

# Rick and Mary Miller

What Women Want / What Men Want  
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Rick Miller: Most discussions about marriage focus on our behavior in marriage. Researchers tend to focus on patterns of communication, ways of resolving conflict and principles of managing money. We are taught to be good listeners, to avoid attacking when we use communication, and to find compromises and solutions in order to resolve conflict. In other words, what we do in a relationship is a focus of much research and most discussions about marriage. Less attention is paid to how we think about our relationships. We have been asked today what men want and what women want in a marital relationship. One way of viewing this is looking at what we expect in a relationship. What do we expect in a relationship? What do we expect from our spouse? What do we expect the marriage to be like? How do men and women differ in their marital expectations? It turns out that these are very important questions. Indeed the expectations that we have about our relationships have important implications in how we behave in a marriage and how satisfied we feel in the relationship. If our spouse in our marriage, meets our or exceeds our expectations then we are happy and we usually want to be close to our spouse. On the other hand if our expectations aren't met then we feel angry and we want to probably be distant from our spouse. In fact, research on this issue has been very consistent in showing that unmet expectations are important predictors of this satisfaction in marriage.

The importance of expectations in marriage is highlighted by a nation study of over 500 marital therapists across the country. They were asked to list the most common problems among couples that come in to see them for marital problems. The findings from the study found that the third most common problem that these couples come in with to marital therapy was unrealistic expectations. These therapists reported that unrealistic expectations was a more frequent problem than other problems that we have more commonly here about such as physical intimacy, money, conflict management, and parenting issues. Unmet or differing expectations may be a root cause of many of these other expectation, many of these other struggles that couples have such as money, or children, because expectations aren't being met.

A couple of years ago, this study was replicated by professor Bob Stahmann at BYU where he used an LDS sample. A sample of over 200 LDS therapists were asked the same question. What are the most common problems that you see among couples coming to you for couple's therapy? Among this LDS sample the number one most common problem was unrealistic expectations about our spouse and marriage. Let me mention briefly a third study.

A study was conducted several years ago that studied engaged couples before they got married. Several thousand, thousands of couple participated in this study. When across the country answered a whole battery of questions regarding their compatibility on issues such as child rearing, philosophies, money management, recreation, marital expectations, friends, personalities, a whole gamut of different aspects of their relationship. Now these researchers contacted these couples 4 years later into their marriage. Because they wanted to see which of these premarital factors was gonna predict subsequent marital success. In other words, which of these issues in that they talked about when they were engaged, 4 years later is important in their relationship? I think that is a

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question that a lot of engaged people ought to know. My spouse isn't perfect, which of these issues can I ignore, which of these issues are important to pay attention to. The study found four years later that the biggest premarital predictor of marital success was incompatibility of personalities. That is, couples reported that while they were engaged that their partner's personality bugged them or annoyed them, were much more likely to be divorced or unhappily married four years later. But the second, the second biggest predictor was unrealistic expectations. Those couples, who had idealistic and overly romanticized expectations about marriage and their partners, were likely to be divorced or unhappy 4 years into their marriages. Expectations was again was a more important issue than issues like communication, conflict management, child rearing patterns, and money management which gets so much more attention.

Consequently marital expectations were an important topic when we talked about factors in having a satisfying relationship. Expectations in marriage though is a pretty broad concept and it is important to discuss the different types of marital expectations.

Mary Miller: Ok, when we think of role expectations, usually the thing that stands out the most is the male role and the female role. In a marriage or in a couple relationship, premarriage situation. Some of the examples of that are division of labor. When you get married, if you are married, how do you divide the chores? What is expected of the male, what is expected of the female? Its interesting because a lot of times when someone goes into a marriage, they and I have experienced this myself where you think of course the woman would do this, or of course the man would do that based on past experiences. Which are giving in a marriage where there may be different expectations from your spouse. Another one is well house work is an example, how to raise the children. What does it mean to be a father to children, what does it mean to be a mother to children? For example, I know of a situation where the husband felt like it was not a male's role to ever change diapers. The woman felt like of course we share that like equally. When you are home its equal, if you are not home then I do it, but of course. But, that would be something that was equal. But that is just an example.

Another one that would be important to discuss is the role of woman working outside of the home. Is that something that is expected or not. I know of as situation again where that wasn't discussed before marriage, but after marriage the husband felt of course his wife would help with the finances and work outside the home and his mother had done that. And she had the opposite experience and of course you want you to stay home with our children and raise our children. And that was source of contention for the two of them. Let me go over some of the things.

