



Lesson Two
Articles:
Understanding Your
Transition Into Marriage

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Crossing the Threshold	5
Letting Go and Separating	13
When You're Mother Can't Let Go	17

Given that men comprise half of a marriage union, one might assume that they would receive equal attention around emotionally preparing for a wedding, yet 99% of wedding and marriage transition material out there is aimed at the woman. Whereas women are encouraged to focus on the planning as a way to distract from their normal feelings or fear, grief and confusion, men are encouraged to joke about the transition. If they dare to bring up their more uncomfortable feelings, they're met with a pat on the back and an old standard like, "Well, you're going to the gallows!" or "Don't worry, son. It's just the old ball and chain!" While these statements actually do validate that it's normal to be scared and that there is an aspect of getting married that is a death experiences, they provide little comfort to the man and offer no guidance or support for how to manage his fear and confusion.

In this lesson, I'll be addressing the guy who's going through his transition from bachelor to husband. What I typically see is that men go through their main doubting and fear stage prior to proposing, and once their girlfriend says yes, they're home free. If they do have cold feet, it doesn't typically last long as it's normal and expected in this culture for men to experience cold feet at some point.

Still, it happens, and men are entitled to the same contextual roadmap and support that I've been offering women for 14 years. Like all transitions, the more you can transition cleanly into your next role

as husband without hanging on to the old identity as bachelor, the more you'll embrace the new life without resentment or regret, and the more readily the two of you can begin your marriage on a healthy foundation.

Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Your Transition Into Marriage

Given that I'm a woman, my interest in the emotional world of weddings naturally led me initially to interview, talk with, ponder, and ultimately write about the experience of women during this rite of passage. But shortly after the publication of my first book, [The Conscious Bride](#), I began receiving hundreds of emails like the following:

Are you aware of a similar resource for the other person involved in this rite of passage? I bought [The Conscious Bride](#) for my fiancé after skimming it in the bookstore, and now I am jealous. It's so perfect for her; she's gained a whole new level of understanding and awareness. Any suggestions?

- James

When I speak to men like James, it's clear that they feel bereft of information to help guide them through their transition. Whereas the books for women focus on planning the "perfect" event, the scant books and magazine articles for men either inform them of proper etiquette and what they are traditionally responsible for or they downplay the emotional intensity of this rite of passage. I have yet to

encounter an article that offers real information that will help men understand their fears and make sense of the magnitude of this transition. Hopefully, the following information will begin to fulfill this need.

And if you're not feeling scared or a sense of loss, that's okay, too. It may be that your partner is carrying enough anxiety for both of you!

A Rite of Passage

What do I mean when I say "a rite of passage"? We've all heard the term, mostly in reference to the major transitions in life: adolescence, birth of a child, midlife (retirement), and old age. A rite of passage is, simply, an event that triggers a significant life change. As a part of this change, a major part of one's lifestyle and identity is left behind so that the new life can emerge. Think about adolescence: you were leaving behind the innocence of childhood so that the responsibility and maturity of young adulthood could begin to grow. The new life cannot take root until the old life is relinquished. This is true for all rites of passages.

A wedding, however, is rarely spoken of in terms of a rite of passage. There are plenty of reasons for this exclusion, the primary one being that our culture views the wedding as only a celebration and doesn't acknowledge that there are a host of difficult emotions that need to be

worked through on the road to welcoming in the joy. If we are unwilling to discuss the cords that need to be cut and the losses that need to be grieved, we will be unable to fully experience the joy and gain of the day and the wedding will only be viewed as a big party instead of one of the most significant transitions in adult life. If we are to walk into the new life with our eyes open, we must be willing to discuss what we are leaving behind.

What Are You Leaving Behind?

What are you saying goodbye to? In a word: your bachelorhood. Once you marry, you no longer exist as a single person in the world. The term bachelor carries many meanings and the sacrifice of this identity holds different ramifications for each man, but you must realize that once you cross the wedding threshold you will no longer be the man you've always been. Your singlehood, your youth, a portion of your freedom, and your attachments to your family of origin will begin to change as you approach the wedding day.

All too often, we see men who enter marriage without having relinquished this identity. They consciously or unconsciously think that life will carry on as before. While on the outside, especially if the couple has been living together, it may appear that nothing has changed, internally each person is undergoing an emotional earthquake. Even if the way of life does not radically shift after a

wedding, your bachelorhood and the people who helped form this identity need to be examined if you are to step into the shoes of marriage feeling joyous and prepared.

