Into-Me-You-See Questions for Self-Reflection

We often have the most difficulty communicating with the people who matter to us the most. This is a normal process of long-term emotionally committed relationships. The reasons we have difficulty are complex. We fear their response, the words come out wrong, we choose to hide or we haven’t taken the time to process our own thoughts and feelings to a point where we are willing to risk sharing with our partner.

The purpose of these questions is to promote your understanding of yourself through personal reflection, and if desired, provide an opportunity for each person to share with the other on a given topic.

Using a written format provides time to reflect and pause before sharing. There is great benefit in working through the questions individually so sharing the responses with a partner is optional. Taking time to put thoughts together and explore yourself on a deeper level creates opportunity for greater intimacy with oneself and potentially with a significant other. Intimacy=into-me-you-see.

If you do share your personal reflection, there is no guarantee the other will respond in a desired fashion to your reflection. Additionally, you may not like what you see in yourself or the other. Into-me-u-see is intimacy for grown ups who are willing to let themselves be seen and who care enough to share themselves regardless of how their spouse responds or participates.

When using as a couple, the process involves two parts including reflection and revealing. A couple can choose to do the exercise in several ways.

* The easiest way is to do it together in one hour. To begin, one person chooses a question (alternate who chooses).
  + Then each person writes or types out a personal reflection for 30-40 minutes. After writing the reflection, each person goes back to review and edit the reflection hearing it from the other’s perspective, preferably editing the wording three times.
  + The couple then takes turns revealing their refection to the other out loud two times. 10-15 minutes.
  + Each person may ask a question of the other with non-judgement. There is no need for a response from the other.
* Another way to do it is over the course of one week or a few days. Pre-determine which reflections will be done ahead of time. Set a time aside for personal reflection and discuss how to reveal to one another.
* Another option is to bring the written reflection to couple’s therapy.

REFLECTION:

This exercise is designed for each individual to use in an effort to grow in self-understanding (potentially in front of your spouse.) Please answer each question as truthfully as possible focusing on your own behavior, feelings and thoughts. Whenever possible use metaphors, stories or memories to help describe your experience, thoughts, desires... Include details and sensory information you recall or may help expand the picture, concept or reflection more fully.

Write each answer as a journal entry, personal refection or a letter to yourself or partner. As much as possible focus the content on yourself or on how your behaviors may have affected the other. For example, instead of “You piss me off when you…” try “I feel angry and then I say unkind things…” The goal is to confront yourself through the questions and potentially share these parts of yourself with your spouse. It is your spouse’s job to confront themselves as well.

One way to explore the concept or question is to unpack your personal (AEIOU)

actions, emotions, ideas, observations and understanding. It may be nice to explore things you used to believe and are now seeing differently.

* Actions are things you have done or not done. What did you do? What would you like to do differently?
* Emotions are what you have felt or not felt. What you would like to feel or not feel. How you choose to deal or not deal with feelings on the topic and the effect. What do you feel?
* Ideas are beliefs, thoughts opinions about the topic. What do you believe? How have your thoughts shifted about the topic?
* Observations are what you’ve noticed in yourself or the other. What do you see?
* Understanding is what you are seeing differently now. What do you understand? What would you like to understand more?

Not all the questions/reflections will lend themselves to these exact concepts and it is best not to use it as a recipe but more of a guideline for how to reflect further or more deeply. Good reflections often open up more questions. There is no right and wrong, this is simply an opportunity to explore your own personal experience and develop as a person (in front of your spouse).

Find new ways to share yourself. Make an effort to not say things in the same way you’ve said them before. See if you can remove a layer and look closer at yourself and your patterns.

REVEALING:

The second part involves reading aloud the reflection to the other. Each person reads their own reflection slowly and with expression out loud two times.

Brief dialogue is permissible so long as both people agree to converse.

When listening and then thinking about your significant other’s personal reflection remember a few key things:

1. ***Manage yourself.***

The number one goal is to manage yourself. Practice staying calm and centered. Work to stay green and if you go yellow, take a moment to re-center and breath. If you go red, communicate and try again later.

1. ***Be curious.***

Take a stance of curiosity, non-judgment and a true desire to understand. Ask questions. Inviting curiosity is the beginning of growth.

1. ***Remember love.***

This is a person who is (or was at one time) precious to you. When you become aware of your own uncomfortable feelings remember the risk taken by the other in choosing to be open and risk upsetting you. Choose to really care about what they think and feel without taking things personally.

1. ***Be open-minded.***

Release your preconceived notions about the other and hear their reflection as you might if you were just beginning to know each other. Appreciate the level of openness they are able to offer at the moment. Look for ways to accept them as they are now and not as you wish they were or how they once were.

1. ***Let them be them.***

Allow them to have their own version of things. When it comes to personal relationships and personal narratives, the truest reality is multiple realities. Each person is separate and unique and has a right to stay that way. Allowing differences means inviting the other to grow in their own way.

