

Some Issues of Psychology in Marriage

Family of Origin, Cognitive Origins of Communication Patterns, Stress Responses and Trauma, The Implicit Contract

Three Thoughts

- 1. We are made for love and need to “learn” how to love and be loved
 - Family of Origin
 - Attachment Theory
- 2. Love is willing the best for the other, as **other**.
- 3 Marriage is a “gymnasium of charity” – a vocation ordered to love.

Marriage Part of the Threefold Vocation

- 1st – The Universal Call to Holiness – The Ultimate Vocation is a Call to Love
- 2nd – The Call to a State of Life – Marriage is a State of Life Ordered to Holiness – Love
- 3rd- The Call to Work – Work as a Vocation Ordered to (Supporting) Our State of Life (Marriage), That in Turn is Ordered to Holiness

Communication Styles

- Linear and Circular Communication styles – Probably Learned
 - Linear – just the facts – straightforward
 - Task oriented but leaves the listener wondering what they are feeling, and whether ultimately they were considered
 - Circular - more context
 - Relationship oriented - more context but often loses their listener, if the listener is a linear communicator. “What is important here?”

Cognitive Processes

- Internal and External Processors – Probably Part of Their Makeup
 - Internal – process information in their head – may take longer to respond to a question, only gives the answer
 - Give this person time – don't just jump in, don't presume that because they don't answer immediately they are trying to hide something or are stalling
 - External – process information out loud – start to talk right away – figure the answer out as they talk – gives all the rationale for their answers
 - Be patient with the processing, recognize that this is what they need to do

Problem Solving

- Problem solving strategies are often learned.
 - ‘Often’ because in part they are governed by our temperaments.
- Do you think people should “lean in?” – “Let’s just talk this out.”
 - Brutal honesty is just brutal. Is it true, is it helpful, how can I say it kindly and respect the dignity of the other person?
- Do you think people should try to avoid conflict? “Let’s just have peace.”
 - Avoidance prevents true reconciliation.

Differences in Stress Response in Men and Women

- Men – Flight, Fight and Freeze
- Women – Tend and Befriend, Flight, Fight and Freeze
- Tend and Befriend an Estrogen mediated process
- Women tend to want engagement initially when stressed, Men tend to first want to get away when stressed

Implications of Stress Response Differences

- Allow men time to de stress – takes about 20 minutes – Can call a time-out on yourself
- Recognize that what looks critical and unrelenting may in fact be an attempt to engage.
- Don't push someone who needs to flee – the next reaction will be fight

The Implicit Contract

- The Marriage Vows are an explicit “contract”
- What is the implicit contract – things I believe about “how” married people are to act, respond – be
 - These are ideas we “learned” often in our family of origin

Finances

- How do you manage money?
- Saver v. spender
- What happened in your family of origin, who made the decisions about money?

- After infidelity – Money issues are the biggest source of problems in a marriage. Like pornography they can also be a source of infidelity (gambling, spendthrift)

Holidays

- Research showing that shared holiday celebrations create very strong familial bonds.
- Research showing that creating new “traditions,” strengthens the marriage bond.

Vacation and Leisure Time

- Active v. Relaxing
- Expensive v. Cost Efficient
- How do people in your family of origin relax?

Work Life Balance

- “Everything I do I do for you” v. “I want you home more”
- What do you believe about work life balance?
- If you are a workaholic – are you using work to support your sense of self?

Cultural Differences

- Every family is its own culture.
- Don't presume that you understand another person's family.
- Teach your spouse about the culture of your family.
 - TRADITIONS
 - INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

Trauma Responses - Reactivity

- Many people have traumatic experiences in their past. They may feel they have adequately processed them.
- How you know that something may still be hurting.
- You have a reaction that even you know is too big. Think back to when you might have first had that response. Learn how to apologize quickly.

Unhealed Wounds

- Triggering experiences from our family of origin,
 - You felt you had to be like/unlike Mom or Dad in order to be loved. Conditional love leads to a fear of losing self in a relationship
 - Abandoned in childhood – Intimacy can lead a a heightened fear of abandonment
 - Rejected in childhood – intimacy can heighten a fear of rejection
 - Attacked in childhood – intimacy can lead to a fear of being attacked.
- Defensiveness, shame, resentment, helplessness

Behaviors to Watch For

- Perfectionism – if I am perfect no one will see the unhealed wounds
 - Controlling – If I control everything I won't get hurt
 - People Pleasing – If I never say no, they will not hurt me
 - Distracted – Phone, games ... If I never really connect, I won't get hurt
 - Addictions – Gambling, alcohol, pornography – I can try to avoid problems by dulling my senses
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- They are all ultimately losing strategies

Ask Yourself Some Questions When Hurting

- When did I first feel this way?
- Is there a pattern?
- Are there previous experiences that make me more sensitive/vulnerable?
- Is my spouse the person who initially hurt me? If not, have they demonstrated that they are trustworthy?

Healing the Wound – Communication Critical

- Communicate with spouse –
- If communicating with spouse feels too fearful –
 - Pray for insight – seek help from a priest
 - Seek professional help (especially with past trauma)
- Ultimately you and your spouse need to understand and be able to respond to each other in ways that are loving and supportive

End Result

- The desired end result is a secure attachment
 - The ability to know that you are loved and capable of loving your spouse
- Ideally, in marriage, with maturity, we don't just react, but respond appropriately, with love to various situations.
 - We used to avoid problems, but now we can talk about them
 - We used to get defensive, but now we try to understand the other person's perspective
 - We used to argue when we disagreed, but now we can discuss