

Bonnie Roland

CAPSTONE ESSAY

MFRL 207: LOVE and RELATIONSHIPS

Module One: The First Years of Marriage

In this module Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth share some principles and concepts that are important to developing a solid foundation upon which to begin a marriage; many of the concepts can be applied to long-time married couples as well.

First, it is important to recognize that pre-marital counseling is critical to establishing a solid marital foundation. According to the lecture, couples spend up to 10 hours in pre-marital counseling contrasted with up to 500 hours a woman spends planning for a wedding. This suggests that couples are ill-equipped for what is the most important relationship in their lives.

A couple that does the work to adequately prepare for the first year of marriage makes a solid investment in the long-term health of the relationship, for example they have to learn how to live together, how each responds to different challenges and situations, and how to support him/her appropriately, so the importance of spending time focused on getting to know each other as individuals with behaviors and habits which may be different from our own cannot be stressed enough.

To support a newly engaged couple or a couple in pre-engagement, I would recommend 24 hours of pre-marital counseling --- that is the equivalent of one full day of investment in their lifetime relationship. The twenty-four hour investment would include reading the book, *The Most Important Year in a Man's/Woman's Life*. Subjects to be covered would include: the role of the man and woman in the marriage; managing expectations; spirituality and marriage; dealing with conflict (criticism vs. complaint), healthy sexuality and finances in marriage. If a couple is willing to put in the work, they can significantly increase the chances of not just a long-term marriage, but a successful one.

Module Two: Building a Safe Haven in Marriage

In their lectures on creating a safe haven in marriage, Drs. Hart and May debunk the myths that marriages, "just work out" --- sort of a love conquers all approach. The reality of marriage is it is hard work and that marriage makes more enemies than any other relationship. They caution us that unless there is emotional safety in the marriage, nothing else will work and the relationship will fail. They recommend emotion-focused therapy as a means of establishing an emotional connection and creating that safe haven. A safe haven is a place where you can safely express what you are feeling, pour out your whole heart.

In a counseling situation, I would want to understand how couples are dealing with conflict now. That is, is there an avoidant or anxious attachment style, or even a fearful attachment style. I would want to discuss with each of them separately how they respond to disappointment or hurt from their partner, and how they think the partner responds. Then I would work with each to modify his/her approach individually. Finally, we would come together to determine what has/has not improved, and what needs are still not being met in creating that safe haven.

Key to this emotion focused therapy is for each partner to learn to establish and communicate trust in each other's commitment to the marriage and successful resolution of their issue(s);

becoming emotionally available and accessible and being caring responsive (that is, considering the other and trying to take their perspective and weigh it).

Module Three: Love Languages

In his lecture on Love Languages, Dr. Chapman addresses the emotional state of “Being in Love”. He explains that the obsessive, euphoric state typically associated with being in love is temporary (approximately two years) in nature and that most people break up after that period because they no longer have the same “feeling”. Dr. Chapman advises that being “in love” is not an adequate foundation for success in marriage, and that moving from that emotional “high” is an opportunity for a couple to transition to an intentional state of love.

Dr. Chapman advises that the key to keeping emotional love alive when you come off the high is making your partner feel loved in the love language that is meaningful to the partner. The five languages are:

1. Words of affirmation
2. Giving and receiving gifts
3. Acts of service
4. Quality Time
5. Physical touch

In a counseling situation it's important that each spouse knows how to effectively communicate with the other in their primary love language. To determine that, as a counselor have the participants:

1. Observe their own behavior (how do they tend to express love to their mate)?
2. Note what do they complain about most often (specifically which of the languages do they point to as a deficiency in their partner)?
3. What do we request most often?

If we can teach couples to communicate to each other what they are feeling in the primary love language that their mate understands and responds to, we can help them solidify the intentional state of love, connect emotionally and reduce the chance of misbehavior in the marriage that comes from the “emptiness in the love tank.”

Module Four: The Languages of Apology: Regret, Responsibility, Restitution, Repentance & Requesting

Dr. Chapman's lecture on apology was one of the most substantive I've listened to throughout the program. It was significant to me because I've often shared or had friends share with me that their partner never apologizes. I now understand that this miscommunication can be attributed to the different languages of apology.

Important to the success of a relationship is that individuals feel loved and appreciated and deal effectively with their failures. When one or both members does not deal with the latter, the former condition cannot be met.

In a counseling situation I would take time to assess the apology language of each of the partners. To do so I would ask each to respond to the questions:

- When you apologize, what do you say or do?
- When someone apologizes to you, what do you want them to say or do?

While it may seem elementary that people who love one another would have no difficulty communicating an apology, several conditions might prohibit apologizing, i.e., having learned a less than ideal approach to apologizing from one's parents or learning never to apologize.

Once the apology language is determined for each partner, we would focus on how to appropriately effect an apology. For example, if the apology language is, Expressing Regret, then I would counsel the partner(s) to not just say, "I'm sorry", but to be clear about why you are sorry. If the language is, Accepting Responsibility, then it is important to admit that you are wrong and not blame anyone else.

Speaking the appropriate apology language is important to the success of a marriage. If someone does not speak our apology language, then the apology is seen as insincere. Under such circumstances, forgiveness is difficult, and the relationship will suffer.

Module Five: Marriage: Keeping Love Alive

In her lecture, Dr. Linda Mintle addresses gray divorce – that is divorce in people over the age 50; the divorce rate for people in this age group has doubled. Dr. Mintle points to several factors that fuel the relationship breakups:

1. Boomers are the first generation of “me-focused” individuals; their focus on their own happiness has overridden commitment.
2. Many couples think that their relationship should always be on a high and full of passion.
3. Women today are more financially independent and are less inclined to stay for the economic support.
4. People are living longer, so at 50 years of age, they could conceivably spend 20 or 30 years with someone else.
5. People are defining marriage differently. Where once being a good parent or valuing the commitment, one made to the relationship were priorities, now the priority is having one’s own needs met.
6. Cultural definitions of marriage have changed. Happiness and self-satisfaction have become the primary goals of marriage as opposed to holiness and sanctification.

She goes on to describe some signs that couples are in trouble. Couples who are negative during the first six years of their marriage; partners who are disengaged from each other and lack positive emotions; and between 10 and 12 years of marriage, there is something going on because during this timeframe many people are divorcing because they are looking for some new kind of satisfaction. In the lecture, which could easily incorporate into a counseling session, Dr. Mintle offers some ways to help rebuild a relationship; she outlines ten things that happy couples do that a couple in counseling can implement:

1. Go to bed at the same time.
2. Cultivate some common interests.
3. Walk hand-in-hand or side by side.
4. Make trust and forgiveness your natural default.
5. Focus on what your partner does right, not wrong.
6. Hug and kiss your partner as soon as you see each other after work.
7. Say, “I love you” and “Have a good day” every morning.
8. Say, “I love you” and “Good night” every night regardless of how you feel.
9. Do a “weather check” during the day – that is check in to see how your spouse is feeling/doing.
10. Be proud to be seen with your partner.