1. ***Find feedback you can use to better yourself.***

Learn about yourself from what they say without defining yourself by what they say. The other often sees us more clearly than we see ourselves. However, we determine who we are by our thoughts, words and actions. The relationship provides avenue for intimacy but we determine our identity. The more clearly we see ourselves the better able we are to self-correct our words and actions…this is how we grow. IF you share anything personal after hearing the other person’s reflection let it be something you learned about yourself or about what it’s been like to be relationship with you.

1. ***Stay present.***

It is very easy to check out emotionally when hearing things we’ve heard over and over, things that are inaccurate or things that make us feel bad. Staying present means breathing to keep yourself calm without avoiding.

1. ***Hope enough to take a risk.***

Hope is perhaps one of the scariest emotions we experience in relationships. When we don’t get the response we were hoping for we stop trying to avoid more pain. The level of risk taken often directly affects the results. Don’t let the other’s words push you into retreating in defeat.

1. ***Let yourself see the other.***

The risk is in sharing the deeper parts of ourselves with the other…this is how intimacy grows. When we put true effort into listening to someone we show we value them…so we don’t need to validate them. Actually taking the time to really listen is validation enough. No matter how deeply they’ve shared, if they’ve risked a deeper level of intimacy by being open, this means they are inviting you to see them. Whether you agree or not, accepting the invitation is a simple kindness.

1. ***Resist the urge to correct each other.***

Oftentimes our partner doesn’t feel exactly as we hope they would. Remember you are doing this to be more real with each other. Let the other feel what they feel and appreciate their willingness to share.

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on the marriage as a people growing machine from your own perspective.

“*When you’re oblivious to ways marriage can operate as a people growing process, all you see are problems and pathology---and the challenges of marriage will probably defeat you. Your pain will have no meaning except failure and disappointment: no richness, no soul. Spirituality is an attitude that reveals life’s meaning through everyday experience; however; don’t bother looking for sanctuary in your marriage. Seeking protection from its pains and pleasures misses its purpose: marriage prepares us to live and love on life’s terms.” Dr. David Schnarch, Passionate Marriage, page 47.*

1. Consider this quote about how men and women get power and status and make space for the other to express fear and vulnerability. How has this been true or not true in your relationship? Where have you observed this kind of man or woman?

“Show me a woman who can hold space for a man in real fear and vulnerability, and I’ll show you a woman who’s learned to embrace herself and who doesn’t derive her power or status from that man. Show me a man who can sit with a woman in real fear and vulnerablity and just hear her struggle without trying to fix it or give advice, and I’ll show you a man who’s comfortable with himself and doesn’t derive his power from being Oz, the all-knowing and all-powerful.”

Dr. Brene Brown

1. Reflect on what love means to you. Is love a feeling or a choice? Where and when have you experienced being loved and loving another?

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1. Other-validated intimacy is when one partner self-discloses and the other partner accepts, empathizes and validates the other. Self-validated intimacy is when one partner self-discloses, is not accepted, empathized, or validated, but continues to choose to self-disclose by validating and accepting themselves without expecting or demanding validation and acceptance of the other.

*“Other-validated intimacy involves the expectation of acceptance, empathy, validation, or reciprocal disclosure from one’s partner. This is what is often mistaken for intimacy per se…*

*Self-validated intimacy relies on a person’s maintaining his or her own sense of identity and self-worth when disclosing, with no expectation of acceptance or reciprocity from the partner. One’s capacity to self-validate is directly related to…one’s ability to maintain a clear sense of oneself when loved ones are pressuring for conforming or sameness. Self-validated intimacy is the tangible product of one’s relationshiop with oneself.” Dr. David Schnarch, Passionate Marriage, page 106*

What are the risks of other-validated intimacy? What are the risks of self-validated intimacy? Which do you rely on or expect in your relationship? How does this cost or free you and those you love?

1. Share thoughts, feelings and hopes about true intimacy in your relationship.

“We’re driven by something that makes us look like we crave intimacy, but in fact we’re after something else: we want someone else to make us feel acceptable and worthwhile. We’ve assigned the label ‘intimacy’ to what we want (validation and reciprocal disclosure) and developed pop psychologies that give it to us – while keeping true intimacy away. We’ve distorted what intimacy is, how it feels, how much we really want it, and how best to get it. Once we realize that intimacy is not always soothing and often makes us feel insecure, it is clear why we back away from it.” David Schnarch, Passionate Marriage

1. Minimization is pretending that an act or situation was not as significant or important as it actually was…either negative or positive. Examples:

“I only stole a candy bar from the store…I didn’t steal anything big.”

“It’s no big deal. I’m just going to ignore it. It doesn’t matter.”

“It was nothing. It was easy. I was just lucky.”

Denial is extreme minimization. It is a way of protecting oneself from unpleasant things in life by refusing to perceive or acknowledge them at all.

