

# THE TEN DELUSIONS

[ *And How to Survive Them Effectively* ]

**A Guide to Understanding Committed Relationships**



TODD DEWETT PhD



# THE TEN DELUSIONS

(and how to survive them effectively)

A guide to understanding  
committed relationships

TODD DEWETT, PH.D.

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## DEDICATION

This book is for all who have experienced love. The ups, the downs, the smiles, and the tears. You know what only people who have loved can know. Love is as challenging as it is beautiful. It's as mysterious and difficult as it is satisfying and comforting.

That reality never changes, though if you're diligent you can tip the scales clearly towards a more consistently positive and fulfilling experience.

I wish you more love – done right!

## DISCLAIMER

Hi. My name is Todd. I've been a consultant, a coach, a professor, an entrepreneur, a father, and a husband. I've won some and lost some. I've made a lot of mistakes. Just ask my first wife. Marriage two is going pretty well, no doubt due to things I learned during the first one and things I've learned from others along the way.

I think you will find this book quite useful. However, for the record, I'm not a counselor, pastor, psychologist or any other flavor of credentialed professional as pertains to relationships or marriage. I'm a recovering scholar (PhD in Management/Organizational Behavior), a well-known educator around the planet, and a person who has had intimate conversations about relationships with thousands of people.

This book represents what I've learned from my mistakes, a fair amount of research, and from talking to you. Nothing more, nothing less.

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## **de·lu·sion**

/də'ləōZHən/

*noun*

An idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained, despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument, typically a symptom of mental disorder.

Please note that the following delusions can be held by either gender or any gender identity. Pronoun use moving forward is basically random.

## THE TEN DELUSIONS

- 1 – The way I feel now is the way I'll feel forever.
- 2 – I know him.
- 3 – I like that we are different!
- 4 – I know what I'm doing.
- 5 – I can satisfy him.
- 6 – I can fix him.
- 7 – It's no big deal.
- 8 – Yeah but...
- 9 – I need to take care of me.
- 10 – If she wins, we win.

# INTRODUCTION

*"An honest life is difficult, but a delusional life is a nightmare."*

People desire healthy relationships, yet few seem to find them. There are a million books, blogs, coaches, and articles designed to help you create productive relationships, so why do you still struggle?

You struggle because relationships are tough. It doesn't help that you've been tricked into living a lie. You are not being straight with yourself. You are not being honest with your partner. To cope, you load the syringe with a fat dose of delusion every day and drop the plunger.

This book can help. It also might hurt. It might upset you. However, it can also push you towards more positive, honest, and productive relationships. The problem is that you have not been trained to understand relationships.

Instead, you have been fed a never-ending stream of fictions in the form of false impressions put forth by other couples, romantic comedies and romance novels, half-truths perpetuated by your parents and other pundits, false impressions created on



social media, and mountains of junk television.

It's time to cut through this unproductive mess. Get ready – the truth hurts, but it's far more useful than delusion.

Some people have truly great relationships. They are defined, on average, by positivity, effort, and growth. However, they're pretty rare. For most of you, relationships are a pain. This book is for you. You don't have to live with the pain, though you will have to humble yourself and work pretty hard to create the relationship you need.

For you true relationship rookies, let's start with this little bit of reality: you won't always have butterflies in your stomach when your partner is around, the sex will fade, familiarity does sometimes breed contempt, and you will experience fights and boredom and all kinds of additional, completely unforeseen challenges.

Don't worry. It's not all bad news. When you create and manage a relationship correctly, the benefits are flat-out life changing. You receive love, support, and a beautiful friendship that makes life absolutely worth it. What could be better? However, you do have to put more time into planning for relationship success than people spend planning the wedding and honeymoon.

I could talk at length about the good that comes from marriage. Married people tend to be happier and less stressed, have a lower risk of many diseases including cancer and heart disease, and they tend to live longer. Not bad!

The point of this book, however, isn't to trick you into some form of long-term partnership by focusing on the amazing benefits. My goal is to help you avoid the well-known mines on the battlefield so that you survive and continue to enjoy the benefits.

When you get it right, love is amazing. It's full of mind blowing feelings of caring and attraction. The feeling that all is possible in life and that you're the luckiest person alive. It is a bond with fascinating and powerful positive emotions that rock you to your core. All true. You just need to be educated and honest about where that all comes from and how long it lasts. Depending on the work you put in, it may not last long at all.

In the end, great relationships are about good fit and hard work. No amount of hard work will overcome poor fit. No amount of great fit will overcome excessive selfishness and laziness. This book is designed to help you understand the reality of relationships and the hard work required to keep them healthy.

