Making Media Work for Your Marriage

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According to recent statistics, over 97% of American adults own a mobile phone, and 67% own a smart phone (McDaniel & Drouin, 2015). In addition, the platforms and mediums for connection are seemingly endless (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, email, Instagram, WhatsApp, IM, etc.). One source shares that mobile technologies and communication devices have become the fastest-growing technology in history (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2007). With so many ways to instantly connect, it is no surprise that, according to Pew Research, 65% of adults in the United States use social networking sites (Perrin, 2015).

Increased options for instant connection can have positive and negative impacts on relationships. While online resources can help us stay connected to those we love and increase relationship satisfaction (Pettigrew, 2009; Sidelinger, Avash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008), being constantly connected to the world through online platforms can also potentially lead to neglecting our partners, conflict, less relationship and life satisfaction, and affairs (McDaniel, 2015; McDaniel, Drouin, & Cravins, 2016). One study found that 70% of women said that cell phones, computers or televisions interfered with their couple relationship (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014).

Relationship expert John Gottman states that one of the most important predictors of a healthy and long lasting relationship is how each partner responds to a “bid” for attention (Gottman & Silver, 2012). According to Gottman, each time someone turns toward his/her partner’s bids for emotional connection, he/she makes a deposit in an “emotional bank account,” and adds value to the account. These little moments of connection add up, and remind both partners of the positive feelings for and their commitment to each other (Gottman & Silver, 2012).

Bids for attention come in multiple ways and forms, and technology can be a help or a hindrance to these bids for attention. Couples that “turn toward instead of away” from each other are more likely to stay happily married (Gottman & Silver, 2012); therefore, it is important to use every opportunity, including connecting through technology, to strengthen relationships. It is also important to consider ways to protect relationships from the challenges that can come through technology, such as being distracted from bids for attention because of technology use.

Strengthening Relationships Through Technology
Consider the following ways that technology can be used to strengthen relationships.

- **Checking-in texts.** Sending texts can be a quick way to let a partner know that they are being thought about and it can also be a way to send a “flower,” “kiss” or another expression of affection through picture graphics or emoji’s.
- **FaceTime/Skype.** While media cannot replace actual face-to-face time, it is an important tool that can be used to help couples stay connected. This is particularly true for couples who spend extended periods of time physically apart (e.g., military, those that travel for work, etc.).
- **Facebook posts.** Facebook can be used to publicly express admiration and appreciation for a spouse. Photographs, memes, videos, and messages can all be used to express affection to a partner.
Technology is an important aspect of everyday life. It is important to remember that while it can be a great benefit to marital relationships, there are also safeguards that need to also be put in place to prevent it from becoming a hindrance to happy relationships. By communicating clearly their expectations and boundaries, couples can use media to strengthen their marital relationship.

References

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