



*Lesson Two:
Emotional Checklists for the
Conscious Groom*

These checklists will help you identify the key areas of this transition that are most affecting you. I suggest that you spend some time working through these checklists and thinking about your answers. The more time and attention you give to your experience the more thoroughly you will pass through your transition.

There are basically nine areas where people feel the transition. If it helps you to see this visually, I suggest you make a circle, divide it into nine sections, title it "Pieces of the Transition Pie", and put each of the following issues in a pie piece:

- Separation from family of origin and friends
- Grief from old losses and unfinished transitions
- Letting go of attachment to singlehood – identity and lifestyle
- Leap into adulthood
- Liminality feelings
- Experiences toward fiancé: anger, separateness, loneliness
- Wedding day issues
- What is a husband?
- Fears about marriage and commitment

It's important to identify which areas are affecting you the most so that you can start to process the emotions that are connected to that specific issue. A lot of the reason why people feel overwhelmed is because they feel FLOODED by the disparate sectors. Once you identify your key sectors, it's important to focus on one piece at a

time. This will help you stay grounded and will help with the panicky and overwhelm feelings that tend to arise.

Fill in as much or as little as you need. Remember, this process is intended to help you feel LESS overwhelmed, not more overwhelmed. I don't want to flood you with "work", but also remember that the more time and attention you give to sorting through your inner world, the more joy you will have. Also, feel free to add any boxes to the checklist that more accurately describe what you are feeling.

Separation from family of origin and friends

For a thorough understanding of this sector, please read chapter two in *The Conscious Bride*, “Cutting the Ties that Bind.”

The engagement marks the beginning of your *moving away* from your identity as a bachelor and your primary allegiance to your family of origin and *moving toward* the identity of a husband and the new union with your spouse. Ultimately, to solidify this bond with your partner, you must begin to loosen ties with those who helped form and mold your identity as a single person. The engagement, besides a time to the wedding day, is also a time when you are separating psychologically from your mother, father, and friends, as well as from your current identity as a single person. The engagement may also bring into focus the difficulties in your relationships. You may feel sadness that you do not have closer relationships to your mother, father, or friends, and this pain needs to be acknowledged.

Mother:

- o I'm having a hard time separating from my mother.
- o I miss my mother. I wish we were closer during this time.
- o I feel caught between my mother and my fiancé/wife.
- o My mother is driving my crazy.

o

o

Father:

- o I feel like I'm stepping into my father's shoes.
- o I don't know how to relate to my father during this transition.
- o I wish my father would guide me through these difficult feelings.
- o I hope I can be as good of a husband as my dad is.
- o I hope I can transcend the negative aspects of my dad as a husband.
- o

Friends and siblings:

- o My [sisters/brothers/friends] have been number one in my life. As the wedding approaches, I can feel this allegiance changing.
- o My friends represent my singlehood and the part of my life that I'm leaving. I feel like I am being ripped away from them.
- o I feel closer to my friends than ever.
- o I feel more separate from my friends than ever.

- o My friends are afraid that after my wedding I will only be a “we” and they won't have a relationship with me separate from my wife.
- o All I want to do is spend time with my friends. I want to go away for the weekend with them and have “guy time.”
- o I feel alone. I am fundamentally alone during this transition and as close as I feel to my friends, they can't go through this with me.
- o
- o

Unfinished Transitions and Grief from Old losses

Most of us pass through life's major transitions without doing the necessary inner work that would make the transition complete: we were *not* “The Conscious Adolescent” or “The Conscious Graduate”. As I discuss in *The Conscious Bride*, our culture does not support its members through these transitions and we are left to cross each passage alone. This results in moving into the next phase of life hindered by the remnants of the unfinished transition. Eventually, around the wedding or another significant rite of passage, we can find ourselves crumbling under the weight of so much unprocessed emotion (one explanation for midlife crisis). Yet if we are courageous enough to swim against the current and bring consciousness to this event, we can allow ourselves to complete these transitions.

