Making Media Work for Your Marriage

According to recent statistics, over 97% of American adults own a mobile phone, and 67% own a smart phone (McDaniel & Drouin, 2015). In addition, the platforms and mediums for connection are seemingly endless (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, email, Instagram, WhatsApp, IM, etc.). One source shares that mobile technologies and communication devices have become the fastest-growing technology in history (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2007). With so many ways to instantly connect, it is no surprise that, according to Pew Research, 65% of adults in the United States use social networking sites (Perrin, 2015).

Increased options for instant connection can have positive and negative impacts on relationships. While online resources can help us stay connected to those we love and increase relationship satisfaction (Pettigrew, 2009; Sidelinger, Avash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008), being constantly connected to the world through online platforms can also potentially lead to neglecting our partners, conflict, less relationship and life satisfaction, and affairs (McDaniel, 2015; McDaniel, Drouin, & Cravins, 2016). One study found that 70% of women said that cell phones, computers or televisions interfered with their couple relationship (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014).

Relationship expert John Gottman states that one of the most important predictors of a healthy and long lasting relationship is how each partner responds to a "bid" for attention (Gottman & Silver, 2012). According to Gottman, each time someone turns toward his/her partner's bids for emotional connection, he/she makes a deposit in an "emotional bank account," and adds value to the account. These little moments of connection add up, and remind both partners of the positive feelings for and their commitment to each other (Gottman & Silver, 2012).

Bids for attention come in multiple ways and forms, and technology can be a help or a hindrance to these bids for attention. Couples that "turn toward instead of away" from each other are more likely to stay happily married (Gottman & Silver, 2012); therefore, it is important to use every opportunity, including connecting through technology, to strengthen relationships. It is also important to consider ways to protect relationships from the challenges that can come through technology, such as being distracted from bids for attention because of technology use.

Strengthening Relationships Through Technology

Consider the following ways that technology can be used to strengthen relationships.

- **Checking-in texts**. Sending texts can be a quick way to let a partner know that they are being thought about and it can also be a way to send a "flower," "kiss" or another expression of affection through picture graphics or emoji's.
- **FaceTime/Skype**. While media cannot replace actual face-to-face time, it is an important tool that can be used to help couples stay connected. This is particularly true for couples who spend extended periods of time physically apart (e.g., military, those that travel for work, etc.).
- **Facebook posts**. Facebook can be used to publicly express admiration and appreciation for a spouse. Photographs, memes, videos, and messages can all be used to express affection to a partner.
- **Instagram**. Instagram can be a great way to share memorable moments of your relationship and different aspects of your life with your partner. This can be particularly useful for couples who are often physically separated due to work or other circumstances.
- **Email**. Emails can be a fun way to share possible gift ideas found online, date night or getaway ideas, silly pictures or jokes or just to check in with each other. This is especially true if a partner tends to check emails often while away.
- **Pinterest**. Similar to emails, Pinterest can be used to collect fun date night ideas, funny pictures to share with each other, or to create a dream board for future events or goals.
- **YouTube or movies**. Spending time together watching a funny video clip, TV show, or favorite movie can be a unifying and bonding activity. This is true when both partners are engaged in spending

time together and are in agreement with the type of entertainment.

Safeguarding Relationships

Using media to express affection and commitment to your spouse can be a great boost to your relationship and add deposits to emotional bank accounts. However, as with all tools, if misused, it could cause hurt or even damage relationships. Consider the following safety rules to prevent misunderstandings or hurt.

- Keep your profile open to your partner and make sure your spouse knows where and how you spend your time online.
- Have an open discussion about technology use with your partner (McDaniel, 2015). Be clear about boundaries and share your thoughts and feelings about appropriate boundaries and expectations regarding what is considered appropriate technology use.
- While it is nice to use media to connect while you are away from each other, block out "tech free" times to be together while you are with your partner in person (McDaniel, 2015).

Technology is an important aspect of everyday life. It is important to remember that while it can be a great benefit to marital relationships, there are also safeguards that need to also be put in place to prevent it from becoming a hindrance to happy relationships. By communicating clearly their expectations and boundaries, couples can use media to strengthen their marital relationship.

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