

What do you wish you had talked about in depth before you got married/moved in together/etc? (Or, what are you glad you *did* talk about first.)

Communication. We talked about how important it is to keep an open communication line and to make the time to talk if something's up.

Housekeeping. We should have talked a bit more about this. She is much more tidy and bothered by messes than I am. Our solution was to hire a housekeeper. But it was something to have addressed earlier on.

I had a prenup of sorts so me and the hubby were both aware that this was a marriage of fun and convenience NOT of merging property. I was surprised my parents were as annoyed as they were with the elopement. We planned for all financial contingencies and did not kid ourselves that the relationship would last forever and we were very very clear about what would constitute "cheating" so there were no surprises.

Before moving in with both [my previous sweetie] and [my current sweetie] (not simultaneously, mind you), the "I will occasionally need time/space to be alone" discussion was had, and I'm most glad that it was. Fortunately, both of 'em understand the need for occasional physical and mental space, so it wasn't an issue.

Glad we talked about how we'd deal with desire for someone outside the relationship... sorry it seems we were wrong about that.... glad we talked about it when we discovered we had been wrong.

Should have talked about: what marriage is/means/entails; what family means to each of us.

Glad we talked about: kids; music; my past.

I'm glad that [my sweetie] and I talked about our dreams and expectations. Having a family is very important to both of us, but before we knew that were fertile we were also okay with the idea of not having children. [Our daughter] has really enriched our lives and I cannot imagine life without her.

- Stupid Little Shit (TM). This is the seemingly insignificant, day-to-day stuff that ends up having a huge cumulative impact on your lives.
 - Examples: toilet seat position (hint: easiest compromise is that EVERYONE puts both the lid and the seat down)

- How miserly you're going to be with natural resources (only use paper towels when blood or bacon grease is involved; turn off water when brushing teeth; is it OK to use the car to drive 10 miles to get ice cream when you're planning on going to the store tomorrow, etc.)
- When it's OK to be in the bathroom with the other person (yes when in shower, no when on toilet, yes when brushing, no when flossing)
- What constitutes "dirty" when it comes to housekeeping? When you say, "Would you clean the kitchen?" what EXACTLY do you mean?
- Bedtimes. Will you go to bed together every night? If not, are there things that keep the in-bed person from sleeping (like typing)?
- How to handle knives in the kitchen. Actually, this extends to any objects that are of importance to either of you. If you *must* move his hand-carved Egyptian nose flute, what is the best way to handle it? Should it be propped up or laid on its side? What's the most sensitive bit that breaks most easily?
- Anything you do in a particular way. Be sure to watch how your partner does it, to, and don't just make them change to your way. Chances are, you're just plain neurotic about some stuff and could be much happier if you did it your partner's way.
- Sex. What does it mean to you? Why do you do it? Are there different moods/types/goals? What role will masturbation have in your lives when you're living together? What do you think is "frequent" or "enough"? Are there some things you just don't do? Do you have any past issues that give you difficulty with sex now? Very important: how are you going to talk about sexual issues when they come up? If nothing else, you're going to get through the new-squeeze-lovin'-like-bunnies stage and eventually get bored. You've got to have a way to talk about that.
 - Fidelity. What does it mean to you? I mean, really. Honestly. Don't forget that you both are the victims of hundreds of years of cultural conditioning. Chances are, what your brain thinks about it and what your heart feel about it are two different things. Some questions:
 - What role does monogamy play? Can I still be faithful to you if I have a fling with someone from work? A long-term, long-distance relationship with someone else?
 - Is "just looking" OK? How threatened do I feel when you say "I met my new cubicle mate today, and she is probably the most beautiful woman I've ever met in my life"?
 - At some point, each of you is going to find another person attractive - not just "he's cute," but you will really be attracted to them. How are you going to handle it? This is as much a question to ask yourself as it is a question to ask your mate.
 - Money. What does it mean to you? (e.g., if it means "security" to her and "toys" to him, you're going to be stressed out about it). What are your overarching money goals? How much do you want to save? How are you planning for retirement? When you need a new car, where will the money come from? What are your dream purchases (house, land, vacations, Bush's head on a platter)? Do you want to give to charities?
 - Also: Who will handle the bills?

- How will your incomes be handled? If one person makes more than the other, someone is going to feel entitled (at some deep level) to more of the money, and the other is going to feel like they aren't pulling their weight. Work it out.
- I can't emphasize enough how well it has worked for us to have "his money," "her money," and "our money." All money goes into the communal pot except for things like personal birthday checks or selling personal property like CDs you bought before you hooked up. Then each person gets an allowance (bad term, good idea) each month (the same amount for each). You can do whatever you want with your personal cash, and the other person can't complain about it. The allowance amount is set by the family budget and the goals you have worked out for savings, retirement, large item purchases, etc.
- Social goals
 - Recycling? Buying organic food? Buying an electric car?
 - Lots of friends over all the time? Drunken parties every weekend? Just the two of you, enough to fulfill all your needs, quietly at home watching movies every night? (p.s. this doesn't work - you need additional friends, kind of like trace minerals)

I think what we most needed to talk about, and still have trouble talking about, is money. It's easy in the beginning when you can just 'Go Dutch' all the time, but once you merge households there needs to be a better, simpler way to work out rent/mortgage, student loans, groceries, etc. At the moment we're lucky that our desires have not yet outstripped our income, but at some point we're going to be forced to take a better look at how we allocate and distribute.