Expectations are about what qualities your spouse should have. Expectations about what your spouse should do and should be and the challenge is possible incompatibility of expectations. The more you have in common, the more you come from similar backgrounds, the more likely you are to be compatible but there will always, always be things that um will be different. The solution is to talk before you get married, and talk and talk and talk. That's just ideal.

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One thing that I can promise you though is no matter how much you talk there will be things that you will have never thought of. That will come up after marriage that then what do you do? You didn't talk about it before marriage. And what you do is you negotiate shared expectations. One safe one that I can share with um my husband and me. I grew up in a family that wasn't as traditional as my husband's family. And my father was the cook. He loved it. he received a lot of joy from cooking. As a matter of fact, when he was stressed you'd often find him in the kitchen cooking. He loved invited people over and having gourmet meals and my mom was his little assistant in the kitchen. Its nothing I thought about, cooking wasn't important to me. I just didn't think about it before marriage. But it wasn't until after marriage that I realized there were two assistants married to each other. When we invited the first time shortly after we were married, we invited our singles ward over um for dinner and I began to realize you know, I kind of pictured that I was going to be his assistant and he was going to take over with this big elaborate production. And I'm sure he pictured the same thing and we both kind of floundered a bit trying to figure out what to do. If anyone had talked to me about this before marriage I could have easily worked through that. And thought, you know his family is the more traditional one, how many gourmet husbands are there out there that just take over in the kitchen. It was just something that I hadn't thought about and it wasn't until after marriage that it dawned on me. It wasn't a problem that was a simple one. But just something you know that I hadn't thought about, discussing or talking about.

Scripts. Another thing that comes into expectations is how um will expectations about how an event should transpire, and well ok. So how an event should transpire also conversations and interactions. How interactions should happen and I kinda got a head of myself here. But often when you have images of how if you say something what your spouse is supposed to say when you say this thing. I'm going to give you an example. If you say I'm upset you would expect maybe your spouse to say well what's wrong, you know did I do something? You might not expect your husband to immediately or your wife to immediately blow up and get angry with you saying that or to walk away and not want to deal with it. So your expectations of how to work out a problem, how to discuss the problem. Sometimes there are not always perfect, but this happens in many American households where the woman will be upset not say anything; it is the man's script. He's supposed to at that time say are you upset and the woman will say no I'm not. And then the man script is to say you seem upset are you are not upset. And then the woman says no, I'm not I'm not upset. And the man, then is supposed to pressure more until he finally pushes his wife into saying today's our anniversary and you forgot. So, that's a typical script that might happen. Maybe the man out of respect for his wife might when she says no I'm not, I'm not upset. Out of respect he might think well I don't want to push her, she told me, I must believe her. So, ok I guess she is just having a bad day. Well, as the wife gets more and more upset because he is not coming in on his script. And he is getting more and more confused because he is not understanding the dynamics that are going on. There is a lack of communication there. So scripts some scripts are good some scripts aren't, but talking is one of the things that will help. It challenges unknown scripts; your spouse doesn't know your script and doesn't come in on queue.

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Another one is events that happen. And I have a story. One of Rick's students um shared this story one time and it's a funny one. But it is about an event. She hadn't dated a lot but had a short courtship and got married and all this happened before a Valentine's Day, so she had never really had a special valentines day before. And she was looking so forward, she is newly married, looking so forward to having a special valentine's day and she had this script of how Valentine's Day would go. Although they were both poor students, she still knew that this was a very special day. So when they both got home her husband said happy Valentine's Day, I have something special for you. And he had something behind his back and she was so excited. You know, in her mind flowers, chocolates, you know tickets to an event, and instead he pulled out a mop. And she was shocked. This isn't how you celebrate Valentine's Day, she had never really celebrated one before with a special one, but she knew this wasn't how it went. And she burst into tears she was so upset. In her mind she expected something different. You also can have a soft spot for her husband because she had complained so much about this old broken down mop that they had to have but they didn't feel like they had the finances to replace it. So she struggled and suffered with this old broken down mop. So he felt like this is a practical, this is something I know she needs and so in his mind he was giving a great wonderful gift. So the solution is share your scripts and negotiate joining scripts especially when you are first married. You really need to share these things because you come from different backgrounds, different places, different experiences and sharing it is the only way that your spouse will know what it is that you expect or how an event you're hoping an event will be played out.

