

There's One Row Happening In Millions Of Homes.

Have A Relationship Revelation By Understanding

THE ROW OF OUR TIMES

It's Not Just You

Relationships are in crisis. If you're thinking "oh my god, what's wrong with me and my partner? Everyone else seems to be getting it together except us!" well, you're wrong. Everybody else isn't getting it together. Most marriages now end in separation and divorce, and more and more people won't even risk the commitment of marriage. It's not just you and your partner - we're all struggling.

This raises a very interesting question: if relationships are in crisis across the culture, are so many of us struggling because we've got so much personal 'stuff', or has it got something to do with the way relationship itself is evolving in our culture? Can we just put the crisis down to our difficult childhoods? Is it that millions of us are just too messed up to have nourishing longterm relationships? Or is there something happening culturally, collectively, at this specific point in history, which is making relationships especially difficult?

In this article I am going to suggest that we're all involved in a cultural development that is very painful, but also necessary and positive - and that once we see this bigger picture we'll realise just how similar our relationships are, and just how similar our struggles are. For many people this realisation is not just reassuring, it opens up a whole new expanded and inspiring vision of intimate relationship.

And within this article, for simplicity's sake, I'm going to be talking heterosexually, although ultimately we're not really talking about the relationship between men and women, we're talking about the relationship between the masculine and feminine - which can be in any body.

The Story So Far

Firstly, we need to appreciate that we're involved in a cultural story. None of us is outside of time and place. We're all children of the era we're born into, and we all inherit the assumptions and habits of those who have gone before us. Their thinking and feeling and behaviour linger on within us. It takes generations for prejudices to really fully shift.

So what is the cultural relationship-story we're involved in? Simply put, it is this: up until a hundred years ago the guiding principle of relationships was 'duty', but in the last century the guiding principle has been changing from 'duty' to 'pleasure'. Whereas people once stayed together out of duty, and didn't expect to enjoy their relationships, we no longer feel duty-bound to stay together, and get together with high hopes of having a great time.

It's not that you and I choose to have these expectations. We don't grow up as teenagers thinking "I personally feel that The Duty Model of relationship is outdated, and I personally tend to favour The Pleasure Model". No, we just pick up the ideas and attitudes that are 'in the air' in the culture around us. When we look around us we see that the modern relationship ideal is not to stay together no-matter-what, it is to be continually in love, to be continually passionately sexually attracted to each other, and to be continually enjoying life together - and so we automatically approach our relationships with these expectations.

And when these expectations aren't met, it hurts. When 'the honeymoon phase' ends (after six months, a year, maybe even three years), we're disillusioned. When the pain kicks in, we're devastated. It wasn't what we expected. This wasn't what we'd hoped for. "There must be something wrong with this relationship" we say, "we're clearly not meant to be together. I'll see if I can find someone else - someone with whom I can have more pleasure, less pain".

Angry Mummies, and Good Little Boys

But The Pleasure Model is not the only problem. There is another problem too. Over the last hundred years or so women have been standing up and refusing to be dominated by emotionally-absent, immature, arrogant and often physically abusive men. Is that a problem? No, not in itself. But as men come to see the validity of the women's complaints, and 'take on board' the women's demand that they grow-up emotionally, they are thrown into a state of confusion and disempowerment. And the combination of angry women reclaiming their power, and disempowered men trying to be sensitive, is definitely problematic - especially if we're caught in The Pleasure Model.

Less and less women are willing to be sexually used, and or to run around their men - on the one hand treating them as children, and on the other being expected to look up to them. More and more women have a great big 'no - never again!' And the men, stripped of their superiority, no longer 'heads of the household', are bending over backwards to accommodate this 'new woman'. They run around her, bringing her cups of tea, and trying to appease her. But this spineless masculinity only irritates her more!

Whereas once (in the times of The Duty Model) most couples were playing out 'big strong daddy and helpless little girl', now (in these times of The Pleasure Model) more and more couples are caught in 'angry mummy and good little boy'. And mums don't want sex with their little boys. Which is a bit of a problem for our Pleasure Model.

In the initial 'honeymoon phase' of our relationships we're on our best behaviour. But whether this lasts six weeks or six years, sooner or later we run onto the rocks of hard-woman and soft-man, and our pleasure boat gets shipwrecked. What we need to understand is that this is a cultural phenomenon. It's not just in your household that the man feels endlessly criticised, disrespected, and sexually frustrated. Millions of men feel exactly the same. And it's not just in your home that the woman feels scornful, impatient, intolerant, unseen, unmet and unloved. Millions of women feel the same. It's the cultural situation. It's where we've got to, our story so far - as a culture.

The exact same scenario is playing itself out behind millions of locked front doors. If we could be flies on the wall we'd see the exact same row happening simultaneously in millions of homes. It always begins with something trivial. Let us say, for example, that some small domestic oversight of his has upset her, and she mentions it. He immediately feels attacked, and defends. "It wasn't my fault" he protests, and he reels off a list of rational excuses. By this time she is more upset by his defensiveness, and his emotional disconnection, than by whatever it was that upset her initially. So she tells him. This confirms his initial sense of being attacked, and so he defends more strongly. She then starts to really have a go at him, and his male friends, and his father and brothers, and men, all men, and five thousand years of male domination, and so on (and on and on and on).

Women have emotional memories that astound men. In the passion of their fury they pull out emotional facts and figures long gone from the male memory. As she builds her case with endless related and overlapping examples of his (and all men's) immaturity and incompetence, for him it's like being in front of a machine gun firing pain. Lost and trapped inside this pain he has to fight back, or flee, or both. And here the scenarios might vary slightly. But it's the same basic row, with a couple of variables. And it is happening in millions of homes. It is The Row Of Our Times.

