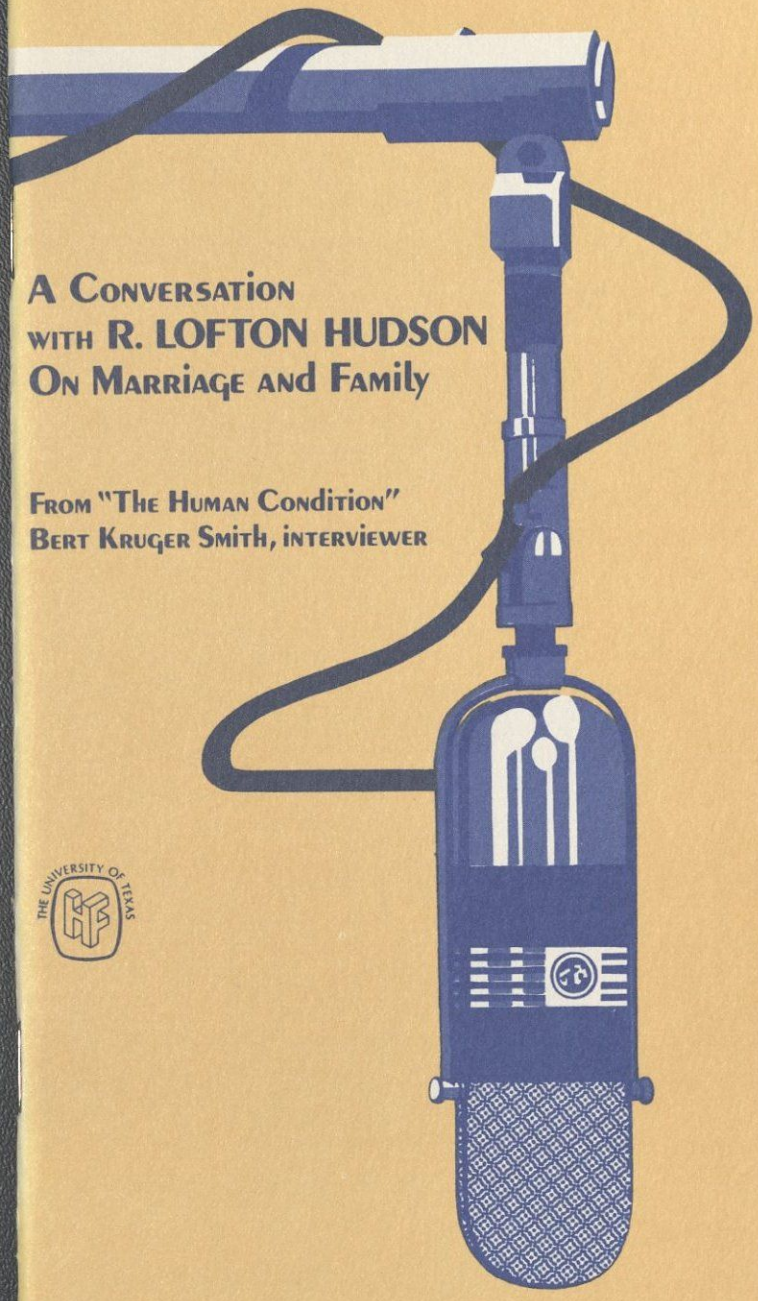
A Conversation with R. LOFTON HUDSON On Marriage and Family

From "The Human Condition"
Bert Kruger Smith, interviewer



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

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Tomorrow's Family Today

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WHO'S WHO . . .

R. Lofton Hudson, Ph.D., is founder and director of the Midwest Christian Counseling Center of Kansas City, Missouri. Prior to that Center's founding in 1958, Dr. Hudson pastored churches in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Missouri over a 25-year period.

He is a Fellow of the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, a Diplomate of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, and a member of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Hudson has written more than 400 articles and 14 books, including *'Til Divorce Do Us Part* (1973), published by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Henry A. Bowman, Ph.D., is author of a widely-used college textbook, *Marriage For Moderns*, published by McGraw-Hill — first edition, 1942, now in its seventh edition. He was Professor of Home and Family at Stephens College for 24 years before joining the sociology faculty of The University of Texas where he retains the title Professor Emeritus.

Dr. Bowman has been recipient of awards for Excellence in Teaching from both the National Council and the Texas Council on Family Relations. His affiliations include the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors and the American Sociological Association.

