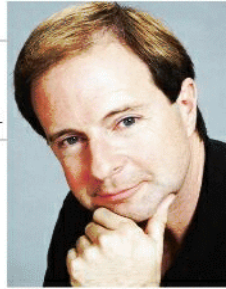


Editorial

BY ROBERT EPSTEIN, PH.D.

Editor as Guinea Pig

Putting Love to a Real Test



I'M ABOUT TO EMBARK ON A VERY BOLD, VERY PERSONAL experiment, one that some people might call—and in fact, have *already* called—crazy. Self-experimentation has a long and proud history in psychology, dating back at least to Ebbinghaus' classic book *Memory*, published in 1885. So I insist that I'm standing on the shoulders of giants and that I'm not simply daffy. OK, here's my experiment:

Through friends, family and some small ads, I'm in the process of seeking a co-author to help me write a book called *The Love You Make: How We Learned to Love Each Other, and How You Can Too*. My co-author and I will sign an agreement in which we pledge 1) to read extensively about love, and especially about the emergence of love in arranged marriages, 2) to subject ourselves to various types of counseling and 3) to put ourselves through various exercises and perhaps to create new ones, the goal being to fall deeply in love by the end of the contract period. The agreement will run from six months to a year (to be negotiated), during which time we will also pledge not to date other people and to keep detailed, private diaries of our experiences, knowing, of course, that the contents might end up in print.

I'm already represented on the book by one of the top literary agents in the country, and several large houses have expressed interest in publishing it—not surprising, since the concept is pure Oprah: a perfect bundle of romance, controversy and inspiration.

But this isn't just a publicity stunt. It's a serious, albeit small-scale, challenge to a vexing myth. We teach our children, and especially our little girls, that a knight in shining Porsche is going to drive up one day, awaken perfect passion with a magical kiss and then drive the blessed couple down the road to Happily Ever After, a special place where no one ever changes. Hollywood tells us that the One is out there for everyone, so no one is willing to settle for Mr. or Ms. Two-Thirds. We want our relationships to be like our antidepressants—perfect and effortless—and if they don't look as perfect today as they did yesterday, unskilled and gutless, we abandon them.

But here's a surprise: Sixty percent of the world's marriages are not love marriages—they're arranged. Divorce rates are extremely low for such marriages, and, even more surprising, in perhaps half of them, the spouses somehow fall in love with each other. Arranged marriage is a complex institution, but even where it's flawed it demonstrates that people can learn to love. A couple of decades ago, after millennia of nail biting, Westerners finally figured out how to take elements of Eastern mystical practices and cast them into consumer-friendly terms; now we've got *mantras* and *chakras* and *katas* by the dozens, and we're better for it. Can we distill key elements of arranged marriage to help us learn how to create a new, more stable institution in the West? Must we stumble clumsily onto love, or can we learn, precisely, how to fall in love?

In 1998, some friends of David Weinlick, a graduate student in Minnesota, set out to find him a wife. An advertising campaign generated 25 applications, and then a party was held where he interacted with the five finalists. His friends selected the winner, and the unlikely pair was married on the spot. Ridiculous, yes? Funny thing is, they're still married and doing fine, and their second child is due in November.

Makes you wonder, doesn't it? Well, I've wondered long enough. I'm up for an experiment.

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