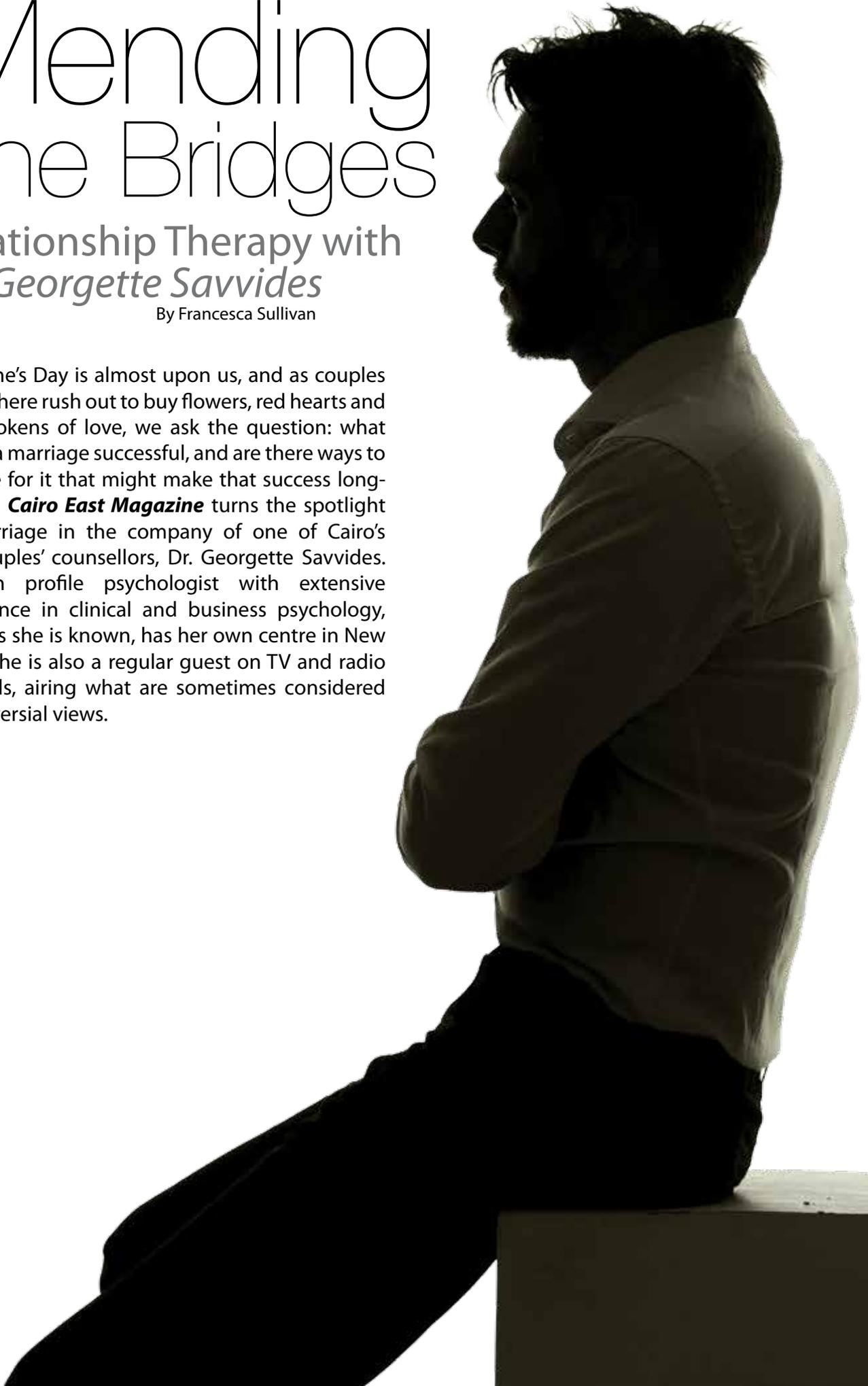


Mending The Bridges

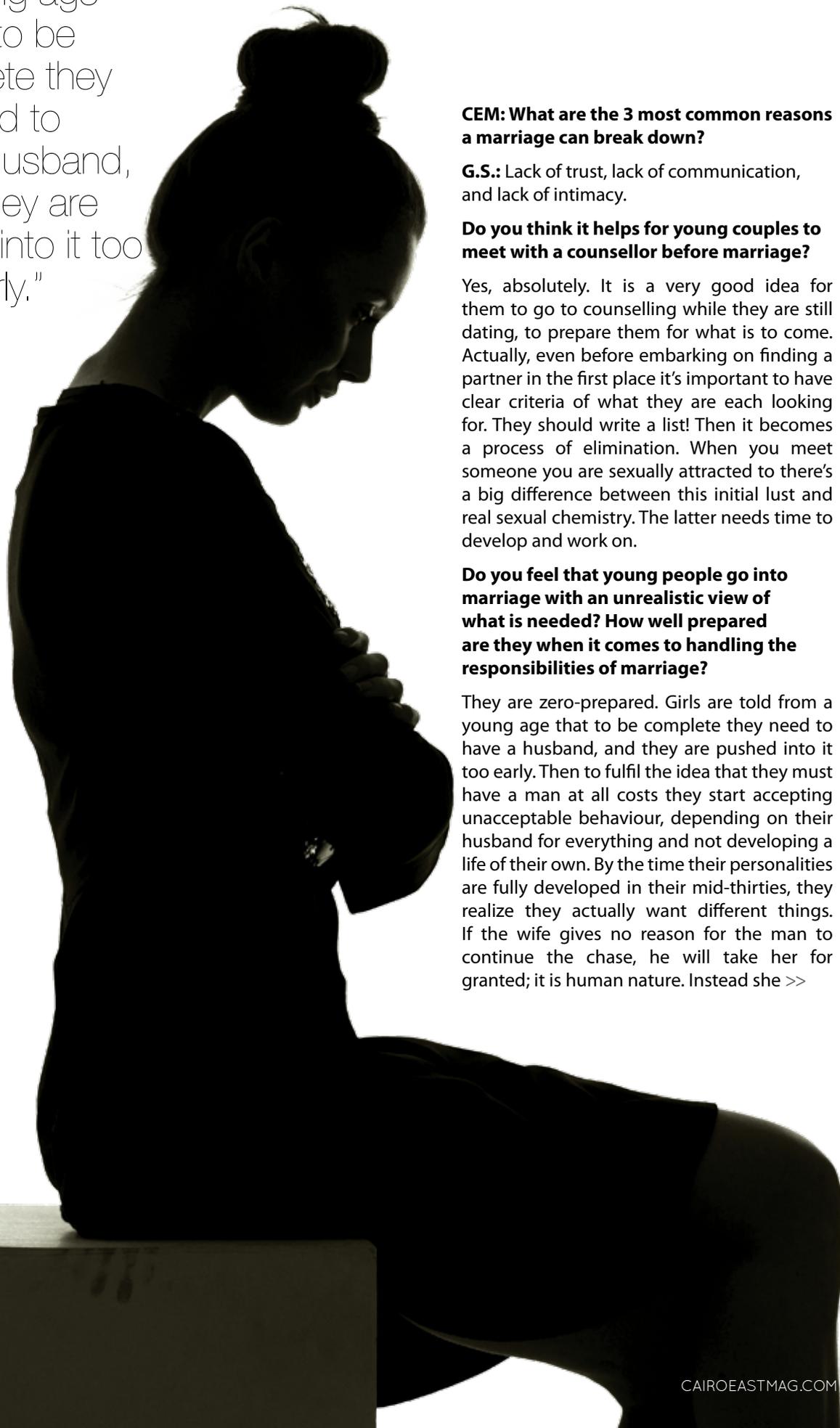
Relationship Therapy with
Dr. Georgette Savvides

By Francesca Sullivan

Valentine's Day is almost upon us, and as couples everywhere rush out to buy flowers, red hearts and other tokens of love, we ask the question: what makes a marriage successful, and are there ways to prepare for it that might make that success long-lasting? **Cairo East Magazine** turns the spotlight on marriage in the company of one of Cairo's top couples' counsellors, Dr. Georgette Savvides. A high profile psychologist with extensive experience in clinical and business psychology, 'Dr. G' as she is known, has her own centre in New Cairo. She is also a regular guest on TV and radio channels, airing what are sometimes considered controversial views.



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CEM: What are the 3 most common reasons a marriage can break down?

G.S.: Lack of trust, lack of communication, and lack of intimacy.

Do you think it helps for young couples to meet with a counsellor before marriage?