On many other issues we see eye-to-eye: politics, religion, children, how to spend our free time, when to give 'space.' I'm very thankful for these things.

I am glad we discussed our previous relationships and what we expected from the other during our marriage.

We have tried to speak out when an issue arises instead of putting it to the side.

Time together/apart - over the years we've had variable levels of desire for spending time together. Sometimes one of us wants to spend lots of time together and the other wants more time apart pursuing our own projects, etc. Sometimes it's the other way around. It would have been too good to talk about that dynamic first, and how to negotiate time spent with each other, how to indicate gracefully that one of us feels either pursued or neglected.

Sex - it's easy to talk about sex when you're madly in lust and having a lot of it. That's probably also the time to talk about your long-term expectations about sex, what it means to you. Are there different reasons to have different kinds of sex (deeply-connected-emotional-moment sex, I-want-to-be-touched sex, snuggly sex, I'm-just-really-horny sex, playful-pouncy-puppy/kitty sex)? Are there circumstances in which you aren't ever likely to want sex; are there circumstances in which you're really likely to want it? The initial rush of passion will fade - talk about how you

expect you'll feel about that, and what you think constitutes a "normal" amount of sex.

Relatively levels of tidiness - you're going to be living with each other's housekeeping. What are your standards of cleanliness? Which bits of housework do you and your partner actually like to do / not mind doing? What does that leave that you need to take turns or compromise on? How will you communicate your differences about housekeeping and chores. Even the jobs you like to and don't mind doing will sometimes be a drag.

Money - our incomes have never been very well balanced and may not be for a long time to come; we should have come up with a plan for how decisions about spending would be made. We normally talk about big purchases, but we don't have much of a plan for how those decisions actually get made. It would be useful to have a clearer outline of how purchases of smaller items are managed. Once upon a time we allocated a certain amount to each of us for any given week, but it ended up being flexible and then at some point we stopped. Have a plan for how you'll decide what's important, what's not, and how much you and your partner can spend on yourselves without incurring the irritation of the other. Even in the realm of "necessary" purchase (things like clothes), there's lots of room for misunderstanding. I am inclined toward frugality, my partner is inclined toward quality (which costs). We've come into balance with that eventually, but it took more negotiation and more time than it would have if we talked about it before we started sharing money.

Monogamy / Non-monogamy - we never talked about this. We never explicitly committed to monogamy, but it seemed a given and since my partner seemed a bit possessive of me I assumed monogamy was on the cards. But even "monogamy" as such has lots of wiggle room; is it OK to find someone else attractive? what if it's a mutual attraction? is it OK to tell my partner that I find someone else attractive? is it *required* that I tell? am I allowed to talk about it with person I'm finding attractive? What kind of interaction if any is allowed with the third party? Supposing that some form of non-monogamy is allowed, what rules will be followed to keep everyone involved from getting hurt?

A corollary to the monogamy question is that of jealousy. There's a really good chapter on Jealousy in *Polyamory: the New Love Without Limits* by Deborah Anapol. I think everyone should read it, preferably in 10th grade, or maybe 6th.

What "I'm Jewish" meant in real life - practices, time commitments, priorities, etc.

How often friends or family could stay and for how long - parents twice a year for a weekend? Sister for a week? Put them in a hotel? etc.

How "out" we would be with family, friends, co-workers, etc. Additionally, what that means in real life in terms of behavior.

Expectations of shared time and activities - how much is too much or too little

Expectations of shared time with friends - with both friends as a “couple” and friends as in she’s your friend, not mine, so why don’t you two go and I’ll stay home.

Ways in which we deal with being ill or incapacitated. How we get angry and how we express that anger - everything from the car that won’t start to the boy, you really let me down...

How much living space is realistic.

Travel - who drives for how long, how much is too much, freedom to travel by oneself.

How much of one’s inner self needs to be shared with the partner.

VERY glad we talked about money, how we were/are going to purchase large ticket items, etc.

How we would spend our evenings – veggin’ front of the TV, reading, studying, working - alone or together.

Also very glad we talked about alcohol, pot and stronger substances - we have different ideas of what/how much/where is ok, and we are clear about what is ok, what is totally unacceptable, etc.

What constitutes a “clean” or “picked-up” house; standards of presentableness.

I’ve now lived with two of my lovers. With one lover, I had a two year long-distance relationship, then we moved in together without any intermediate step. We broke up a year later. At the time, we realized that moving in together was probably pretty stupid, since we hadn’t really even had a chance to date in the same city. But the housing market in [our town] did a lot to make living together the best/only option at the moment that we needed to make that decision. We thought, at the time “Well, if we don’t like living together we can always move out ...”

