

Love Lingers Here: Intimate Enduring Relationships

IX. Stability and Remarriage

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In our aspirations regarding the formation of a long-term, enduring relationship we tend to look for stability and even tranquility -- especially given the turbulence in virtually all other areas of our lives.

The Fourth Myth

So we hold on to the fourth myth: living happily ever after. Frieda and Vern, for instance, have lived together in remarkable tranquility for more than fifty years. When talking about their marriage, both Frieda and Vern were hard-pressed to identify any times when their marriage was in trouble even after having raised three children, lived through a bankruptcy together, and confronted (like all long-term couples) radical changes in the world in which they live. One wonders if Frieda and Vern either are hiding their problems from the interviewer (perhaps even from each other) or if they have truly lived for many years in a simpler place and time, in which couples truly could live happily ever after, with minimal need for soul-searching reexamination of their personal lives or their lives with one another.

When we look at one of the younger couples we interviewed, Patrick and Mary Anne, we find a clearly articulated vision of stability and tranquility that seems to parallel that described by Frieda and Vern. Yet for Patrick and Mary Anne, this vision seemed quite out-of-keeping with the era in which they grew up. Perhaps it was wishful thinking brought about by viewing "Leave It to Beaver" or "Ozzie and Harriet" reruns -- as they think about their own upcoming marriage. Both Patrick and Mary Anne were initially hesitant to talk about their mutual aspirations for "it's too serious a subject." Patrick, however, volunteered the following image:

I always think of [marriage] positively. I'm kind of idealistic about it. I always think of good things about it, like raising a family, how the kids will be, how they'll look, traveling with her, being more committed. This summer we did have some problems, so I see being married will be more intense because leaving (each other) will not be as feasible as before you are married. It's not an option until the fatal end (laughter). . .when all else fails.

Clearly, for Patrick, a 22 year old male, marriage is both attractive and a bit frightening. He knows there is a way out (divorce, death) but hopes that this will never occur. He goes on to be somewhat more specific about his image of marriage exhibiting by word (if not deed) a more "liberated" vision of the male's role in marriage:

I see both of us working, going out, carrying equal responsibilities at home, like cooking, cleaning, laundry --- depending on who is overworked. I see us spending a lot of time together, but I think we will have other friends. It's hard to know -- once you get married, all things change. I feel comfortable in sharing and having a joint account, as long as she does not get out of control. She does not like me to spend money on her, although I enjoy it. It's fun for me to buy her things. I don't like the fact that she doesn't let me -- although I would be broke if she let me (laughter).

Mary Anne then articulates her own vision of their future together. She is somewhat more practical and "down-to-earth" (as Patrick already noted), and also offers an interesting shift when she talks about "I" at the point of having a baby:

It's like having a companion that you live with. You go to work, come home and have dinner together. Sometimes problems arise. I imagine after awhile you get sick of the person sometimes, .and sometimes you need your privacy. Once you get married you wanna be sure you'll be together for a long time. Expenses should be shared. I think 50-50. Not like putting your names on milk cartons or keeping your receipts. There must be a joint account. You withdraw as you need it, and put back when you can. I will have children after college, and when I can afford it. So I can get toys for them, but I don't want to spoil them.

Patrick and Mary Anne hold an image of their future relationship together that is a mixture of both fantasy and reality. The reality of contemporary couples is that there are periods of both stability and instability. Patrick and Mary Anne seem to realize this, though they might not yet be aware as to the areas in which they are likely to experience the greatest instability. Our bet is that it will be in the areas of finances and decisions regarding the best time to have their first baby. In our interviews we found that virtually all long-term relationships involved frequent, profound changes.

Alice and Tom, for instance, said that there "have been many major changes" in their relationship since they first met. Some of the changes that they enumerated include: having children, becoming homeowners, adjusting to new living environments and cultures, raising children, and unanticipated pressures from parents and other relatives. These are rather standard changes that most couples confront over a lifetime. In addition, Alice and Tom -- like many couples — confronted several "intrusive life events" that profoundly impacted on their life. On several occasions, each of them lost their job or had to work at night to support their family. On one occasion, they also faced the very difficult decision to have an abortion. These events precipitated crises in their individual and collective lives. The couple's character was forged on this anvil of challenge and change.

One of the most poignant statements regarding this interplay between love, relationship and change was made by Peter Kaukonen, one of the people who conducted our interviews. Peter proposes that:

The issue of love is deceptively simple and realistically complex. If we-choose to love in others what we would well love in ourselves, then the nature of love -- presuming that the individual, his notion of self, his self-image, his needs and his awareness of those needs are in a state of flux -- must be in a state of flux as well. Love and the way it intertwines with a relationship is always in a state of flux and change. As a relationship develops, individual awareness and perceptions shift and change and, presumably, one's self-knowledge alters as well. One's needs for change: one's needs for -- and ability to request -- admiration, acceptance, approval, encouragement are all part of love, loving, and being loved.