How have I used minimization and/or denial to justify myself or my actions that have harmed myself and others?

1. What does integrity mean to me?

“Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.”

1. Humility is described as “an honest assessment of self.” This means embracing both our giftedness and strengths as well as our work areas and failures as a part of who we are, our identity.

Reflect on your personal strengths and weaknesses. Most people tend to focus more on either one’s own strengths or one’s own weaknesses. Which do you tend to focus on? Where did you learn this? Has your focus changed over time? What would it look like to bring more balance here?

1. Reflect on the role of blame in your life.

Blaming is avoiding accountability and responsibility for one’s decisions and actions by making someone else or something else the reason for everything bad that happens. How have you utilized blame to avoid responsibility? How has shifting blame hurt yourself or those you love?

Self-blame is taking ownership and responsibility for something that wasn’t your fault or you weren’t entirely responsible for.

How has self-blame played a role in your life? What has the cost been to you and those you love?

Where has shifting blame intersected with self-blame in your life?

1. Take some time to write a kind and gentle request for forgiveness to your partner. Remember that forgiveness is by definition undeserved and a gift when offered. The true change occurs when we take the time to offer sincere apology and ask for the gift of what we do not deserve.

“There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of my pain, fear, anger, and confusion.

Let yourself remember and visualize the ways you have hurt others. See the pain you have caused out of your own fear and confusion. Feel your own sorrow and regret. Sense that finally you can release this burden and ask for forgiveness. Take as much time as you need to picture each memory that still burdens your heart. And then as each person comes to mind, gently say:

I ask for your forgiveness, I ask for your forgiveness.”

― Jack Kornfield, The Art of Forgiveness, Loving-kindness, and Peace

1. Reflect on what you are learning happiness means to you:

“In the end, just three things matter:

“How well we have lived”

“How well we have loved”

“How well we have learned to let go”

“Peace requires us to surrender our illusions of control. We can love and care for others but we cannot possess our children, lovers, family, or friends. We can assist them, pray for them, and wish them well, yet in the end their happiness and suffering depend on their thoughts and actions, not on our wishes.”

― Jack Kornfield, The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace

1. In what ways do you show compassion to others? How and when do you show compassion to yourself? What about your partner? When have you experienced or observed the compassion of your spouse?

Compassion can be defined in many ways: “As a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others with a deep commitment to try to relieve it and prevent it” Dalai Lama

1. *A Solid Flexible Self is the ability to be clear about who you are and what you’re about especially when your partner pressures you to adapt and conform. This includes the following concepts:* 
   * + - *Allowing for differences without having to create distance*
       - *Holding on to one’s desires in the face of potential, perceived or real rejection*
       - *Confronting one’s self in front of those important to you*
       - *Being motivated by personal integrity – not the approval of others*
       - *The higher the sense of self the more open one can be with loved ones*
       - *Solid flexible self is strong enough to identify fear, accept help and honor vulnerabilities as strength*
       - *Capacity to be flexible without disappearing*

*Dr. David Schnarch, Intimacy and Desire*

Reflect on each of these ideas and share which one(s) seem challenging for you personally and what developing this may look like. How has a lack of a solid flexible self on your part affected you over time and affected the other?

1. Read the blog on [green light practice](http://amyfullerphd.com/green-light-practice/). Share your experience of each color and state. Experiment on the practice and reflect on the difficulty, enjoyment or experience of practicing.
2. *It’s easy to misunderstand boundaries. We readily see, for instance, that people who have difficulty setting limits have a boundary problem, but so do those who don’t respect other people’s limits. (Drs. Cloud and Townsend, Boudaries).*

Do you tend to be someone who is:

* compliant (fuzzy boundaries that melt into the demands/needs of others),
* avoidant (unable to ask for help, let the good in, or recognize limitations),
* controlling (see other’s “no” as a challenge to change his or her mind and/or resisting taking responsibility),
* or nonresponsive (not pay attention to the requests, desires of others).

How can acknowledging and understanding your tendency help you shift how you see yourself and interact with others? How have you struggled to have appropriate boundaries in your relationships with those important to you?

1. *The pressure to appear as a certain kind of person can be tremendous, especially when we’re looking for or interested in keeping a partner. However, when someone is inauthentic, the effect is like that of a sick salesman: we’re sold on something we we’re interested in buying. Often we hear, “she wasn’t who I thought she was” or “as soon as we got married, it was as if the whole different person showed up.” These are dramatic examples of the cost of inauthenticity. Our own inauthentic behavior can cause pain for us and others, and ultimately interferes with intimacy. Authenticity not only eases the pain and difficulty sometimes found in relationships, but ultimately may prevent them. (Drs. Walser and Westrup, The Mindful Couple, page 21-22)*

How have you been inauthentic or hidden your authentic self from your partner? What would you risk to let your true thoughts be known? What would motivate you to be more authentic than you are at the present moment?