As you read the rest of this book, please keep a couple things in mind. First, the target is long-term committed relationships. This includes marriages, partnerships, or any other form of genuine attempt to be together for a long duration. As a result, I might use a few words interchangeably, including spouse, partner, or significant other.

Also, please don't get hung up on my use of male or female roles in any examples that are included. Each role can be played by any gender. Yes, traditionally we do know that men and women are different, but depending on the relationship or the issue, the roles can be reversed. Further, if you are male, female, trans, non-binary, or have some other identity – I fully respect that identity, but for simplicity I'll mostly use traditional pronouns. Believe me, all humans face terribly similar relationship challenges.

Let's get started.



# CHAPTER 1

## WELCOME TO YOUR MESS

*“There is something enchanting about a good relationship. Why else would we endure a thing so fraught with peril?”*

What? You are unhappy with your relationship? You feel trapped and don't know what to do? How did this happen?

You did this. You are ultimately responsible for yourself, but I must admit, the odds have been stacked against you. We were all trained to be delusional by our parents and society, but not intentionally. As a species, we simply aren't great at dealing with certain issues. Most adults can't deal with reality. That's one of the reasons they teach their children so many odd beliefs, or simply fail to teach them about certain topics at all.

As a result, young people believe a million things that are simply insane. Without even touching religion, race, or politics, the evidence is everywhere. Just to use a few Western examples, they believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. Kids believe they can be professional athletes, astronauts, and even the President of the United States (all true, but the odds are horrible).

The list is long. Don't go swimming after you eat. Jerking off will make you go blind. You can wish on a falling star. A penny in a fountain makes your wish come true. Blowing out the candles on your birthday cake will also make your wish come true – as long as you don't tell anyone what you wished for.

Sex might be the best example ever. The education available to young people is typically quite poor. This leads to absurd and dangerous beliefs. If you don't "go all the way" you can't get sexually transmitted diseases. If you swallow semen you can become pregnant. You will lose your virginity if you use tampons.

My parents were kind people, but they, too, had difficulty with reality. For example, until her senior year in high school my poor mother believed that French kissing a boy would result in pregnancy! Talk about a shocking lack of education. Her mother is actually the one who gave her this idea.

Fast forward many years and things did not get much better for me when I came of age. My father did not want to give me "the talk" as a responsible father should. Instead, he waited until I was caught making out with a girl in the neighborhood when I was in middle school. Her little brother saw us kissing and touching each other and told her parents, who told my parents.

Dad came home from work that day and called me to the living room. He paced nervously in front of me. I had no idea what was going on. I was only thirteen years old.

Finally, my mother spoke up and told me what they had learned. Then Dad gave me his version of “the talk.” This is the talk in its entirety:

“Keep your peter in your pants!” Then he stormed out of the room. Deep stuff.

Many aspects of relationships are difficult, but we cannot avoid them, or we only perpetuate ignorance, bad decision-making, and difficult, life-changing outcomes.

For example, we are all experts at feeling infatuation and sexual attraction. It’s natural. The problem with most people is that they often mistake these things for evidence of real relationship compatibility. Attraction and compatibility are radically different things. Failing to make this distinction can lead to strange consequences – like marriage.

Next thing you know, you’re wearing the ring! You’re tied down, no room to maneuver. Over time you begin to feel locked in a prison. You don’t feel the love any longer. You don’t feel understood.



You don't feel appreciated. You have several more decades of this situation to endure. You basically feel like you are just waiting to die. Ever been there? Many of us have.

Here is the reality: a mountain of marriages end in divorce. The rate (give or take) is about 50% for first marriages, 60% for second marriages, and over 70% for third marriages. Third time is the charm, right?

A casual look at the data might seem to suggest that we are bad at marriage and we get worse with consecutive attempts. However, you have to remember not to be fooled into thinking about the divorce rates. For long-term relationship success, you are wise to look instead at those who stayed married – and happy. What is their secret?

I'm especially interested in the successful second and third marriages – and there are plenty! The vast majority of the people who get divorced twice or more are people making the same mistakes they made during round one. They did not grow, they did not reflect, and they did not become a better version of themselves.

In the first marriage they were selfish, they fooled around outside of the marriage, they never took feedback seriously, they never forgave or asked for forgiveness, and so on. They attributed all of

the problems to the other person to justify their mistakes. Once they get divorced and become lonely, they convince themselves that the solution is simply choosing the “right person” for the second marriage. Then they repeat the process. What a joke.

