

How Commitment Keeps Marriages Together

BY VAL FARMER

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Why do some couples stay married despite major troubles while others divorce because they feel they aren't as happy as they think they should be? It is in the level of commitment they share. Level of commitment derives from three factors: level of satisfaction, size of investment, and the quality of alternatives.

1. Level of satisfaction. Couples experience commitment when important needs are being met and the attachment they feel toward the romantic partner meets those needs. Thus, the more a person "needs" the relationship, the more likely he or she will choose to remain.

Despite the tendency of our individualistic culture to label dependency as bad, it is essential for successful relationships. What relationships need is interdependence, a voluntary and healthy form of dependency.

When there is a balance of power in the relationship, there is less opportunity for exploitation or abuse of power. Interdependence is the opposite of power. There is equality in their decision-making and each is able to influence the other. A relationship is pleasurable when couples cooperate. They become involved with each other's efforts and accomplishments and unselfishly give of themselves to

each other. Unequal dependency occurs when partners differ as to how central their relationship is compared to other forms of life satisfaction. When both partners place similar value on their relationship, they allow more of their needs to be met and their mutual commitment grows.

We develop feelings of dependency and attachment when our partner:

- has similar attitudes and goals.
- has care and concern for our interests and well-being.
- is able to give empathic understanding, acceptance and emotional security.
- freely expresses his or her deep personal thoughts, feelings, fantasies, hopes and dreams.
- draws close to us with physical affection and sexual fulfillment.
- shows a strong liking for our positive qualities.

Ideas about what love is and how it is expressed influence our judgments on how satisfied we are. Feelings of satisfaction are influenced by the type of relationships we experienced with past romantic attachments, parents and friendships.

2. Investment in marriage. The value of a relationship grows with time. A couple accumulates a store of shared experiences that give their lives meaning. The size of the investment binds couples together.

Over time, couples depend on each other's habits of thinking, expression



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bers it. The more interdependent a couple is, the more their memories are jointly held between them. To lose a partner is to lose memory - to lose a part of oneself.

More importantly, a person comes to view him or herself on how their partner sees and responds to him or herself. Personal identity is strengthened when couples share common meanings, perceptions and understandings.

Relationships blossom when partners give each other freedom, support and acceptance in helping each other grow and develop along unique paths. A partner's support and encouragement helps a partner express his or her best self.

Their investment becomes an investment in each other. It grows as they aid each other in becoming the good and

desirable person each wants to be. Their relationship has a history of the many reciprocal acts of love and personal sacrifice each has made for the other's well-being.

Social and cultural ties. The couple gathers mutual friends, shared financial commitments, possessions, children and in-laws. There are memories, love and obligations that are uniquely associated with their relationship. They bind each other together. The welfare of the children is a powerful inducement to maintain their marriage. Divorce is expensive in both financial and emotional costs.

Each partner also has a set of cultural and religious norms about the appropriateness of when and under what conditions a marriage should be dissolved. The strength of these norms and the social costs of violating them are a consideration in keeping their marital vows.

3. Quality of alternatives. In the past, couples in unhappy marriages went to great lengths to work out their difficulties. Now there is less tolerance for abuse, alcoholism, chronic conflict, and infidelities. Even so, divorce is bleak and daunting when one considers the economic and social consequences, especially when children are involved.

In abusive relationships, low income, low education, and no money on hand are factors in preventing women from leaving. Low self-esteem, reinforced by the abusive partner, convinces dependent partners that they are not going to

get their needs met elsewhere. There are periods when marriage satisfaction dwindles, when reality does not meet expectations. During these times of vulnerability, an attractive alternative may become a threat to a relationship. Couples with strong commitments ignore or minimize the attractive qualities of others.

They also put on rose-colored glasses when it comes to their marriage. They minimize negative qualities or flaws in their relationship. They redefine destructive past events in more benign ways. They over-estimate how influential they are in their ability to control the course of the relationship. Finally, they keep hope alive that the future of their relationship will be good.

These three factors, level of satisfaction, size of investment and quality of alternatives that help couples act constructively when their marital partner engages in an action that is potentially destructive to their relationship.

It is the research of the late psychologist Caryl Rusbult that helped define this investment model of commitment in romantic relationships.

For more information on marriage commitment, visit Val Farmer's website at www.valfarmer.com.

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Head

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remarks.

Sheehy concluded the program by presenting awards to Sorensen and the school.

Jensen told the *Press & Dakotan* this week that Sorensen provides an outstanding role model both in and out of the classroom.

"Anna is a genuine person that is an excellent student, but an even better person," the principal said. "Anna is of high ethics and morals and puts others first. This is evident by her excellent academic performance, but also in her willingness to help others through volunteering and mission trips."

With her perfect ACT, Sorensen enjoys a special stature not only in Nebraska but nationwide. In 2010, nearly 1.6 million graduates took the ACT. On average, fewer than one-tenth of one percent of students who take the ACT receive a top composite score, which is the average of four sections of the test.

The average composite score for Nebraska high school graduates in 2010 was 22.1.

When it came to the ACT,

Sorensen proved tenacious as well as intelligent.

"I took the test three times. I had scores of 33 and 35, then the final time where I got my 36. I kept wanting to try again and see if I could get a perfect score," she said.

"The first time, I studied with my guidance counselor. I studied and took the John Baylor test (as part of an ACT prep course) before my second one, then I took several practice tests before my third one."

There was no waiting by the mailbox to receive her ACT results. Sorensen obtained her score late at night through cyberspace.

"I learned that I got my 36 when we were in Lincoln for a math competition. They posted the scores (online) at midnight, so we went to the hotel lobby to check on the computers," she said.