I think we made two key mistakes. First, we were both so terrified by the idea of living together, and the idea of me moving across the country to be with her, that we really didn’t talk honestly about it. We didn’t talk about practical things or really make a solid contingency plan. Second, I think we underestimated just how difficult it is to go from living together to not-living-together-but-still dating. It feels like a failure, and definitely says publicly that not all is well in the relationship. It’s not like you can say to your friends “Yes, well, we love each other, but we really weren’t ready to live together yet, so we stopped.” They’re going to be like “Right. Whatever, they’re breaking up.” You are not going to get real support. I think that I personally put myself under a lot of pressure to pretend that everything was fine, great, wonderful, etc..

When things got really bad, we would say “well, maybe we should move out.” But the difficulty of doing that was significant -- finding another person to live in a very small apartment, finding a new place to live, moving all your shit, restructuring your time so that you have dates, instead of just being home, and then you think, “We hang out together so much, what difference would it make?” and “If we can’t make it work in an apartment where we each have our own room, why would it work if we lived in different houses? We should just try to make it work.”

In retrospect, I don’t know if living apart would have saved this relationship b/c there were ways in which the relationship was fundamentally flawed. But it definitely would have made the relationship less painful. Living with someone that you love, but with whom you constantly have emotional tension has pretty much been one of the more hellish experiences of my life, and I think she would say the same. I don’t know if we would have stayed together, but I think the quality of our relationship while we were together would have been vastly better if we had been willing to admit that moving in so quickly was a mistake, that there was too much fear and not enough trust, and that we needed to take a step back and see where we were.

In my current relationship, I dated this person for a year in the same city before she moved in, which was in August. At the 2.5 month mark(!), everything is great, but I feel quite stupid saying that in front of people who have been married 5, 10 years, etc.. Currently, I live with my lover, the ex-girlfriend featured in the story above and a fourth roommate. Everyone has their own room. Believe it or not, this works well.

I think that I personally prefer having more people around than just my lover in my living environment. Call it fear of intimacy, or call it knowing the value of community, but I think it’s a preference I should pay attention to.

I think I strayed from the question.

I am glad that we discussed issues surrounding how our extended families would be involved in our relationship. My partner, deals with her family and I take responsibility for my family.

We also casually discussed a variety of ways to split and share the financial part of living. Our money flows between us and we don’t keep track of who pays what. We know that it balances out in the long run.

After we moved in together we have continued to talk about how to each have portions of our lives be separate and independent along with specifically doing specific activities together.

For us, it was not so much a conversation that we had as it was a shared attitude going into it. We had to take all the little surprises as just something new to learn. We both agreed - early on - that problems need to be addressed before they arise. We are

going to get relationship counseling as soon as we can afford it - not because we have big problems, but we have teeny little problems that we want to solve now, while they are small. We even argue about the rules we will set for our kids now - before the kids come along and we have to argue in front of them.

We talked about just about everything beforehand, but then we knew each other for 3 years before we got married. Among the things I'm glad we did talk about are:

Finances

Stability (I was really looking for someone who would stick around in good times and in bad, after my experience with my first husband.) I just wanted someone who would be truly committed to the relationship.

On everything else we were gratifyingly in accord & didn't need to talk about; we just lived it.

Although--perhaps I wish I'd known more about the impact of being an only child on forming later relationships. ([My partner] is an only.)

I wish that I'd been more honest about my being prepared to [talk about things first]. I wish I had known him better and he'd know me better.

Glad that I made it clear that I didn't want children. Glad I made it clear that I preferred someone who didn't do cigarettes, and who did drugs or alcohol minimally if at all. Glad we talked about the fact that we are both "morning people." Glad it was a given that my religion is very important to me, and not open to adjustment."

VERY sorry that I did not make it clear that I wanted a non-monogamous relationship. (Of course, in the beginning, I had no way of knowing how important this would be to me.)

Well now, we did talk about non-monogamy and the basics of that arrangement: no sex with others in the marital bed; no sex with each others' friends; nothing embarrassing to each other; no falling in love!

What I wish we had talked more about though, was his perspective on the generalized and specific other. How much did he care about what others thought of our relationship? How concerned was he with others' judgments? Who was he worried about in terms of anyone learning about our arrangement?

I think that this would have really helped me, although I always feel wiser in retrospect. I suspect that he would have just told me what I wanted to hear.

I am terribly doubtful that I would ever remarry. I will not have kids - that absolutely

needs to be clear from the start - and I have my own job, so why marry? The pain of the divorce is a sufficient deterrent to ever doing that again.

It is important to talk about some long-term plans (town/country, kids/no kids, house/rent, marriage/no marriage etc.) That doesn't mean that differences can't be lived with, but you should at least know where each other stand.

It is also important to understand the others' philosophy of life or religion - their framework for viewing and interacting in the world. These talks aren't one-time events, because the answers may evolve over time.

What attitudes/behaviors/etc help keep your relationship healthy?

Honesty and communication. I am not good at talking about my feelings and I think if I had worked harder, things might have been better.

A sense of humor is absolutely number one on the list. Probably numbers 2, 3, and 4 as well. Following that I'd have to say a natural desire to be playful and affectionate with one another. Oh, and also the understanding on both parties' parts of when they should "back off" and just let the other person be where they are right now. (Uh, I think that's called "detaching.")

Communication is good; so is remembering to do dishes, when it happens.

Having things to talk about helps, so reading the same books or seeing the same movies is good too.