Listen, you need more high quality love in your life. Life is hard for you at times, isn't it? Life is hard most of the time for everyone. Remember that every person you meet every day is fighting a battle you don't know about. I don't care if you're rich or poor; black, white, brown, or purple; old or young; clear about your gender or thoroughly confused – life is hard.

That's why love is so amazing. It comforts you. It builds you up. It makes you feel that you are not alone in this crazy world. It helps you believe in life. It helps you cope with challenges. Even after the early stages of love fade and things change – as they always do – love is a beautiful gift that defines what is best in life.

You're not going to follow the traditional unproductive patterns that plague relationships and threaten love. You're going to think openly and honestly about yourself and about your relationship.

## PERSPECTIVE IS EVERYTHING

There is no doubt, however, that marriage will tax you like you can't imagine. This book will ask you to think about the difficulties you've experienced in your relationship. It will also ask you to look critically at yourself. It can be heavy at times. So, a little perspective and levity might be useful to get us started.

You think modern beliefs are odd? Consider the progress we've made:

Marriage was once thought to be required for a man to be in good standing. In ancient Greece, Solon (638-538 B.C.) considered making marriage compulsory, and in Athens under Pericles (495-429 B.C.), bachelors were not allowed to hold public positions. In Sparta, single and childless men were treated poorly. In ancient Rome, Augustus (63 B.C.-A.D. 14) passed harsh laws requiring people to marry and assessing fines for those who did not. Maybe they were on to something and we should bring back public shaming?

During the 1500's, most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and were still smelling pretty decent by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide any body odor. Today, we shower all the time, we still carry flowers, and yet marriages are failing left and right.



The tradition of the “best man” is thought to have originated with the Germanic Goths around the same period. A friend became designated the “best man” for, specifically, the job of stealing the bride from her neighboring community or disapproving family. So, he was your best friend, insanely brave, and murderous if necessary. Wow.

Queen Victoria started the Western world’s white wedding dress trend in 1840 - before then, brides simply wore their best dress. White was a color for the rich. It was an indicator of wealth, not a symbol of virginity. Somehow the practice spread. It is widely thought to symbolize purity and innocence. That’s odd, since the vast majority of adults have enjoyed coitus prior to their nuptials – multiple times.

One of the earliest engagement rings was given to Princess Mary, daughter of King Henry VIII. She was two years old at the time. This is not as shocking as you might think. Throughout most of history, marriage was not necessarily based on mutual love. It was a way to acquire in-laws, property, and new labor for the family by creating children. The modern notions of love and marriage are actually very new, relatively speaking.

Views of sex have evolved significantly over time. For example, Egyptian men once thought it distasteful to deflower their new brides and gave the chore to a hired servant. Or consider the Talmud, which not only bans extramarital sex, but also specifies how often husbands should have sex with their wives. For men of independent means, every day; for laborers, twice a week; for ass-drivers, once a week; for camel-drivers, once in thirty days; and for sailors, once in six months. Choose your vocation wisely.

As these historical artifacts make clear, marriage is a thrilling, interesting, uplifting, bizarre, and dangerous affair. But don't take my word for it. Consider the words of these daring and learned people:

*“Men marry women with the hope they will never change. Women marry men with the hope they will change. Invariably they are both disappointed.”*

**Albert Einstein**

*“Marriage is a wonderful invention: then again, so is the bicycle repair kit.”*

**Billy Connolly**

*“Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and just visit now and then.”*

**Katharine Hepburn**

*“Marriage is an attempt to solve problems together which you didn’t even have when you were on your own.”*

**Eddie Cantor**

*“Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.”*

**Benjamin Franklin**

*“My wife and I were happy for twenty years. Then we met.”*

**Rodney Dangerfield**

*“Longed for him. Got him. Shit.”*

**Margaret Atwood**

*“I came from a big family. As a matter of fact, I never got to sleep alone until I was married.”*

**Lewis Grizzard**

*“I love being married. It’s so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life.”*

**Rita Rudner**

My, how far we’ve come – kinda. For much of the planet, gone are the archaic beliefs and practices derived from ancient writings, traditions, and simple ignorance. Women are rapidly becoming equals in every way. Gender itself is being redefined in interesting new ways. People marry outside of their race, religion, and socioeconomic status. That’s real progress.

However, our progress brings us to a new challenging place where the success of marriage is determined mostly by knowledge of relationships and our efforts to use that knowledge. Tradition, family, and religion still play a role for some, but ultimate success depends on how much the two people honestly desire to be good partners.

I think most people like this proposition, though we're not necessarily good at living up to the potential it suggests. Faced with the reality of navigating a committed relationship, we often arrive at the beliefs and feelings expressed in the quotes above.

