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Stop These 3 Roadblocks to Finding and Keeping Your Valentine

As Valentine's Day approaches, you may be wondering why you are still single.

Perhaps you are having difficulty meeting the "right" one and/or being able to have a reasonably healthy, long-term romantic relationship.

There certainly can be different reasons why things haven't worked out for some singles looking for love, including poor timing, ill health, or circumstances beyond one's control.

However, working for over twenty years as a licensed psychologist with individuals and couples has opened my eyes to several psychological reasons that also can be disruptive and damaging to one's romantic success and longevity.

For the purposes of this column, I will target three of these roadblocks that I have run across in my practice: 1) perfectionism, 2) the people pleaser tendency, and 3) and being stuck in a subconscious pattern.

1. The Perils of Perfectionism

One of the roadblocks that can keep you from having a healthy love relationship is perfectionism. People that are perfectionists tend to be hard both on themselves and on others.

They frequently reject potential suitors and can't stay in relationships very long because no one is ever "good enough."

People often become perfectionists because one or both parents acted this way with them, being overly critical or not acknowledging their child unless he or she had done something amazing.

Also, perfectionistic people frequently have a fear of closeness, often believing that they will be rejected once someone gets to really know them because they aren't perfect.

Consequently, these people subconsciously may engage in the pre-emptive strike of rejecting someone first before it happens to them.

One way to identify if you are a perfectionist in your love life is to assess over the last ten years what you found wrong in whomever you dated or could have dated during that time span.

In essence, identify what you didn't like about the person and evaluate how critical (or not) was that quality or reason that you made it a deal-breaker to end a relationship or never even start one.

Then, re-evaluate on what your non-negotiables currently are based. They should be about what really matters to you, your priorities, and your values.

If needed, change your non-negotiables to represent these, and then use these as a guide to help you sort through potential candidates, keeping the ones that meet most (it doesn't have to be all!) of these factors.

Realize that no one is perfect and that many people, surprisingly, though not unhappily, often do not end up with whom they thought they would.

So, stop being so rigid with your specifications.

To some tolerable degree, open up your parameters and ranges regarding things like age, height, looks, weight, geographic location, earnings, etc.

By doing this, you will be opening up a whole new world of choices and meeting a greater amount of people who are viable love interests.

2. The People Pleaser Problem

Another roadblock to love is if you are a people pleaser. People pleasers tend to either not know themselves very well or muffle whom they are in order to accommodate and get acceptance from others.

As a result, people pleasers can end up making decisions not based on their true beliefs, wants, or needs, but on what they believe others value.

If you live as a people pleaser, you are living someone else's life and you potentially are choosing a life partner who may be exactly what someone else (i.e., a parent, friend, relative, etc.) thinks is right for you, but, in actuality, may be completely the wrong match.

A person can become a people pleaser if one came from an emotionally or physically volatile home and/or was the "peacemaker" there, trying to keep parents and/or sibling calm and happy with each other and with him or her.

Also, people pleasers tend to have low self-esteem, often due to being dismissed, ignored, or criticized as a kid or teenager for speaking one's mind or because they were never encouraged to figure out or value their own feelings, wants, or needs.

If you are a people pleaser, first you need to reclaim your control over your life by realizing this is YOUR life.

This means that you need to find a way to live a life that represents who you are and what is important to you, instead of trying to live by someone else's standards or preferences.

(Yes, compromising and valuing a partner's beliefs, wants and needs is critical when you are part of a couple, but not to the point where you and your individual identity disappear.)

To find out whose life you may be living, make a list of what you think are your top ten criteria that you are looking for in a significant other and ask yourself what you value about each point.

If your list truly does reflect who you would be happy and compatible with, try these characteristics out in the dating world and see if you end up being attracted to people that embody these qualities.

However, if it turns out your list is more about what your friends, family, or society in general might value, it's not really YOUR list.

This should be a big warning that you need to find a way to get in touch with and identify what your priorities are in general and, specifically, what you are looking for in a partner.

3. Repeating Unhealthy Patterns

The third roadblock that can derail love is if you keep repeating patterns that prevent you from finding or remaining in a healthy relationship.

The world-renowned "father of psychoanalysis," Sigmund Freud, created the concept "repetition compulsion" in which a person subconsciously keeps repeating unresolved issues from the past with new, significant people in one's life in the hopes of finally getting some resolution with the issue.

The problem is that one can never reach a true resolution with the issue because the original problem has never been adequately dealt with, so, unfortunately, the issue can keep playing out through patterns in new relationships of importance.

The tricky thing about these kinds of patterns is that they can be very subtle.

For example, you know better than to go after the obvious unhealthiness (i.e., if you had an alcoholic parent, one usually knows to not get romantically involved with an alcoholic).

But, you still may be attracted in a more indirect way to someone who leaves you with the same emotional upset.

So, instead of wanting an emotionally shut-down alcoholic, you are drawn to a workaholic who doesn't have time for you or you are attracted to a person who is emotionally unavailable and distant.

The results are still the same, and you still end up feeling emotionally disconnected and neglected as you did with the alcoholic parent.

Remember that repeating one's unresolved issues through patterns is subconscious; people don't deliberately do this to themselves or others.

In fact, many people aren't even aware that they are playing out patterns with new, key individuals that come into their life.

To stop repeating these unhealthy patterns, you first need to look for any common themes in your love relationships so you can pinpoint your particular pattern/s.

One way to evaluate this is to see if you keep ending up with similar negative results. For instance, you repeatedly may have felt used, abandoned, not special, or been cheated on.

These are just some samples of recurrent results you may have experienced in some of your romantic relationships.

Next, you need to trace back where this kind of upset first was experienced or witnessed by you. Maybe one of your parents cheated on the other and you knew about this because it caused much upset and instability in your home growing up.

If you were unable to adequately deal with this original issue and the upset that accompanied it, unfortunately, it may need to keep playing out in your romantic relationships in your subconscious attempt to find some resolution with this.

Furthermore, once you've identified the original issue, you need to find a way to directly work through the issue and the attached feelings as a way to heal and find some peace and true resolution.

As a consequence, there will be no need for the patterns to keep repeating with new people in your life.

Therapy Can Help With These 3 Roadblocks If Needed

If you get stuck or can't break through the perfectionism, people pleaser tendencies, or recurrent unhealthy patterns, working with a psychologist who specializes in these areas can help you find more effective and healthy ways to stop these roadblocks to finding and keeping your Valentine!

About the author

Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist with three degrees in psychology and over twenty years of experience working with individuals and couples.

She specializes in a variety of areas including relationships, life transitions, anxiety, depression, grief and loss, career issues, overeating and body image, and self-esteem.

For many years, Dr. Thomas also has been sought out and quoted as a media psychologist for T.V. including CNN, VH1, E! Entertainment, and Nightline, and for magazines such as People, Smart Money, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Redbook.

Dr. Thomas has been featured in several books and has been the in-house psychologist expert for two national magazines with her own columns. She maintains a private practice in Los Angeles, California.

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