And in a longer article we could also discuss the times when the traditional (Duty Model) 'soft woman' comes into the row, and apologises, feeling guilty and/or afraid, and represses and minimises her anger. Equally, there are times when the traditional 'hard man' steps on stage, and threatens her, or beats her, or looks down on her 'hysteria', and just walks out. This kind of behaviour is deep in our psyches, and deep in our DNA, as a result of

five thousand years of Patriarchy, and is very much part of The Row Of Our Times.

We could even discuss the aftermath, which also has a limited number of variables. And we could discuss how the accumulated pain of these encounters leads to separation. But the main point of this article is to really insist that our relationships are not as different as we think, and that we're all tied up together in the same cultural patterning - with the same struggles, and the same challenges.

Models On The Market

When couples begin to really understand the truth of this, their relationships are often transformed. It can be a revelation. When we work with groups of couples, and each couple hears from every other couple, and the same stories are repeated again and again and again - couples begin to realise "we are not alone, it's not just us, other couples are enacting the exact same scenarios - that's fascinating, and gives us so much hope". And then, once we have this larger, collective-cultural perspective, there are two areas we need to address: our model of relationship, and our development beyond hard-woman/soft-woman and soft-man/hard-man. And as we shall see, these two areas are inseparable.

The Pleasure Model is obviously inadequate because, as you may have noticed, relationships also involve pain. Nor do we want to go back to The Duty Model. The other two main models on the market seem to be The Growth Work Model and the Neo-Tantric Model. In the Growth Work model each partner works through their own 'stuff', in the earnest hope that as each one becomes more 'owning' there will be less blame and clearer communication. And hopefully, there will be.

The problem with the new-agey Growth Work Model is that it is not rooted in a cultural understanding. There is little, if any, appreciation of the different developmental histories of men and women. It tends to be a unisex path, in which each partner is seen more as a human being than as a man or woman. And as each one endlessly owns their 'stuff' the relationship becomes tiresome and heavy and asexual. Any anyway, the separation statistics for Growth Workers are as bad, if not worse than, those of the Pleasure Seekers.

The Neo-Tantric Model is basically a combination of the previous two. It tries to combine growth and pleasure. But unless the underlying cultural pattern is addressed, however much spiritualised sex we might have, the tension between the hard-woman and the soft-man will remain. And eventually their pain will disrupt their Neo-Tantric bliss. And anyway, again,

the statistics speak for themselves. What to do then? Is there no model that addresses our mass cultural dilemma?

The Archetypal Model

If we begin with the question “What would diffuse The Row Of Our Times?”, the answer is obvious: for the men to stop defending with their minds. But that’s easier said than done. Why? Because what the women are saying is painful, and above all - although it might be expressed in distorted, even desperate ways - in essence: true. When women point out that men have been culturally conditioned into a state of superiority, emotional and sexual superficiality, and the inappropriate use of their power - they are speaking the simple truths of their hearts.

For men to see that this is actually the finest mirror they could ever hope to have, and to see that the women are their allies, not their enemies, requires a lot of background work. In other words, men have to go beyond the softness which, in its own time, was a progression from the macho hardness that went before it. And it’s not enough to say “oh yes, we need to get back a bit of the hardness we left behind”. That’s true. But it takes more than that to open to the pain and rage of the women. It takes commitment to truth - to not being controlled by the ego. It takes commitment to oneself - to fulfilling one’s own potential as a man. It takes commitment to one’s manhood. And as this commitment matures, it allows the men to meet the women in a new way.

When a man doesn’t defend, hard-woman softens. Does she soften back into the submissive little girl from which, in its time, her hardness was a progression? Let’s hope not. That would be a regression. As hard-woman softens, if she doesn’t give up her hard-won power, she also enters a new level of commitment to herself. His willingness to embrace the truth she sees with her heart confirms her in her perception. To put it bluntly: they both acknowledge that what she was feeling (however badly she expressed it), was right all along. Gradually she becomes more and more confident, even fearless, in the seeing of her heart.

But what does it mean for a man ‘not to defend’? Is it just “yes dear, I’m hearing you dear, oh how awful that must have been for you dear”? No. Not to defend oneself from a woman means to be penetrated by the seeing of her heart. Which hurts. It means to be able to rest, together, in the pain of her seeing - and not to try to change it at all. When a man can be penetrated in this way, he can penetrate. To the degree he welcomes her in, he will be welcomed in.

I see this happening in the lives of the couples we work with. We call it The Archetypal Model of relationship because as soft-man re-claims his power and then matures into the fullness of his manhood, and hard-woman

reclaims her tenderness and matures into the fullness of her womanhood, we see an Archetypal Encounter taking place. We see the meeting of Man and Woman, the meeting of The Masculine and The Feminine – each one open to the other, without denying its own power.

While remaining predominantly masculine, he opens to his feminine by opening to her, and while remaining predominantly feminine, she opens to her masculine by opening to him. Both become whole, and a vast Archetypal Encounter takes place through two tiny human beings. It's exquisite. But it's not a quick fix. It's an intense shared journey. But it is absolutely beautiful to see couples sharing a sense of their relationship as a journey – a journey in which his development in his masculinity is supporting her development in her femininity, and her development in her femininity is supporting his development in his masculinity. It is beautiful and inspires deep respect to see a couple with a sense of being 'allies', of each supporting the other in their own empowerment. And what unfolds between the empowered masculine and the empowered feminine is awesome. And this awesome potential is what is exploding so painfully, so repetitively, and so unconsciously within the millions of Rows Of Our Times.

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