Then why do we keep trying? Because, when done right – it's so incredibly worth it.

## THE HONEYMOON

The honeymoon is a state of existence that is very well-known. When you get a new job, you enter the honeymoon phase. You're excited. In fact, you're so elated that the massive learning curve you face feels more invigorating than defeating. People are nice to you! Your boss is kind! Fun times.

Same thing happens in relationships. Your interactions with your partner are fun, effortless, and fulfilling. You don't think about the person's shortcomings. You don't tire of their presence. You don't direct negative behaviors towards them. When you're together, it's quite shocking how fast time flies. You literally imagine that it's impossible to ever grow tired of them.

We all know the honeymoon never lasts. Well then, how can one possibly explain this radically positive phase of existence in the face of the endless changes and challenges that always emerge? The answer is not rational. It's chemical.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHEMICAL CLOUD: THE BIRTH OF DELUSION

*“Love is the strongest narcotic, and it’s free.  
Of course we’re junkies.”*

There are only three phases to any relationship: the honeymoon, the reality, and the reaction.

The “honeymoon” is a short period of blissful ignorance with lots of romantic love. This begins before formalizing your partnership and lasts for some relatively short period following the decision to be a couple.

The “reality” is the period when you realize that everything is not as it seems. You are not exactly who you said you were. Your partner is not exactly who you thought they were. Things are not as perfect and easy as you imagined. It’s an incredibly tough dose of truth about the real nature of the relationship you have chosen.

The “reaction” is the phase when things have become difficult enough for change to be absolutely necessary. It might be very problematic change at first (e.g., fights, adultery), but it could end up

quite positive (e.g., counseling, a seriously improved relationship). In any event, the status quo won't last.

There are many ways to explain why you might find yourself in a mess of a relationship: decisions made with too much youthful exuberance and optimism, poor decision-making skills, peer pressure applied by significant others and society, the inability to correctly end a relationship, fear of being alone, and so on.

But I guess it's worth it, right? When you feel the spark with someone, it's intoxicating. I find it useful to think about the small spark and the big spark. The first is the everyday interest or intrigue one might feel, but only the second one ignites a potentially life-changing chemical reaction.

The small spark represents our most simple form of sexual attraction. This type of spark happens all the time. As a species, we are wired to feel a physical attraction to others. There are many triggers; how they look, how they smell, something they say, what they wear, and so on. It's as normal as breathing and our desire for food and shelter. Being "good" in light of this truth, however, is a very important topic to address. The small spark does not make us want to take vows or otherwise make long-term commitments. It's just the natural process of taking notice.

The big spark is far more rare, interesting, and challenging. It might hit you once or twice in a lifetime. It's what we think of as "falling in love." It represents a much higher level of attraction, one that feels as if it might be measured in years instead of days. It contains a very real sexual attraction, but also much more. Vows? Sure, let's do this.

It also includes your logical attraction based on your belief that you have high compatibility with the other person. This then feeds a significant emotional attraction as well. You become willing to trust and to be vulnerable.

When this rare occurrence of sexual, logical, and emotional attraction happens, there is an explosion. Literally. A love explosion. A blinding cocktail of chemicals floods the brain and distorts reality better than the best-known psychoactive drugs.

Unfortunately, in the presence of the big spark, the explosion happens quickly, seriously compromising your judgment as you think about your fit with the other person. I refer to the aftermath of this explosion as the chemical cloud.

Testosterone and estrogen light the fuse. When the bomb goes off and the cloud surrounds you, it's impossible to think straight. The brain goes nuts and overindulges in phenylethylamine, nor-

epinephrine, and dopamine. This is something like an amphetamine rush that inclines you to feel attraction. What follows is a burst of oxytocin and endorphins and a lowering of serotonin. This helps you feel a calming, positive attachment, if not a lovely obsession and dependence – not unlike the effect of a good opiate. Finally, vasopressin helps create a desire to move from just sex to a more committed relationship. Drugs!

What a mess. Many medical doctors have noted the parallels between this love-driven chemical party and various diagnosable mental health conditions. Love makes you crazy! In some ways, I think that falling in love is like being really drunk. The difference is that when you're drunk you only have to survive one painful morning with a hangover. When you fall in love it can affect your entire life!

The effects of the chemical cloud are quite strong. It distorts your ability to accurately assess fit with the other person, it makes you like things you normally don't like, it makes you dismiss as unimportant things about them you don't like, it makes you kinder and more forgiving than you have ever been, and it makes you cheerfully bend and compromise at levels never before seen. In essence, you're driven to feel a false sense of deep alignment with the other person.

