

Gender Equity Project Colloquia and Workshops

Equality in Personal Relationships Activities and Discussion

Read: *Contemporary marriage: Still an equal partnership* (Steil, 2001)
Discusses the current state of contemporary marriage, barriers to equality, and reasons for continued gender inequality in present-day marriage.

Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high, pp. 65 – 92 and pp. 193 – 214 (Patterson, Greeny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002)
Offers useful strategies for initiating and maintaining conversations about difficult or sensitive issues.

When a spousal hire becomes a single mom (Trubek, 2004)
Food for thought; offers a first-hand account of the negative consequences of tying the success of one's career to the success of one's marriage.

Presentation and Discussion:

Professor Laurel Eckhardt will share personal experiences and discuss strategies for effective negotiation and establishing equality in personal relationships.

Negotiation can be as helpful at home as at work, as helpful with friends and lovers as with professional colleagues. Although negotiation with a friend or lover is different in some respects from negotiation with a colleague or a department chair, some of the same skills and principles are applicable. Equality is an issue in every adult relationship, and negotiation is necessary for mature interactions.

Factors that are particularly relevant in relationships are: sensitivity to and respect for the other person's point of view; an ability to explain how equality will improve the relationship for both people; a willingness to work through disagreements; a healthy respect for the power you hold (Williams & Valian, 2003).

Think about an occasion where you and your partner successfully worked together to solve a problem you were having.

- How did you move beyond conflict or disagreement?
- How did you address your partner's concerns and interests?
- How did you reach a compromise?

Now think about an occasion that specifically concerns a division of labor at home. If you and your partner successfully resolved the situation so that it more closely approached equality, think about how you did that. If you did not resolve the problem, think about why. Refer to the material in "Crucial Conversations" and in the handout on negotiation to try to understand what went wrong and to think about a better strategy.

Activity 1:

Each group will be assigned a negotiation scenario and role-play a negotiation between partners. Read the assigned scenario and discuss the negotiation with the entire group.

- a. Consider what the partner's interests in the issue might be and how you can either address concerns in order to negotiate more effectively, or how you can create a solution that is mutually beneficial.
- b. Think about the main character's position on the issue. Identify the tradeoffs she has available and how she can use them to generate compromise.
- c. Decide on the best way to conduct the negotiation and come up with a plan of action.
 - i. When and how will the main character raise the subject of the negotiation?
 - ii. How will she respond if the partner seems unwilling to compromise on the issue or even negotiate it to begin with?
 - iii. What counter-arguments can she use to overcome her partner's objections and reservations?
 - iv. How can the main character's desired outcome benefit both partners?
 - v. How can she convince her partner of these benefits?
2. Once the group has decided on the best plan of action, choose two people to act out the negotiation for the entire workshop. One person will negotiate as the partner and the other as the main character.
3. After each group has performed its role-play, we will all discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the group's plan of action, the main character's argument, and the overall success of each group's negotiation tactics.

Scenario 1: Sue's partner has been offered an attractive position elsewhere that would require relocating their family. Although they both have positions lined up in the new destination, Sue is not sure she wants to move. She has a good set of collaborators in NY and there are no people who work in her area at the new school. She also has a strong research team here of students that are not in a position to move with her. Sue feels confident she will be tenured at Hunter, but is uncertain that her accomplishments will be viewed as positively at Research University. Her partner does not feel his current position has much room for growth, but she thinks there are possibilities he is not considering.

Sue's partner has several reasons for why they should definitely move.

- His new position includes a higher salary
- Her new position is more attractive because the school is ranked higher
- The public school system is better there

Scenario 2: Martha has a grant proposal deadline in one month. She has been working on her proposal as well as other projects for the past few weeks and has now decided to devote as much time as she can to writing a successful proposal. She is prepared to suggest ways her partner can put in extra effort around the house over the next month to ensure that the housekeeping is done, groceries are bought, and meals are prepared without her doing as much of the work as usual so she has more time to work on her proposal. As she tells her partner that she is going to need to cut back on some of the things she usually does around the house for the next month, her partner tells her that she needs to cut back because she was just assigned a new case that is to go to trial in a month and will require her to work longer hours at the office.

Martha's partner has several points.

- This is not the only grant Martha can apply for but she has to work on the case now
- Martha can work at home while dinner is cooking or the laundry is going but she needs files she can't remove from the office

Scenario 3: Sally and her partner are going to have a child and need to find child care. Sally feels she has been doing all the leg-work and would like her partner to take a more active role. She has found a dozen possibilities and asks him to spend some time on it now so she can focus more on her work.

Sally's partner has several reservations.

- Sally knows more people with children so the networking is easier for her
- People involved in childcare are more comfortable speaking with the woman
- She has already started and knows what information to seek out
- If she knows all the possibilities she will be able to compare them more easily than if they are each only familiar with some of them – he is happy to help her make a final decision once she narrows it down

Take home exercise

Disagreements and minor conflicts are a normal and healthy part of any interpersonal relationship. Arguments can lead to open negotiation and communication around the area of disagreement that may ultimately help both partners develop a more equal relationship (Knudson, Martin, & Mahoney, 1998). Marriage is also a form of cohabitation and can be seen as special case of living with a roommate with different lifestyles and habits. In order to maintain harmony and live together successfully, they must accept and respect each other's preferences. Certain disagreements must simply be tolerated, and certain issues are just not worth fighting over. Think about some of the minor conflicts you have had with your partner, particularly those around housework. Would you handle the conflict the same way if you were dealing with a roommate instead of with your partner?

Reframe the conflict in terms of a roommate dispute, and consider the following questions:

- Is it worth fighting over?
- Is it something you can change?
- Is it a matter of simply having different habits or points of view about the quality of a household task (e.g. how clean is “clean”)?
- Is it something that you can learn to accept with minimal consequences to your personal well-being, the well-being of your partner, or the well-being of the family as a whole?
- Is it something you absolutely cannot tolerate and need to change or will just talking about it make you feel better?

Thinking about these questions whenever you encounter a minor conflict or disagreement with your partner can help put such small disputes into perspective. In addition, it can also help you to find simple resolutions to conflicts that may initially seem insurmountable.

References

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