We balance each other fairly well. We try to read each other and anticipate each others needs. We have learned by trial and error how we each like to be handled in a given situation. My husband has brought a great deal of humor and light heartedness to this relationship and it has been an excellent example for me.

"Attitude is everything". Learning when to walk away is key to not escalating a situation.

Again, I'll have to bring physical and mental space into the discussion. Sometimes I need to be alone. Sometimes [my sweetie] needs to be alone. Both of us know that this does not reflect poorly upon the relationship.

Communication (in general) and talking before one acts (specifically) is a necessity. Demand truth. At least as far as I'm concerned, the whole "I didn't tell you because I didn't want to hurt you" theory is utter bullshit. Having someone whom you trust lie

to you, for whatever reason, is more painful than whatever harsh reality you're supposedly being protected from.

Not thinking the marriage would necessarily last forever, but wanting to keep in it as long as it was fun and workable. no societal expectations to live up to -- we made up our own rules which we could both agree to. we had fun together but didn't consider ourselves joined at the hip, we traveled a lot and that was interesting.

One attitude that works for us is knowing or stating that we love each other even while we are arguing or upset about something. We both make sure to talk about irritations soon after we notice them or asking each other about issues as they come up. Now that we have a child, we make sure to carve out a few moments that are just for us. No conversation about the baby allowed. I treasure our physical intimacy and we often fall asleep in each other's arms.

We spend time reminding each other why we love the other. In a way, we are renewing our vows to each other every day.

Neither of us expects the other to be perfect. We forgive each other's lapses. Generosity of spirit in my spouse is a huge factor and a grace.

We're always glad to see each other and show it.

We have fun together.

We make time for each other and also take time to do special little things together as a change of pace.

We give each other lots of space/time to be alone.

We do little things to please and support one another. (He brings me flowers & chocolate; I help with his shows.)

We each hold up our own end of household tasks.

We respect each other's needs, even if we don't totally understand them.

We are very honest with one another, and yet there are some things I don't tell him & some things he doesn't tell me. And it's OK that way. Everyone needs some privacy. Too, there are some aspects of ourselves that couldn't or shouldn't be put into words for a whole variety of reasons.

Respect the others' preferences - for example, don't over-schedule someone who needs non-social time.

Tell the truth and share your opinions.

Flexibility with schedules

“Warnings” ahead of time of possible changes in plans.

“Warnings” ahead of time of possible new ‘shared’ purchases (regardless of who’s paying), so that there’s discussion. This is a great mgmt technique also - you’re basically bringing up ideas and leading people into making a decision which may bring them around to your side. This feels much better than doing something “controversial” and then dealing with the resulting irritation/ bad feelings.

Don’t rely on the other person for happiness; make your own happiness and you both will feel better.

Don’t let insecurities drag you down, or taint your interactions with the people you love. You need to pull yourself out of insecurities; no one else can do that for you, and until you do, you are quite frankly not very fun to be around. :) (but you can’t fake confidence either, because you won’t feel happy and your actions won’t ring true. So buck up if you’re in a funk. You’re a great person.)

Every morning when we wake up together we smile and say “Good morning! How did you sleep?” This is because we have made a pledge, so to say, to recognize that everyday is a new day and that everyday we are slightly different than the day before and we need to keep learning to love each other in new ways.

We have also very consciously made sure that we do not go to sleep angry or very upset. We make a concerted effort to be responsible for what we bring in to the relationship. We use “I-statements” and are quick to say things such as, “I am so frustrated with my self for such & such. . .I am sorry that I was letting my frustration out on you.”

We also plan special time for us to have away from work and home. One our favorite things to do is stay at a hotel on the way back from visiting friends and family over the holidays and family events. This way we can transition and debrief about how the experience was for both of us together and separately. Usually we have the dogs with us (two of them) and we also share special treats with the dogs that they usually don’t get at home. It is a special place for us as a whole family to breath and enjoy the fact that we are on a journey together, but we can take time out together and just BE. We love camping and hiking all together too for similar reasons.

My partner is amazing at coming to me after a fight and saying - I see it your way now, I understand what you were trying to say. In the middle of an argument, it is easy to get so focused on trying to get your point across that I forget to listen. She does, too -- but she goes away and really thinks about what was said.

We both make a lot of compromises. Both of us have really changed the way we communicate; made difficult changes. It takes a lot of work to say "you mean enough to me to fix this problem." And we apologize quickly, admit we are wrong when make mistakes.

I read this book called "rewriting love stories" - I think. And two things in it really stuck with me. It said that to make a relationship work, you need to be vigilant about how you talk about your relationship or your partner to others. It also said to never let intimacy get away. So there are times I hear myself start to complain about my partner to friends, family, and I stop myself and instead I talk about something that I love about her. Sure, real problems I confide in one close friend, but for the most part I try to keep what I send out to the universe about our relationship to be positive. It keeps my energy focused on keeping us together instead of on pushing us apart.

Keeping vigilant about intimacy, physical closeness is essential too. My father started sleeping on the couch, more and more frequently, when I was young and I watched the intimacy between my parents dissolve before my eyes. It got to where they never touched at all. They divorced when I was 25.

