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Love Beyond the Fairytale: Rethinking Modern Relationships

We are surrounded by stories about love. From childhood fairy tales to romantic comedies, social media highlights, and dating reality shows, we are taught that love should be effortless. We often see relationships portrayed as something that, once found, should make us feel complete, constantly fulfilled, and deeply understood. While these stories can be comforting and entertaining, they also create expectations that real relationships simply cannot live up to.

The truth is that relationships are rarely perfect, and they were never meant to be.



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Today's culture often places enormous pressure on romantic partnerships. Many of us unconsciously expect one person to meet nearly every emotional need we have. We hope our partner will be our best friend, confidant, co-parent, financial teammate, travel companion, therapist, cheerleader, and passionate lover throughout every season of life. These expectations are understandable, but they can also leave both partners feeling overwhelmed and inadequate.

Healthy relationships are not built on perfection. They are built on flexibility.



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People change throughout their lives. Careers shift, families grow, health changes, priorities evolve, and personal identities continue to develop. Strong relationships are not those that avoid these changes, but those that make space for them. They allow each person to continue growing while finding new ways to stay connected.

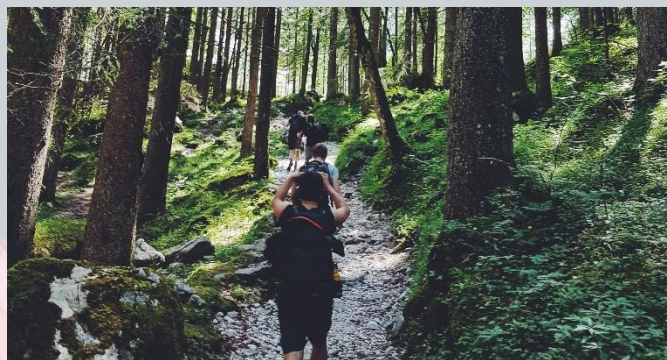
Conflict is another area where our expectations can become distorted. We often assume that happy couples don't argue or experience disappointment. In reality, every relationship encounters misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and periods of distance. What matters is not whether conflict happens, but how we respond to it. Repairing after conflict, listening with curiosity, taking accountability, and learning from one another are often stronger indicators of relationship health than never disagreeing at all.



The Comparison Trap

Social media can make these unrealistic expectations even more difficult to escape. We are often comparing our everyday experiences to someone else's carefully curated moments. Rarely do we see the difficult conversations, the compromises, the moments of uncertainty, or the ordinary routines that make up the majority of any long-term relationship.

An often-overlooked truth is that no one relationship is meant to carry the full weight of our emotional wellbeing. Healthy lives are supported by many kinds of connection; friendships, family, community, meaningful work, hobbies, spirituality, and our relationship with ourselves. When we nurture these areas, we place less pressure on our romantic relationships to be everything.



Rethinking Modern Love

For more than two decades, psychotherapist Esther Perel has encouraged people to rethink many of the myths surrounding modern love. In her influential book *Mating in Captivity*, she explores how today's relationships are expected to provide both complete security and endless excitement which are two needs that can naturally pull in different directions. Rather than offering simple solutions, her work invites us to become more curious about our expectations and more compassionate toward ourselves and our partners.

Perhaps the healthiest question we can ask is not, "Is this relationship perfect?" but rather, "Is this relationship helping us grow?"



When Technology Meets Intimacy

The rise of artificial intelligence introduces another fascinating question about the future of human connection. Increasingly, people are forming emotional attachments to AI companions and chatbots. These digital relationships can feel comforting because they are designed to be consistently available, attentive, validating, and free from the unpredictability that comes with real human interaction.

While AI can offer companionship, practice for difficult conversations, or even reduce feelings of loneliness, it also raises important questions. Human relationships require compromise, negotiation, empathy, and the willingness to encounter perspectives different from our own. AI, on the other hand, can be personalized to reflect our preferences, reinforce our beliefs, and rarely challenge us unless it is specifically designed to do so.



This highlights a broader cultural shift. As technology becomes better at meeting our immediate emotional needs, we may become less tolerant of the very qualities that make human relationships meaningful.

Love isn't about finding someone who perfectly meets every need. It's about building a relationship where two imperfect people feel safe enough to grow, communicate openly, and continue choosing one another through life's inevitable changes.

“The word ‘love’ is most often defined as a noun, yet we would all love better if we used it as a verb.” — bell hooks

“The quality of your life ultimately depends on the quality of your relationships.” — Esther Perel

“Instead of looking for a person who checks all the boxes, focus on a person with whom you can imagine yourself writing a story with that entails edits and revisions.” — Esther Perel



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