

You, Me and Venn - Exploring The Truth of Your Relationship

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*"It doesn't much signify whom one marries, for one is sure to find out the next morning that it was someone else."* Samuel Rogers

First, let's introduce Venn, actually, the Venn Diagram. In its simplest form a Venn Diagram shows two overlapping circles which illustrate similarities, differences, and relationships between groups (here, we'll use a couple you and your partner). Statements of partners' preferences are represented in each circle, where they don't intersect or overlap. Similarities and differences in both partners' preferences are then represented in the space where the two circles overlap.

If you're experiencing a disconnect or discomfort in your relationship - at work, at home or at play - using this Venn Diagram exercise can support you to explore what's "underneath" your discomfort and discover the truth of your relationship dis-harmony or imbalance.

### **Here's how this exercise works.**

Use relatively large circles; I suggest using flip-chart or poster board size paper.

In one of the circles, where it does not overlap the other, write your name (Partner A). In the other circle where it does not overlap, Partner B's name. Agree on categories related to your life which you'll explore (I'll suggest some below). Caution: do not collude with one another to choose categories that are "safe." If a possible category makes you feel uncomfortable, that's a sure sign it's worth exploring. You both must choose and agree upon the same categories.

Before each category title, write "my." For example, "my life visions." Here are some suggested categories: (my) life visions, life goals, interests/hobbies, choices about how I like to spend time, values, preferred ways to express emotions and feelings, beliefs about relationship, beliefs about family, beliefs about career, beliefs about intimacy, ways of relating to money, beliefs about trust, beliefs about independence/space, beliefs about health, beliefs about spirituality, wishes for my partner, ways to deal with stress, beliefs about children, ways of dealing with conflict, beliefs about using alcohol and drugs, beliefs about household chores, beliefs about fun, or control, etc.

(Note: if you're exploring a workplace relationship with a colleague, boss, direct report and the like, categories might be: (my) views about work, beliefs about bosses, beliefs about leading/managing, beliefs about employees, workplace values, etc.)

Then, in the space where the two circles overlap, write down the same categories and instead of using "my," use "our." So, in this space you might have: our life visions, our life goals, our values, our beliefs about intimacy, our beliefs about household chores, etc.

Now you're ready to begin exploring individual aspects of your relationship to see what you discover about compatibility or incompatibility.

Working alone or together write your categories in your "circle" (allowing lots of room underneath each to itemize your preferred ways of being and doing). So, for example, if one category is "my ways of relating to money," list the ways: e.g., fearful I'll never have enough; spend as much as I make; money grows on trees; don't like saving money; I love shopping; don't feel I'm responsible with my money, etc. Got it? Each Partner lists the ways

they relate to money, under the category title. Then, on to the next category. Continue until you've covered all the categories. This may take some time: a few hours, or on and off for a few days. Allow lots of time. This is serious stuff. Remember to list all the categories in the area where the circles overlap, beginning each category with "our," instead of "my."

The next step. One partner chooses a category and one by one reads their list to the other. If the other partner has a similarly-worded item (doesn't have to be word for word but the notion, concept, idea or behavior has to be close in meaning or action), place a plus (+) sign under that category (the "our" category" ) in the area where the two circles overlap. No need to repeat the item just a "plus" (+) sign to indicate a match or compatibility. When an item does not match your partner, place a "minus" (-) sign under that category. Plus signs can be blue. Minus signs can be red.

Alternate the process. As Partner A reads one of their entries, Partner B looks for a match. If there's a match, place a blue plus sign in the overlapping space; if not place a red minus sign. Then Partner B reads an entry; Partner A looks for a match, followed with a plus or minus sign under that category in the intersecting space. So, if Partner A, under the category "Life Visions" has "live in a large house in the country" and Partner B has "own a condo in the city," place a "minus sign" under the category " our life visions" in the space where the circles overlap. Do this for every item in every category.

Also, for every "my" item that has a match, highlight that item in blue. For every "my" item that has no match, highlight it in red.

*"The purpose of relationships is not happiness, but transformation." - Andrew Schneider*

It's important - actually, crucial - that during this exercise Partners **do not** judge, blame, nit-pick, justify, nag the other or otherwise "defend" their belief, behavior or item. It is what it is. You match or you don't. Breathe, relax, and be present to yourself.

### **Now, what?**

When you've completed the exercise, three things will stand out:

1. the number of blue plus signs indicating agreement or compatibility
2. the number of red minus signs indicating differences or incompatibility, and
3. the number of blue and red highlighted items in your "my" categories indicating, specifically, where you match and where you don't.

Now, stand back and look at your collective sheets for ten to fifteen seconds. Then, IMMEDIATELY, close your eyes and sense into your body notice what sensations, feelings and emotions you're experiencing. Notice your breathing, your heart-rate, posture, neck and shoulder area, face and eyes, and overall how your body feels. Here is where the truth of your relationship lies. In this sensing experience (NOT in your attempt to justify your self with logical, defensive, attacking or judgmental "mental activity") you will begin to discover the truth of your relationship. The truth is in your body and here lies the source for your discussion and exploration (see below).

*Human relationships are the perfect tool for sanding away our rough edges and getting at the core of divinity within us. - Eknath Easwaran*

One major reason relationships fail - basically, where partners are not on the same page - is the disconnects between the two partners. These disconnects can be physical, mental,

emotional, spiritual or psychological.

Another reason for failed relationships is the partners have been unable or unwilling to move from an "I vs. you" relationship to a "we" relationship.

If you conduct this experience honestly, sincerely and self-responsibly, you'll both have a clear idea if you are growing together or growing apart, if your relationship is aligned or "two ships passing in the night," if you're involved in a win-win, loving, caring and committed relationship or a "me-first," selfish relationship, or simply roommates masquerading as a couple.

This discovery process will tell you where relationship lies on your list of priorities and whether or not your actions reflect that priority, and whether you are making healthy and conscious, or unhealthy and unconscious, relationship choices and decisions. Are you open to compromise? What non-negotiable issues exist, and why? Are you mutually supportive or overtly or silently antagonistic toward your partner?

The exercise and resulting discussion should indicate in which direction your relationship is moving. Are you moving forward with your eyes wide open, or sideways with your eyes wide shut?

Finally, and most importantly, this exercise is **not** about one or the other being "bad" or "wrong." It's about truth-telling and uncovering what's underneath disagreements and disconnects - **not** in order to change one's self or the other, but to look for ways to bring greater compatibility, connection and harmony into your relationship. "We-oriented" folks can do that. "I vs. you" folks cannot, or will not (the place to ask "why not?") and work towards a deeper exploration (which, by the way, is probably better done in the presence of a qualified, professional, objective, non-judgmental third party such as a coach or counselor).

Truth is the foundation of trust. And trust garners respect and, ultimately, love. True, real connection and intimacy are a function of truth. If you're interested in commitment, connection and consciousness, the journey is well worth the effort. The question is whether or not you're willing to explore the truth about your relationship.

**So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

- Do you and your partner sit down and openly and honestly explore questions like: "So how are we doing?" or "What was it like being in partnership with me this past week?" on a regular basis? If not, how do you feel about even the thought of doing this exercise?
- Are you and your partner on the same page when it comes to life's issues and challenges? How do you know?
- Does your relationship look and feel harmonious and balanced or does it tack in one partner's direction?
- Based on your experience with the exercise where do you feel you are vis-a-vis compatibility/incompatibility?
- What do you now see about yourself that maybe you didn't see before and how do you feel about that?

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