We have a rule - we never go to sleep on the couch as a solution to anger. I also force myself to reach out and touch her physically in some way, any way, to end a squabble. Sometimes just a pat on the arm, or taking her hand to remind us that this is something we are getting through together, not apart. A little gesture like that can change everything in a fight.

Sometimes sexual intimacy threatens to get away too, when all your time seems to be focused on very non-sexy things like laundry and work and cleaning and errands and family, blah blah blah. We may not feel like sex at all - when we just don't have the energy. But sometimes you can't wait for a perfect, romantic moment -- you've just got to make it happen to get back into it. It is what distinguishes you from being "roommates".

Flexibility! A genuine like to similar things and adventure. Support - both professional and personal. Playfulness. We both like to dress up and have fun. Not being jealous. This is KEY. We are both flirts and have fun - and we recognize and accept this. The attitude that we are both individuals who are together in a relationship... not two trying to lose their identity in a new one based on the relationship.

Talking - when something makes me happy, excited, proud, etc. and when something makes me feel bad, sad, lonely, etc. Humor !!!!!!!!

Being willing to change my/her idea of how something needs to be done, lived, talked about, etc.

A shared feeling of creating something worthwhile together (our relationship).

Believe it or not, exercise and eating right and getting enough sleep.

A feeling that we do have separate lives outside of the relationship (i.e., our own friends, work, hobbies, etc.)

A real basic desire for the other person's happiness, whatever that might be.

A shared love for the dog we live with.

A shared love of the outdoors and outdoor sports. Another strange-ish thing: we are both librarians - although our jobs are vastly different, we have a good understanding of what the other person does, and respect for it.

Well, one is making time to be together outside the daily stress of living. After a month or so of living together (second time), my lover and I instituted a "date night" when we don't generally make plans with other people, and try to do something special. Although right now it's on Friday, and mostly the special thing we do is rush around and shop, make a nice dinner and then fall asleep from the stress of the workweek!

Once we moved in together, I felt that we had more time together b/c we didn't have to do the constant back and forth between houses. But my lover was afraid that, with her starting graduate school, we just would not have quality (or quantity) time with each other. I'm usually the one who resists structure, and I recognized (after some screaming, irrational accusations that she was trying to take away my free time and independence) that she is paying attention to the health of our relationship and our intimacy and that it was a good idea.

We also keep a sleeping schedule. I CANNOT RECOMMEND THIS HIGHLY ENOUGH. To me, the sleeping schedule is a beautiful thing. We have three nights off (sleeping alone) and four nights on. Yes, right, oh, structuring your sex life, how awful and blah blah -- well, we love it. I personally need my alone time. The nights we chose for off nights are those when we probably would not get much quality time anyway -- Tuesday and wed. nights she works, Sunday night we're both thinking ahead to work and the new week. Since it's not negotiated every night, and no one has to ask to sleep alone if they feel they need it, no one's feelings get hurt. And they're our rules and we break them whenever we want to. My girlfriend was VERY skeptical on this one, but she is now the sleeping schedule's biggest fan.

I think that the biggest challenge in living with someone is to try not to get crabby with each other, and take out the daily stress of living on the other person. I have to constantly watch myself for that, and I feel that I often fail. Remembering to treat

my lover with the same care and respect I give my friends, not to take out my frustrations and annoyances on her. There's a way in which more formal (traditional) marriages may have some advantages there; I think in our society we are very careless with each other. Home is where your needs are supposed to get met, where you're supposed to be able to just be yourself. Well, ourselves sometimes suck, so there is that tension between wanting there to be one place where you don't have to suppress how you really feel, and totally mistreating the people closest to you.

I am also a big fan of couples therapy. As my ex and I were ending our relationship, we went to therapy and found it incredibly helpful. I wish we had gone earlier. Unlike personal therapy, couplehood often involves just a lot of not really seeing what the other person is saying, and having a hard time getting out of your own paradigm where you are right and they are totally unreasonable. Having an objective third eye in those kinds of situations can be really helpful. I think if you go and seek that kind of help as soon as you have a recurring problem, then it does not need to be a huge, decades-long ordeal. Sometimes you just need a more objective person to weigh on what's going on, and look, counselors have seen far more marriages than any of us have experienced.

Having sex a lot helps too! Finding enough time to have sex is highly undervalued.

Having enough in common to related to each other with love and respect; having different enough perspectives to learn from each other and provide a little variety.

A joint determination to make the relationship work, but the acknowledgement that the relationship should not continue at the expense of our selves.

Saying 'I love you' every day. Sounds cheesy, huh? That and physical intimacy, no, not just sex, but holding hands, snuggling in bed, giving backrubs, showering together. Little stuff.

Making compromises to keep both parties happy.

Apologizing. We're not perfect, life's better when you can acknowledge that and move on.

Trying to treat him like the dearest person in the world to me, because he is (well, aside from my parents).

Talk, talk, talk. Talk about stuff before it becomes a Big Hairy Deal TM. Bitching and complaining does not constitute talking. Talking is composed of saying how something makes you feel, then requesting a specific change in behavior and/or saying "how can we resolve this?"

