

MARRIAGE WITH A SUCCESSFUL WOMAN: A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

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I assume I've been asked to tell you what it's like to be married to a successful woman because I've been married to one for a long time, am a notorious proselytizer on the joys of marriage to a successful woman, and have a first-hand knowledge of the determinants that have made my own wife and my marriage truly successful by anyone's standards.

Come to think of it, I was married previously to another successful woman, so I qualify doubly. Also, I've been a practicing internist for more than thirty years and a consultant in endocrinology and in diabetes, as well as a family internist. So I've had occasion to discuss many problems of diverse types with women of all ages, from before the menarche to beyond the menopause.

Finally, perhaps I owe the honor of being the only male participant in this two-and-a-half-day symposium to my experience in the women's equality movement. I was the first board chairman of the New York Chapter of the National Organization for Women, and I've been an outspoken battler for N.O.W.'s goal of "equal opportunity for women in truly equal partnership with men." If, occasionally, I let slip the word "lady" or—even more unforgivable—"girl," this lapse merely indicates the verbal programming of my unenlightened generation rather than any emotional prejudice.

Invariably the first question asked about marriage to a successful woman is: How does it affect the husband's self-esteem? Does he feel threatened if she is *more* successful than he is? Suppose she brings in more money than he does—how does this affect the marriage and the relationship? I was on a TV show a few months ago that posed similar questions to four couples, all of whom had been married many years, and of whom both the husbands and the wives were successful. The consensus was that, if both the husband and wife are successful by their own standards, and not necessarily the materialistic standards of the world, the marriage can be a fulfilling one. If the husband is secure within himself, sure that his contribution to the marriage and to society is a valuable one, he does not feel threatened. Rather, he is as proud of his wife's accomplishments and recognition as she is of his. It is a mutually nurturing relationship. The moderator of the TV show asked, "How would you feel if your wife made more money than you do?" The unanimous reply from these four husbands was "Relaxed! Since we share and share alike, it doesn't matter who brings in the money." The suggestion that they might feel belittled by their wife's incomes brought incredulous smiles to the faces of these accomplished men.

Another time, I was on the Susskind Show needling David Susskind on his attitude toward women. Making common cause with me was Tim Cooney, bright, concerned, very much a man, and also the husband of Joan Ganz Cooney. Joan is the originator and producer of *Sesame Street*, administrator of a \$13-million-dollar budget and boss of more than 200 employees. Tim, at that time, was working without salary as head of an important Harlem project, training minority groups to exert political pressure in order to obtain better housing for themselves.