The next one is standards. How well should you perform um a certain job or duty. For example, let's see. A big one is how clean should the house be or the apartment be. There is a lot of conflict over that in marriages. Both Rick and I have run into that a lot when people don't agree on how well. If you asked a couple before they were married is it important to have a clean house. I think that most everyone would say yes of course, we want a clean house. But what does a clean house mean? Again, that is a good one to discuss before hand. I again know of a situation where I the woman has a house that clean, maybe cleaner than mine but I know that when it is even cleaner than mine on a regular basis her husband isn't happy enough. Sometimes it was hard for me to see how do you get cleaner. What's cleaner than this? And yet what I realized is that I wasn't part of that marriage and I wasn't part of the team negotiating how clean a house gets. And sometimes it's reversed, it's the woman who really wants a really clean house and the man is the one that is not interested. How clean do you keep your cars? Some people are comfortable with all the McDonald's and Wendy's wrappers in the back and you know the spouse might just really struggle and have a hard time with that. Another one is how well do you do your callings. You may have an idea of what the standard is for callings and your spouse might have a different standard and that's a good one to discuss ahead of time.

And jobs, how hard of worker is your spouse? I know for me that was a big one. I came from a home where hard work was really important. I saw all my parents work really hard and that was something that I was aware of before I got married and I wanted in a spouse and my husband is that way and I am glad for that. I also have talked to women who if their husband is behind on a project they can't stay late at work because

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their priority is that their husband get home in the evening. For me I want my husband to feel that he has some flexibility there that he can stay a bit later at work if he needs to get a job done because that's important for me that he feels like he's accomplishing and doing a good job in his work.

Another couple I know came from two different backgrounds and they both agreed of course we are going to pay tithing when we get married together and we will be full tithe payers, but what does that mean? One came from a home where they paid on their gross, one came from a home where they paid on their net and again had to negotiate what is a full tithe payer. Temple frequency. I could give lots of examples, but that is another one. Of course we are going to go to the temple on a regular basis. Maybe in one person's mind, going to the temple regularly is once a week and in another person's mind maybe that is once a month. So getting down to the details um is really critical. The challenge in this on standards is unrealistic standards and incompatible standards. And the solution is to develop realistic standards and again to negotiate. Negotiating is so important. We are go on and talk about beliefs about marriage.

Here are some ideas that set you up for difficulties in your marriage. And these are ideas that some people do have. Good marriages don't have disagreements. Every once in a while you hear someone say "we've been married for 45 years and we have never had an agreement." I never know whether to really believe that or not, but it might happen. But I wouldn't count on it if I were you. Getting married will solve all my problems. I will always be happy when I am married. I'll kiss a frog and he will turn into a prince. What this really means is that this person I'm dating has so many ruff edges, but I know that once I marry him he'll change. I'm going to get him to change. That's that doesn't work. A good righteous marriage never has disappointments or challenges. My marriage will constantly be wonderfully blissfully romantic. Some people don't think it changes or can't picture it changing from before you got married, or maybe your honeymoon stage that it could ever change from that. And it does, and the truth is that it changes for the better usually. Usually it can change for the better. It becomes deeper, more relaxed, more comfortable.

The challenge to these unrealistic beliefs are based on incorrect information and idealistic thinking. They make you at risk for severe disillusionment in your marriage and the solution is expectations about marriage should be based on accurate beliefs and facts about marriage. Studies show that individuals that overly romanticize or that have unrealistic expectations about marriage are more likely to be unhappy in their marriage.

This is a quote. It was in the March 1997 Ensign. It was given by Gordon B. Hinckley quoting Jenkins Lloyd Jones. "There seems to be a superstition among many thousands of our young men and women who hold hands and smooch in the drive-ins that marriage is a cottage surrounded by perpetual hollyhocks to which a perpetually young and handsome husband comes home to a perpetually young and beautiful wife. When the hollyhocks wither and boredom and bills appear, the divorce courts are jammed. Anyone who imagines that bliss in marriage is normal is going to waste a lot of time running around shouting that he has been robbed. The fact is, most puts don't drop, most beef is

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tuff, most children grow up to be just people, most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration. Most jobs are most often dull than otherwise. Life is like an old time rail journey. Delays, side tracks, smoke, dust, cinders and jolts. Interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the right.” Isn’t that a perfect quote?