Comments by a family sociologist

Much is said and written about the "sexual revolution." Some say there is one, while others claim there is not. The difference of opinion is due, in part, to the sparsity of facts and the various interpretations given to data made available by research. Bias unshaken by facts is another causal factor, as is the assumption that "sexual" applies only to sexual behavior in the strictest and most limited sense, namely, sexual relations.

But "sexual" can be taken to imply anything that involves the two sexes. In the broadest sense, then, we may think of the sexual revolution as involving any behavior, activities, attitudes, roles, ideas, expectations, laws in which men and women are interrelated as male and female, think of each other as male and female, or conflict or compete as male and female. When we think in these terms, it becomes clear that revolutionary changes have occurred in this country in this century. Not the least of these changes has been in the roles of the sexes, both as expected and as played.

There is movement from the widely accepted bisected roles of the past to the increasingly sexually-mingled roles of the present. With the increased fusing of roles goes an increased "blending" of the sexes, so that each individual is appraised not only as male or female but as a person. As roles change, new opportunities arise and new problems emerge. How to grasp the former while solving the latter becomes a very live issue.

With changes in the roles of the sexes—sometimes as cause, sometimes as effect—changes in marriage and the family occur. A question arises: What is successful marriage and family life and how may it be achieved? Some persons find in these new questions and problems—and in such things as divorce statistics—reasons for pessimism and gloomy predictions about the future of American family life. But persons with sociological and anthropological perspective realize that problems do not necessarily lead to breakdown and that marriage and the family have survived the ups and downs of most of mankind's long existence.

These relationships will probably continue to survive through the current transitional period. But measuring them with the old yardstick of stability is no longer suitable. New means of evaluation are called for.

It is to these issues that Dr. Hudson addressed himself in two radio interviews from which this publication is taken. He analyzes changes, defines problems, and suggests possible solutions. He is realistic in facing facts but optimistic in looking toward the future.

Henry A. Bowman

Tomorrow's Family Today

The family of the future may be close at hand. Our culture is experiencing an emerging awareness of the importance of feeling, of openness, of greater mutual respect between men and women. Roles are changing and blending. People are becoming more flexible. One's personhood is being given higher priority than one's masculinity or femininity.

Rigid caricatures of what represents male or female behavior are disappearing. Women are working in construction, for example, discussing sex more openly, and going to cocktail lounges. Meanwhile, men are cooking meals, changing diapers, and doing needlepoint.

The area of family finance demonstrates this melding of roles. The earning and spending of money have traditionally been of great significance in marriage. In 1920, grandfather earned the family living and gave grandmother an allowance. Today, a large percentage of wives work, and decisions on the spending of family income are made jointly. In addition, in increasing numbers of young families, women are the treasurers or financial managers.

Evolution

Many factors have contributed to the evolution of this changing pattern of interpersonal relationships. Women's Suffrage was a beginning. The technological revolution certainly had its influence. The rapid development of labor-saving devices and the availability of pre-processed food have greatly reduced the amount of time required for homemaking tasks.

Wider employment opportunities for women constitute another reason for the change in family patterns. Two world wars drew women out of the kitchen and into the mainstream of the economy. Women's working was viewed as patriotic, and their standing in society rose. Mechanical advances over the past thirty years have reduced physical strength requirements of many work tasks, thereby opening new fields. And, more women are taking advantage of educational opportunities.

The Women's Liberation and various feminist movements have had a significant impact on current sexual roles. The rising divorce rate may be a reflection of that movement. But this increase is not to be construed as necessarily bad; many unions now being dissolved had long ago ceased to be meaningful. Years ago a couple might have stayed together because the woman had hardly any other place to go. Today broader alternatives are unfolding, and more women are opting for these rather than staying with poor marriages.

The transformation of this "new woman" is causing some change in male attitudes. Increasing numbers of men are reacting positively, indicating they want to be fair with women. This fact is surprising to many feminists.

Advantages

One factor frequently overlooked in the feminist movement is that often the man is liberated, too. He may have stayed in an unfulfilling

occupation because it provided income on a scale required by his family's needs. His wife's contribution to the family earnings may well permit him to take, instead, a job he really enjoys at a reduced salary.

Another advantage of women's full participation in the life of their society may be seen when a couple's children leave home. A woman who is doing something she considers significant and rewarding does not experience the vacuum that many homebound mothers do. Too many women have not prepared for this time and are unable to cope with the "empty nest" syndrome.