The Faces of Singlehood

As I mentioned, each man experiences the transition differently. Take a moment to read the following list to determine which aspects of this transition feel most prevalent for you:

1. "I'm no longer on the field."

With an engagement and impending marriage, the realization hits that the days of flirting, dating, and sleeping with other women are over. If the single way of life has comprised a significant portion of your identity, this can be a sobering thought! Even if you've been living with your partner, the commitment that a wedding seals creates a finality that needs to be recognized. You may be marrying the woman of your dreams, but there is still a loss of an identity and lifestyle, and the more you make this loss conscious, the easier the transition into a lifelong commitment will become.

2. "I'm losing my freedom."

As Robert says in his interview in this lesson, "I can't just go out and

drink with the guys and play hockey whenever I want. There are responsibilities now. It's over. My god, it's over!" Yes, the time of limitless freedom, of being a bachelor, of having no one to be accountable to, is over. While you are hopefully very much aware of the gift in having someone who cares about you and wants to know your whereabouts, at first this aspect of commitment and marriage might feel restricting. But, as with all aspects of transition, the more you are willing to acknowledge and talk about your fears and losses, the more quickly you will remember the beautiful and irreplaceable gains of sharing your life with your chosen partner.

3. "This is the end of my youth."

Connected to the loss of freedom is the realization that your youth is over. Youth is about freedom, about staying up all night with your friends, about exploring who are you and carving out your identity. You are responsible to no one but yourself. If you mess up financially, it doesn't directly affect anyone but you. If you drink all night long and wake up hung over, there's no one standing over you the next day with a curious expression on her face. While your decision to marry indicates that you rightly realize that at some point every boy needs to grow up, it still may be difficult to let go of the youth mentality. Again, it is essential to realize what you are saying goodbye the old ways so that you can offer a sincere and proud hello to the new life.

4. "My singlehood is over."

Once you marry, you will no longer be just an individual; you will be one becoming two. For many men, this is one of the most difficult adjustments to make. Men are conditioned in our culture to watch out for number one and to establish themselves as individuals early on in life. If a man has lived alone, he has probably become firmly established in his ways and it may be difficult to make compromises and think for two instead of one. With marriage comes the reality that there is another person who is directly affected by your actions. Different than just living together, marriage solidifies a bond and commitment that defies tangible reality, and this can take some adjustment. On the other hand, you now have someone is thinking about and considering you in her decisions and actions. This is one of the beauties of marriage. [I discuss this point in greater depth in the next article.]

5. "My relationship to my parents is changing."

Men are taught to break away from their parents early in life, so it is quite common for men to have already established an identity and value system separate from their parents' by the time they marry. However, I often work with men who still place their mother's opinions above their fiancé's, as often comes out around planning issues. With the new marriage, you are creating a new family. While it's important

to maintain healthy ties with your family, the primary allegiance needs to shift from family of origin to wife if the new relationship is to take root in healthy soil. [I discuss this point in greater depth in the next article.]

What To Do

Once you've realized how you're feeling, the next step is to take action so that these feelings don't obstruct your ability to feel joyous and present on your wedding day. Try taking these three simple steps:

1. **Acknowledge Your Experience:** Remember that you may feel sad, confused, and scared during your engagement. These feelings are a normal, expected part of your transition.
2. **Feel Your Feelings:** For most men, this is easier said than done. Unlike us women, you're not exactly conditioned to have a good cry when you feel overwhelmed! But it's important that you find a way to release your feelings, whether it's through focusing on them while you're punching the bag at the gym or driving out to the ocean and having a good scream.
3. **Get Support:** Talk to your family and friends about what's going on internally. If you have a close male friend, take a risk and let

him know some of the pre-wedding thoughts and feelings you're having. Your married friends might be a good place to start. Also, consider sharing your experience with your fiancé. I can guarantee you that she will appreciate your honesty and willingness to be vulnerable and it will certainly bring the two of you closer during this time.