Transitions that feel incomplete:

- o loss of virginity
- o a geographic move
- o graduating from high school
- o leaving home for the first time
- o graduating from college
- o first major purchase: car, house, tuition (signifies moving further into mature adulthood)

- o first professional job
- o first marriage
- o having a baby
- o

Transitions also activate grief from old losses. By definition, a transition is a loss and a gain; a letting go and a moving forward; an ending and a new beginning. During this process of change, our psyche remembers other times in our lives when we experienced loss. Again, when we have the courage to meet this process consciously, we have the opportunity to grieve losses that we either didn't know we were supposed to grieve or didn't have the support or resources at the time of the loss to allow the grief to move through us into completion. Grief, like all emotions, has a unique lifespan. When we interfere with, bypass, or amputate the grieving process in any way, we are left with the remnants of incomplete grief in our bodies. Now you have an opportunity to finish these processes.

Grief from old losses:

- o end of significant relationships: friendships, romantic loves, family ties (many people find themselves having dreams about ex-girlfriends)

- o estranged relationships
- o divorce: parents, siblings, friends (it is very common for an upcoming marriage to bring up grief from divorces you have witnessed)
- o death of a loved one
- o illness that created a permanent change in your body
- o giving a child up for adoption
- o your own adoption
- o loss of home through fire or move

Letting Go of Attachment to Singlehood- Identity and Lifestyle

This is a very common area where people feel the fear, grief, and anxiety of this transition.

As Monica on *Friends* said a few months before her wedding: “I've been so busy planning the wedding I forgot about all the things I'll be giving up... I just keep thinking about all these things I'm not going to have.” (3.21.01 episode). This realization of all that she's giving up-no more sex with other men, no more falling in love for the first time-is an essential part of the letting go and grieving process.

If you find yourself having some of the following thoughts and feelings, you are probably having difficulty letting go of your attachment to your bachelor identity and lifestyle:

- o I feel envious of young men in their early twenties. They seem so free and *single*.
- o I'm scared I won't be able to go out to bars and flirt with women. I still want to be attractive to women.
- o I wish I had the chance to experience some things again, i.e. college, dating, clubbing, traveling.
- o It seems like everything exciting is equated with being single.
- o I long to be 21 again.

- o I'm scared I won't be able to take trips with my guy friends.
- o I have to change the way I relate to half the people in the world – women!
- o My life is over.
- o I'm afraid I will lose my sexual fire.
- o I feel like I'm losing my youth.
- o I can feel my childhood slipping away.
- o I am losing my independence.
- o When we move in together, will I ever have space and time to myself?
- o Is _____ going to be the last person I ever sleep with?
- o I like my life now. I love living [alone, with my best friend, with my brother]. Why does this have to change?
- o I will never be able to travel alone.
- o

Now, it is important to distinguish between the *true* beliefs and the *false* beliefs. For example, it is true that as a married man you will be changing the way you relate to women. But is it true that your life is over and you will never have any fun again? No! And is it true that you will never be able to go away for the weekend with your friends? Not unless you and your wife make this agreement. In other words, a lot of the fears that men feel about letting go of bachelorhood are not

based in reality, but they indicate a need to *recognize* that there is a change happening and to allow yourself to grieve this change.

When grieving the loss or change of identity the mind wants to grab onto tangible experiences because it is confusing to grieve something as amorphous as an identity. With most losses in life we can point to the thing that we are leaving or losing – a house, a city, a job, a person — but with a loss of identity there is nothing to point to. The truth is that the loss is less about anything tangible — the loss of last name or one's own apartment — and more about the general sense that you are leaving one *life stage* and moving into a new stage of life. The most important step, after distinguishing the true and false beliefs and putting some of the unnecessary fears to rest, is to let the feelings in. You don't have to understand them. You only have to trust that they are a very important part of your transition, and the more you let yourself feel them, the better off you will be.