The question often arises as to whether this blending of roles makes for a good marriage. It is important to understand that there is not just one type of marriage that is "good." A good marriage is what two people find good and healthy for *them*. Problems arise when people cannot adapt to one another's needs, habits, and personality patterns, and when they cannot blend their roles and values.

Neurotic incompatability about roles can be tragic in marriage. For instance, when a man brings to a marriage the idea that the male is the boss—because that's the way his father and grandfather related to their families—and his wife comes from a home where her mother held a lot of responsibility, problems may well lie ahead. But when persons are willing to adapt and find their best matching of strengths, a good marriage should result.

Flexibility in meeting each other's needs is the key that many young couples are discovering today. There is increasing awareness that simply being in love is not sufficient base for a solid and lasting relationship. People are looking at personal qualities, as well, and finding a healthier, more realistic approach to marriage.

Influence on Children

Doubts have been expressed about the effect on children as roles become less distinct. Parents are concerned about how to rear boys and girls for their roles. What youngsters *should* learn is that they need not be rigid about what a man does or what a woman does. Sewing on a button is not unmanly. Mowing the grass does not indicate that a female is less womanly. Masculinity and femininity are internal appraisals.

Children need models to teach them that the approach to roles is through adaptability and flexibility. Ideally, their models—parents and others—will instill in them a desire for openness, for sharing, for feeling. In relationships where a man *must* exude machismo and a woman *must* be glamorous, people are found to be immature and insecure.

For children to grow up well adjusted, they need to develop an understanding of emotions in marriage. This understanding can come only from exposure to loving relationships where personhood, not maleness or femaleness, is stressed; where individuality, not conformity, is encouraged; and where openness and feeling, not reserve, are practiced.

THE STATE OF TODAY'S UNIONS

Marriage American-style is alive and well. In the foreseeable future it will probably remain essentially as we know it today. The majority of people who marry will stay married.

The demise of marriage may have been predicted in popular media, but family sociologists do not agree. These experts point out that when, as now, there are rapid changes taking place in society, people become alarmed and concerned about their traditional institutions, particularly the family. Many anthropologists and sociologists foresee the continuation of marriage as it is now—with a father, mother, and children living under one roof.

Traditions do not remain static, however, nor impervious to time. Wedding rites of the 1970's frequently include the exchange of nonconventional vows. People are trying to say to each other something they consider more significant than the recitation of phrases from another time. For these persons, fresh words bring deeper meaning to their weddings as couples commit themselves to each other's self-fulfillment, well-being, and growth. They find greater expression in their personalized vows than in "love, honor, and cherish."

The Unmarried "Married"

Close investigation might reveal that traditional values are not totally disregarded in many of today's unmarried liaisons. Often one finds the same interpersonal relations as are found in conventional marriages. There are many who truly marry—emotionally if not legally. For these couples, "unmarried" may not be a thoroughly accurate definition for the lifestyle involved. After all, marriage does not mean just one thing in our culture. Similarly, "unmarried" may connote a variety of types of relationships.

Of course, not all couples living together have much intention of working to maintain a deep relationship. Some simply live together in a sort of "arrangement," perhaps largely for sexual fulfillment. Many others, however, do display a kind of commitment and creative caring for each other.

Young couples living together outside marriage may face painful rejection by or conflict with parents who disapprove of the lifestyle their offspring have chosen. Schisms result, but these may lessen with time. After a period of adjustment parents may become more accepting, and the young persons often begin to see that the parents were acting within their own frame of reference, even though their techniques of dealing with the situation may have been poor. As attitudes change, communication may well be restored.

Unmarried couples sometimes move from the less formal union into marriage, but their having lived together on a trial basis does not guarantee greater stability for the future. Counselors are seeing clients who lived together and adjusted successfully before marriage, but who begin to experience difficulties — sexual and otherwise — after a ceremony is performed.

This might be attributed to their developing a feeling of being "trapped." Their concept may be that marriage not only is traditional—it is

detrimentally traditional. Conditioning may have caused them to associate marriage with some sort of bondage rather than with commitment.

Also, if one of the partners is insecure, that insecurity may not be revealed while the couple is living informally. At that time the person likely will be alert about his behavior and try to maintain a good image. But chances are high that after marriage this person will fall back into old personality patterns, and these may cause disruption.

Development, Not Dogma

The biggest single factor in the solidity of any marriage, according to family sociologists, is the determination to stay married. On the other hand, our society—including most churches—has passed the point in history where attempts are made to keep persons together in a legal contract regardless of whether or not they are happy.