Three Models of Enduring Relationships

Some of the books that have been written over the years about the ingredients of a successful marriage are filled with optimism, A "successful" relationship is one in which each member of the couple has maximum freedom to grow and change. If there is strain and stress in the relationship, then the couple should reexamine and rework the relationship or break it up. If a couple's relationship does not yield a modicum of happiness and support then it is unsuccessful. Susan Campbell represents this perspective in *The Couple's Journey*:

coupling [is] a vehicle for attaining psychological and spiritual harmony or wholeness for the couple. . . . [C]oupling, like life, is a continually changing process. There are (almost) no insurmountable problems, since if we stay with a situation long enough it will change into something else (or at least our perspective on it will change). Yet there are also (almost) no lasting solutions, since each "solution" sets the stage for the emergence of new problems.

The destination [of a couple's journey] (never quite fully attained) is wholeness: that ideal state in which all my parts are in harmonious communication with each other, with my partner and with the world beyond our relationship. it is that state when "everything's working together."

A second school of thought about the desired mode of development among couples is filled much more with existential despair. A good relationship is one in which there is considerable pain and challenge. Two members of a "successful" couple will encourage one another to learn and grow -- often in spite of themselves. The spirit of this approach to the development of couples is captured in the following quotations by Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig (from *Marriage: Dead or Alive*):

A marriage only works if one opens himself to exactly that which he would never ask for otherwise. . . Marriage is not comfortable and harmonious; rather, it is a place of individuation where a person rubs up against himself and against his partner, bumps up against him in love and in rejection, and in this fashion learns to know himself, the world, good and evil, the heights and the depths.

The so-called happy marriage is unequivocally finished [in our society]. Marriage as a welfare institution has no justification anymore. Psychologists who feel

themselves committed to the goal of well-being would do better, if they really took their standpoint seriously, to recommend and suggest other forms of living together, rather than to waste their energy trying to patch up a fundamentally impossible institution with a lot of technical treatment modalities.

Another, somewhat less gloomy representative of this perspective (who was influenced like Guggenbuhl-Craig by the work of Carl Jung), Thomas Moore (1994, p. xiv) suggests that: "pain and difficulty can sometimes serve as the pathway to a new level of involvement. They do not necessarily mean that there is something inherently wrong with the relationship; on the contrary, relationship troubles may be a challenging initiation into intimacy."

Other observers of the development of couples similarly suggest that neither the optimistic nor existential viewpoints are quite accurate, though each has a partial grasp on what seems to be a typical developmental pattern for couples. Carter and McGoldrick have found that couples (and families in general) move, as do individuals, through developmental "plateaus" and periods of "transition". The plateaus are "extended periods of relative structural stability" -- they typically involve some change, but this change is of a "first-order" variety, i.e. involving more or less of something, rather than something new and different. The Transformational periods involve "second-order" change, according to Carter and McGoldrick, in which some fundamental change occurs.

Sometimes, these changes involve "normative events", such as marriage, birth of a child or retirement. These normative events are the "givens" in most relationships. Virtually all couples can expect them to occur, for they involve the basic issues of life and death, love and work. Other significant, transforming events are labeled by Carter and McGoldrick as "paranormative" -- they include conflicts (marital separations or divorce), illnesses (e.g. miscarriages), relocations of the household, changes in socioeconomic status and external events, such as war, that can result in massive dislocation for the couple or family. At least one or more of the paranormative events are likely to occur in most relationships, and require that second-order transformation take place.

The Process of Remarriage

In the study that we have conducted, neither the optimistic nor existential viewpoint were quite accurate, though each has a partial grasp on what seems to be a typical developmental pattern for couples. Typically, our couples described themselves as moving through periods of relative stability and considerable contentment, followed by periods of significant stress and disillusionment, often accompanied by profound changes in the structure or goals of the relationship.

The information that we collected suggest that most couples go through these periods of stress and transition at least once during their life together. After a honeymoon period of relative stability and happiness, changing conditions in the relationship or in the outside world impacts the relationship. The trust that has been established is eroded. Minor annoyances and complaints begin to accumulate. In many marriages, these are not voiced or given sufficient attention. The fantasies of the "ideal" mate and of "living happily ever after" are dispelled as a result of daily interactions. The accumulated experiences with one's mate, particularly related to the mundane issues of life, lead to disillusionment and disinterest.

While most couples repeatedly move through a series of developmental stages (that we will describe more fully in subsequent chapters) in which many of these problematic areas are repeatedly confronted, one or more major issues often begin to emerge that never seem to be adequately addressed by the couple. Central issues may concern time away from home, inequity in household work, allocation of personal funds, or any of a wide array of problem areas. The couple is faced with a decision which is often not fully acknowledged, but rather is acted out in an informal, often unconscious manner: do we remain together as we now are or do we attempt to change or disband this relationship?