Letting Go of Bachelorhood and Separating From Family of Origin

While I was researching and writing “The Conscious Bride” fourteen years ago, I simultaneously took notes and interviewed for the obvious sequel, “The Conscious Groom”. But when I presented the idea to my publisher they said that there simply wasn’t a male market for that kind of book. Perhaps they were right, but since that time I’ve received thousands of emails and posts on my message board from men who are seeking consciousness. I’ve sent them to the Groom’s Room section of my previous site; I encourage them to read “The Conscious Bride”, explaining that, while it’s written for women, the principles of transition cross all lines of gender, geography, religion, and culture and so it does apply to them; and I counsel them. But I always wish I could refer them to a resource that directly speaks to them in a serious way, a book that doesn’t make a mockery of their feelings and recognizes that the marriage transition is not less significant – and scary – for them than it is for their partners. At long last, 14 years after beginning this work, I’m delighted to offer this section for men.

I’m always touched by the emails from men. While there is more tolerance for grooms experiencing less-than-blissful feelings during the engagement (they’re almost expected to drag their feet a bit), it still takes courage for them to contact me or post on my message

board saying things like, “I’m having doubts and I don’t know who to talk to about them” or “I don’t want the traditional stripper bachelor party and I’m wondering if you have other ideas for meaningful bachelor party rituals.” These are men who are seeking consciousness and want to make sure that they’re getting married with as much awareness as possible. So these first two lessons of this course are for you: conscious men, scared grooms, guys who are in touch with their emotional life enough to know that this transition is enormous and that guidance is not only helpful, but necessary.

Men struggle with a variety of issues, all of which I’ll cover in this course, but for this article I’ll discuss the two most common areas where men are challenged: Letting go of bachelorhood and separating from your family of origin/transferring allegiance to your wife-to-be. The surface issue when men call me is usually the same as it is for women: I’m having doubts about my fiancé. I’m wondering if I love her enough. I’m having a hard time connecting to my love for her. We may spend some time talking about the myths and erroneous beliefs about love and marriage that permeate our culture, but eventually the surface issue simmers down to reveal the topics that are at the root of the doubt.

Just as it is for many women, letting go of being single requires focused attention and active emotional work if this aspect of the transition is to be done to completion. For some men, they’re just

relieved not to be single anymore and thrilled to put the dating scene behind them. But for many others, while they're ready to get married, they find themselves in the months leading up to the wedding wondering if this is really the right choice. The burning question is: Can I really give up flirting, dating, and having sex with other women? By saying yes to this one woman, I'm saying no to the other 7 billion, and that's a lot of nos! Men, like women, experience this as a real grief.

The confusion arrives when you assume that because you're thinking about other women and wondering if you can give them up, you must not be ready to get married. Rarely is this true. It's much more likely that you simply need to allow yourself time to grieve the loss: there will be no more flirting in the same way, no more first dates and the butterflies of a new relationship, no more one night stands or three month flings. One of the most helpful and powerful exercises I know is for men to write a goodbye letter to their bachelor self. Sometimes this letter needs to be written two or three times, but with enough attention and compassionate guidance, the loss lessens and ultimately opens up to excitement. In the action section of this lesson, I will encourage you to write one of these letters today.

The second area of struggle is often more difficult to identify and resolve. Even if you have separated geographically from your parents many years earlier, on the eve of marriage the ties that bind you to

your family of origin rear up with a force. Suddenly you feel caught between your fiancé and your parents and, if the allegiance isn't transferred from family of origin to future wife and the feelings not consciously identified, owned, and expressed, you will begin to harbor anger and resentment toward your fiancé for "putting you in this position." And with wedding planning on the table, there are endless situations where the allegiance is put to the test. Your parents want to invite eighty of their best friends and your fiancé wants a small affair. Your parents want the wedding in your hometown and your fiancé wants it in hers.

Transferring allegiance to your fiancé doesn't always mean choosing in her favor. Rather, it means making conscious choices with a thorough understanding of the underlying dynamics at play in mind. It means taking the time to have meaningful conversations with your parents and fiancé so that everyone understand that's it's not actually about how many people attend the wedding or where it takes place. The wedding is a ritual through which everyone involved grieves losses, adjusts to major changes and, in the end, welcomes with open arms the birth of a new family.

When Your Mother Can't Let Go

The following article is an excerpt from my book, [The Conscious Bride](#). The article begins with a common wedding disagreement as told through the bride's eyes, then offers my interpretation as a way to understand the conflict when we view it through the lens that the engagement is the time for separating and allowing the necessary grieving that always accompanies the transformation into a new identity.

