

Columns & Viewpoints

Comment

ANOTHER VIEW

By Nancy P. Wallitsch

Cyber Cupids require better understanding of love's reality

"Until death or distance" do part was the phrase used in the marriage ceremonies of American slaves since it was the common practice of slave owners to split a family by selling a spouse.

This vow epitomized true love since neither partner wanted the other to suffer future guilt if things happened beyond their control that would render their continued relationship impossible. Of course, in those days, people had the time to consider another person's needs.

Today's technology is the slave master that splits the modern family, and the vow that in reality is superimposed on the traditional promise is "until death or disconnect do part."

Let's face it — what love means today is just not the same as it was even a few years ago.

In the past decade, the candy-shaped hearts bought for children to give their friends on Valentine's Day had sayings like, "I Love You," "Kiss Me," or "Be Mine" printed on them.

Now the same heart-shaped candy is made with low fat ingredients and comes in a box with a complete nutritional breakdown posted on its side. The messages now read, "Fax Me," "E-Mail Me," "Page Me," and "Be My Cyberbabe."

Technology is changing the meaning of love or at least how we define it. Love now means contact. If you love me, you will not miss a minute of my life. There is a cell phone, e-mail, fax, FedEx, voice mail, videocam and, of course, the ubiquitous pager.

Minds much greater than mine have pondered what the impact of all of this technological access has on relationships and on love.

Do we really need someone to tell us what we already know? That looking for self-fulfillment through technology is a delusional search for love.

The problem with technology is not when it is he or she, but when he or she becomes three.

It is the children who suffer from the consequences of technological relationships.

Today's latch key children cannot even rely on the emotional cushion of hearing the live voice of a parent when they get home from school because now the parent has the ability to record instructions on the answering machine or the child gets the parent's voice mail when calling work.

The rules need to change. Maybe somebody can download this into some chat room and collectively come up with some solutions.

In the meantime, consider the following: A child born on Feb. 14, 1996, has lived 100 percent of his or her life in a cyber society. This child has less of a chance to grow up in a household with both parents than any other child born in the history.

This child is more likely to hear the first discussions of love in a day care center or from a TV character than from the mouths of parents who are together in the same room at the same time as the child. This child will probably not bond to either parent by choice but by survival.

Since no one wants this for any child, why not demand funding to study love?

Go ahead and laugh. Love has never received serious consideration for study because it was thought



to belong to the field of romance, not science.

There was, in fact, a government grant awarded in the 1970's by the National Science Foundation which gave two social psychologists, Elaine Walster of the University of Wisconsin and Ellen Berscheid of the University of Minnesota, funds for their research on passionate and companionate love.

However, the foundation withdrew the funding after learning that Sen. William Proxmire, D-Wis., gave the grant his famous "Golden Fleece Award." Sen. Proxmire's press release stated:

"I object to this not only because no one — not even the National Science Foundation — can argue that falling in love is a science; not only because I'm sure that even if they spend \$84 million or \$84 billion they wouldn't get an answer that anyone would believe

"I believe that 200 million other Americans want to leave some things in life a mystery, and right at the top of things we don't want to know is why a man falls in love with a woman and vice versa."

Since the mystery of love has become entangled with the reality of technology, is it not time that we consider what love really is — a science, and fund some studies to make sure that tomorrow's children have a better chance at it?

So where does this leave Cupid? Remember him?

Venus, jealous of Psyche's beauty, employed Cupid to make sure Psyche fell in love with someone unsuitable. Venus perceived Psyche to be prettier than she and this was Venus's way of getting even.

But Cupid, during the course of his employment with Venus, fell in love with Psyche. This love manifested itself as chest pains and now he is out on workers' compensation. Venus, however, has found him a sedentary position and has established a website for him this Valentine's Day.

Anybody interested in contacting Cupid this Valentine's Day may do so at www.funcluv.com.

(Nancy Perpall Wallitsch, R.N., J.D., practices in Allentown, with an emphasis on family law. She is a member of the American Bar Association Custody subcommittee and a member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association Family Law Section. She is president of the Family Law Section of the Lehigh County Bar Association. She has published numerous nursing and law articles.)

The reason people turn to the court system is to find "justice." 'Justice' is a noun that has many definitions. What 'justice' means to each family member depends upon the person's gender, age and financial status. The problem is that when a family is dissolving, there is no justice for anyone who is involved in the process as it now exists.

In Pennsylvania, support, custody, divorce and protection-from-abuse matters each have their own statute and

Far too often under the present system, parties are free to argue one fact in front of one judge, then deny the same fact when they appear before another judge whose only interest is in deciding a particular issue and not in hearing the whole case. This attitude prejudices the litigants in that there is frequently little concern over the long-term result of a decision made hastily by someone who is unfamiliar with all the facts.

Many people who go through

bringing them to court. Look into, for example, marriage counseling, mediation, pastoral counseling and support groups, and consider talking with your family physician, your family and friends. These are people who have *your* interests at heart.

Nancy P. Wallitsch is a partner in the Allentown law firm of Wallitsch, Figure & Marinos and is immediate past president of the Family Law Section of Lehigh County Bar Association. ■