
James L. Tucker
not essential in finding liability. It appears that the reasoning behind the majority is to curtail to the same reasonable extent the defendant's privilege to act as he sees fit without care for the protection of others.

Gus James II

Torts—Damages—Negligent Injury to Husband Does Not Give Wife Action for Loss of Consortium.—In *Rush v. Great American Ins. Co.*¹ the plaintiff sued to recover damages for loss of consortium resulting from injuries negligently inflicted upon her husband by the defendant. The defendant demurred, alleging that no such action could be maintained by the wife under common law and that there was no state statute permitting such an action. The trial court sustained the demurrer and dismissed the case. Affirming, the Supreme Court of Tennessee ruled that the common law was, and continues to be, in full force and effect,² except, of course, where expressly changed by statute.³ In its strict adherence to a common law rule which was originally based upon the inequality of the sexes, this decision stands in direct opposition to modern social pressures which demand complete legal equality for the married woman. It is obviously of great importance to understand why, in the face of desirable reform, this court has decided to support that ancient common law principle.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of the word "consortium,"⁴ it generally refers to "conjugal fellowship; and the term embraces love, companionship, affection, society, comfort, sexual

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¹³ 376 S.W.2d 454 (Tenn. 1964).


¹⁵ Tenn. Const. art. XI, § 1; accord, Henley v. State, 98 Tenn. 665, 41 S.W. 352, 39 L.R.A. 126 (1897).

relations, services, solace and more." 5 Under the earlier common law, whatever the particular definition used, no right of consortium ever belonged to the wife. This right was considered a property right, and, as such, it belonged exclusively to the husband.6 Its invasion gave the husband a right of action in trespass for loss of the services of his wife (trespass per quod consortium amisit).7 In regard to the right of consortium, the common law view has existed practically unchanged down to modern times. The first reported American case in which a wife sued a third party for loss of consortium was Welsh v. Morrison8 in 1887, and not until 1950 did any American court ever allow the wife to recover such damages.

The great majority of legal writers had long advocated giving the wife the right to sue for loss of consortium;9 nevertheless, not until Hitaffer v. Argonne10 bestowed judicial recognition upon this view did the courts earnestly begin to scrutinize the concept of consortium. The Hitaffer case was the impetus for a great increase in litigation concerning the rights of a married woman to consortium, and it has given rise to a small, but strong, minority which grants such rights to the wife.11 Although the Hitaffer decision admittedly contains sound and logical reasoning and even though the majority of courts do grant a remedy

6. See 3 BLACKSTONE, COMMENTARIES 143.
for a direct attack by a third party upon the marital relation,\(^2\) the great majority of courts still steadfastly refuse to give the wife any right of action where the interference is indirect and is the result of negligence.\(^3\)

The majority view, relying upon the time-honored common law and upon the principle of stare decisis, explicitly declares that any change in the present law of consortium must be made by the legislature and not by the courts.\(^4\) One of the principal arguments used in denying recovery to the wife is that her injury, if any, is too remote, consequential, speculative, and too infused with sentimental elements; thus, her damages are incapable of reasonable ascertainment.\(^5\) Another reason why the courts refuse to allow recovery by the wife stems from their appre- 


hension of a double recovery for a single injury. Technically, the minority view is correct in stating that the respective damages of the husband and wife are separable; however, from a practical viewpoint, and because such actions are generally allowed to go before the jury, there is a real possibility of overlapping recoveries.

The majority of courts do not consider their denial of the wife’s action inconsistent with allowing the husband to recover for loss of consortium resulting from a negligent injury to his wife. This position is based generally upon the premise that the husband has a common law right to his spouse’s services, whereas the wife has no corresponding right to her husband’s services. Thus, the husband has a base upon which the sentimental elements of damage may attach, while the wife does not.

Neither can the wife find refuge in the various married women’s acts, for in the great majority of jurisdictions these acts are interpreted as merely having removed the liabilities which were formerly imposed upon females, and not as having created any new rights which were unknown to the common law. Nor can the married woman gain her right of action in those few states which, in view of the married women’s acts, recognize the incongruity of denying such an action to the wife while granting it to her husband. These states, either by


17. “Adjectives, adverbs and epithets can neither solve nor eliminate the problem. When two overlapping causes of action are made to grow where one has grown before, the possibility of a double recovery is real.” Dini v. Naiditch, supra note 11, at 895 (dissenting opinion).


statute,\textsuperscript{21} or by decision,\textsuperscript{22} solve the whole problem by denying the action to the husband also, thereby placing both parties to the marital relationship upon more or less equal terms.

The common law denial of the wife's right to sue for loss of consortium is admittedly incompatible with the modern concept of legal equality for the married woman; however, in order to bring any semblance of uniformity and effectiveness to the solution of this problem, and in order to give true and complete equality to the wife, legislative action is imperative.\textsuperscript{23} Until such action materializes, the courts will continue to resist any complete breach of the long-established doctrines of the common law.\textsuperscript{24} Certainly, without statutory directives it would be extremely difficult and time-consuming for the courts to agree upon what elements such an action by the wife should include and upon what limits should be imposed upon the action. Considering the nonpecuniary nature of the interests involved, the allowance of such action would involve the unsystematic inclusion and exclusion of the various elements of damage by means of slowly evolving court-made doctrines whose rules would be subject to change with each new decision.\textsuperscript{25}

One must bear in mind the fact that, regardless of the desirability of changing a particular facet of the common law, the courts are extremely reluctant to invade the province of the legislators and become lawmakers.\textsuperscript{26} Although pressured by a society which demands equality for women, it appears that the majority view continues to hold sway

\textsuperscript{23} See note 14, \textit{supra}.
\textsuperscript{24} "We have given careful consideration to the able arguments advanced in the Hitaffer case, many of which are founded on sound reasoning and which logically support the conclusion reached if considered as an argument of what the law \textit{should} be. They might appeal to the Legislature. But we find them wholly unconvincing when viewed from the only angle from which our jurisdiction permits us to consider them, namely a determination of what the law of Florida is . . . ." Ripley v. Ewell, 61 So.2d 420, 423 (Fla. 1952).
\textsuperscript{25} "Clarification by statute as to both the husband and wife would, of course, be preferable to piecemeal determination of the problems by judicial decision." Hoffman v. Dautel, 388 P.2d 613, 626 (Kan. 1964).
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{E.g.}, "We are mindful of the critical comments of the law writers and some of the courts against adhering to a static principle long embedded in our jurisprudence, but much can be said on either side of the question and we think it sound to adhere to the legal concept so long established in this jurisdiction." Ex parte Hammert, 259 Ala. 240, 243, 66 So.2d 600, 602 (1953).
over the courts and is continually being re-examined, clarified, and strengthened by decisions such as *Rush v. Great American Ins. Co.* Such decisions do not refute the logical reasoning of the opposition, nor do they ignore the pressures of social change—indeed, courts of law thrive on logic and welcome desirable change. These decisions merely propose that such a change should come from the legislature; until such change is forthcoming, the time-proven common law will govern.

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27. *Supra* note 1.