

Psychological perspective of the importance of relationships



Psychological Perspective of the Importance of Relationships

Abstract

Relationships are not just about those we love, they are also about ourselves. If we let them, relationships present multiple opportunities for personal growth. They teach us things. From our very first relationships with our parents, to our lifelong relationships with significant others, and everything in between. They are a vital part of our mental, physical, and social health. While it's easy to think about all the warm and fuzzy elements of relationships, the fact is that relationships can also leave us feeling hurt, abandoned, and scarred for the future. I have learned that when conflict occurs there is growing to be done. Thankfully, there are numerous resources available today that can help us navigate our relationships with ourselves and others. What do we need to know to make our relationships great? Do you know what your relationships have taught you?

Psychological Perspective of the Importance of Relationships

Developing and maintaining relationships with others is a vital part of our overall health. From day one we depend on these relationships—from those with our parents, to other family members, friends, and romantic prospects. Each of these relationships are different and offer up multiple opportunities for self-reflection and growth. It is our relationships in life that help to shape and groom us into who we have become today. It is easy to evaluate and criticize the characteristics of those involved in our relationships, but it is not always easy to evaluate and criticize the characteristics of ourselves. One important aspect of maintaining healthy relationships is our ability to observe, learn, grow, and change. Throughout this paper we will discuss the importance of relationships, including those of parental attachment, marriage, and divorce. We will also look at some helpful relationship resources and apply what I have learned throughout this course to me personally.

The importance of relationships

So, why is it that our relationships have such a big impact on our lives? For starters, it is in our DNA. When God created man, He also created woman. We were designed to thrive on companionship. To strive for happiness. If you close your eyes and think about your daily activities, how many of them involve interactions with others? Probably a very large percent. It would be nearly impossible to progress in life if we were unable to form relationships and cooperate with others. Some of the benefits gained from our relationships include emotional support, status, and intimacy. (Weiten, et. al, 2018) Other benefits include growth, self-disclosure, the ability to connect, ability to trust, willingness to share, empathize, capableness of love, and of course ability to forgive. Most importantly, they allow us to evaluate who we

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are through the eyes of others. However, relationships do require effort. They require time, communication, energy, support, and high levels of commitment. Relationship satisfaction is one important ingredient to our happiness. And, when we achieve high satisfaction in our relationships, the benefits clearly outweigh the costs.

Parental Attachment

One of the very first relationships that we form is with our parent(s). Some psychologists theorize that romantic relationships are formed through a process of attachment, similar to those that we form with parents and caregivers as infants. Their theory states that adult love and parental attachment share common features, including intense fascination, distress during separation, and effort to stay close or spend time together. (Weiten, et. al., 2018) As humans we often form expectations about our relationships based on our attachments and observations with parents. We might seek out partners similar-to or opposite of our parents based on the type of relationship that exists throughout our childhood. Sometimes, we look to fill voids in our relationships with others that are absent at home, and sometimes our relationships at home create such high expectations that it can be difficult to ever achieve the same level of satisfaction with others. (Branjerdporn, 2019) For example, if a young girl grew up with a father who was not present and paid little attention to her, then the little girl may grow to expect the same from others in her adult relationships. If your first relationship — the one with your parents — didn't go well, you will very likely expect all relationships to fail, and vice versa. (Steber, 2018)

My Perspective

My attachment with my parents could be described as a secure attachment. My parents were warm, authoritative, supportive, and affectionate. I was close with my parents and respected their roles as important figures in my life. When conflict arose, we communicated very effectively. I was open and honest and in return they were open and honest with me. Both my grandparents and parents grew to marry their high school sweethearts, and I admired the relationships they were able to establish and maintain. In doing so, I created a fantasy about my own marriage. I believed that I would also meet the love of my life in high school and continue the tradition of happily-ever-after's in our family. Because my parent's relationship never failed, I convinced myself that mine would not fail either. I trusted very easily, after all I never had a reason not to. I would later find that these expectations I had for my own relationships would be very difficult to realistically achieve.

Marriage

One recent study found that both married and cohabiting people were happier than those who remained single (Weiten, et. al., 2018) We already know that relationship satisfaction is a big indicator of overall health and happiness. There are also physical health benefits to marriage and romantic relationships. One recent study suggests that these relationships help to protect against cardiovascular disease in women. The author theorized that marriage is an important source of social support, that more positive health behaviors would be present when held accountable by a spouse, and that an increased socioeconomic status would result in a higher use of health

resources or preventative medicine. (Yildez, 2017) However, in many cases marriage and like relationships can be the source of large amounts of stress. Only around 50 percent of first-time marriages in the United States are successful. Unfortunately, I became a part of this sad statistic, and only recently have really begun to search for the answers as to why.