Listen, listen, listen. That talking does nothing if you don't truly listen to each other. Most of the shitty relationships I've seen (lovers and otherwise) happen more because people don't listen rather than people don't talk.

Act, act, act. If you've agreed something needs to change, change it, dammit! If you're not willing to make the change, don't agree to it. Also, it helps to have a mutually agreed-upon, non-charged way of reminding someone to do what they had agreed to do.

Have fun together. Enjoy each other's company. You've got to like this person as well as love them. If you just love them deeply and passionately with the core of your being, but you don't like them the way you like your buddies, watch out!

Currently, what works in my new relationship is pretty simple really. He doesn't let me go for too long without telling him how I feel about things. He will not let me get overly distant. We each realize that 'in love' does not mean 'swallowed up by'. The 'in' word implies 'process' not goal, I think. And it doesn't mean 'inside'. So we're not engulfed by the other person, generally. We're still basically us.

We also laugh at all kinds of things, sometimes each other. When I goof up he points it out humorously. We share a similar although not at all identical sense of humor. I have decided to be monogamous in this relationship, so I try to adopt his apparently natural attitude that monogamy and commitment go together. To do this, I have unlearned flirting I consciously keep myself out of harm's way (temptation is far far away).

There's a belief that sex is connecting, like connective tissue. Good sex in the relationship is like that tissue too, in that it is benign, usually devoid of ego, and nonjudgmental. It's just easy and liquid.

What misconceptions/preconceptions did you have about your relationship (or about marriage in general) going into the marriage that were later altered?

Before meeting my boyfriend, I felt that you could make a relationship work with anyone if you put enough work into it. Now since dating him, I feel that there are people with whom you are much better able to enjoy life, people who you really relate to and they to you. You can bring joy into their lives. Now, I do not think of putting work into my relationship to try to prevent it from falling apart. I think of things to say or do that bring joy to my boyfriend, because I have that capability and enjoy it and he does the same for me. So relationships have gone from being reactive and always teetering on the edge, to being proactive and enjoyable.

No real preconceptions. We've lived together for so long now that marriage seems like just another day of waking up and having him in my life.

That we would agree on what time to get up and what time to go to bed.

That she would know what I left unsaid because if she loved me she would know.

That I would always think an annoying habit would be cute instead of annoying.

That we would agree on how much effort would go into a joint project.

That we would both argue/disagree in a rational, just manner, and that compromise would be evoked in areas of complete disagreement.

Not knowing, even though recognizing in an abstract way, that there are ups and downs in any relationship - just knowing you're in a "down" phase doesn't make it any easier to work through it. That at some point, after we got to know each other really well, the relationship wasn't going to be so much work. Hahahahahahaha!

I thought I'd be immune to feeling pressured by what society says it means to be a "wife." I wasn't, and had to deal with that, especially the first time I moved in with someone.

That I would be fulfilled by one (that) person... and that that fulfillment would last.

One of the hardest lessons I learned was that sometimes, the thing you need to do to help your love is to leave them alone and not "help" them at all. If you help them too much, they aren't learning to do it themselves. For some things (doing laundry), this might not be a problem. For others (finding a job), it is.

Sex & related activities may be a big part of a dating relationship. Living together is more than a relationship. Thus, if x% of time was spent in bed together, that percentage will almost certainly decrease. It's not just about fun and games, it's going to be sharing everything, whether you want to or not.

A related point: your needs -- whatever they are, related to whatever -- must be "met" by your potential cohabiter. What seems like a small irritation or difficulty or unpleasantness at a remove will become intense and excruciating close up. Your mate is not going to change entire patterns of behavior or life for you because you have moved in together.

Not so much a particular misconception, as a vague amorphous distaste for the whole concept on my part.

This has not changed, but I think we have shifted the parameters of our relationship outside of those things I find objectionable; possessiveness, for example.

I would say considering the relationship as some kind of floatation device for getting through the choppy seas of life was not the best way to start out. Mutual self-confidence would have been better.

I can't think of any misconceptions about marriage or our relationship that were later altered.

I think that our relationship changes or is changed by our circumstances. One example... [Our baby]'s first month was very difficult. I was at home and found I had no time at all take care of myself. I didn't eat, drink or even get up from my nursing station to go to the bathroom. My partner took on the extra responsibility of taking care of me *and* the baby. It was hard at first, because we didn't know how to meet all of [the baby]'s needs. She cried when she wasn't nursing or sleeping. Usually by the end of the day I was crying, too. That has changed and you would never know that our contented 7-month old baby fried her parents during her first month!

The little things like how we want to decorate or how the yard will be maintained. After a period of time you have the opportunities to experience your partner in ways you never thought would be challenging. We also have experienced the differences in how we each handle our son. That has been a challenge I didn't put too much thought into before marriage. I thought we would be on the same page all of the time and I am surprised at how often we aren't.

Child raising. Budgeting our money.

