, intimacy means talking things over, especially talking about the relationship itself". The men, by and large, don't understand what the wives want from them. They say, "I want to do things together, and all she wants to do is talk." In adulthood, women tend to be uncomfortable with separateness, while men are wary of intimacy.

Marriage typically makes a woman draw closer to her parents, while a man often becomes more distant from his. For a woman, closeness to her parents ranks among her most important expectations, while husbands tend to rank a warm association with either set of parents comparatively low.

Perhaps the most dramatic difference was in evaluating the relationship. The men rate almost everything better than do their wives. Men have a rosier view of love-making, finances, ties with parents, listening to each other, tolerance of flaws and romance.

According to John Gottman, a psychologist at University of Illinois who has studied happy and unhappy couples, wives are more willing to complain about problems in marriage than men are. Men generally try to avoid conflicts, while women are more willing to confront them.

The preferences that draw couples together also show a major and perhaps an unsurprising difference between the sexes; women, by large, place great importance on a man's earning potential, while men place great stress on a woman's attractiveness.

One lesson to be learned from the differences is that each partner in the psychological alliance that is marriage can be enriched by learning from the other. In this view, marriage offers a unique opportunity for psychological growth.

The differences also point to what people mean when they say that it takes work for a marriage to work. Those who are complacent about the differences between spouses, who see no need to accommodate the partner's perspectives, may be putting the marriage at risk, the experts say. "While you want to understand the differences, it is probably futile to try to change your partner to be just like your best friend. It's better for husbands and wives to develop a sense of humor and tolerance, and to accept their mates as they are."