On the one hand, it is usually less risky to keep doing what we have always done. We know each other and we certainly know how we feel about each other in these problematic situations in which we repeatedly find ourselves. On the other hand, our relationship is no longer satisfying either of us and we assume an even greater risk if we don't do something dramatic about our relationship. Namely, we risk either living the rest of our life in a stagnant,

inhospitable relationship or losing everything we have built up by breaking off our relationship. Thus, we must risk our relationship if we want to save or renew it. Ironically, couples seem to change precisely because they want to remain in some sense un-changed.

Typically, the second path is chosen when one or both partners decide to work on the relationship and perhaps to alter some major part of it. There is always a risk in doing so, for the alteration will inevitably force the two partners to change the accustomed ways in which they relate to one another. These changes may destroy the relationship. It is often even more frightening when we realize in the midst of this process that the change in our relationship with our partner may also force each of us to change some part of ourselves!

What is our model for such a dramatic change in an intimate relationship? This type of change certainly doesn't fit with the myth of "living happily ever after," nor does it fit with most of our other images of the perfect relationship. We looked around for help—and found it in several movies of the 1930s! Stanley Cavell writes about a process that he calls "remarriage" in his analysis of the romantic, "screwball" movies of the 1930s (for example, "Bringing Up Baby" and "The Philadelphia Story"). Cavell suggests that all of these movies emerged not from the depression (as "escapist" movies to distract people from their personal misfortunes), but from an emerging women's consciousness (that became dormant again after the Second World War). Cavell believes that the early thirties represents a time when women in many modern societies sought consolidation of their gains in the public arena by translating these gains into the private arena.

The general construction of the remarriage in film narrative (which always occurred among rich people who have the "luxury" of reflection and dialogue) was first, a running quarrel which is forcing apart two people who in some sense view themselves as people representing a much larger and eternal struggle between men and women. In the midst of this ongoing (in some sense ever-lasting) quarrel, these two people confront the challenge and risk of examining their relationship in some depth and experimenting with an alternative mode of relationship. This examination requires that the two people leave one another for a period of time. There is often a divorce or at least a physical separation. This reexamination in the movie implies the risk that these two people may never get back together once they have

begun the reexamination.

According to Cavell, in order for both partners to take this risk, they must at some level (often unconscious) believe that their partner is capable of and willing to undergo the stress associated with this period of testing and transition. Both partners must also believe that the relationship is worth saving. It is special enough to be worth substantial psychic investment. Cavell suggests that these 1930 comedies inevitably end with a remarriage (actually or figuratively) of the couple and with an accompanying new sense of relationship and a heightened sense of sexuality. The couple lives "happily ever after" — or at least until the next remarriage.

The remarriage process in real life resembles that found in the movies of the 1930s. Two partners in a relationship get a psychological "divorce" from one another in order to take a fresh look at the relationship, to tinker with the relationship, and to try out radically new ways of relating to one another and other people. The two partners then come back together in a remarriage, often with a second marriage ceremony, or, at the very least, a second honeymoon. If either partner is unwilling to take the risk of temporary divorce from the other person in the relationship in order to work toward a remarriage, then the couple must consider one of three other options. One or both partners may decide to assign the relationship less importance and to invest their interest elsewhere -- in their work, in their hobbies, in community service, and so forth. Alternatively, one or both partners may decide to work on another significant relationship. He or she might have an affair, focus on a relationship with one or more of their children, or spend more time "out with the boys (or girls)". A third option is to get an actual, legal divorce, in order to disengage from one's partner and not work further on their relationship.

At some point, almost all couples find themselves in a profoundly disturbing and immovable impasse. No matter what they do, they cannot escape; there are no more areas of conversation to open up, no more strategies to try, no more activities to limit. They feel totally stuck. Some couples separate at this point. Many others, perhaps only through inertia or devotion to children or to the idea of marriage, stay together. Most couples simply endure, emerging diminished but essentially unchanged after their ordeal. While the periods of stress and

transition are very brief or of minimal intensity for some couples, these periods do seem to exist in virtually all relationships.

Most couples that seem to be successful in sustaining a supportive, yet growing relationship, have lived through and worked through these transformational periods by means of some type of remarriage to the same partner. For some couples, there is only one such period of transition and recommitment. For other couples, these occur rather frequently, but are usually still interspersed with intervals of relative tranquility. Among those couples who have not engaged in a recommitment, there is a strong tendency for stagnation to set in or for the couple to divorce, separate or live “alone together” in an unsatisfactory relationship.

We have concluded from our interviews that the concept of remarriage is critical in understanding the dynamics of contemporary intimate relationships that are enduring. Couples of the 21st Century are facing complex, unpredictable and turbulent times. Their relationship is unlikely to remain viable and vital for many years without one or more of these significant readjustments of their relationship.

One typical married couple spoke of periods of relative tranquility in their lives together and of periods of considerable stress and soul-searching. This couple --- we will call them John and Evelyn -- identified a ten year period in their life together when they shared many interests in common. John and Evelyn both enjoyed horseback riding and other outdoor activities. During this period of time, their children were very young and (by mutual agreement) primarily the responsibility of Evelyn. John and Evelyn both worked, but made relatively small amounts of money. They didn't seem to need much money, however, for their mutual interests (and small children) kept them at home or pursuing inexpensive outdoor recreation.

