

Chapter 14

The Path of a Relationship: How Life Decisions Lead to a Positive and Fulfilling Partnership

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ABSTRACT

From the cradle to the grave, life experiences lead to one making important decisions regarding relationships that may take a person by surprise! The purpose of this chapter is to examine how each decision made throughout the course of a lifetime can bring about a lifetime of happiness due to a fulfilling relationship rather than forever chasing rainbows waiting for “Mr. Right.” The theories providing the basis for this chapter are Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Eric Erickson’s study of human development. A closer look at parent influences shaping decisions regarding relationships will be discussed from a psychological point of view. Attributes of family therapy will relate to the influence parents have on the decisions made which are connected to a fulfilling, “or not,” relationship. Generational components affect relationships and the characteristics of how partnerships are formed due to those characteristics will be relayed. Finally, what constitutes a fulfilling partnership as opposed to one that disintegrates with each passing day has an important piece to this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

By the time a person reaches the age of consent, he/she may be experiencing a fulfilling relationship. However, what if the individual is longing for a committed, happy, symbiotic relationship, but it doesn’t come “on time”. In other words, young girls, depending on which cultural lens with which they are taught to view relationships, understand that marriage is the ultimate goal for their survival and must be accomplished by a certain age. Young men, driven by Freudian “id”, look for the perfect mate early on, even as soon as puberty approaches!

One’s decisions, clouded either by parental dictates, peer pressure, and/or society can take the individual on a journey, circuitous at times, which ultimately results in “finding the one”.

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BACKGROUND

A young child cannot concentrate on schoolwork when hungry! Hence, Maslow established a hierarchy of needs; the first three levels a basis for “survival” the last three levels approaching a sense of a “higher being” or self-actualization (Woolfolk, 2013). Freud may attest the id could even drive the basic needs for survival in “The id was responsible for behavior which was ultimately reinforced with food, water, sexual contact, and other primary biological reinforcers” (Skinner, 1953, p. 284). Freud’s id aligns well with Maslow’s first few tiers of deficiency needs, but not to say those basic survival needs avert the human organism from certain drives seeking needs for fulfilling relationships, i.e. care of parents, search for a stable “mate” and/or shelter from the cold!

Maslow has sparked controversy in that the individual cannot be identified solely on what level of hierarchy with which he/she can be identified. At some juncture, moral development plays a role in altruistic self-efficacy, which lead Maslow to determine a higher moral purpose of meeting “being needs” (Woolfolk, 2013).

In essence, the reader is asked to consider finding a fulfilling relationship is aligned with meeting basic needs. In other words, Maslow’s first tier of his hierarchy is “Physiological: Air, Water, Food, Shelter, Sleep, Sex. (Palomares & Ball, 1980,p.29). If a relationship does not meet those needs in the first tier, difficulties could arise.

Ovid (2017) notes a basic “rearrangement” of intimate relationships, friends located near the base of Maslow’s Hierarchy. This author purports without Freud’s id or Maslow’s drive to satisfy basic needs, there would be no “path” to seeking a fulfilling relationship. Hence, further discussion is needed to ascertain how one’s life decisions take one on a journey to finding relationship which lead to fulfilling partnerships and concluding in a positive outcome.

Without a close look at Eric Erikson’s levels of life span of human development, this journey, “path” to a fulfilling relationship, and the decisions one makes at each level, could not be investigated.

The most noteworthy aspect of Erikson’s dissection of life span development is the aspect of psychological conflict noted in each stage. It is thought the individual psyche has a protagonist and antagonist and favor over one or the other rests on the decisions the individual makes!

For example, looking at the human organism’s most difficult time to adjust to “living in one’s own skin”, so to say, is early adolescence. Erikson terms this as “group identity vs. alienation” and spans ages 13-17 years of age (Palomares & Ball, 1980, p. 76). Here the young teen must decide to succumb to group pressures, which may bring about a life’s decision that is detrimental, especially if given into testing adult boundaries such as rebelling against adult authority, experimenting with drugs or alcohol, or disregarding proper sexual mores which could lead to a “life-changing” unwanted pregnancy.

The psychosocial conflict here is does the young teen “follow the crowd” (which sometimes goes against his/her moral values) or does he/she risk alienation from the crowd which could lead to less popularity, a risk of bullying, or name calling such as nerd, four eyes, or Brainiac! Here the human organism is faced with a crises which calls for an important life decision. But is the young teen equipped to handle decision making at this age (13-17 years of age)?

According to Erikson, the young teen is going through several developmental tasks, one of which may become the most distracting-puberty! At this stage, what Freud terms as the id, may take over the adolescence sense of reason, morality and/or thoughtful decision making.

At the same time the teenager is encountering puberty, he/she is forming “formal mental operations” which can be supported by:

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