Leap into Adulthood

These days, it is not uncommon to enter adulthood kicking and screaming. We often stumble through our twenties delaying each leap into adulthood as long as possible. In our parents' and grandparents' generations, they were expected to become full-fledged adults by the time they were eighteen: men were expected to begin college or enter the workforce, and women were expected to begin preparing for marriage and motherhood. Our generation has the luxury (or curse?) of keeping these responsibilities at arms' length. But with an impending marriage we can no longer avoid the fact that mature adulthood, real adult responsibilities, is staring us in the face. We are no longer playing at romance and love, but are about to make the biggest commitment of our lives. It is important that we take the time to recognize the fears and thoughts that accompany this aspect of the transition so that we can make the leap as gracefully as possible:

- o I'm scared to grow up.
- o I don't want to grow up!
- o This is all happening so quickly.
- o This wedding is making me feel like I'm being pushed into adulthood.

- o I'm not playing at love and romance anymore. There is another human being who is directly affected by my actions.
- o Am I supposed to have mom over for dinner now?
- o I feel like I am saying goodbye to the innocence of childhood.
- o I feel like I am saying goodbye to the carefree nature of adolescence.
- o Does this mean I am responsible for *everything* now?
- o Marriage is such a mature act. Am I ready for it?
- o Does this mean I'm going to have to be serious all the time?
- o I wonder if I'm ready to assume the responsibilities of marriage and adulthood. There was no class in school that prepared me for this endeavor.
- o I'm not old enough to get married and be a husband! (Even though I'm [25, 35, 45, 55]).
- o
- o

Liminality Feelings

As the wedding nears, you will enter the in-between stage of your transition: liminality. Liminality describes the psychological/emotional state when you are in-between identities--no longer single and not quite a husband, between who you have been and who you will become, letting go of the phase of life known as your *single years* and preparing the ground on which the phase of life known as *marriage* will take root. Some hallmarks of liminality are:

- o Disoriented
- o Groundless
- o Untethered
- o Sense of unreality
- o Numb
- o People feel unfamiliar
- o Difficulty feeling love
- o Floating
- o Asking yourself, "Who am I? Where am I?"
- o Sense of being in a void
- o Vulnerable
- o Skinless
- o Feeling nothing and everything; collision of serenity and chaos
- o Desire to be with mother, or whomever or whatever symbolizes womb, familiarity, ground, safety, comfort

Which metaphor works for you?

- o The old structures have crumbled and the new structures have not been erected
- o The old skin has been shed and I have not yet grown the new skin
- o I am in the middle of the ocean without a compass or rudder

Experience Towards Fiancé

Your fiancé, like your father, mother-in-law, and everyone closest to you, is an easy target, the perfect place to dump your unexamined and misunderstood fear, loneliness, confusion, grief, disappointment, and anger. After all, if you didn't marry her, you wouldn't have to be feeling all of these difficult feelings! When you work through the other pieces of the pie, you will probably find that your negative feelings toward your fiancé will dissipate. It is important to keep reminding yourself that she is not the cause of your emotional state. Given that you have made sure that you are making the right decision, most annoyances and grievances toward your fiancé that develop during the engagement are a result of your transitional emotions being transferred onto her. *You would be feeling these feelings no matter who you married. They are a normal, necessary part of your transition and actually have very little to do with your partner.* It takes a lot of courage to admit to the less than romantic feelings you may be having right now. Let them in, recognize them for what they are, then see if you can trace them to their root.

- o I feel annoyed at my fiancé. Little things, like the way she eats or the way she mumbles his words, bother me now when they never bothered me before.

- o Sometimes it hits me, “Oh my god. This is the woman I'm going to be married to *for the rest of my life!*” And it scares the _____ out of me.
- o Sometimes I feel so separate from her. It's strange that we are walking toward the same event-the wedding-yet we seem to be having vastly different experiences.
- o I feel lonely around her, especially when I'm in touch with my grief and what I am letting go of. As much as I try to communicate what I'm feeling, I'm not sure that she can really understand.
- o Sometimes I feel angry at her for no reason.
- o Sometimes I feel angry at her for “taking me away” from my single life and my family of origin and “making me” grow up. I want to scream, “IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT THAT THIS IS HAPPENING!” even though I know that's completely irrational.