By the end of this ten year period, things had changed dramatically. John seriously injured his foot and was unable to ride horses any more without considerable pain. Both Evelyn and John assumed new jobs with increased responsibility and salary. The children were moving into junior and senior high school, requiring the attention of both parents in new ways. The family moved several thousand miles to a new home, leaving behind their family roots and strong

small town community ties. Within two years, John asked Evelyn for a trial separation.

During the following year, John and Evelyn lived apart, though saw each other on frequent occasions. They decided to move back together after this year long trial separation, and within a year had reestablished a supportive relationship. At the time when they were interviewed, John and Evelyn had decided to take a year off from their work so that they might live in a very different region of the United States, while both worked on projects of specific interest to each of them. The children were off to college, so this seemed like a perfect time for John and Evelyn to reestablish their old, pre-children rapport, while working out a new way of living together. During this year of intensive interaction, John and Evelyn established more open communication with one another, while pursuing their individual areas of interest in new and vigorous ways.

The Variety of Remarriages

In our interviews we found that remarriage takes many different forms, though there are certain common factors: a willingness to risk the relationship in order to make it work, a significant restructuring of the relationship with each party making some concessions and reframing the relationship in new terms, and a resultant revitalization of the relationship based on this new alignment.

David and Meryl exemplify the typical remarriage scenario. They had been married for twelve years and lived together a total of fifteen years when they were interviewed. Both of them are in their mid-thirties and they have two children, ages 2 and 12. Meryl indicates that she has always responded to David's temper by refusing to communicate, i.e. "clamming up," which was the strategy she also used around her stepfather when she was younger. For David, anger took the form of verbal outbursts and Meryl was unable to believe that anyone who loved another was capable of treating them in such a manner. When faced with the wall of silence, David felt frustrated and unwilling to even try to change what was going on, thereby totally shutting off any chance of communication or resolution of the conflict. Eventually (perhaps a week later), Meryl would explode and David "couldn't see where her anger was coming from."

This unsuccessful process of resolving conflicts is a typical ingredient in most remarriages. For Meryl and David these unresolved conflicts culminated in a remarriage four years ago. Meryl reached a point where she concluded that she couldn't change David, so she had to determine if she was going to stay in the relationship. Like many couples, the break began in the bedroom. Meryl began sleeping on the couch, while David retreated to the bedroom and would have no contact with Meryl. Eventually, after six nights, David came out of the bedroom and began talking to Meryl. First, he asked if she wanted a divorce and eventually began to talk with her about their interaction and the lack of communication which brought them to this impasse. Both of them indicated that this was a major breakthrough in their ability to communicate. They both acknowledged that they were in trouble as a couple -- a key ingredient in any successful remarriage -- and that they both needed to change their behavior if the relationship was to survive -- a second key ingredient.

Alice and Fred identify a period of time in their marriage that they label the "crying baby" episode as an example of their own remarriage. Alice describes this incident:

My second baby, all she did was cry. I would breast feed her and she would cry. We later found out she had severe colic. We were doing a major remodel of the whole house at this time. As you can see we're still remodeling. It's been three years of it. But at that time, we had bare walls. I'd be up walking the baby all night and remodeling took place all day. The stress level became extreme. Plus, Fred couldn't get much sleep but still had to go to work each day. I became very abusive, both verbally and physically, especially toward the oldest daughter, Suzanne, who was four at the time. And then the hormones kicked in from Post Menstrual Syndrome. The thing that saved it is Fred never went into a fight or power struggle.

As is often the case with remarriages the primary problem confronted by Alice and Fred, that is the crying baby, was exacerbated by the impact of other stressors that are either independent of or related to the primary stressor, such as the remodeling of the house, concerns about the potential impact of loss of sleep on Fred's job performances, and Alice's abusive behavior. Typically, the crisis in a relationship which brings about a remarriage is not

caused by one, isolated stressor, but rather by the simultaneous impact or close interrelationship between a variety of different stressors that impact on the different domains of a couple's life.

Even more importantly, it is not so much the individual event, or even a series of events, that defines the critical stages of a relationship, but rather the interpretation that is placed on their events -- or more accurately the stories that are told about these events. In the case of Alice and Fred, the period of tending the crying baby passed. As Alice noted, her daughter "then became a happy child." But the long term ramifications of the event -- the guilt and sadness that comes from how they treated each other during the incident -- are still being carried by the parents. Alice stated it this way: "ever since (our baby was crying so much) we've related worse. The harmony was destroyed."

