

Love is Blind Marriage Opens its Eyes

"Every relationship travels a predictable path from the Bliss of Romantic Love to the Nightmare of Disillusionment and Conflict; and has the potential for Mystical Union".

Harvelle Hendrix

As necessary as it is to hire a wedding planner to facilitate all the components of the ceremony, it may be as important to hire a coach to help couples prepare for what happens after the wedding day.

As much as couples think they "know each other", feedback from the same couples after being married indicate the contrary.

According to Murray Bowen's Systems theory, a couple is not alone at the altar. Behind each of them are their parent figure's relationship as well as significant past relationships and cultural norms on the "roles" of spousal relationship. "When people marry they recreate the feelings and behaviors they saw modeled in their family of origin." *John Bradshaw*

Most couples are not aware of these neurological imprints. Instead, couples often have idealized expectations of their future which may not be realistic. Unrealistic expectations lead to disappointment and disillusionment.

Couples can greatly benefit from identifying "imprinted" and conscious expectations of marriage and the evolutionary stages of spousal relationship. Couples can then approach marriage with "eyes wide open;" and develop a healthy, loving relationship.

Susan Campbell studied over 500 couples who had been married from 3 to 30 years. From her research, she identified four basic stages of spousal relationship. John Bradshaw compared each stage with Eric Erikson's theory of childhood development.

The following states are:

- "In Love"

The first stage can be compared to infancy in that the beginning relationship is considered symbiotic or co-dependent

The couple thrives on feelings and often operates from the illusion that they can not exist without the other. The common belief is that this new relationship is the solution to perfect happiness forever. Tom Cruise in the movie *Jerry Maguire* describes this stage with the line "You complete me."

The attraction during this infatuation period can certainly boost self-esteem and lower depression. I tell my clients this phase in a relationship is much better than Prozac!

Love is Blind Marriage Opens its Eyes

- “Power Struggle”

In order for the relationship to continue, couples move from infancy to toddler. The relationship becomes more oppositional and shifts to counter-dependence.

During this time, couples can become disillusioned in that they realize their partner is not perfect and can not make their life blissful. What may be the source of attraction in the beginning becomes conflictual.

Some examples of disillusionment are:

He was ambitious -to- Now he works too much.

She was creative and spontaneous -to- Now she is irrational.

He had a great sense of humor -to- He does not take me seriously.

She was passionate and emotional -to- She is hysterical.

It is during this stage, couples begin to recognize their differences. The power struggle is each believes “their way” is the best. Common struggles involve sex, money, child rearing, in laws, or children from a previous marriage.

This is the stage in which couples learn how to disagree and resolve conflicts. Although the “first” argument can be difficult, couples begin to realize some conflict is normal and actually can build intimacy.

“We can't grow in intimacy without some conflict.” *Virginia Satir*

- “Self Actualization”

After we emerge from the fog of “in love” and realize our spouse is not perfect and we accept differences; Stability in the relationship is established.

The relationship allows for independence in which each person has an identity which allows for a cooperative partnership. The couple will support each other's strengths without feeling threatened. The couple has the capacity to listen to their partner without becoming defensive and judgmental.

Together, the couple takes on their own unique identity in which they value each others contribution to the relationship.

“In Love, the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two.” *Eric Fromm*

Love is Blind Marriage Opens its Eyes

- “Co-Creation”

In this final stage, the couple has matured in their capacity for loving which goes beyond “neediness”. The relationship becomes interdependent and is defined by the following characteristics:

Empathy

Able to understand from partner's point of view and anticipate needs.

Security

An unquenchable confidence of safety and internal trust with partner.

Soulful

The ability to feel and know there is a mystical union which will live on forever, even after death.

A couple was celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary and the husband was noticing his wife's wrinkles; he said “She is more beautiful than I can ever remember”.

“The relationship is no longer a problem to solve – it becomes a mystery to live.”

*T
h
o
m
a
s*

*M
o
o*