If you see yourself in this scenario, it may be the time to ask yourself if your mother has sufficiently cut the ties that will allow you to successfully transfer allegiances from your family of origin to your new family. If not, if you find that she is being intrusive like the mother in this scenario, it's critical that you find a way to sensitively and diplomatically have a conversation with your mother about how she's feeling about you getting married – and forward her the article for mothers in the bonus section of this ecourse. Most likely, she's not even conscious that she's acting divisively and will appreciate you bringing some awareness to the situation.

One of the most critical factors in beginning your marriage with the best change for success is transferring allegiance from your family of origin to your partner. If your parents aren't facilitating this process,

it's your job to do whatever it takes to recognize the situation and take action on cutting the ties so that you can prioritize your wife-to-be.

Kathryn remembers the tension between her and her mother-in-law during the engagement:

"My mother-in-law was so intrusive during the planning. I remember the contrast from how she behaved toward me before Jay and I got engaged and afterward - it was like a faucet had been turned from warm to cold in a matter of minutes. She had never been overly welcoming of me, but she had always been polite and warm, and I knew that she liked me. But after we announced the engagement she started giving off the impression that she didn't want me to marry her son. When she saw that we were serious about getting married, she suddenly wanted to be a part of every element of the planning. She would call about five or six times a week and always ask to speak to Jay, and then rattle on and on about this cake or that caterer. It was unbelievable to me, and scary that Jay listened and didn't set some kind of boundary with her. We've been married five years now and the tension has definitely died down, but it did take a few years. Jay and I have fought a lot about it. It has been a very difficult issue, and it all started during the engagement."

Kathryn's situation is a very common story that is often played out on the wedding stage. This is the archetypal triangle consisting of the mother of the groom, the groom, and the bride - the triangle enacted in the myth between Aphrodite, Eros, and Psyche. This is the mother who cannot let go of her son, the mother whose grief at "losing" her precious boy is so big that she becomes somewhat of a tyrant around the planning of the wedding. The planning provides the perfect arena to spill out all of her rage at this insolent young woman who is "stealing" her son. She rants and raves to her son about the ridiculous choices his fiancé is making, about the amount of money she is spending or not spending, about her choice in table settings or food, and anything else she can dig her claws into.

The truth is that she is beside herself with emotion and has no understanding of how to manage it. She probably feels a great emptiness at the thought, most likely unconscious, that her son's primary allegiance is shifting to another woman. If the mother has used her son to fill the empty places in her life - perhaps an estranged marriage or an unsatisfying career - now is the time she will have to come face to face with these holes. Instead of looking at her own grief, loneliness, and anger she displaces all of this onto the plans for the wedding. She feels that the wedding is her last opportunity to avoid the great darkness of emotions that lives inside her.

But, as Kathryn states, the intrusiveness does not end with the wedding. All of the emotions she managed to repress during the engagement still overflow into her son's marriage. The situation finally calms down when she finds some way to release her son from her embrace and accept that he is committed to spending his life with his beloved. Much heartache could be relieved if the mother were to recognize during the engagement the grief over the loss and separation and spend some real time sitting with herself and all that lives inside her.

Yet this triangle also serves another function (as triangles usually do). With all the time and energy the engaged couple spends focusing on the troublesome mother they too can avoid confronting their own feelings about the wedding: the groom avoids feeling sadness about "leaving" his mother's nest, as well as any feelings of fear about making this lifetime commitment, and the bride avoids the multitude of feelings spawned by the engagement. If the groom were to refuse to listen to his mother's incessant criticisms of his fiancÈ, the energy of the triangle would dissipate and bride and groom would be forced to face themselves. Yet without the consciousness and rituals that could sustain the well of emotions that exist within both of them, it is understandable that they would agree to participate in this type of triangle.

When we avoid facing the emotions during the engagement, they surface in the first years of marriage. Kathryn and Jay struggled with their intrusive mother-in-law for many years before they finally were able to face the real issues. In this situation, the real issue was between the mother and son, and as soon as Jay stopped putting all his energy into mediating and diffusing the conflicts between his mother and Kathryn, he began the difficult process of navigating his new relationship with his mother, which included much more separateness than before he married. The wedding sets the stage for the dramas that play themselves out in the marriage. If the groom does not learn to separate from his family of origin before the wedding, the problems that begin at this time will continue until they are openly addressed.