"I was a little surprised to see the 36. I was with some classmates, and we were really excited about it."

She was so excited that she called to share the news with her parents, Terry and Susan Sorensen, back at Creighton — forgetting about the time of night.

"It just after midnight, so they were asleep, but they were really happy," she said.

Sorensen credits the support of her parents and the high academic

standards maintained by older sisters Julie and Sara and younger sister Emily.

Sorensen couldn't say for sure that she considered one ACT subject area easier than others, but math and science are her favorite subjects. The perfect ACT score shows she can master a wide variety of subject areas.

"I don't really study that hard," she said. "I read a lot in elementary school and junior high, but not as much when I was in high school because I was busy with activities."

Gov. Dave Heineman commended Sorensen and the other Nebraska students who achieved perfect ACT and SAT scores.

"I want to congratulate each of these students on all the hard work that put them at the top of their class," he said. "This achievement is evidence of a true commitment to learning."

With her perfect ACT, Sorensen could have attended practically any college in the nation, including Ivy League schools. Instead, she has chosen to remain in her home state for her education and developing her talents. She is attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for civil engineering.

But first, Sorensen is taking a major road trip. She has headed to California, but she's not hitting the

beach or seeking out television and movie stars.

Instead, she has hit the hard streets of inner-city Los Angeles. She has traveled this week with her congregation, Faith Community Church of O'Neill, Neb., to work with The Dream Center.

According to its website, The Dream Center is a non-profit outreach dedicated to helping inner cities. The ministry provides hope by meeting both tangible and spiritual needs.

Located in the heart of poverty, hopelessness, and violence, The Dream Center is surrounded by gang members who actively recruit young children into lives of violence and drugs. Poverty and addictions have sent many to live on the streets.

The Dream Center provides food, clothing, shelter, life rehabilitation, education and job training, Biblical training and more through its 273 ministries and outreaches. The center operates 24/7 and reaches thousands of hurting and needy children, families and adults across all races and cultures each week.

"(The Dream Center) helps the homeless, cleans up the streets, distributes food and helps with church youth programs," Sorensen said.

It's a far cry from her rural

hometown of about 1,100 residents in northeast Nebraska. However, she is no stranger to making annual treks to sometimes dangerous areas for missions.

"This is my sixth mission trip in a row. I have been doing this since seventh grade," she said. "The first two years, I worked in Torreón, Mexico. The next two years, I went to Mexicali, Mexico, where I taught Vacation Bible School. These last two years, I came to Los Angeles."

Sorensen said she helps others, such as with the mission trips, to thank God for her talents.

Those talents include a variety

of school and church activities. She has participated in choir, show choir, drama, cross country, National Honor Society and Physics/Trig Club. She is also active at Faith Community Church and with its youth group.

Sorensen has attained a multitude of successes in high school, but she said she looks forward to new challenges in college.

Jensen, the Creighton High School principal, believes good things lie ahead for his top student.

"Anna truly has a bright future and will enjoy tremendous success," he said.

Water

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and tribal governments.

Residents along the river are urged to take basic precautions to protect themselves and their property from flooding.

Snowpack in the reach above Fort Peck hit 141 percent of normal peak, with current conditions at about 108 percent of the normal peak accumulation. The snowpack above Garrison Dam reached 136 percent of normal peak, but is slow to melt, with 132 percent of the normal peak accumulation remaining and actually gaining snow in some of the higher elevations.

In addition, as much as eight inches of rain fell over the weekend in portions of eastern Montana and western North Dakota.

At the Garrison Dam, which is a 210-foot high rolled earth embankment, releases were in-

creased to 60,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) Tuesday and will be stepped up until they reach 75,000 cfs today. At the same time, releases from the upstream reservoir Fort Peck will be reduced from the current rate of 20,000 cfs to 10,000 cfs to help stem the rise of Garrison reservoir.

Garrison reservoir is expected to reach 1,853 feet by this weekend due to the high flow on the Yellowstone and Little Missouri Rivers.

Fort Peck reservoir is also climbing rapidly due to the weekend's rainfall and low elevation snowmelt. It is expected to rise 2 feet this week, reaching 2,246 by the weekend.

At Oahe Dam, which is a 245-foot high rolled earth embankment, releases will transition from 60,000 cfs Tuesday to 70,000 cfs by mid-week. Farhat expects the Oahe reservoir to reach 1,618 feet by the weekend and continue to slowly drift upward over the next few weeks, perhaps peaking in mid-June. The record pool at

Oahe is 1618.7 feet, set in 1995 and repeated in 1996. The peak pool level in 1997 was 0.1 foot lower at 1,618.6 feet.

Fort Randall has some space to store water, but the river reach between there and Gavins Point is already at bankfull. Gavins Point releases were increased to 60,000 cfs Tuesday afternoon and will be slowly ramped up over the coming days. It will eventually necessitate a similar magnitude increase in Fort Randall's releases.

In expectation of continued high runoff, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will release a daily

bulletin detailing releases and levels for the Garrison and Oahe dams. Because conditions in the Missouri River basin are changing so rapidly, Corps officials said forecasted releases are subject to change with little notice.

"As already seen in other parts of the nation, high water years always bring pain and suffering with them," said Farhat. "We are doing everything we can to protect people and their property, and reduce the extent and impact of flood stages along the Missouri."

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40th Wedding Anniversary

Bill and Sharon Eggers of Littleton, CO, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary May 29, 2011. They were married May 29, 1971, in Lesterville, SD.

A card shower is requested in their honor. Greetings may be sent to: 9491 W. Walden Ave., Littleton, CO 80128.

The couple has three children: Sheana Eggers of Yankton, SD, and Damon and Guy Eggers, both of Minneapolis, MN.

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