



*Interview:
Michael on
Newlywed Depression*

I interviewed Michael specifically to hear about his experience after the wedding when his new wife seemed depressed, sad, and listless. I've named this experience "Postbridal Depression" in *The Conscious Bride* to describe what happens when women don't find the information and support they need before the wedding to work through the fear and grief that a marriage activates. What doesn't get worked through on the front end comes out on the back end, and because our culture generally doesn't support women feeling anything less than pure joy during her engagement, her less-than-blissful feelings are consumed by the planning and they come crashing over her after the event. Michael speaks honestly about what this was like for him and how he was able to ultimately support his wife by finding the support that he needed.

Michael and Jennifer were married on December 2nd, 2001 after a year-long engagement and a seven year courtship. They now have a daughter and are well adjusted to the changes that their marriage initiated.

I know that you both had a hard time after the wedding. Can you tell me what that was like for you?

Yes, it was a very hard time. During our engagement, Jennifer was that "bridezilla" that you talk about, obsessed with planning the "perfect" wedding. I tried to talk to her a couple of times about it but she would get angry at me and think that I was trying to control her. I wasn't trying to control her, but I was frustrated because I felt like I lost my partner to this wedding. How ironic that we were planning a wedding, this ultimate day of union, and yet we never felt so separate! I don't think she was even aware that we were separate. It was "wedding this" and "wedding that" and she rarely checked in to see how we were doing as a couple. It wasn't at all how I thought the engagement would be.

But then, almost immediately after we returned from our honeymoon, and actually starting a bit during our honeymoon, she crashed. She withdrew from me almost completely. This was so hard. Here we were, this newly married couple on this beautiful beach, and she was a thousand miles away. She was gone. So of course the first place I went in my mind was, "She thinks she's made a mistake. She doesn't love me anymore." I didn't say anything, though. I just let her mope around. I could see that she was confused by all this, but she didn't have the words to talk about it. We didn't fight, but we weren't close either. It was pretty awful.

When we came home things went from bad to worse. I had never seen her so depressed. She didn't want to do anything with me. I felt completely rejected. I know now that she wasn't rejecting me but I had no way to know that at the time. I'm sure I made the situation worse because every day I would ask, "Do you still love me?" At first she would say yes, but after a few weeks of this she would get angry with me when I asked. Of course this just confirmed my fears that she didn't love me anymore. We fought constantly. And the worst part was that we kept the whole thing hidden and put on this happy face for our family and friends because I think we were both devastated and embarrassed that this was happening to us. This was not the rosy picture of the first months of marriage that we hear about!

No, it's not. We just don't know what goes on behind closed doors. The truth is that more people experience what you're talking about than we can possibly imagine. So how long did her depression last?

It lasted about six months. She wasn't severely depressed for six months, but she was definitely not herself. I felt so helpless. I wanted to make it right and I just had no idea what to do. Then, as you know, we found your book one day while wandering in the bookstore. I gingerly showed it to her and she kind of flipped through it but didn't give it much thought. I bought it anyway. A few weeks later she started reading it. The part about postbridal depression hit home for her. She said that she felt like she was reading her own story word for

word. I actually read parts of it too because it really helped me understand what was going on for her. Then we each had a couple of sessions with you, and things started to change. I don't know exactly what went on in her sessions, but I know that you helped me to understand what transition is all about and how the best way I could help her was by stepping back and letting her go through this. You also reminded me again and again not to take it personally!

Yes, that's the hardest part for men because it certainly feels like a personal rejection. Is there anything else you would like to say about this? Anything you would like other men to know?

Just that the more you understand transitions, the better. Having a context, as you say, really helped me step back and let her go through her feelings. There were no solutions to offer, nothing for me to fix. The biggest gift you can give your fiancé or wife is just the space to allow her to go through this and to understand what she's going through. [see article: "What is Going on With My Bride?"] It's a hard thing to do. When I see her uncomfortable it has a pretty profound effect on me. I want to jump in with a solution. Now I know that that's not what she needs and that kind of crowding doesn't work.