The Value of Vulnerability in Relationships

Emma Allen
Brigham Young University, emmaeallen18@gmail.com

Madisen Bird
Brigham Young University, madcolebird@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives

Part of the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives/vol1/iss1/7

This Featured Insight is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Family Perspectives by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Due to several experiences with painful rejection, I fear vulnerability.

When you share your whole heart with someone, you hope they will love your soul entirely and will see your value despite imperfections. Unfortunately, I have let the opinion of others about me define my worth once they exit a relationship with me. As a result, I have had moments of considering myself worthless since I am not “good enough” for their love.

During difficult breakups, shame has allowed my demons to attack my weaknesses and devalue my self-worth. However, by coming to know the positive aspects of vulnerability, I now understand how exposing raw emotion is a powerful strength in relationships—not something to be feared. To appreciate the depths and beauty of human connection, we need to embrace vulnerability.

Why Vulnerability Is Feared

When we share more of ourselves with others, our hearts may be devastated when the relationship ends. We are often cautious when it comes to the innermost workings of our heart. Indeed, researchers state that “the dependency and vulnerability inherent in romantic relationships make some degree of caution a necessity.”

We tend to avoid vulnerability to protect ourselves. However, as we avoid meaningful connection with others, we may not have the courage to break down the walls necessary to strengthen relationships.

According to researcher Brené Brown who studies vulnerability and shame, “You can’t numb hard feelings without numbing the good.” Therefore, if personal insecurities get in the way of a willingness to be vulnerable with others, then positive aspects of human connection in relationships may begin to dissipate as well.

When one of my relationships unexpectedly ended, my mind flooded with insecure thoughts. I had given my whole heart to the relationship and was left broken. I instantly felt that if he did not accept me, then who would? In those moments of low self-esteem, fear overpowered love and connection. After this painful experience, I chose to close doors in further relationships in order to avoid further validation of my insecurities. However, this choice only led to an increase in loneliness and fear.

The Value of Vulnerability

After months of processing the breakup, I sought to re-open the door of vulnerability. I trusted family members, a few close friends, and a therapist with the key. I gave them access to hear my pains and struggles with the hope that I would receive love in return. I was surprised to find that when I was vulnerable, I was able to connect with others through their
“When I feel the tendency to close myself off from others, I now try to have courage to be open and express my emotions to those I trust. I push through the initial fear with hope.”

similar emotions and experiences. True empathy was expressed in these relationships, and I began to heal.

I found that vulnerability opens us up to deeper connection in our relationships. Brené Brown also states, “connection is why we are here. It is what gives purpose to our lives.”

According to the attachment theory, we all have an innate desire to feel a sense of love and belonging. As we develop the courage to be fully authentic and vulnerable with those around us, we begin to feel more secure in our relationships. Expressing my insecure thoughts with trusted loved ones allowed others to love and support me. Rather than feeling judged, belittled, or embarrassed, I felt accepted and understood. I began to realize the moments of understanding and empathy that we crave often start with vulnerability.

Endnotes