

PSYCHOLOGY

Wives Are Most Neurotic

The Biggest "Worries" of Wives and Husbands, College Boys and Girls, Are Revealed in a Study by a Psychologist

By MARJORIE VAN de WATER

DOES the distant roll of approaching thunder send involuntary shivers of fright down your spine? Does an "instinctive" fear make you avoid the touch of metal objects during an electric storm? Does it send you flying about the house to shut out drafts, disconnect electric appliances, perhaps even to hide your head under a feather pillow?

Such a neurotic fear of lightning is a decidedly feminine affliction and one which particularly characterizes married women, it was found by Dr. Raymond Royce Willoughby, of Clark University, when he recently asked a group of married persons and a group of college students to fill out a questionnaire sometimes used by psychiatrists to test for neurotic traits.

Married persons are more neurotic than college students, he discovered.

Wives are more neurotic than husbands.

But husbands have their own ways of displaying a certain amount of emotional instability, too. If you are one who likes to laugh at the frailer sex for timidity in the face of an electric storm, just ask yourself this question "At a reception, do you feel reluctant to meet the most important persons present?" As many as 74 per cent. of the husbands questioned are nervous in this sort of situation. They would much rather dodge out the side door without the punch and cake than be dragged up to pump the hand of the lion of the party. The wives probably think that silly, too.

Men and women, student groups and married groups differed so decidedly and consistently on the particular brand of nervousness affecting them, that Dr. Willoughby found he could single out certain questions as "student" items, others as "married" items, or "male" or "female" items.

"Are you interested in meeting a lot of different kinds of people?"

This is a "male and married" item. Husbands are particularly diffident in

this respect. But wives are less enthusiastic over getting acquainted with strangers than are male college students. It does not worry many college girls.

The importance of this finding is evident when you consider that it is the husbands who most need to get out and meet people. The fact that the typical social climber of fiction is a woman may be justified by this little fact of psychology.

"Does Criticism Hurt?"

"Can you stand criticism without feeling hurt?"

This is a "married" item, but the difference between husband and wife is not great. What of it there is is in the favor of the husband this time. Girl students, however, show up better than do the boys.

Other questions on which the married couples fall down are the following: "Do you like to be with other people a great deal?" and "Were your parents happily married?"

But here is a "student" item:

"Are you troubled with the idea that people are watching you on the street?" Answers to this question revealed a strong difference between married couples and the students, the latter being by far the most likely to be nervous in this regard.

"Do you think people have made quite a lot of fun of you?"

"Do you think you are usually unlucky?"

Such questions bring out typical worries of the college student.

And here are the things which trouble the ladies—wether they be married or single—housewives or students:

"Are you often frightened in the middle of the night?"

"Are you frightened by lightning?"

"Does it make you uneasy to have to cross a wide street or open square?"

Some of the questions included in the list brought out an unusual number of "neurotic" answers from some of the groups, Dr. Willoughby found, and

these tell a story of the particular emotional tensions faced by these persons.

As many as 68 per cent. of the wives report that they are easily moved to tears. And 67 per cent. suffer from stage fright. Among the men students 60 per cent. have stage fright, 59 per cent. daydream frequently, and 55 per cent. worry and are depressed because of poor marks. Of the girl students, 67 per cent. are troubled by things they have said on the spur of the moment and later regretted. Reports from 61 per cent. show that they are kept awake tossing on their pillows by persistent ideas which keep running through their heads.

This does not mean, of course, that all these men and women would be classed as "neurotics" by any physician. Just as there is some good in the worst of us and some bad in the best, so also there may be some tendency to "nerves" in even the most placid and tranquil of individuals.

The questionnaire used by Dr. Willoughby contains a great number of questions. Probably no one would fail to give the "neurotic" answer to at least a few of them. Yet that type of answer to the great majority would indicate a need for medical attention.

If you search your own mind, you will probably find a number of unreasoning fears such as are included in Dr. Willoughby's list. Perhaps you have an uneasy feeling every time you go out that you may have left the gas stove burning and must go back to look. Perhaps it is an unfounded dread of walking over manhole covers in the pavement. Perhaps you dislike crossing wide streets, or walking down narrow alleys. Or going out at night, or staying alone at home.