Fred indicated that he responded to this multiple-crisis in his life with Alice by "walking away" when his life at home got too tense. Alice observed that she "got into a 'box' for four days until he would approach me and then we'd normalize." Fred then cracks a joke: "The difference between PMS and a terrorist is you can negotiate with a terrorist." Alice notes that "Fred is a well-grounded person and a stable anchor." However, Alice went on to say that ever since this set of events (which happened two years ago):

the consideration for one another got damaged. . . . We are just now concentrating on ourselves again. I had to learn to let go. And stop pushing Fred to get done with the house. I put myself into a recovery program. A Twelve Step program . . . What is happening now is that Fred has had to learn to really hear me. And see value in what I have to say. I'm facing him with the whole truth. He has to accept that I'm changing and that's hard for a spouse and threatening. He must be willing to let me change. He must be willing to grow with me.

The interviewer then asked both Alice and Fred why they are still together -- what kept them together during this difficult remarriage process. Fred indicated that after their second child, Alice threatened him with divorce. Fred responded by telling her that "she didn't know how much this marriage meant to me." "And," according to Alice, "I started to feel that way too." She went on to conclude that "we both have a commitment, a dedication to the marriage

itself, even during those times when we don't have that much dedication to each other personally.”

The distinction between the two partners in a relationship and the couple itself is critical in this instance (as well as in many other remarriages). Alice and Fred didn't like each other very much during this period of stress and felt very little commitment to each; however, they both felt a strong commitment to the third entity—the relationship—and stayed together during the remarriage in order to keep this third entity intact. When threatened with the possibility of divorce, Alice and Fred looked toward their commitment to the marriage even more than toward their commitment to each other.

Fred went on to indicate that their relationship "is the first sign of stability I've ever had in my life. It brings continuity to my life. It's an opportunity to experience family. An opportunity to create something bigger than ourselves." Alice believes that:

trust is what's holding us together right now and will help us bring this marriage back from the brink. Neither of us would cheat on the other. Neither of us would purposefully hurt one another. Equally important is the freedom that we have that comes from being tolerant of one another. Also the fact that we allow and encourage each other to grow.

Private and Public Remarriages

Many of the couples we interviewed have gone through fairly difficult times. However, their difficulties are often only fully known to their close friends or therapist. Other people in their lives are often less cognizant of their difficulties. They may only sense that everything isn't "quite right" with this couple.

In other instances, the remarriage is quite apparent to everyone. For instance, Dora and Jim clearly went through a profound remarriage that was known to everyone in their lives. Literally everything was up for grabs and everyone was aware that they were going through difficult times. Their remarriage was particularly visible because it centered initially on Dora's pregnancy. Jim and Dora weren't married at the time, having chosen to live together rather than make a long-term, formal commitment. When they announced that Dora was

pregnant, all of their friends and family were outraged. Dora had already had two abortions and neither of them had either a job or money. When Dora found out that she was pregnant, everything began to fall apart:

There was an intensity to the situation . . . I felt this energy inside of me so I couldn't do it (have an abortion) this time. Our friends thought we were insane . . . Our friends and families abandoned us. They thought we were crazy. . . . It was a nightmare for three years. I broke part of my pelvis during delivery, so I couldn't walk, even to get to the bathroom. We moved to a bad area of [the large city where they were living], because we wanted to get away from the anger of those around us.

Yet, these hellish times were viewed much more positively by Jim:

I go up in the morning and carried Dora to the bathroom. Then I fed her and David [their son] and changed him and then went to work. All I could think about all day was getting back to Dora and David. I worked like a madman so that I could come home early and be with them. I was on automatic. Nothing else mattered. I wasn't unhappy at all.

Unfortunately, while Jim felt quite good about his role as parent (in many ways to both Dora and David) and as reliable breadwinner, this very stance caused difficulties in the relationship between Jim and Dora. Dora indicates that during this three year period she felt very isolated, particularly with Jim going to work every day. Previously, Jim had been unemployed, which meant that he was around more often. Now, he is working and she is confined to her home because of a new-born child, because of her own broken pelvis and because of the dangerous community to which they had moved: "I didn't like being pregnant and immobile for six months after. We became holed up, like hermits. I was in shock at not being able to get around, even if I could go outside into the bad neighborhood." Dora also suffered from a change in her perception of self: "Before the pregnancy, I was a size one. Afterwards, I was fat. This totally changed my self-concept. Jim was surrounded by these gorgeous women all the time. Maybe because I was in bed all the time, I was not very grounded."

The stage was set for a marital crisis. All of the ingredients were there. Jim was annoyed. He

had finally become a responsible adult and was loving his role, only to find that Dora resented his work and his time away from home. She felt lousy about herself and about the predicament that she and Jim had put her in. Dora recalls that she "was agitated about everything," Jim asked her if she wanted a divorce. This is the critical point. Do they want to work toward a redesign of their relationship, or do they want to give up and turn to independent paths? Dora answered Jim by saying "no." She backed this up by deciding to return to school after her pelvis healed in order to mend her self-concept:

Jim paid for me to go back to school and earn my degree. He has provided everything we have ever had, physically. He bought us this house, which brought us to this [much safer] town. I didn't want to move here, but he got a good deal. This put us in a major transition in our lives.

