

The eReview provides analysis on public policy relating to Canadian families and marriage.



### The days after Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day comes but once a year, but the opportunity to show love shouldn't

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Imagine this: Canadians probably spent at least \$894 million in chocolates, cards and flowers for Valentine's Day this year.[1] That's a lot of cocoa beans to say "I love you."

Don't misunderstand me. I like the idea of giving something special to my wife. But it is important to remember that buying chocolates and flowers and celebrating one day of the year is not what romance is all about. (In a similar vein, [a wedding day is not the same thing as a marriage.](#)) Rather, romance needs to be a regular part of our relationships, on all the days between February fourteenth.

Relationships grow, build and change over time. There is a direct relationship between the amount of time and effort that we put into our relationships and their success. While some provincial governments have been putting efforts into making the divorce process easier, the IMFC consistently recommends to couples and governments alike to put as much energy—if not more—into making marriages successful, rather than making divorces easier.

In today's instant response society, many people have a hard time waiting. This seems especially difficult for an increasing number of young people. Want to listen to a new song? Download it now. Don't get an answer to your Tweet, Facebook message, email or text immediately? Obviously, the recipient is not really your friend. Advertisers have gotten in on the act. Take a recent ad from a telecommunications company declaring very recent events to be "so 27 seconds ago..."[2] The premise of waiting for the right relationship, and/or maturing, nurturing and working hard on the relationship you have is almost beyond the pale for many young couples today.

Neither do we focus as much as we should on offering positive feedback. Consider a recent study on marital satisfaction of long-wed couples by Dr. Norm O'Rourke, associate professor of psychology at Simon Fraser University. "For each of the traits, when husbands rated their wives relatively more positively, they reported higher levels of marital satisfaction; similarly, when wives rated their husbands relatively more positively for four of five traits (all traits but openness to experience), they tended to describe more satisfied marriages," report O'Rourke and co-authors Amy Claxton, JuliAnna Smith and Anita DeLongis. "The best case scenario is thinking better of your spouse, and your spouse thinking better of you." [3]

In other words, it's not all about you, it's really about the other person. Relationships are hard work. We like to think that we're always right, however, that can't possibly be true for everyone. We need to understand that if we want a relationship to be successful, everyone involved needs to work at it.

Imagine a version of Canadian society where we put the needs of others, particularly our spouses, before our own. We don't need to be naïve and think that we striving to live in some form of unobtainable utopia – problems exist and sometimes seem insurmountable, however, the small petty ones would likely ebb away.

A 2002 study by the Institute for American Values determined several key relationship factors:

- Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were no happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married. Even unhappy spouses who had divorced and remarried were no happier, on average, than unhappy spouses who stayed married. This was true even after controlling for race, age, gender, and income.
- Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation were happily married five years later. Just one out of five of unhappy spouses who divorced or separated had happily remarried in the same time period.
- Staying married did not typically trap unhappy spouses in violent relationships. Eighty-six percent of unhappily married adults reported no violence in their relationship (including 77 percent of unhappy spouses who later divorced or separated). Ninety-three percent of unhappy spouses who avoided divorce reported no violence in their marriage five years later. [4]

Personal relationships are hard work, but worth the effort. The days beyond Valentine's Day, it is worth considering how you are working to help your relationship thrive. Given the strains and stresses of marriage and how hard it can be, the opportunity to show love and affection should not come but once a year.

## Endnotes

[1] Visser, A. (2006) Valentine's Day--A business perspective. Retrieved from <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/programs/generalbusiness/VDay.html>

[2] The advertisement in question can be viewed [here](#).

[3] Harris, M. (2012, January 20). How you're seen more important than who you are for happy marriage: study. Postmedia News. Retrieved from <http://www.vancouversun.com/life/seen+more+important+than+happy+marriage+Study/6019543/story.html>

[4] Waite, L. et al. (2002). Does divorce make people happy? Findings from a study of unhappy marriages. New York: Institute for American Values. Retrieved from <http://www.americanvalues.org/UnhappyMarriages.pdf>