Well, when I was really married (as viewed by the state & the Lutheran and Baptist Church) to my ex-husband, I went into the relationship thinking that [he] and I could move past many of the societal roles of husband, wife and a married couple. I kept my last name for six months into the marriage to keep some of my self. I was shocked to see my name listed on the potluck sign-up at church all of a sudden a week after we returned from our honeymoon. My contemporaries that were still unmarried were not listed. Over and over again I was invited to husband-wife events in the church community where the other women would treat me in kitsch-like ways about being in the first year of marriage. I did not identify with how I was being treated at all. After a year of the hoopla, I was starting to feel as though [my ex-husband] and I could not find each other through all of society's misconceptions, falsities and stereotypes. (There were a few other major issues at this point, such as my husband not handling his anger and rage well at all...and controlling every cent in the house.) By a year and a half we were starting to feel the relationship die. I had a preconception that [he] and I were creative and inventive enough to break through

society's systemic roles, but we were unable to which left both of us feeling lost and frustrated along with hurt because we could not follow through with our relationship.

Time has passed and now I am in a same-sexed relationship with my partner. Our relationship is very creative and we feel a great sense of responsibility for making manifest the kind of relationship that we both want to have in life. I thought that in a same-sexed relationship that we would feel pressure to take on some of the gender roles (butch/femme...) but instead, we are aware of constant role-reversing, exchanging, melding, swapping and flowing. We give each other more freedom to be our whole selves than I could ever imagine. In response to the freedom giving issues my mom says, "Of course you do! You're both WOMEN!" I don't know exactly what she is aiming at with that, she has been in a very hard working relationship with my father for almost 35 years now.

[My partner] and I also have been able to focus on a tremendous friendship unlike any friendship that I have had with men while in relationships. I think it is because we are so gentle with one another and even if we are frustrated or angry we responsibly pull ourselves back into communicating in ways that are not hurtful or threatening. Our relationship is also deepened by the fact that we know that we will have to work harder in life to live the way that we would like to live. We are interested in having our first child in the next few years (once I am employed with an understanding community) and we know that we will need to be very strong together to go through everything. We will need to make special arrangements with our wills, our insurance, the donating man (or agency), the hospitals and so on... Our lives will not be as privileged and simplistic as when I was married to a man - at least this is what I think right now. I am glad and joyful about the journey that I have chosen to take now, though it may be difficult, I know I will learn a great deal and have more of a chance to live more fully true to my self and better for the world! Okay, with that last sentence, did I win the International Ms Pansexual Title? :)

This is from a previous unsuccessful relationship/engagement/living together arrangement...

Being married would change the things that didn't work already. Being married would provide some sort of stable platform from with the relationship would develop. Being married would anchor us more.

In my current relationship -- I did think for a bit that having a partnership agreement would be important .. but that's not so much the case.

Other people had a really hard time accepting our alternative marriage -- we had to expend a lot of energy saying "I know you THINK you understand it, but I don't think you do" I thought that would be a lot easier. And, in the end, ending the relationship was much more difficult than I think he thought it would be. I sort of got over the relationship when the marriage/living together part was over but he

hung on sort of in a weird way [not clingy but just still having me as his best friend] until he found another female partner and that was a bit of a hassle to deal with because by then I had made him my post-marriage good friend and it turned out to be a much more temporary arrangement than I had thought it would be.

I thought that if I assumed that divorce was possible, then I would ward it off. In other words: I thought that being realistic about the chance of failure would enable us to actually be stronger, rather than living in a la-la romantic idiocy. I thought that my deep love for my husband would remind him of how special he was, external to the non-monogamy (but he never seemed to grasp that he was the only one I loved). I assumed that being honest about what was my biggest flaw would make all the rest of the honesty less painful (it didn't). I thought it would be harder to actually live with someone but my ex was so nice to be with that I really miss having his companionship now that it's gone. And I learned that I am not as anal and neurotic as I had always feared that I was.

I think I suffer from totally ridiculous and insane misconceptions about marriage. From outside, almost all marriages look perfect to me, and I have a hard time believing that anyone is having troubles. You need to be really, really close to someone before they will reveal that they are having troubles in their marriage (as opposed to a dating relationship). Marriage is like this veil of secrecy, where people agree to not really talk to anyone about what is really going on. The only time I get real information from my friends about what's happening and how they worked on it (or can't work on it), is from friends I was very close to BEFORE they got married. People I meet as a couple (more and more people as I get older and move to new places, obviously) do not offer that information. My family is not close, so I have not had the privilege of observing many long-term marriages and how they weather the difficulties of life, how you can tell what is going on, and how people solve problems. It's easy to say "marriage is supposed to be work" but HOW much work is it really supposed to be? When do you know that it's too much work? Does everyone REALLY just decide for themselves? Could we just come up with a formula or something?

People talk a lot about having to work at a relationship, and I used to believe them. Now I think a relationship that needs a lot of work is like a car that needs a lot of work - you can't keep it up for very long. If you perform routine maintenance every 3000 miles you'll have fewer blown gaskets.

Moving in together early in the relationship is a BAD thing. Period. Bad. Bad. Bad. Until you've been together for long enough for the glitter to have worn off (or been toned down). Moving in together should always occur for positive, relationship-related reasons that have been substantiated by long observation.

It wasn't until after we had committed to monogamy that I understood why people find the idea of non-monogamy intriguing. In this practical reality, I still don't think it could ever really work, but I understand the impulse. "You mean, this is it? This

one person, forever?” “What if I get bored?” “What if I’ve made a mistake?” “Now that we know we’re safely together, maybe we can try the sampler platter, and the only person left in the cold if it doesn’t work out would be the ‘extra’ person.” “We’ve proved we love each other; now we can do whatever we want sexually.”

