

The “Superior Wife Syndrome”

By Barbara Rainey

On a recent Monday morning, I had turned on the *Today Show* to catch our local news and weather on the half hour. As I listened from the kitchen, I heard one of the hosts introduce an author with new research on wives. The title of her book is *The Superior Wife Syndrome*. When I heard the intro, I grabbed my notepad and sat down to hear about the latest syndrome to afflict our population. I was ready to critique.

But as I listened, I found myself agreeing with some of what she said, though I wouldn't go so far as to label it a syndrome. The author, Carin Rubenstein, has discovered that millions of wives think they do everything better than their husbands. They feel they are more responsible, more capable, and, in a word, superior. *Hmmm*, I thought. *Sounds a little more like pride to me.*

There is truth to this research. Beginning in the 1960s, women have been instructed to do it all. We've been told we can work full time and raise kids at the same time, all with great success. Many have gone so far as to say we don't need men.

This temptation to exalt ourselves over our men is as old as the earth. I find myself dealing with this attitude more than I'd care to admit. I load the dishwasher more efficiently than he, I fold the clothes better than he, and I pack the car much more neatly than his haphazard preference of just throwing it all in and slamming the door to keep it from falling out.

And when I focus on how much better I am in certain tasks and responsibilities, I can quickly move to feeling superior. In addition, I'm learning this is much more of a temptation in the empty nest. When we had kids, my corrective measures were directed more at them and less at my husband. Now, he is the sole focus of my rehabilitation and retraining efforts.

Poor man.

To cure the syndrome, Rubenstein gave three tips. They're not new, but they are good to remember, because they are timeless:

First, *ask for help*. He can't read your mind.

Second, *educate him with logic, not emotional outbursts*.

And third, *be willing to settle for less*.

I would add a fourth tip: *Let him be who he is*, as my husband would say.

And he is so right, because there is more than one way to do a task. My way isn't always right, and his isn't always wrong. Most of our conflicts aren't about right and wrong in the first place, but about personal preferences for how something is accomplished. In the end it's not a big deal either way. Certainly not worth the damage to your marriage and to your man that an attitude of superiority will cause.

The Dominant Husband

by Jimmy Evans

When Karen and I first married, I had a very dominant personality. For several years, it killed our chances at intimacy. Our marriage nearly failed until we learned to disarm it. Dominance means disproportionate control over the relationship. I am the Biblically appointed head of my home, but in a healthy marriage the wife should be free to express her opinion and the husband should lovingly encourage her.

People always marry according to their level of emotional health. Health marries health, and unhealth marries unhealthy. When Karen and I met, I was popular, confident, and had a raging ego. On the other side, Karen had very low self-esteem. I was emotionally unhealthy and so was she. She needed a man with the self-confidence she lacked. I needed a woman who would accommodate my ego. We were a terrible, perfect match.

That happens often in dominant marriages: A very assertive woman marries a very passive man, or an unhealthily assertive man marries a passive woman. It's rare that two dominant people marry each other, or two passive people marry.

Understand What Causes Dominance

A strong personality. This is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, but when one person talks far more than the other—I was never at a loss for words—it can give that spouse more power than the other.

Fear. We fear being controlled, and so we become controllers ourselves. Some of the most controlling people I've ever met are people who were afraid. It made them into tyrants.

Iniquity and inner vows. Iniquity is a sin that passes from generation to generation. When you're raised in a chauvinistic or sexist family, you tend to be bent in the same way as your parents. Family systems of male or female dominance will produce dominant men and women. Inner vows are the opposite side of that coin. When we go through pain, we make ourselves promises to comfort ourselves. We say, "No one will ever treat me like that again" or "No woman will ever do that to me." That prevents Jesus from being Lord over that area in our lives. It makes us unteachable.

Bitterness and unforgiveness. If we are unforgiving toward someone in our past, that past pain tends to be reflected in how we treat a spouse. Bitterness takes root, and husbands and wives get the worst of it.

What do you do if you're being dominated in your marriage? Be honest and admit it, then stand up. Marriage is like a teeter-totter: When you move, it forces your partner to move, too. When you change, your marriage changes. *When Karen began to find healing from her emotional health, she started lovingly standing up to me* and I had to sit down. She stopped accommodating my ego and God used her to make me more humble. Today, rather than passively letting me make all the decisions—and rather than me refusing to allow her any input—we make significant decisions together. Once we had an equal marriage, we discovered that intimacy followed. We've never been the same. Is dominance destroying your marriage?