Thus, they were able to turn around Dora's envy, by coupling Jim's enjoyment in becoming a reliable breadwinner with Dora's interest in improving her self-image through further education. Rather than envying Jim's success, Dora was able to build on it by allowing Jim to pay for her education. In addition, rather than blaming Jim for their move to a new community, Dora went along with the move and found some real benefits in moving to a much smaller town. Rather than complaining about the isolation, Dora saw it as an opportunity to come closer together as a family: "this house isolated us. We began to clean up. We also stopped fighting as much." Jim noted that: "we moved away from the party crowd. We left the wild times, the bands, the drugs and alcohol." In getting away from the party life, according to Dora, the two of them "didn't have to try as hard any more to grow up. It solidified our growing up."

This process of remarriage was highly visible in part because they worked out their new relationship in the midst of complex family dynamics. Dora's family is upper middle class, WASPish and very traditional. They were able to accept Jim because he is a "nice guy" and hard-working. On the other hand, Jim's family is more "ethnic having come from another country." Jim has ten brothers and sisters, and his sisters especially took a dislike to Dora: "they would wait until Jim was out of the room and then they would attack me. I left the house in tears, many times." Jim: "I kept asking you to stay away from them." Dora: "I know, but I guess, coming from my background, I thought we should do 'the family thing' on

holidays and such, but then they would isolate me and then rip me to shreds. My family had their difficulties with Jim, but they're more underground."

Thus, in the midst of their remarriage to one another, both Jim and Dora had to redefine their relationship with parents and siblings. They both increasingly detached themselves from their families of origin and in doing so began to claim ownership for their own individual identities, independent of their family histories. Dora refused to adopt the old family pattern of helplessness and resentment. Instead she went back to college and built on, rather than resented, Jim's success. She also became more cognizant of imposing her own childhood fears onto Jim and now is creating a new relationship with Jim that is distinctive and nurturing:

Growing up, I always had a deep sense of aloneness. I thought that I would die alone. Yet, as close as Jim and I are, I don't know about that any more. In any case, I don't have that feeling of aloneness any more with Jim. . . . Us together is different from me alone.

It is this sense of connectedness that has kept Jim and Dora together throughout the difficult process of remarriage. Rather than looking elsewhere for a new relationship, they both determined that it is better to work out a current relationship, with all of its hardships. Dora puts it this way:

I am not looking to trade partners. I am not endlessly fascinated with other human beings. Why would I give up a deeply satisfying relationship for another face? I would rather spend my time with other things than to give up my center and go out looking for another human being. We are from the same light. I am convinced, after that first kiss. This is the best part. I have no desire for that alone feeling.

Jim and Dora represent one end of the continuum. Their remarriage was highly visible, for it was precipitated by very public events -- the birth of a baby, Dora's fractured pelvis, moving to a new community, fights with their families, fights with one another. Furthermore, the resolution of their conflicts was also public: Dora's return to school, moving to a new community, spending substantially less time with their parents and siblings. If we had interviewed members of their family and friends they probably would have all agreed that Jim

and Dora went through a major transition in their life together.

By contrast, Arlene and Kevin recently went through a much less dramatic remarriage, that was probably no less meaningful for them than was Dora and Jim's highly public remarriage. Arlene and Kevin knew that their relationship was in trouble. As a result, they took a trip to an ocean side town near the city where they live. This trip gave them an opportunity to refocus their lives. They both recall sitting by the fire in their room overlooking the ocean and talking for hours about their relationship and their future together. They describe it as a great experience that they don't usually have the opportunity to take, because of their hectic lifestyles. Like many couples undergoing a remarriage, Kevin and Arlene found a sanctuary in which to work on their relationship. For them, the sanctuary was a seaside inn. For others, the sanctuary is a supportive marital counselor, a week alone at home (with all the cellphones shut off), or a marriage enrichment weekend.

Early in the day, Kevin and Arlene took a hike through the hills and "just enjoyed time with each other." Kevin said that the whole trip was really wonderful and that he "drove home feeling closer to Arlene than ever before." He remembers feeling that Arlene understood everything that he was trying to communicate to her that weekend. "This is very different from friends who just hear what you're trying to say to them. Sometimes it feels like we are so in-tune that we can see into each other's heart and mind." It should be noted that Kevin is hyper-romantic and that the bloom may soon come off the rose of this remarriage, just as it did off the bloom of this couple's initial infatuation with one another. Nevertheless, brief remarriages of this type -- be they ever so simple and seemingly inconsequential -- can keep a relationship in tact through many difficult periods of trial and tribulation.

Some couples, like Jim and Dora, go through a slow, often painful and very public re-evaluation of their relationship, leading to a gradual shift in the norms, rules and shared values of the relationship. By contrast, other remarriages seem to be precipitated by a single, defining event that is often quite private, as in the case of Kevin and Arlene. A single moment of clarity brings about the remarriage.

