



BEYOND BLUE

A spiritual journey to mental health

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Why Relationships Change After Marriage and Why Loyalty Brings Happiness

Thursday July 2, 2009

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A recent Northwestern University study found that what makes a person a good dating partner might not determine who is a suitable spouse.

For couples in both a dating relationship and a marriage, an important contributor to a satisfying relationship is an understanding that a partner will help the other achieve his/her dreams. That's huge for married couples, too, but in the married relationship, it is even more substantial that the partner upholds his/her part of the commitment pledged before taking vows.

Explains Daniel Molden, assistant professor at Northwestern University and lead author of the study:

In other words, the feelings of being loved and supported that people use to judge who makes a good girlfriend or boyfriend may not be completely trustworthy in deciding who makes a good husband or wife. Those feelings may only partially capture the emotions that will determine your satisfaction with the person you marry.

Molden believes the study, to be published soon in the journal *Psychological Science*, helps to explain why so many marriages fall apart today.

Perhaps young adults enter marriage with a faulty notion of loyalty, and what is required of a faithful mate. Maybe we simply aren't as loyal as we used to be.

In their new book, "[Why Loyalty Matters](#)," authors Timothy Keiningham and Lerzan Aksoy explore the connection between satisfying relationships, happiness, and loyalty. Their research is intriguing.

According to their studies the people who value loyalty -- to their spouse, family, and friends -- are happier and more satisfied with their lives than the executives working themselves to death in order to pay for the country club, enjoy the spa, and eat fancy cuisine (unless they do all those things with their spouse ... which would make it an "experience" not merely an "acquisition." Keiningham and Aksoy write: "The most important factor that separates happy people from unhappy people is our relationships with others. It is more important than money, and even more important than our health."

Just as the Northwestern study indicated, the couples who are more loyal to each other--making good on the promises they uttered at the altar--are also happier. The loyalty translates into happiness.

But say you're a person who doesn't like to commit ... who always likes a lot of options. How do you train yourself to become more loyal?

Keiningham and Aksoy offer a Loyalty Advisor tool at www.loyaltyadvisor.com, where they assess your relationship style and examine your loyalties across multiple areas that relate to your happiness, and offer guidelines based on the results. The authors have come up with ten basic building blocks of our relationship DNA: leadership, reliance, empathy, security, calculativeness, connectedness, independence, traditionalism, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping.

Northwestern's Molden hopes that his study will encourage young couples to not only think about how their partners will support their dreams, but also about how committed their partners will be to the obligations presented within a marriage as well. Because, as he says, "We could end up with both happier marriages and more satisfied people, in general."

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