



Marriage Rules[©]

“ROLE CONFUSION”

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What do you suppose contributes to the disintegration of a relationship that had once been a good one?

In my opinion, relationships begin to fall apart when there is “role confusion”.

This confusion frequently occurs when the roles each person has in a given relationship are either poorly defined or inappropriately cross over into other role-expectancies.

One need not be an expert in psychology to recognize that all of us engage in one role or another at certain times, in certain situations and with certain individuals.

Such roles serve an important purpose to the extent that a particular relationship or interpersonal transaction becomes largely circumscribed by what specific role a particular set of “actors” choose to adopt and then “act out” between them.

If a person comes to me for help and I am at work, then I may confirm that person’s role-expectation of me by “getting into role” of a clinical psychologist.

This is neither good nor bad, but simply is the most effective, efficient and ethical way for me to do what’s appropriately expected of me.

If that person is a machinist and I need a part to be custom-made for a piece of equipment, then it makes sense that I ought to get into role, as may be appropriate, of a prospective consumer.

Were I to be stuck (fixated) in my earlier role of a mental health professional, chances are that person would not know if he should get “into role” of client or expert tradesman.

This is an example of role confusion.

So too with other relationships, when we adopt one role indiscriminately for all situations or we adopt all roles for the same situation, we fail to adapt to the variable needs, wants or requirements which characterize ongoing relationships.

Confused...

By getting locked into role or by not getting into role or even by getting into too many roles, our relationships are set up for failure.

Expectations become violated and feelings get hurt because our perceptions confirm our thoughts that with regard to our relationships, “they aren’t acting themselves”, and so we react to our confusion by “backing off”.

The challenge is to develop expertise with each particular role but keep each role separate from the other roles and always be respectful and vigilant of the potential for the development of any “dual-relationship”.

When this challenge is met, role expectancies do not become violated from role contamination because others learn to expect and then to know, *in vivo*, where you’re coming from, as do you, in relation to them.

If there is any “role confusion”, then there will very likely be a confusion of all the roles and all of the rules!

If there is no “role confusion”, then there will very likely be no confusion of any of the roles and any of the rules!

In my opinion, “role confusion” is always extremely confusing and, generally, should be avoided at all costs.

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