I’ve talked a little bit about where these expectations come from. The foremost place is from our parents and families of origins. You know even as compatible as a lot of LDS marriages are, where they come from similar backgrounds, um parents who might be both LDS and raised in the church there are still many differences between one family and another. Also previous relationships. You may have been in a relationship previous to the one that you are now in or that the spouses that you have where things went a certain way and you have to adjust and get things going a different way. Also from television and movies. And there are studies that show people that watch a lot of soap operas and love romance novels are often more disappointed in marriage than those that don’t.

Our church leaders. We think about marriage um according to what we hear from them how marriages should be. And that’s a healthy thing. That’s a good thing. Very few things are set in stone and um its important in a marriage to be flexible to bend. There are a few things that are set in stone in our marriage and those are church standards. We know, that that is something that we don’t give in. You know, we would never consider giving it up in our family. We have that set in stone but most things that couples argue about aren’t set in stone but often times one of the problems is that people think that they are. One person will say absolutely I can’t bend on this one because it is just right for the husband to duh duh duh, it’s right for the wife to duh, duh, duh. And if you can be a little more flexible, never giving up your standards, but be a little bit more flexible on those things that don’t involve those. Also of course abuse is never allowed, never allowed in marriage. And that would be one of those things that is set in stone. Another place that expectations come from is gender. And I’m going to turn this over to Rick who is going to go into more detail on gender.

Rick Miller: So what influence does gender have on these expectations that we have been learning about? There was a major study conducted a few years ago at BYU, Provo and at BYU Idaho by professors uh Chatwick, Topp, and McClellan and published a little bit off of that data but there was some interesting information in there about marital expectations. In there they had a list of about 15 different items like easy to talk to, and social and those kinds of things. And then each respondent was supposed to talk about if this was very important, important, somewhat important, or not important at all. We looked at those in terms of gender. So the top part of it is the female and the and the bottom bar is the male. And see how each of the items is on the is on the left. So look at these. Healthy a little bit less than half. Pretty close the same. Funny, exactly the same. Have a sense of humor. Outgoing, being social, about the same. Ambitious, looks like the women that was more important for the women that that be their spouse’s characteristic. Athletic, neither one of them thought that was that important. These are people that said very important. Attractive, the guys saw that as being more important for their spouse.

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Intelligent, about the same. Kind, about the same. Notice which one happened most there. One more chart of them. Come from a good family, but neither one them thought it was that important. Loves me, almost tops at 100% and pretty much identical. Communicates well, easy to talk to, good listener scored very high by both. Wants children, about the same, very very important for both. Spiritual, religious acts in the church, about the same. Educated, seemed to be more important for the woman that her husband be educated. And then earning capacity, the women score higher here but really only 14% of them said it was very important, so really no one saw it as that important. So again, these are gender difference with these about 15 qualities here.

Now what strikes me is when I see this, is I don't see a whole lot of gender difference. I mean there's a few in there, but really when you look at statistics and those things, meaningful differences, there really aren't that many. In fact, what I see more of as I look at these at these data, is the fact that there's a lot of similarities. For example, both of them, both men and women both the most important thing is that my spouse love me, and shows that he or she loves me. They want their partner to be spiritual and active in the church. They want to spouse who communicates well, open, easy to talk to. This is both men and women saying this is very important to them. They both want children. They both want a partner who is kind and understanding. And they both want a partner who is fun and who has a sense of humor. No gender differences on these. Both men and women want to feel loved in a relationship. Both men and women want to be in a relationship where the other person has a pleasing personality, who is enjoyable to be with. Now there were a few a few differences. The males, not surprisingly were more likely to say that physical attractiveness was more important to them. But even there only 36% said that this was very important. A total of about 80% said it was either important or very important, but much more the male saying that then the females. For the females they were more likely, they really valued more than the men that their spouse be ambitious and hard working, and be educated. Again, an LDS sample probably a lot of these women were thinking about what the potential of my husband being a good provider for our home. And those were the gender difference. Notice how there is so many more similarities than there were differences.

