

How do relationships go sour?

One of the difficulties of this age is the way we view the needs of each sex in relationship. At the risk of being accused of being sexist, I need to say that in several thousand years of human history, very little has changed in the relative needs of men and women as they ponder relationship.

I'm going to pick on women first and state that my belief from my experiences as a counselor is that women's highest priority in relationship is security. Women need to feel that regardless of what happens in their world, there will be someone on whom they can rely for support.

Men have a different priority, and no, it's not sex. Men need to experience nurturing. They need to feel that there is always someone who will treat them as a prince. Just like mother did, they want to feel that there is a caring warm loving human being there to make them feel good.

In a perfect world this would all come together smoothly and there would be perfect harmony. What then goes wrong most of the time?

Something we all do is we create a little model of the perfect partner in their head which encompasses our view of the universe. We are attracted to a partner who seems to fit that model as closely as possible.

We join that person believing the relationship will always be based on our view of our internally represented partner. The woman sees her man as strong and protective, the man responds to the naturally occurring nurturing and caring behaviors in his woman.

After a while, reality sets in, and both partners perceive change in the other. They both see their partner as different from the idealized model held inside. He shows a self that isn't as strong and protective as he was during the courtship. He demonstrates a need to look after his own needs which sometimes don't include his woman. She demonstrates a need to feel heard and understood, and to express her own unique needs.

In the ideal course of events, effective communication can offset any deterioration in the relationship, but usually what happens is gradual separation as both parties feel betrayed. "You aren't the same person that I fell in love with" is the usual sentiment.

Her response is to attempt to change him from the reality of who he is into the little model of how she created him internally. In doing so she needs to exercise control of his life.

His response is to back away from the relationship blaming his woman for becoming uncaring because, unlike his mother, she wants to express her own needs before his.

The relationship becomes more and more strained until finally either one of the partners decides enough is enough. What extends the painful time of breakup is that the man is often coming from a position of being dependent. He worries that if he doesn't attempt to conform to his woman's attempts to remake him according to her internal image that she will reject him. The woman experiences an

increasing weakness as he tries to deal with her behaviors and believes he is unable to provide her with the security she seeks. She feels she has to become the protector in the relationship, a role that runs contrary to her needs for her partner to display .

The solution appears simple and is based on an anthropological concept that men and women have not changed their roles in several thousand years. To create a workable relationship, the male has to be or become strong and protective in his personality. This allows the woman to experience an inner confidence on which she can depend for security and support, and the man is free to be himself without the need to feel manipulated into someone else.