



American Husbands Are Too Domestic!

A noted anthropologist laments the disappearance of the old-fashioned marriage and proposes some modern solutions

By Dr. MARGARET MEAD as told to Lester and Irene David

AMERICAN HUSBANDS are among the world's most domesticated males!

It is time we realized that this situation is not as harmless as most married couples—and many authorities in the field of family relations—seem to believe.

A study conducted by the Princeton Research Service revealed that 87 percent of younger husbands and 78 percent of older ones help their wives with the children and housework. Among married college students, according to Gilbert Youth Research, the figure is just about 100 percent. Despite some rumbles of discontent, most husbands have accepted their lot and even manage to enjoy it.

Certainly this state of affairs helps insure a smoother-running home, and contributes to the American wife's reputation for an incredibly clean, well-ordered household.

But while a domesticated husband is reckoned an immediate advantage to a wife, he is an ultimate liability to himself and to the nation.

The generally accepted notion that a married man must spend a good portion of his free time helping care for home and children can stifle his ambition and hurt his career.

In fact, it has already influenced vast numbers of males to lower their sights so that they seek only job security and an adequate income, not any greater responsibilities that might keep them away from home and its chores. This has happened because we have succeeded in convincing them that they are shirking their duties as good husbands and fathers unless they pitch in valiantly at home.

But if our men are busy with the work of the home, who is left to do the work of the world? Where will our statesmen, creators, and industrial leaders come from? Government, business, and industry are already suffering from an acute shortage of good executive talent. Small wonder! The pool from which top-management material ordinarily would emerge is much too busy doing the week's shopping at the supermarket.

Wives are not entirely to blame. They, too, are victims of a way of life that has developed around them. The villain is our cultural standards!

When this century was young, an entire family would live in a large house near a husband's place of work. Help was plentiful. Often, there were grandparents or other relatives around to lend a hand. As a result, Father could devote his time to

his career. He hardly knew where the kitchen utensils were kept, much less how to use them.

Now we have the era of the small home. There's no room for other relatives; they live separately. And full-time domestic help is found in less than 3 percent of our homes. The mother must rear three or four children and keep house, with all its gadgetry, by herself. The house must always be spick-and-span, the children must always look starched and shiny. The result is that she works from 80 to 100 hours a week at her job, about two-and-a-half times more than her husband does at his. She must be an expert nurse, social secretary, chauffeur, and purchasing agent, not to mention the time she has to spend in the highly organized community life of our towns.

She needs help. The only thing she can do, she thinks, is to call on her husband.

Faced with this dilemma, far too many American

women have fallen into a trap. They look for a good husband instead of a superior man. To them, a "good husband" is one who puts his family above his work. They want a man to be a good provider, but they do not want him to aspire to any eminence that might prevent him from coming home on time and deprive them of their "assistant." In short, many American wives are no longer ambitious for their husbands in any way except financially and socially.

I cannot propose any sugar-pill solution to the problem. It is too deep and tangled. However, I do believe that wives and husbands with understanding can avoid the pitfalls that lead to the overdomesticated husband.

WIVES SHOULD realize that you cannot judge a husband by how helpful he is. A man may rarely perform housework yet give his family a full measure of security and warmth. Another may do much but fail to give his family affection.

Not that a husband should get into the habit of relaxing before the TV set while his overburdened wife attends to everything; he should share the essential tasks. And few fathers are unaware of the fact that spending time with the children results in closer, warmer ties.

But, on the other hand, a husband also should realize that his fulfillment as a human being lies in his ability to achieve his goal in life. And his wife must realize this, too!

Wives will find it pays to ease up on their standards of household perfection. It's better to have a less tidy home than to keep a husband from where he should be heading.

Women must remember, too, that the breadwinner's job is enormously difficult and exhausting in today's highly competitive world. Thrusting a broom or baby in his hand when he comes home is hardly the way to welcome him or help him meet the challenge of his daily problems.

Marriage today is a matter of sharing, but this does not mean that all the jobs must be split down the middle, like children dividing an apple. Wives would do well to share the work by sensibly managing a home so that a man may still have his ambitions and a fair chance to fulfill them. It is the intelligent woman's job to help her mate achieve the greatness he might well be capable of attaining, and which the world needs so badly.



DRAWING BY JACK WOOLHISER

COVER:

As Jim Pond's photo shows, it's the wise mother that points Junior toward a pool during the dog days. The result is less work for her, and lots more fun for him.

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