Life's Little Dreads

Normal persons may be conscious of one or a number of such dreads, but are not hindered by them in going about their ordinary business. With truly neurotic individuals, these little fears grow and develop until they assume the proportions of obsessions, and disrupt life's routine until it is centered about the fears.

If you are one who has the gas-stove-burning or the electric-iron-running fear, you may even turn back from the street



WOULD THIS FRIGHTEN YOU?

Would you be scared if your home were the center of the storm pictured here? Wives are more afraid of lightning than are their husbands. Girl students fear it more than their male classmates.

to reassure yourself that all is well. Or you may go so far as to telephone from your office to your home to have someone look into the matter for you even though you may really know that you have turned it off as you customarily do. But once you have secured the necessary reassurance, your mind is then at rest.

The neurotic individual must return again and again and still has no peace of mind.

Or in these days of antiseptic treatment of wounds, you may have developed a dread of infection. Every time you cut yourself, or whenever you see any one else receive a bump or scratch, you must see to it that the wound is properly sterilized. The neurotic person having the same dread would be kept busy all day long scrubbing and sterilizing and disinfecting to remove germs and possible although improbable sources of infection.

"The investigation has been largely exploratory," Dr. Willoughby says of his research, "and on the basis of the results so far found the opinion may be ventured that extremely interesting and significant problems might be uncovered and studied in this field."

Particularly he suggests the interest in studying the relationship between neuroticism and the duration of marriage, age, and size of family.

Results already obtained indicate that couples having three or more children are emotionally better adjusted than

those with smaller families. Dr. Willoughby is careful to point out, however, that it is possible that a reverse statement of the relation might be more correct—it may be that the better adjusted couples are more likely to have the larger families.

Another striking fact which is suggested by the preliminary data obtained by Dr. Willoughby is a calming effect upon the nerves of husbands brought about by the arrival of the first child, and a reverse effect of the same event on the wife.

College students of both sexes seem to be less self-centered and happier in relation to their environment than do the married couples of the same educational and social level studied. The latter, however, appear to have dropped out some of the inner tensions of their students days as they grew older.

Marriage Taken Seriously

At first thought, this finding will surprise those who have been led by modern theories of psychology to believe that neuroticism has its origin in repressions of the sex desires. Married women in general, however, despite the prevalence of divorce, probably take marriage vows very seriously even when the husband is most incompatible and when emotional adjustment is impossible. Tension in such a case is likely to be considerably greater than it is among a group of young college students who, in these days, have attained or appro-

riated a considerable measure of freedom from sex taboos.

If you are married, you may have noticed some tendencies toward neuroticism in your wife or husband. If so, beware of using this fact as a weapon in a marital spat, for the data from Dr. Willoughby's research have made it a two-edged weapon.

By having married couples fill out the questionnaire for spouse as well as for themselves, he found that the ability to see neurotic traits in one's wife or husband is associated with neuroticism in oneself. And that is particularly true when the neurotic traits are falsely ascribed to the partner in marriage. Women are more discerning than men in sizing up the other person, however.

There is also a real relationship, although it is not very great, between actual neuroticism in one of the pair and neuroticism in the other. It would seem that wives are most likely to be neurotic. But if they are, then they most likely think that the husband is a bit that way, too.

And perhaps he is!

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CHEMISTRY

Chemical Society's Prize Given for Work on Atoms

THE AWARD of the American Chemical Society's thousand-dollar Langmuir prize to Dr. Frank Harold Spedding, 30, of the University of California was made in recognition of his researches on the differing behavior of atoms at ordinary temperatures and at very low temperatures.

His experiments were conducted at temperatures ranging all the way from that of an ordinary room down to the point where liquid hydrogen "boils" into its gaseous state, which is 252.7 Centigrade degrees below freezing point. In an atmosphere of such extreme cold, the behavior of atoms discharged from various substances is quite different from what it is under ordinary circumstances, and a study of the light rays they give off gives information on the composition of matter.

The Langmuir prize cannot be given to any chemist more than 31 years of age, the object of this limitation being to encourage younger men.

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