Yes, absolutely. It is a very good idea for them to go to counselling while they are still dating, to prepare them for what is to come. Actually, even before embarking on finding a partner in the first place it's important to have clear criteria of what they are each looking for. They should write a list! Then it becomes a process of elimination. When you meet someone you are sexually attracted to there's a big difference between this initial lust and real sexual chemistry. The latter needs time to develop and work on.

Do you feel that young people go into marriage with an unrealistic view of what is needed? How well prepared are they when it comes to handling the responsibilities of marriage?

They are zero-prepared. Girls are told from a young age that to be complete they need to have a husband, and they are pushed into it too early. Then to fulfil the idea that they must have a man at all costs they start accepting unacceptable behaviour, depending on their husband for everything and not developing a life of their own. By the time their personalities are fully developed in their mid-thirties, they realize they actually want different things. If the wife gives no reason for the man to continue the chase, he will take her for granted; it is human nature. Instead she >>

becomes a mother figure and he may feel suffocated by her possessiveness. She needs to stop revolving her life around him. From the man's point of view, she was unobtainable before marriage, then he gets to know her and new habits appear. Unless the two of them having a strong dating history these differences can result in loss of interest, so they need to spend time getting to know each other first.

Should young couples allow their parents to become involved in issues that arise, or should they work it out for themselves?

NEVER EVER involve the families – and feel free to write that in block capitals! Parents will always be parents; they cannot be objective, and they are likely to throw in examples of their own experience which are not applicable in 2016, or shallow and unhelpful advice such as ‘all men cheat, just stick it out,’ or ‘all women are drama queens, ignore it.’

In previous generations it was understood that even if you were miserable in a marriage you would live with it. Today, women are less tolerant, more empowered and better educated. Exposure to multiculturalism has expanded marriage values for women and men too.

Also, in involving other people in their issues couples are actually giving up their power of creative boundaries, and inviting interference, which will impact their future. If they allow interference in their marriage problems before long it will be interference in other situations such as how to bring up the children, where to live, and so on.

What are the most common problems in long-standing relationships?

Common difficulties lie around the couple not having defined roles that are gender appropriate, for example there can be resentment if the man is a lower earner. If the wife is the breadwinner, that's OK as long as both partners are agreed. Lack of gratitude and appreciation of the other partner is also an issue, as are lack of intimacy, sexual problems and the loss of friendship.

When older couples face problems what do you recommend?

Using various therapies specifically relevant to couples work: counselling, exercises to practice together as a couple, learning healthy communication skills and so on.

Do you see the type of marital problems changing a lot according to social and economic levels?

The bubbly myth of Prince Charming lives on no matter what socio-economic background young people are from. Many girls want to marry in order to escape a troubled home environment – and this situation runs across all classes. For example if a parent is very authoritarian or

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has very strict religious beliefs. In a marriage the husband still wants his clothes cleaned and his children fed, no matter what social class he is from. However, perhaps lower social classes have more financial strain and are therefore more accepting and tolerant of certain behaviours because they have less chance of getting out of the marriage.

Egyptian men are not keen on seeing marriage counsellors, how do you convince them?

I am not finding this a problem anymore. Five or six years ago women would seek help without their husbands, but these days they usually come together; there is less stigma attached to seeking professional help.

What are your 5 top pieces of advice for couples seeking to maintain a great relationship?

Have fun together! Remember at least two things you can do for your partner daily. Be friends. Spend as much time talking together as you can. Once every ten days minimum arrange to do something alone together, just the two of you. Lastly, make sure you have me-time, away from your partner; don't depend on them for everything.

What advice do you give couples who have children and have fallen out of love, but are continuing the marriage for the sake of children? Do you ever recommend a divorce if you feel the couple have exhausted everything?

To begin with, I would always try to work towards fixing the relationship, help them develop friendship and try to rediscover the spark that drew them towards each other in the first place. However, if both partners are unable to work on improving their relationship then they are left with finding alternative options, one of which would be separating. Although I always try to help people come to a conclusion by themselves, I have to admit that I often meet couples who were clearly unsuited to each other in the first place. I have a high record of getting people divorced! ■



Dr. Georgette Savvides holds a MSc. in Clinical and Public Health Aspects of Addiction from King's College, Institute of Psychiatry National Addiction Center, UK, and a Conversation Diploma in Psychology from the Open University in London, UK, in addition to a Doctorate in Psychology with a specialization in Adult Clinical Psychology from City University, UK, and a second professional doctorate from Southern California University in the USA, with a specialization in Occupational/Business Psychology.

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