The Wedding Day and Night

On this one day, through ritual and ceremony, you will pass from single to married and from bachelor to husband, and in order for the transformation to be complete you often need to span the spectrum of human emotions. The wedding is a celebration of life and union as *well as* a day of death and separation. It is the funeral for the single man as much as is it the birth of the husband. The wedding is bridge over which you will walk to signal the ending of one way of life and the beginning of another.

When thinking about the wedding day and night, you may experience an array of conflicting thoughts and emotions. Please check and circle all that apply:

- I feel excited about my wedding day.
- I feel [scared, anxious, terrified] about my wedding day.
- Every time I think about the wedding, I want to _____.
- It's okay if I cry on that day.
- It's not okay if I cry on that day.
- I have low expectations for how I'm going to look and feel on that day.
- I hope my partner and I feel connected and in love on that day.

- o I feel consumed by my perfectionism-the need to create a perfect day.
- o I'm enjoying the planning process and for the most part I don't feel overwhelmed by the details.
- o I want only [*names of friends and family*] _____, _____, _____, and _____ with me while I'm getting ready (add more if necessary).
- o I feel like this is more my parents' wedding than mine and my fiancé's.
- o I feel like this is very much our wedding.
- o I envision us making passionate love on our wedding night.
- o I have low expectations for that night-I know we're going to be exhausted and I don't want to put any pressure on us.
- o If we don't make love on our wedding night, or if the sex is less than stellar, does that mean there is something wrong with our marriage? Is it a sign?
- o I'm worried that my partner will be disappointed or upset if we don't have sex that night.

What is a Husband?

What does it mean to be a husband today? In the months immediately preceding and following the wedding, this question will probably be roaming through your mind.

Negative associations to the word husband:

- o Boring
- o No social life
- o Fat
- o Subservient to my wife's every whim and need
- o Weak
- o Non-sexual

Positive associations to the word husband:

- o Alive
- o Powerful
- o Nurturing
- o Devoted
- o Sexually satisfied and satisfying
- o Committed to the partnership

- o Mature manhood
- o Striving to maintain the balance between togetherness and separateness, intimacy and solitude

Describe the kind of husband your dad was/is:

Is there anyone, actual or fictional, who embodies the kind of husband you would like to be? If so, who, and what is it about them that you would like to emulate?

Fears About Marriage and Commitment

To marry these days is an act of faith. Most of us are acutely aware of the high divorce rate in this country and many of us come from “broken” homes ourselves. We are aware that when we marry we surrender ourselves to love, and with this surrender comes the possibility of losing this love to divorce, deflation of the love, or death. We are also aware that with intimacy and a merged level of commitment comes the challenge of maintaining our identity as a separate individual within the marriage. Remember, conscious questioning and exploration of legitimate issues should not be equated with doubt. On the contrary, it is usually when men feel secure in their love and commitment that they can allow these fears sufficient room to breathe.

Check the fears and belief that apply to you:

- o I'm scared our marriage won't last.
- o I'm scared that the passion will fade and we won't feel excited by each other anymore.
- o Marriage consists of phases of constant bickering sandwiched between the monotony of every day life.
- o We will get bored with each other.
- o We will take each other for granted.
- o I'm scared she will cheat on me.

- o I'm scared I will cheat on her.
- o I'm scared something terrible will happen to her — that she will die.
- o I'm scared our sex life will gradually dwindle, and eventually the fire will die completely.
- o I'm scared we will grow apart.
- o I'm scared she won't be attracted to me when I'm older.
- o I'm scared I won't be attracted to her when she's older.
- o What is a good marriage? I don't have any role-models of passionate, fulfilling, lifelong marriages.
- o I am aware of the effect my parents' divorce has on my beliefs about marriage.
- o I am aware of the effects my fiancé's parents' divorce has on his beliefs about marriage.
- o I'm scared of “losing” myself.
- o I'm scared of feeling suffocated.
- o I'm scared of not having my own space.
- o I'm scared my inner spark will become dimmer and dimmer as the marriage progresses.