



Harmonic Connections PLUS LEGACY INSTITUTE

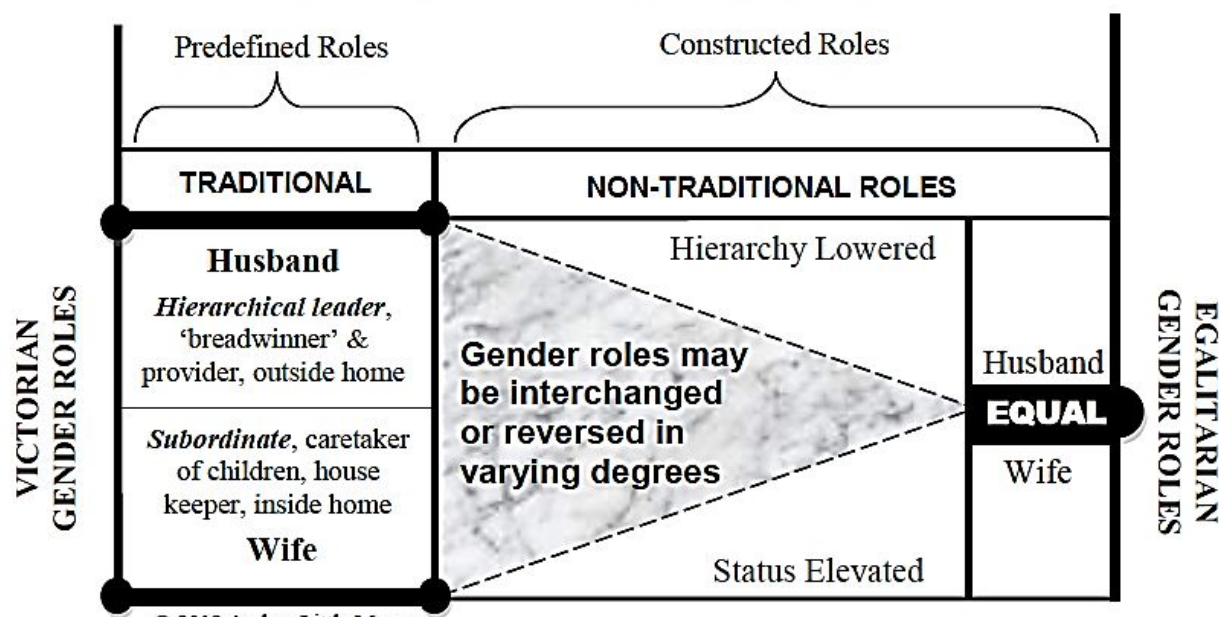
"An educated individual is an empowered individual."

Understanding Your Role

Modern expectations for romantic partnerships are different than traditional gender roles. While in the past, gender role expectations were predefined and men and women's roles were clearly defined, currently the roles that men and women have in committed relationships are more diverse. Most often, the roles that men and women play in romantic partnerships is determined by individual couples.

Gender roles and a partner's ability to function within those prescribed Victorian-style gender roles were once the foundation of romantic partnership in the United States. Whether couples follow traditional gender roles or create their own practices within their romantic partnerships, it is important that couples consider the particular needs of their relationships and seek to accommodate one another.

GENDER ROLES SPECTRUM



What are GENDER ROLES?

The illustration of the *Gender Roles Spectrum* provides an overview of basic gender roles from a marriage perspective and how they can differ in less traditional relationships. Even when couples are not married, there are many couples who still (almost instinctively) seek to position themselves in some aspect of traditional gender roles.

Gender roles are constructed and individual perspectives about romantic partnership are different. They are gender expectations given to people based on norms determined by behaviors, society and/or culture. These expectations are shaped by others and have the ability to shape your expectations for yourself and your partner.

Gender roles, like race, are unavoidable in much of modern society. They can influence what you believe about how you should act, where you can work, what you can wear, how you should speak to people, and how you should think about others. Gender roles have not only shifted in American society, but they also differ based on one's ethnicity, culture and background.

Most "traditional" norms that couples seek to mimic were derived from Western cultural norms as seen by the majority culture in America. However, this perspective about gender roles has not been effective as a universal expectation among all couples in the United States.

Gender beliefs are often based in marital myths—widely held beliefs about men and women in committed relationships

that facts do not support. Ideologies about gender are informed by family processes and structures that assign rights and responsibilities based on sex, attitudes and expectations about romantic partnership. Most gender roles are determined strictly by the sex of the individual and are not based on the abilities of individuals in relationships.

Males and females often have different attitudes and expectations about romantic partnership. These gender role expectations affect couples' interaction and how individuals perceive satisfaction in romantic partnerships. The attitudes that men and women hold toward gender roles have a significant influence on couple and family dynamics.

For example, some women play dual roles by changing their assertive personalities to become more passive in an effort to make their male partners feel more comfortable and confident. However, the dilemma created by these dual roles can be counterproductive to the relationship if the woman does not feel she is being her authentic self in her relationship. On the other hand, some men might strive to fulfill roles in dealing with finances that are not their strengths or in their capacity to do alone. This can leave them frustrated and negatively affect the relationship as well.

When individuals are able to bring their strengths to their romantic partnerships, then they can strategize to synergize their efforts and work at their maximum potential for their families. These beliefs that individuals have about their roles affect relationship satisfaction, positive expectations, and partners' willingness

to work toward mutual change in romantic partnership.

Consider this...

Traditional gender role expectations allow individuals to function within prescribed roles, which are useful to solving basic problems and resolving basic conflicts. Each person knows the other person's position and that it is not going to change. On the other hand, non-traditional gender roles require greater flexibility to consider how partners can form stable romantic partnerships in a society that has become increasingly more complex.

In less traditional partnerships, there must also be a tolerance for change to accommodate changes within the relationship.

Very few couples fit perfectly into traditional gender roles models. Yet there is often an effort to fit themselves into these roles. If you are finding frustration in your relationship consider how much of that might be attributed to making extreme efforts to fit a **square peg (your relationship) into a round hole (traditional expectations)**.



Remember this if you remember nothing else... If you are in a relationship where the woman works outside of the home and makes decisions about the finances, or the man cooks meals and is an active participant in raising the children, then **you do not fit into the traditional mold of couple relationships**. You have already moved away from traditional expectation. Don't

be afraid to break the mold in other areas to figure out how you and your partner can best fit together. Understanding how to navigate nontraditional gender roles in romantic partnership is vital to the longevity of modern relationships.

Updating your expectations for your relationship, however, will require that

you begin to let go of many assumptions you may have about claiming to know *what every woman wants* or *the way to every man's heart*. ALL of those suggestions are based on traditional stereotypes about men and women, and do not come from a perspective that acknowledges the uniqueness of each man and each woman in a romantic partnership. The truth is, if you want to know **what your partner wants** or **the way to your partner's heart**, you will need to **study your partner** and spend time getting to know them, their strengths, their limitations, their needs, and what they are expecting from you.

There is no single expectation for healthy romantic partnerships and most agree that the definition will be different for different populations, cultures, and ethnic groups. However, most agree that

a healthy romantic partnership will be mutually satisfying to both the man and the woman and help create a nurturing relationship where both partners respect one another and are able to function at their highest levels.

Healthy romantic partnership is mutually enriching and satisfying where both partners have deep respect for one another and are committed to continual growth in their relationship. A thriving romantic partnership will serve each partner's greatest good.

[Power Couple Mentoring](#) was developed to provide additional information and objective educational tools that couples can use to effectively structure their unique household situations.