If people are really committed to each other, crises can usually be worked through. Marriage counselors help persons see *if* they have a basis on which to build. If there is such a foundation, the counselor's role is to help persons learn how they can build good interpersonal relations to give the marriage cohesiveness.

A healthy approach has been the trend toward helping persons discover *how* to be happy together and how to grow together and how to keep open to each other. Happiness cannot be defined as simply the absence of problems. And boredom is not something one person does to another. If a marriage reaches the stage of boredom, it is because a partner has allowed himself or herself to slip into a bland period which is reflected in the relationship. A dull marriage may result from a situation where one or both partners have moved into a drab period in their emotional and social life.

Turning Points

Stress is more likely to develop in particular periods in the span of marriage years. The initial turning point occurs when the first child is born. A couple faces many problems that did not exist before, and strains upon their relationship may follow. A second time of drastic change takes place when the last child starts to school. This is a stressful time, especially for the mother who has not worked outside the home in her children's early years. Again, when there are teenagers in the home, there may be crises. The family may be unsettled as persons are moving from childhood to adulthood.

The next turning point is seen when the child-launching period is over and the couple is alone. The "empty nest" period can be a tragic one, or it can be one of the richest stages of a marriage.

Twenty-five percent of divorces now occur among couples married fifteen years or longer. Marriage counselors are seeing more and more people who have been married 25 or 30 years or more. This increase is at least partly due to increased longevity.

Around 1900 a man and woman married at ages 26 and 22 respectively, and the husband died at age 40 to 50. Thus, this couple was married for less than 25 years. Today's husband

marries at 22 with his bride's being 20 or less. With the increased life expectancies, this couple might expect to be together long enough to celebrate a golden wedding anniversary.

Also, today's father is typically 49 when his last child leaves home. And, he probably has two children (or fewer) now; in 1900 he would have had a family of five or six. These statistics inevitably affect modern marriage conditions, and they are a strong factor in the divorce rate.

Yet studies indicate that marriages which are basically strong reach a new morale high when childrearing responsibility has passed, when there are no longer decisions to be made regarding the children, and when the couple can devote their time and resources to their own pursuits.

The retirement period may well be developing into another crisis state. *When* to retire can be a problem for couples in which the husband, a bit older, reaches retirement age and begins to plan for leisure, but the wife wants to continue working.

Advance knowledge of these particularly stressful times could help persons avoid the pitfalls. Psychologists and counselors have found that persons live through a period more successfully if they know what to expect, what problems are inherent in a particular situation.

Single Parents and Their Children

Once divorce or death has ended a marriage to which children were born, a single parent is left to direct the home and family. In most such homes that parent is a woman, though men—widowers and the divorced—in increasing numbers are bringing up children by themselves.

Whenever divorce or death occurs, there is expectation of a child's being seriously and permanently damaged, but this does not necessarily follow. It is not the presence of a blood-related parent in the home that is so important. Rather, it is important for the child to have a parent *image* and to develop a good concept of how men and women interact. Others are around to provide the models—relatives, teachers, Scout leaders, neighbors. Children have a great resilience and can rise to the occasion if the environment provides them with the kind of support they need to grow into integrated personalities.

Statistics may indicate that broken homes produce a greater incidence of mental illness or delinquency among youngsters than do two-parent homes. Again a closer look is needed. A point which is often overlooked is that the emotional problem or delinquent behavior likely was building prior to the family break and did not happen as a result of the divorce. Problems of children proliferate in homes where there is continual conflict and turmoil.

The working single mother, of course, faces additional stresses. She must be the breadwinner, mother, social planner, all while trying to keep up her own personal life. This is a difficult challenge, and she may benefit from the support of organizations where common needs can be shared and encouragement received.

Finally . . .

In a male-female relationship, it is naive for one to think that another can *give* him happiness. However, two people who are personally maintaining their own inner happiness and growing as individuals can do a lot to enhance each other's happiness. This is not the case when one has a childish view that life together should be full of ecstasy. The person holding this viewpoint will show instability as a mate.

Too often a marriage partner may feel—unconsciously, perhaps—that the state of being married gives one the right to boss, to "pick the other's emotional pocket," to tell the mate what to do, or to "straighten her out" or "make him over." One might conclude that marriages could be more successful if couples behaved as though they were not married.

A good marriage is likely to depend on persons' having good communication patterns, flexibility, enough maturity to give and take healthily, and willingness to adapt. Strong marriages are made of people who can tolerate each other's weaknesses and who enjoy seeing each other as individuals.

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