My Perspective

People get married for all sorts of reasons, and those reasons may vary from culture to culture. Some say they marry for love, some for money, some for status, and some are even pre-arranged. When I married for the first time, I was thinking about two things, my childhood fantasy and of course love. I married my high school sweetheart, just as I had always dreamed I would. We were young and I had just started college. Soon I found out I was pregnant, and things began to change. I began to change. My priorities changed. However, this marriage would end shortly after the birth of my first child, and the conflict within the relationship would become unrepairable. I was betrayed in the worst possible way and my marriage was over. My husband had left me for another women, and my world was shattered. I was broken, sad, and very depressed. I now know that the age at which one marries is also related to the likelihood of marriage success. Couples who marry young have higher divorce rates. (Weiten, et. al., 2018) When the newness of our relationship began to go away, another attractive alternative became available. I would marry for the second time a couple of years later. After months of therapy and soul searching, I learned more about myself than I ever thought possible. I put the pieces of my broken heart back together. I thought about what type of mate I would need, and want, to

achieve high relationship satisfaction. Individuals who marry later have more carefully selected their mate or are less likely to undergo dramatic personal change that would render them incompatible with their partners. (Weiten, et. al., 2018) Although I will forever be scarred, my marriage now results in great happiness. My husband supports me. We are open and honest. We have similar values and share the same religious beliefs. We have realistic expectations and understand that conflict is a normal part of any relationship. It is how we resolve those conflicts that matter. My marriage this time has taught me that while love is important, communication, effort, and commitment are also key factors to success and that all relationships require perseverance.

Divorce

Divorce can be a very negative and stressful life event, which can affect physical, social, and mental health. Divorce has even been shown to adversely affect the cardiovascular system. (Yildez, 2017) Like marriage, the reasons for divorce vary from relationship to relationship. If either partner feels that the costs of the relationship are starting to outweigh the benefits, or there is low satisfaction, they may seek to get out. Remember some of the reasons discussed earlier as to why people get married? Well, there are also several reasons as to why people choose divorce. The first is that sometimes partners enter marriage without spending the time to get to know one another. The Hollywood “whirlwind” love story leaves little room for success. The second reason marriages end is due to lack of communication and the inability to resolve conflict. In one study of more than 5000 participants in ninety-six countries, “lack of communication” was the most commonly reported reason for breakup. (Cortes, 2018) Third, relationships can become

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boring. When the newness wears off intimacy and passion tend to decrease. Finally, a more attractive alternative might replace the existing partner, and often people will stay in a relationship only until they can find the next best thing. (Weiten, et. al., 2018) Whatever the reason, divorce plays a large role in our overall health. There is one benefit to divorce however, and that is that divorce affects us so deeply that we are forced to reevaluate ourselves and learn from the relationship if we hope to move forward.

My Perspective

Given what I know about parental attachment and my upbringing, it could be assumed that my relationships would exhibit high satisfaction. Sadly, one of them did not. After my divorce I developed serious trust issues. I shut myself off and still to this day have a very difficult time opening up. I found myself feeling insecure about my other relationships and ended many friendships simply because I was afraid to get hurt by someone close again. Given all of these findings, I found myself wondering how I might ever be able to get involved into a romantic relationship again. I waited a long period of time before deciding to enter into the dating world. Only once I truly learned to love myself, set real expectations, and work on problem solving did I think I might be ready to try again. The real answer to my question came when I met my current husband. It was he who was able to make me feel more secure, and he who proved his trustworthiness and level of commitment. Our marriage now can be successful because of who we are together as well as who we have become as individuals.

Slowly, I am learning to trust and disclose again. Researchers are finding that the pain of breaking up might activate the same brain regions as actual

physical pain. (Lue, 2015) Just as we heal from a broken bone we must also heal from failed relationships. I have found that forgiveness has also been an important factor to my healing. People who have been hurt need to learn how to forgive those who have offended them in the past so that they not poison their future relationships with the pain of past ones. (Lue, 2015) I have had to work at forgiving my ex-spouse but also at forgiving myself. I must continually tell myself that I would not be the same person I am today had it not been for that relationship.

Relationship Help and Resources

There are numerous resources available for those in need of some relationship help, regardless of the type of relationship. Whether its parental, familial, or marital counseling that's needed, the seriousness of issues range from minimal to critical, and the resources should reflect the circumstance. It is important to remember too that there is help available for every situation. Some of the most common forms of relationship therapy available include couples counseling, family therapy, religion-based counseling, group therapy, tailored programs, and narrative methods. (Weiten, et. al., 2018)

In a recent study, a group of married women attended sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy. Each woman was provided with one-on-one therapy as well as group sessions in which issues of solidarity and agreement were addressed. The research showed significant rises in relationship satisfaction among the women and the cognitive behavior therapy increased the understanding one another's behaviors, corrected attitudes, and created

skills to establish more effective communication and problem solving within the marriage. (Shayan, et. al., 2018)

For me personally, I chose religion-based therapy in a group setting. DivorceCare is a program implemented within my church organization in which educational materials are provided via literature and videos by marriage and divorce professionals. The literature was extremely educational and informative. The group setting allowed me to see that I was not alone in many of the situations I was in, past and present, as this was a women's only group who were all divorcees. The relationships were examined from a biblical perspective and the way that God designed them. I also chose to follow up with family therapy, another program in my church organization, in which co-parenting, single parenting, and ex-spousal forgiveness were areas of concentration. Therapy and counseling were very important parts to my healing and resulted in huge amounts of self-growth.

In conclusion, no matter what type of relationships we have had or the ones we are in, there is much to be learned. They are important to our health and affect our overall happiness. Our modern-day world has tried to teach us that there is strength in being independent, and while this is true, I believe that it takes even more strength to maintain relationships with others. Beginning with our first relationships, we should continue to observe, learn, grow, and change, thus resulting in higher relationship satisfaction, health, happiness, and increased rates of relational success. The relationships in my life, both successful and unsuccessful, have allowed me to really understand who I am as an individual, flaws and all.

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