

Familial Tendencies

In chapter three of *A Wife's Secret to Happiness* we met the Joneses. Three generations of women in one family as they meet up for Sunday brunch, filing into Grandma and Grandpa's house for waffles and pastry sandwiches. Here's an excerpt from the chapter to refresh your memory of their family dynamics, along with some descriptive notes of the possible characteristics.

First Generation Wife: Grandma Dee and Husband Grandpa Dave

Her hair pinned in a silver bun, Grandma Dee's eyes still sparkle with the beauty of youth. Married at a young age to her charismatic army man, Dave, they've loved each other well by anyone's standards. She enjoys the busy hum of a full home, everyone gathered in the kitchen—her domain, especially after quitting her job to raise the kids.

Dave's gruff voice jolts her back into the moment and halts other conversations.

"Cooking has been your only job for the past forty years. You'd think you'd be better at it by now." He bites into a crispy waffle.

Dee notices the awkward silence but pays it no mind as she laughs. "You'd think so, wouldn't you, dear?"

Blunt, but never cruel, Dave has always been the boss in their home. Dee catches her daughter's sympathetic gaze and widens her smile. Linda wishes her mom would stand up to Dave, but Dee knows only to speak when spoken to and keep her opinions to herself. She ignores latent abilities and minor wounds. Her role is to submit, because that's what you do.

Often a generational perspective of the role of a wife within the home. No job. Stay home with kids.

Unbothered by what many would deem sexist comments.

Both view the role of husband as "boss" which includes his dominance in their relationship.

Good wife = quiet.

Hidden wounds and husband is unaware.

Submission = demure and quiet, active at home.

Second Generation Wife: Mom Linda and Husband Larry

Linda sends her mom a knowing smile before shooting a pointed gaze at her own husband, Larry. My Dad's at it again. Why does he put Mom down this way?

She cringes with each macho wisecrack and sets about cleaning the kitchen, making every effort to ease Dee's load. Linda's homemaking skills were cultivated with love by her mother, and she feels pride at being the queen of her castle, not relegated to chambermaid—the apparent wifely role in her father's house.

Linda refuses the antiquated oppression her mom calls “submission” and ensures her voice is heard and respected, even feared, in her home. Per usual, she holds her tongue until their car pulls out of her parents' driveway.

“If you are the head of the home, then I am the neck,” she resolves.

“You turn me whichever way is best.” Larry offers a small nod and monotone refrain, familiar with the monologue. Over the years, he's resigned to keep the peace rather than engage in a constant battle. Linda resolves not to become her mother, but Larry notices a resemblance to her father's overbearing tendencies. Dejected at her lack of respect, he rolls his eyes and turns to stare out the window.

*Pity for mom's
“submissive” aka
subordinate situation.*

*Wife is the boss. Her mom
may serve in her house,
but Linda rules hers.*

*Submission = subservient
and oppressed.*

*Husband feels pressure to
agree with his wife and
stay quiet to avoid strife
in their relationship.*

*It's not just men who can
be overbearing.*

Lack of spousal respect.

Third Generation Wife: Daughter Marissa and Husband Michael

Marissa double taps the key fob to unlock the passenger side door as she climbs in the driver's side and slides her legs under the steering wheel. The car ride begins with only the hum of the SUV to score the moment.

"I like our life." Marissa shifts to see Michael better in the passenger seat.

"Me too."

"I think my parents and grandparents are happy, but I don't know that their relationships work. I mean, did you hear what Grandpa said? Borderline sexist. And you know Mom took offense; Dad's probably hearing about it the whole way home."

"Yep . . . I like your family." Michael winces at his own comment. He wonders if it's wrong to appreciate how Grandma Dee serves Grandpa Dave breakfast even though he's so mean to her. "I especially like your Dad. I feel for him," he adds, grateful Marissa isn't as belittling as her mother.

"Me too. Just don't end up too much like him. I don't think he's really there for Mom emotionally. Grandpa and Grandma have this kind of forced peace in their house, but my parents? It's more like a constant tug-of-war. Talk about a ball and chain to weigh down your relationship."

The silence resumes, heavier than before.

"Tug-of-war?" Michael massages his forehead. "Is that what you think we have, too?"

"Nope." Marissa tucks her hair behind one ear. "We share it. Mutual submission. Sometimes you lead,

Wife as driver. Perhaps driver in life and family as well.


Husband appreciates the consideration but isn't sure how to resolve this feeling.

Awareness of belittling actions and attitudes.

He's thinking about what he needs, respect.

She thinks about what she needs, emotional security.

Submission is viewed as mutual, switching leadership roles.



and sometimes I do.” She wiggles playfully in her seat, “We groove together.”

“Oh, that’s what you call it.” Michael fidgets, his insides twisting. He’s relieved to share the weighty responsibility of leadership in their home but hates how Marissa downplays his role—like he’s incapable of leading or caring for their family. This part of their relationship feels so lessening, but Michael dismisses defensive thoughts and feelings of betrayal. The last thing he wants to do is come across as sexist. (*A Wife’s Secret to Happiness*, pages 50-52)

He appreciates the shared responsibility but feels stifled. She is unaware of how he feels.

He feels prevented from fully functioning in his role as a husband, and has hidden wounds.


Each of these women carries strength. She loves her husband and family, and we heard snapshots of conversations to clue us in to some perspectives each wife carries about submission. Please hear me, these are not judgments.

Quitting your job to stay at home and raise your children is a wonderful, beautiful, and incredibly sacrificial calling. And I celebrate your choice to do that, if in fact, it’s what you’re called to do.

Nothing is wrong with a woman driving the family vehicle instead of her husband. And not all men share the same sentiments or perspectives as the men in the scenario above.

The purpose of this exercise is to help us begin to inspect our unique foundational beliefs about submission and gender roles in marriage, and generational norms are a good place to start. Now it’s time to take these fabricated relationships and overlay them on our real everyday lives.

Please use the following questions to start this process for yourself. Don’t try to fit into one specific “type.” Many of us will find similarities with different aspects of all three examples.

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1. Between Grandma Dee, Mom Linda, and Daughter Melissa, which tendencies or perspectives sound most like you?
 2. As you read through the other wifely descriptions, which aspects of their marriage experiences make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end? Why do you think that is?
 3. Which familial tendencies have you observed in your own family or friends? What have you liked or disliked about them in the past?
 4. Consider the way these wifely habits impact each woman's husband. If your man lived with these feelings or struggles for the entirety of your marriage, how would you feel about that? For example:
 - Dave loves his wife but is unaware of how his words may hurt her. She carries hidden wounds from his actions, and he's oblivious to some of her God-given abilities because she's withheld sharing that part of herself with him.
 - Larry feels like he can't offer a different opinion than his wife without inciting a war. He feels disrespected and dominated.
 - Michael harbors conflicted feelings about his unmet desire for respect. He wants to lead but isn't trusted to do so, and doesn't fully agree with mutual submission but can't figure out how to express his desires to care for his family.
 5. As we learned in the chapter, a wife's genuine submission is a volitional attitude, a voluntary heart perspective she chooses for herself. It's not a man-made curse, but a God-ordained blessing, a means to grant us Kingdom authority. If you chose to view submission in this way, what familial tendencies would no longer fit in your home? What actions or perspectives would you replace them with?

Use these questions to keep you mindful of your wifestyle as you go about each day. Simply by being attentive to these aspects of your family life, you'll begin to notice elements of your communication style, your outlook on the home, and your view of yourself and of your husband that you didn't notice before. Talk with God about these components and ask him to help you make intentional choices as you build a new normal as a submitted wife.