Real fit is about significant overlap of values, interests, beliefs, and goals. For relationship success, you don't need, or really want, perfect overlap, just significant overlap.

The cloud inclines us to unintentionally misrepresent ourselves as we initially get to know the other person and begin to assess fit. We are managing impressions, which is understandable. However, if you manage impressions while on drugs, you say all kinds of things that are not really reflective of your values, interests, beliefs, or goals.

All of a sudden, you like things you did not like last week. People who have a hard time getting off the couch tell their potential partner that they love to go to the gym at six in the morning. People with limited sexual interests will tell their partner how much they enjoy any number of colorful sexual practices. People who crave animal meat more than air will tell their prospective partner they love vegetarian dishes. And they mean it! Drugs are powerful.

Of course, both people in love are doing this. Together you weave a fictional reality and believe it to be completely legit. Not only do you manage impressions poorly while on drugs, you also see a lot of things about the other person and interpret them favorably when you normally would not.



One minute you can't stand something. The next minute you feel that, you know what, well – it's really kinda okay! She smokes once in a while, but so what. He really wears a lot of camouflage, but I think somehow it looks good on him. She has no career aspirations at all, but who cares since life is simply about being happy. He is unemployed, but I don't care because with that winning personality it can't possibly last.

You dismiss an amazing array of things as unimportant. Further, you check all of your normal harsh reactions. If you are talking to your father, your best friend, or your colleague and they make a disparaging comment about your political party preference, what would you normally do? You would speak your mind and assert your truth.

Not when you're lost in the cloud. You might be a life-long Democrat, but when he says he's a Republican, you think to yourself, "Well, I should be open-minded and not judge." Or, "Huh, maybe he can explain it. I mean, I'm not a political expert. Besides, who really cares about politics?"

Next thing you know, you're doing things you said you would never do! You part with your favorite piece of nasty furniture that you've kept since college. You go to church. You sell the motorcycle. You vacation in a place you don't really like. You film your bedroom activities! Oh, love!

In truth, there are many things that trigger and explain the cloud explosion including factors from your childhood, your biology, socioeconomics, and many more. Scientists admit, however, that we don't yet understand why, in a room full of potential partners, you experience the explosion with one particular person.

What they all do agree on is that you're stupid when inhaling the cloud. We engage in huge amounts of well-intentioned nonsense. Here is a classic example; on the topic of values, we very often manage impressions and profess values that are far better described as aspirational or safe, as opposed to real.

Aspirational, in that you once dreamed of achieving it. Maybe for a day. Four years ago. Safe, in that you feel some particular value feels consistent with "good" mainstream people or with what you feel your partner might accept. Oddly, in the moment, you really do mean it.

Regarding fitness, for example, you might profess a desire to one day run a marathon. In reality, you simply enjoy the occasional walk. You conveniently forget about your beer and potato chip fetish and tell her that you love broccoli and kale. On religion, you tell him that of course you believe in God! Yet when not in the cloud, you have

always professed doubts. In your first big sex talk she admits she loathes any kind of oral sex. You smile and assure her that does not matter at all! The cloud is brutal.

Another way to look at the cloud is that it provides you a false sense of comfort. Comfort is one of my all-time favorite litmus tests for love and friendship. I've met so many people who lack a sense of ease in their relationship. If you can't feel at ease most of the time in a marriage or partnership, you have made a terrible choice. If you are always "on," like you're worried about what they are thinking or might say, feeling like you are putting on an act – you're in for a lot of relationship-related pain.

The problem is that the chemical cloud produces a false sense of ease for a while. All the distortions noted above conspire to make you see only sunny skies. That's not a rational comfort. That's a drug buzz. Real comfort exists if you feel at ease after sharing deep truths with each other, sans the chemical cloud. That is why it often makes sense to date longer, not shorter, before making big decisions. That is why living together can be useful. You gain real data, less saturated with that toxic mix of chemicals.

No matter which path you choose, while you're dancing happily in the cloud, you encounter the first set of delusions.

At its heart, a delusion is just a mental game we play in order to feel good about ourselves and our lives. It's about distorting reality to see what you want to see. Your goal now is to admit they exist and that you're using them. The sooner the better. I'll help you identify the major delusions you've been using, but it will be up to you to admit it and do something about it.

In the middle of this drug haze, the first crop of delusions arises to protect the dream. Subconsciously, you want to believe all of your original positive thoughts about your partner are true. You want to believe that you are making sound decisions. Delusions help you achieve these goals.

