

## FORMING OUR RELATIONSHIPS BACKWARDS

By

Larry F. Waldman, Ph.D., ABPP

The divorce rate in the U.S. continues to hover around 50 percent and the dissolution incidence when one or both of the parties have been previously married is about 65 percent. This is a national travesty. The amount of emotional angst and money spent, not to mention the extent of trauma brought to the involved children, is immeasurable.

Finding a partner today has never been easier. There are numerous websites which facilitate making a connection with a prospective mate. Two generations ago one typically met their prospective spouse at a bar, dance, or was “fixed up” by a mutual friend or family member. Today a few mouse clicks may be all that is needed to begin a relationship.

Despite the technology-aided match-making, relationships are not lasting any longer than before—and things are likely to get worse. The reason for this that more than ever before we are developing our relationships in a backward manner.

Ask any relationship expert or any couple happily married for a while and they will say that a successful long-term marriage is based, in large part, on compatible values and principles, positive personality characteristics, commitment to the relationship, effective communication, and enjoying each other’s company. While sex is important, it is not part of the basic foundation of the relationship; passion is a wonderful benefit of a solid relationship.

Not that long ago, couples courted. Premarital sex was frowned upon. In some cultures the couple was chaperoned during the dating phase. While all this sounds terribly outdated by today’s standards, these couples were, in fact, building a firm foundation for their future relationship, as they focused on the primary tenets of a successful long-term union. Diagrammatically, successful relationships look like a pyramid, with the union soundly grounded on shared values and principles:

Sex

Communication  
Commitment

Personality Characteristics

Solid, Basic Values and Principles

Today, many relationships are formed in a backward manner. Given the ease of connecting, “hook-ups” are common. Some current sites, like Tinder, are expressly aimed at creating sexual liaisons.

In a relationship that begins primarily due to a sexual connection, all those important factors, like values and commitment, become secondary. The sexual attraction blinds the individual to problems that may exist in their bedmate with regard to personal values, personality characteristics, communication, etc. Such a relationship, diagrammatically, looks like an inverted pyramid, balancing precariously on sex:

Solid, Basic Values and Principles

Personality Characteristics

Communication  
Commitment

Sex

Is it any wonder, then, that relationships founded on lust ultimately teeter and collapse? Let’s get back to the “good old days” and form solid, long-lasting intimate relationships right side up.

If you are in a relationship and are considering marriage, consider the following:

What is his/her family like?

Do his/her parents respect each other?

Does he/she respect his/her parents?

What is his/her view on the sanctity of marriage?

How does he/she communicate?

How does he/she handle money?

How does he/she run his/her house or apartment?

How does/would he/she raise children?

How does he/she handle change, frustration, and disappointment?

How does he/she resolve conflict?

How willing is he/she to consider your needs?

Does he/she overuse drugs and/or alcohol?

How willing is he/she to compromise?

All of these questions, and perhaps several more, need to be contemplated before one decides to make a life-long commitment to another person. Simply being good in bed doesn't cut it. A relationship founded primarily on lust will last, if you are lucky (and really sensual), at most 18 months. Successful long-term relationships, per the "Pyramid," must be built from the ground up.

Larry F. Waldman, Ph.D., ABPP is a licensed psychologist who has practiced in the Paradise Valley area of Phoenix for over 35 years. He works with children, adolescents, parents, adults, and couples. He also provides forensic consultations in the areas of family law, personal injury, and estate planning. He speaks professionally to laypersons, educators, corporations, and fellow mental health professionals. He teaches graduate courses for the Educational Psychology Department for Northern Arizona University. He is the author of "Who's Raising Whom? A Parent's Guide to Effective Child Discipline," "Coping with Your Adolescent," "How Come I Love Him But Can't Live With Him? Making Your Marriage Work Better," "The Graduate Course You Never Had: How to Develop, Manage, Market a Flourishing Private Practice—With and Without Managed Care," and "Too Busy Earning a Living to Make Your Fortune? Discover the Psychology of Achieving Your Life Goals." His contact information is: 602-996-8619; 11020 N. Tatum Blvd., Bldg. E, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85028; [LarryWaldmanPhD@cox.net](mailto:LarryWaldmanPhD@cox.net); [TopPhoenixPsychologist.com](http://TopPhoenixPsychologist.com).