Tally and Kasha live in the United States, where Tally works with a computer firm and Kasha

is a school teacher. They both come from well-established families back in India and seem to have made a successful adjustment to American culture. After some difficult years of transition they are now happy with their life together and proud of the hard work they have done. The largest and most continuous cause of stress in their relationship has been their relationship with Tally's mother. She was against the marriage from the beginning. In fact, there had been a problem even before they met. Tally was alienated from his mother and was living on his own from the time he was sixteen. He didn't invite her to the wedding and when she showed up, he ignored her. Soon after Tally and Kasha moved to the United States, his mother followed. Tally continued to ignore her, but he was becoming more and more consumed by his anger and resentment. This took its toll on the marriage.

The time that Tally and Kasha spent together was becoming routine. "Every night we would go through the same thing," said Tally, "how was your day today? How was school? How's so and so?" "We were talking," adds Kesha, "but I never thought we were getting through. He was so angry and intense those years. He wasn't mean, just fearful or domineering. Finally, I got a job. I felt he had stressed out so much that I had to leave the house. I couldn't be around this person with all his troubles. I spent more time with my friends and my children. I couldn't deal with him."

The problem for Tally went back to abuse that he suffered at the hands of his mother when he was a child. Tally was unable to deal with this directly. He talks about how this was finally resolved:

My whole personality had to change for me to finally learn how to deal with my mother. The funny thing was I had been doing all this work with other people, with human development workshops and marriage encounters, but when it came to my mother, I would react so negatively. I think the fact that when we left India, Kesha and I had to depend on and trust each other made us able to work through this. It was when I was finally able to admit that my mother was ill that I began to feel healthy myself. While I was trying to deal with all this, my sister and my brothers all came over and came to me with their problems with my mother. I had to keep going through the whole thing again and again. But when I realized finally that I was not the only one abused by my mother, I was able to get a

clearer perspective. That was the real turning point -- when I was finally free from my mother.

Kasha marks the turning point in their remarriage not in terms of Tally's gradual reconciliation with his mother's abusive behavior, but rather as a specific time when she saw herself and Tally on national television:

Recently, I was able to see Tally again, as I had seen him that first time [when they first met.] We had become very involved in a parenting class. Because of our different approaches to parenting, we wanted to get some outside help. Tally was one of the few fathers, actually the only one, to stay with the class. When the producers of the [national daytime talk show] called around looking for couples for the show, we were asked to be on it. They flew us to New York. It was when I saw us on TV together -- it was like seeing Tally again for the first time. Suddenly I realized I had been [in love] all this time, but I'd forgotten what he was like.

Tally and Kasha had some real strengths going into their marriage. They were a good match culturally and religiously. These values supported them and gave them a clearer identity as a couple in the larger, more heterogeneous American environment in which they had chosen to live. They were able to break through the barrier of Tally's childhood abuse by personal work and by working together. Tally spent several years in therapy dealing with his relationship with his family. As a couple, they invested in some common tasks outside themselves, most notably their children and their parenting skills. This hard, daily work paid off, leading to a refocusing of the marriage and to a successful remarriage at the point that Kasha saw them together on TV.

Frequency of Remarriage

Usually, a remarriage is infrequent in an enduring relationship. A couple may move through this painful and frightening process only once or twice in a life time. Most couples we know will acknowledge that they have gone through at least one remarriage, but usually they report no more than three or four. However, in some cases, remarriages frequently occur and are a regular part of the relationship because the partners regularly go through major conflicts, readjustments, and renewed vitality in their relationship. A fabled celebrity relationship

comes immediately to mind: the remarkable relationship between Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. They were married twice, but apparently went through a host of remarriages in between and after their two formal ceremonies. In this celebrity case, as in many, the remarriage process centered on substance abuse, yet we suspect that many other issues were interwoven in their relationship. Remarriage rarely rests on a single problem (even if identified as such), addressing instead a broad range of problems for which both partners must assume some responsibility.

Delores and Bart are not celebrities. However, they reported during their interview that even though their current relationship was remarkably satisfying, they had, in fact, already undergone two remarriages during their time together, and were undergoing a third such transition at the present time (despite the apparent lack of major conflicts in the description of their current relationship). It seemed quite clear to the interviewer that the ability of Delores and Bart to weather these periods and to confront them honestly was in large part the strength of their relationship.

Early in their marriage, Delores and Bart confronted troubles powerful enough to find them—like many other couples—considering divorce. Seeing a therapist, they discovered tools that allowed them to better communicate with one another. As Delores explains it, the two of them “decided to see if we couldn’t work better together. And we did and that made the relationship ten times better.” Five months ago they began to drift apart again, as Delores became more focused on her work. They seemed to have less and less in common and disagreements seemed more frequent. Largely at Bart’s prodding, they sought out couple therapy again, and began to confront issues that had been building. The result is that, as Bart explains, “in the last couple of weeks we’ve made some major shifts about how we perceive the relationship, and have undergone a kind of reevaluation of values that led us to enter into this marriage.”