I thought being right was more important than getting along. I thought the point of an argument was to win. I have had to let go of a lot of my arrogance. I felt that I deserved to be worshipped by my significant other and that I needed to feel above him/ her in some respect -- I needed the control in the relationship. [My partner] turned all of that upside-down. Her vulnerability compelled me to be a kinder, less selfish person. But I still have a long way to go.

I thought that if I treated him as I wanted to be treated that things would work well. Golden rule and all that. Very quickly (but after marrying, not before somehow) I found out that he needed to be treated the way he wants to be treated. The way I want to be treated just may very well not apply to his case. Also, it’s my job to figure out how he wants to be treated and to find ways of doing it. One of us read this at our wedding, & I believe it now more than ever,

“Once the realization is accepted that even between
the closest human beings infinite distances continue to
exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up,
if they succeed in loving the distance between them
which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against the sky.”
(Rilke, of course)

None, really; [A former lover] and I had lived together in small doses as housemates and later as lovers before “formally” cohabitating, so I had a fairly clear picture of what it would entail. Ditto [my current partner], sort of: because of the distance

thing the first year, we saw each other only for full weekends and a week at Christmas/New Year’s, which gave us a pretty clear picture of what was involved. Also helpful in the latter case: we were both in our 30s upon setting up house. We’d both lived with partners before. Most of the potentially unrealistic expectations had been eliminated by that point. I’m not sorry that I lived with [my former sweetie]; out of the ashes, as it were, of that romantic relationship came one of the best friendships I’ve got. However, I think it’s better done with some experience under one’s belt (again, as it were).

Do you have anything to add?

Be as sure as you can be that the relationship will last. Even the mere act of physically separating possessions and trying to figure out what happens to the lease are draining. I can’t even begin to imagine what that would be like as a genuine legal issue.

I'll admit that you might have non-monogamous feelings because you truly are polyamorous, or that a fling can be just that, and that's OK. But I really think that's a small percentage of cases. Usually, though, there's something else going on - some kind of power dynamic or some sign that your current relationship isn't or can't provide what you need to be fulfilled. They could be things missing in your relationship that you just need to ask for, or things missing in your relationship that will never be there. They could also be things missing in you (like enough self-esteem that you don't need affirmation of dozens of fawning admirers) that will never be fixed by non-monogamy or finding the "perfect partner" or asking your partner to change.

Live in the same city for a while first. I hate to insert timelines, but at least six months... more if one of you had to move long distance to get there - long enough to settle into a life of your own. And for Pete's sake, it doesn't count if you're married-in-practice. Live as single people in the same city. And for the person who has moved, make friends who don't necessarily become friends of the couple.

I had lived with a couple guys before [my current partner], and especially after all the therapy I'd been through, I had a pretty good idea of what "marriage" was going to be like. By the time I got to [my partner] I knew that one's "baggage" often got worked out within the relationship, and because of this the relationship requires a tremendous amount of give and take, patience, communication and acceptance. Blah, blah, blah, blah... don't know where I'm going with this.

Most of the breakups I have seen or been through have had to do with one simple fact, not related to the partner much, if at all: you've got to know who you are on your own before you hook up in any permanent-ish way with another person.

In my book, this means you have to live on your own for at least a year before moving in with someone else. Dorm life doesn't count. Living at home after college doesn't count. Having two technically separate apartments but spending all your time in one may or may not count depending on just how much time you spend in your own place. Living with housemates who aren't your lovers...I'm not sure. But you've got to know what *you* like, what *you* want out of life, what *your* habits are completely distinct from your parents (this is harder than you think) and others who are, in some way, shaping your life.

The idea here is self-sufficiency and living, for probably the only time in your life, without compromise. This isn't a three-month internship to be survived, with a definite ending date and financial help from home (though that's a good "dry run" before the real thing, if you can get it). This is you, exploring and shaping your very own life. It is fun, liberating, selfish, empowering, lonely, and absolutely terrifying. Yes, you're going to want someone to hold to when you just don't know if you can hack it on your own. But if you go into this with someone to share the burden, the

responsibility, the decision-making, you are not learning self-sufficiency. You're probably learning more compromise and sharing, which are critical skills, but it's so easy to expect (or simply let) the other person take care of things, or to take care of them so you don't have to think about other hard questions yourself.

The other thing to remember is that every person is ready to take this trip into self-sufficiency at different times, and, though my preference is written above, it's not the only way. I've seen people do it while in relationships, but it's harder, I think, because you have that added fear of how this will affect your relationship. Am I being selfish? Am I pissing her off? What if I find the real me, and she doesn't like me, or I don't like her any more? If you're essentially independent, you don't have these worries.

It might be that the situation and the readiness to live on one's own don't work out right in the timing. It may simply be the case that you're at a point in your life (say, right after college) where what you really need is to be in a steady relationship that keeps your world from spinning completely to bits. Fine. But realize you're going to have to resolve this issue eventually. Who are you, really?