For each delusion, first I'll state the interesting and unusual thinking that takes over your brain, followed by a description of reality as you might understand it, if you were not lost in the fiction.

#### DELUSION 1

The way I feel now is the way I'll feel forever.

This is the big daddy of delusions. I love him. He loves me. He's nearly perfect. I can't believe how lucky I am. Our love is eternal! It is easy to commit to forever when you know you will feel this way forever.

The problem is that you are both shooting drugs together right now. The chemicals will naturally fade. They may or may not come back at different intervals, depending on your fit and your efforts to support the relationship.

Marriage has little to do with the chemical cloud. A more accurate statement is that a marriage or any type of long-term partnership is based on good fit, commitment, and underlying rational love, punctuated by periods of liking, and rare periods of chemical love. It's also not uncommon to have periods where you don't really care for the person at all and wonder if you're capable of continuing. Don't freak out – that's normal.

By rational love, I'm referring to a relationship that is thought out and planned, not simply a spontaneous romantically-driven relationship. Certainly, a better relationship includes a little spontaneity and a nice dose of romance, but it also needs to be thoughtful. It takes a lot of sometimes touchy conversation to establish real fit. You have to address values, goals, fears, and interests to establish that there is in fact a nice overlap.

But even a good fit doesn't mean there will be no challenges. A long-term relationship inevitably goes through good times and bad times – that's why they put that phrase in the vows! Thirty years



later, if you are still together, you'll look back and see clear phases. Some that were exhilarating, some that were uninteresting and hard to remember, and some that you can't believe you lived through. Some are long, others short. The proverbial roller coaster is quite real.

I'm not disparaging the reality of love. I love the stuff. I simply wish that everyone would achieve a higher level of success. That requires a lot more than giving in to the chemical cloud. It requires you to understand how to survive the roller coaster.

## DELUSION 2

I know him.

No, no you don't. You think you do, but you don't. You might know a lot. You might like what you think you know. You might know more about him than most. You might know his espoused view on a variety of issues. However, you only know a little. Very little. It takes years, if you're lucky, to really know a person.

Come on. Think about it. Does he really know all there is to know about you? Does he know that you think his brother is super cute? Does he know you slept with your BFF Michelle in high school? The fact that you honestly believe aliens are living among us? No. He does not know all of your deepest thoughts and beliefs.

When you fall in love you do let down your guard and bring your partner in closer, but certainly not all the way. I don't think anyone ever knows everything about their partner. There are simply some thoughts and beliefs we keep to ourselves. Of course, you don't have to know literally everything. However, for a successful partnership, you need to share significantly more than you've shared with anyone else. That happens over time. What you know when the cloud first explodes is basically jack squat.

One of the biggest traps people fall into, is believing they are supposed to be privy to every last thing in their partner's mind. That is completely unreasonable. Further, you don't want to know everything they are thinking.

Follow my logic. No person is perfect. All good people sometimes do or say things their partner will not like. All good people have normal human thoughts not fit for polite society. People have been socialized not to admit this, but it's as natural as breathing; boy, I'd like to sleep with that lady, I would punch my boss in the face if I could get away with it, I think my wife's family's religion is straight-up nuts.

Normal people have these thoughts! What makes good people good is recognizing that these thoughts are just that – thoughts, not invitations

to act in a potentially deviant or unacceptable manner. They are normal, and typically fleeting, and not problematic in the least when seen for what they are – just thoughts.

You have to get over it. Get this – both of you actually share some thoughts with friends that you don't share with each other! What? How could they? It's normal. She might speak to her girlfriends about money, or kids, or whatever with more candid comments than she offers you. He may chat with his pals about how he is sick of being an accountant but feels he has to stay with it for the money, about how he thinks the new neighbor is gorgeous, or how he's sick of his partner's friends who are always at his house.

This is life, these things are inevitable, not weird. Get a grip and put things in perspective. You don't need to know your partner perfectly. You simply need to know him or her, overall, better than all the rest, and you need to trust each other.

### DELUSION 3

I like that we are different!

This is one of my favorites and it's one that does real damage later. It is very often the case that opposites attract. That doesn't mean it lasts. For many, that which you initially find intriguing becomes the exact thing you can't stand later. Think of it this way; a little or some difference is really

good. It gives you space to be an individual, not just part of a couple. A lot of difference is dangerous. It can create a feeling of being alone, misunderstood, and undervalued.

