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'Idealizing' Your Spouse Makes an Ideal Marriage

Study Shows Couples Are Happier When They See Only a Spouse's Good Qualities

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WebMD Health News

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March 3, 2011 -- Love is blind, and that may be a good thing. According to a new study, people who idealized their partners when they got married -- and saw primarily only their good qualities -- were more likely to still be happy with their mate three years later.

The study, published in *Psychological Science*, included 193 newlywed couples. Most participants were in their mid- to late-20s, nearly 90% of them were white, and their annual family income ranged from \$40,000 to \$70,000. At the beginning of the study and at six-month intervals over the first three years of their [marriage](#), each couple completed a battery of surveys.

In the surveys, they described themselves and their partner, rating their positive characteristics (kind, funny, understanding, or warm,) as well as the negative ones (lazy, critical, moody, distant, or immature). They then rated their ideal partner on the same scale. The couples also completed several other surveys that measured satisfaction, self-esteem, [depression](#), neuroticism, and attachment.

Seeing the Positive Side

Most often, self-assessments are grounded in reality, the researchers write. The way we see ourselves is fairly accurate. The way we see others, they continue, is often shaped by hope. With that in mind, they took one partner's self-assessment at face value and compared it to the other partner's assessment, as well as that partner's description of his/her ideal partner.

For example, John's ideal mate is funny and warm. And that is how he chooses to see Jane, who he has just married, despite the fact that Jane describes herself as moody and distant. Will John change his tune over time and come to regret his marriage to Jane? Or will his positive -- if skewed -- view of his wife help maintain his happiness?

Fortunately for John, the researchers found the latter to be true. In tallying the data, they discovered that those who did not idealize their partners when they got married tended to be more dissatisfied with their marriage by the end of the study compared to those who had an unrealistically idealistic view of their partner. Those in the "idealistic" group tended to be happier and more satisfied with their marriage.

"People are very good at changing their definitions to match how they want to see themselves or how they want to see others," study co-researcher Sandra Murray, PhD, says in a news release. Murray is a psychology professor at the University of Buffalo.

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SOURCES:

Murray, S. *Psychological Science*.

News release, Association for Psychological Science.

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