Now there might be some differences in the scripts that men and women have in terms of how these expectations should be met. For example, for although both genders want to feel closer to their spouse, wives may tend to think of this in terms of talking more, or men and husbands may think it is more in terms of physical closeness but they both want to be loved. There is an abundance of literature that shows that in marriage often times the man and the woman act differently, their behavior is differently. For example, studies have shown that often times there's a with pursuit withdraw pattern in many marriages where one tends to pursue and the other one tends to withdraw from the relationship a little bit. So there are few behavior differences, but the point is, is that in terms of expectations men and women are remarkably similar. They both tend to want the same things in marriage. They want that same things from each other in terms of spouses.

One of the problems I think is that the mass media and those popular books out there that talk about marriage that have overstated gender differences in terms of marital

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expectations. The truth is, that there are other things that have a much stronger influence on marital expectations than gender. As Mary talked about, the families that grow up and have a huge impact on expectations. We learn from our homes how couples dance together. And we use this to base our expectations on what we observed from home. I remember several years ago I was working with a couple and they came in and I said how has your week been. And the wife says the most bizarre thing happened. My husband bought me an organ for my birthday this past week. And the guy was smiling this was the best thing ever. And the problem is that I don't play the organ. And I said, so I'm sure there is an explanation here, and he says growing up my mom always always always wanted to have an organ. And I grew up in a humble home where my dad could never afford it and I promised myself as soon as I could afford that for my wife, I would buy my wife an organ. And his wife's going I don't play.

The families that we grow up have a huge influence. Also the part of the country that we grow up in. Social class has a big influence on types of expectations. The neighborhoods that we grow up in. There are a lot of different things that have the influence our expectations more than what gender might.

The truth is that our society is just far too complex to have simple cookbooks of what men want and what women want. In our modern society, gender roles are very fluid. There are a lot of things that women can do, there is a lot of opportunities for women now and there are a lot of ways to configure a relationship. Back in the olden days, the man did this, the women did this. Now a days lives are so much more fluid that the expectations can be a number of different ways. Going back to that study, the BYU dating study that I talked about a few minutes ago. Professor Chadwick made an observation that the best predictor of what people would find it important in terms of expecting from their partner was based on their own characteristics. What he found was with athletic people wanted to marry an athletic partner and people that that were highly educated and valued education wanted to be with someone who is highly educated. Someone was social and the life of the party wanted to marry someone who was social also. And that was a much stronger predictor of expectations than was gender.

Now there are a few differences. I don't want to minimize them. That is terms of content, men and women kind of want similar things. However there are a few differences. One is that when women tend to think more about relationships than men. One article that I read said that that women what they what they call relationship reflection. They think about it more. Also I thought this was interesting. Women's behavior is more consistent with both their expectations and their husband's expectations about them. Men's expectations, men's behavior was sent sort of random in terms of you know how it related to expectations. Also, probably because of the first issue that women think about these things more often that women are more, become more upset than men do when expectations are not met. It reminds of a study that I um in terms of this relationship reflection. Several years ago I read a study where they interviewed husbands and wives on why they, why they were getting divorced, cause they wanted to find the reasons for divorce. And the third was most common response from the men were was I don't know. So that the research shows that men don't think about these things as much

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as women do. So there are some gender differences in terms of how men and women process expectations and how they think about the marriage, but the overall basic expectations, the content of the expectations are remarkably similar.

So what do we do about expectations? One is we need to become aware of our own expectations. Usually when you find yourself being bugged and upset you need to ask yourself, why is that? Was there an expectation that was just not met? Was there a script? Did my husband or wife did not come in on queue right now. I mean, hopefully you have gained some tools today where you can think about that. I'm kind of bugged right now, what's going on. And its often times an unmet expectations. So be aware of your own expectations. And then especially in terms of standards and some of those issues, you need to develop reasonable expectations. Also beliefs about marriage. President Hinckley's quote is a classic. You know, we need to be reasonable in our expectations. That if they are overly idealistic or overly high expectations we are setting ourselves up for a fall. Also we need to be clear about our expectations. As Mary says, we need to talk talk talk talk talk. You can't stereotype expectations. You can't say well he's a male therefore, she's a female therefore. In fact that she was a human being that grew up in a certain place with a certain family and certain set of circumstances and that probably shaped her expectations. So we need to, we need to be clear about our expectations and communicate about them.

As we share our expectation with each other as we negotiate each other's expectations we develop joint expectations then we can we can work and dance together much better. And as we do so, we will have a happy and fulfilling relationship. Thank you.