Consider these examples:

The extrovert and the introvert – When the bomb first exploded: I know I'm quite the introvert, but I find his extroversion exhilarating. It complements me. He says what I wish I could say. We are such a cool ying and yang! As the chemicals fade: Really? Doesn't he ever stop talking? Does he have to share his opinions on every issue, every time, with everyone?

The risk taker and the risk averse – When she first suggested you should try sushi: I know it seems weird, but it must be good – she loves it! The raw fish is okay I suppose, but I really like the ginger salads and the eel kind of tastes like chicken. More please! After you come back to your senses and the chemicals fade: Wings! Somebody give me wings! And beer – I want beer!

The financially adventurous and the fiscally conservative – When he first suggests we purchase something large: I agree, let's get the boat! I guess we deserve some fun, and besides, we're young and have plenty of time to pay off the loan. Down the road a bit: I can't believe he wants to build an addition to the house when we still haven't paid

off the boat. Doesn't he know that we have to start saving for retirement? He's so irresponsible!

To be honest, this type of thing happens even if you're not opposites per se. It's often just about familiarity breeding contempt. Things about them that you once found endearing somehow morph into things that really get under your skin. Why? Because you've seen them a million times!

At first: He is really into the history of religion. It's amazing how he can explain the evolution of religions across time. I'm fascinated. Two years later: I don't want to know any more about the bible, why it was written, by whom, or when! I just want to go to church and believe!

When you first get together: Oh my god – I love your Dodge Charger. Now that you have allowed me behind the wheel, I can't imagine driving anything less than eight cylinders! The month after marriage: You know honey, we have a family to think about. You have to stop looking for the next gas guzzling muscle car. We need to be practical and get a minivan.

When you started dating: I can't believe how many baseball stats this girl knows. I've never met a girl who knows more about a sport than I do. That is so cool. After hundreds of hours of watching baseball on television and five separate road trips to

watch live games: No! I don't want to schedule our vacation around the Marlins' spring-training schedule. Can't we just go to a beach somewhere?

If you are opposites, please know that it can work, but it's not common or easy. It requires personalities that are quite open and tolerant. You don't have to be a perfect fit in terms of interests, but the overlap should be significant. You're wise to be skeptical of anything less. However, that's the point of this chapter, isn't it? You have no power to choose. You're wasted on drugs, swimming in the cloud!

#### DELUSION 4

I know what I'm doing.

I suppose this one feeds the others. It's a very common thought for people who are in love. I got this. My eyes are open. I am clear about what I am doing and I'm confident I'm making solid decisions. Yeah, right.

There are some things in life you simply can't understand until you do them. You can say you understand. You can read about the topic. You can talk to others about their experiences. Great, but that doesn't mean anything. Think about it: going to war,

losing a loved one, growing old, having children – you can't understand them until they happen.

Marriage goes in this category as well. You don't know how it will feel day after day. You can't imagine the challenges and conflicts that will surface. You have no idea how hard it is to pay for the dream you have dreamed. You know nothing about the daily work required to properly care for a child. Sometimes marriage will exceed your expectations. Many times, it will fall short of what you imagined.

However, you're not crazy full-time when lost in the cloud. There are moments of clarity, fleeting though they might be. You might actually assemble a few rational thoughts or questions. Do we share a sufficient number of hobbies? I mean, will I ever like to watch NASCAR races? Will he ever learn to love antiquing?

Unfortunately, not having a good answer to these questions is oddly acceptable when you're in the cloudy haze. The questions are quickly replaced by a surreal feeling that all will somehow be okay.

You've seen it happen right in front of your eyes. Ever seen a friend at a bar make the transformation from being sober, to completely impaired by beer goggles? We are talking about the same effect, essentially. A temporary chemical reality (in this case



being drunk on alcohol) is driving your friend's behavior. They were well-behaved just an hour ago. Now, they are begging some strange-looking person to take them home. What?

Luckily, you are with your friend and can take care of them. It doesn't work that way with marriage, does it? Nope. In a marriage or any serious partnership, chemically induced optimism leads to all kinds of unforeseen challenges – and your friends can't save you.

#### DELUSION 5

I can satisfy him.

This one is going to hurt. We can't talk about the delusions taking over your life while you are lost in the cloud without talking about sex. I know that I can satisfy him! That's possible, but not likely, and certainly not easy. Your sexual interest in him will rise and fall. Over time it's more fall than rise for a variety of normal predictable reasons. Same goes for his interest in you.

Not only do you lose interest, but you won't always agree on sex-related issues the way you did at the beginning. For example: how often you have sex, the type of sex you engage in, sexual toys, pornography, etc. Reasonable people sometimes disagree on these issues. However, there are two absolutely essential sex-related topics any aspiring couple must deal with and talk about: monogamy and masturbation.