While, Delores and Bart are a very romantic couple, they describe their relationship in pragmatic terms. Bart suggested that:

marriage is certainly different from anything I thought it would be like when I was a kid. I always figured it was like, you know, in the fairy tales. You got

married and if you were compatible then things would work themselves out and it would be real easy. And it's just not that way . . . I mean, you have to really make a commitment . . . and be willing to go through some bad times sometimes, for what is wonderful most of the time. When it's effortless it's wonderful, and when you have to work at it it's really hard . . . you have to really keep in mind how much you love that person.

Thus, a process of frequent remarriage need not reflect a bad marriage. Rather, this process may suggest that the two partners are committed to working very hard on the relationship, despite its ups and downs.

In other instances, there are frequent remarriages because the partners have adopted a life style that includes frequent separations, independent life paths and periods of re-acquaintance and readjustment. Ted and Velia exemplify this in-out pattern given their decision to own a home in Wyoming, where Ted lives full time, and Velia's decision to pursue an advanced degree at an East Coast graduate school. While Velia comes to visit Ted as often as possible, they spend as much as one third of the year living separately. According to Ted, "last year, we were apart for three months. . . . I didn't like it! It's difficult." Velia added that their frequent separation "seems very unnatural. We can do it. It's not as much fun. Definitely lacking. Feel a need for the physical and emotional connection." As in the case of other forms of remarriage, however, Ted noted that "when we do get together, it's like falling in love all over again. Like a honeymoon."

Ted later notes that their marriage has remained vital precisely because of these separations and because of the new ways in which they relate to each other when they come back together. These are new ways both because they have had time apart and because each time they are apart both of them go through their own mini-growth period. In offering advice to other couples, Ted urges partners to "try and create their own romance and not with props, etc., but to create circumstances that are romantic." Ted notes that "most couples grow tired of each other; they don't create new spaces for each other. One of the biggest reasons couples break up. . . .they become used to each other. They look for new stimulation." As painful and disruptive as their life pattern is, Ted and Velia at least have the joy and challenge of constantly reinventing their relationship and going through a series of remarriages that keeps

their relationship alive and never predictable or tiresome.

Staying the Course

The most important common ingredient in successful remarriages appears to be a commitment to working within the relationship rather than outside it. It is very tempting to simply leave the relationship, and to either go it alone for a while or shift to another relationship and either have a secret (or not so secret) affair while continuing with one's current relationship, or choose to separate from the current partner in order to begin building the new relationship.

Glenda and Roy had been married for five years when their relationship began to fall apart. The symptom' are quite common in not only our interviews, but also many other books about couples, as well as novels, movies and television soap operas. Roy was no longer spending much of his free time with Glenda. Instead, he was opting out for his male friends. Glenda felt like she was being "taken for granted and unappreciated." When she tried to get Roy to spend more evenings at home, he resented her interference and didn't want Glenda "telling me what to do." As a result, they began to drift apart, they fought "about everything, and could not get down to the real issues."

At this point, Roy and Glenda were at a choice point. Do they attempt a remarriage or shift their attention to other relationships? Glenda chose the latter course. She had an affair and, in essence, challenged Roy to catch and confront her. As in the case of many couples, Glenda and Roy tried to restore their marriage by having a child. This didn't help. Childbirth only exacerbated the problems. Yet, indirectly, their child did draw them to a different choice point. They decided to work on their marriage. Roy admitted that he knew of Glenda's affair and acknowledged his own role in bringing about this situation. Furthermore, he recognized that he was committed to his relationship with Glenda because he was not willing to "let someone else raise my child."

So they got to work on their relationship. First of all, they became more open with one another regarding the influences of external factors on their marriage. For instance, since Roy

was an only son, there had been extensive interference by his mother. Glenda began to openly discuss this issue for the first time with Roy and found that he was willing to confront his mother regarding her behavior. Both Roy and Glenda also sought individual help during this remarriage process and discovered how their past histories were influencing their current relationship. They broke up some of the games that they played with each other, and they began to make more decisions together.

Their remarriage seems to have worked. Their sexual relationship has begun to blossom as never before. Furthermore, neither Roy nor Glenda are now willing to "give up what we have and go through all of that again with someone else." Thus, they have come to recognize the value of a central ingredient in successful remarriages: a commitment to the relationship and an unwillingness to be distracted from this relationship by either partner having an affair with another person.

Key Chapter Points

Enduring couples:

- Make conscious choices to work at preserving the relationship when enmeshed in trouble and chaos
- Move through period of relative stability and considerable contentment followed by periods of significant stress and disillusionment resulting in profound changes in the structure or goals of the relations—remarriage.
- Experience at least one remarriage during the life of their relationship, either of a public or private nature.
- Believe consciously or unconsciously that their partner is capable of and willing to undergo the stress of a remarriage.
- Demonstrate a willingness to risk the relationship in order to improve it.
- Are committed to working within the relationship rather than outside of it.
- Find that restructuring the relationship with compromise and concessions results in a revitalization of their relationship.