First, monogamy. Humans evolved to embrace monogamy for social reasons, not as a biological necessity. It is largely for the benefit of our children. However, like most mammals, we're not great at being monogamous. The science is strikingly clear. It is not our natural state. We are not wired to be with one person for a lifetime and feel content sexually. Most humans feel strong urges to, well, satisfy urges with others. How you choose to behave, relative to societal norms or relationship commitments, may determine how you are viewed by others, but the urge itself is wholly natural.

The amount of time that has been spent trying to deny this fact or vilify people who admit this fact is shocking and sad. If you have a problem with this, you have only two possible futures. In one, you are very unhappy because you notice time and again that your mate likes to look at other people. In the other, you are happy as a clam because you've denied this reality and fully embraced substitute delusions regardless of the data all around you.

There is, however, a third possibility. How does a person with character deal with the fact that monogamy is at times odd and difficult? The answer is honesty in conversation and clarity about behavioral boundaries. In terms of happiness and relationship longevity, this is a massively important statement. Stated differently, if you're both

reading from the same script, it doesn't really matter what it says.

Maybe you are together but rarely have sex. Maybe one of you likes to watch the other one fool around with another partner. Maybe you have an open relationship. Maybe you only have sex with each other on certain days of the month, with the lights out, after showering, in the bedroom, on the bed, under the covers, in the missionary position, followed by another shower.

Who cares. If you are both being honest and you are respecting the agreed upon rules and boundaries, you are good to go. Yes, the discussion might shift over time as interests change and evolve, but the point stands. It's dishonesty that ultimately gets people in trouble, not specific sexual behavior.

Next, is masturbation. This is of course a completely normal and healthy behavior. It can be enjoyed alone or with your partner. Most of you know this. Some of you still think it is somehow wrong and you try to hide it from your partner. Others might inappropriately shame their partner for engaging in this behavior.

Sexuality is a core aspect of what it means to be human. You do not have the right to make your partner deny some core part of their sexuality (assuming it is not highly deviant). That's as silly as

telling your gay teen son to stop being gay. If you're surprised when you find your partner masturbating, shame on both of you. He needs to learn to be honest. You need a basic sexual education class – and probably a little masturbation.

Of course, I'd like to believe you can follow my simple advice, but you can't. You're lost deep inside the cloud. Unfortunately, instead of having a deep sex talk before committing to a partnership, it only arises (if ever) later after a near break up when you're trying to rehabilitate the relationship.

Yes, the drug-fueled party does eventually end. The cloud inevitably fades. For some couples this happens in weeks, for most it begins to happen after several months, or maybe a year. Generally speaking, the worse the actual fit between the two of you, the quicker the chemicals go back to normal.

Humans are predictable. Your marriage is in many ways a goal you wished to achieve. It is a target that you wanted to secure. Once you've achieved that goal, it's natural to seek another. If the goal was a promotion at work, you get one and then begin thinking about the next one. If the goal was to get a pizza, you eat a slice, then grab the next slice – but, you typically don't feel like eating an entire pizza. Quickly, you get your fill. So, you achieved the goal of marriage, now what?

In relationships, once “forever more” begins, you view the person differently. The cloud makes sure that you never see it coming. Any honest married person will admit this. Dating your future partner and getting married are quite wonderful. Being married is a radically different thing.

As the chemical haze subsides, you both begin to see more clearly. The buzz has worn off and you can once again see in high-definition. Week after week, you both start to behaviorally slide back towards your normal selves – the people you unintentionally hid while courting. This is the regression to the mean, and it’s unavoidable.

The process speeds up as you both tumble back to reality. As the magnet of reality pulls you both towards your normal baselines, the last of the chemical fumes leave the room. You now see each other and the relationship more clearly than ever before. What you see surprises you. A little bit of it delights you. Some of it scares you to death.

He keeps walking around in cammo shorts! She keeps insisting on a romantic comedy every single Friday night! In many ways, you feel like you are just now starting to truly get to know your partner.

Reality is different than you thought. You continue to spot new oddities. The weight of commit-

ment and daily compromise sets in. On top of all of this relationship stuff, life continues to happen at breakneck speed: job issues, family issues, health issues – curveball after curveball!

Over time, without the assistance of the cloud, the initial delusions lose their effectiveness. You gain more clarity about your imperfect fit with your partner and the effort required to maintain the relationship (and the effort required to feel good about it). It's hard, and soon enough you both make mistakes.

The honeymoon is over. Say goodbye to the drug buzz. Now, reality begins.