



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOLD DIGGERS

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE
DESIRE ONLY WEALTH
FROM A MARRIAGE TO THE
EXCLUSION OF ALL ELSE?
PSYCHOTHERAPIST SUSIE
AMBROSE UNCOVERS THE
TRUTH. ILLUSTRATION
BY ALEX TOOHEY

They say that a young girl never fell in love with a 'poor' old man, and the phenomenon of gold digging is an ancient one. These days, with changing gender roles, even gold diggers can be male or female. The old excuse of mere survival is no longer valid – there are plenty of opportunities for even the most delicate flower to make a living. The psychology of gold digging now is more complex in an age when we expect marriage to be emotionally fulfilling.

True gold diggers have learned to fake love successfully – materialism informs their every move. They have no interest in the emotional support, intimacy or companionship ideally offered by a modern marriage and are driven exclusively and entirely by material gain.

Key formative features among typical gold diggers are a troubled background and hyper-materialistic values (to the extent that things in the material world are used to represent identity). The combination is dangerous both for them, and those they attract who meet their materialistic criteria.

The clue to this life choice usually lies deep in the gold digger's childhood. They tend to have experienced great betrayal, neglect or hurt so that they develop materialism as a defence mechanism against future anguish.

We interviewed Jas, a pretty and outwardly sophisticated 28-year-old, for her suitability for Seventy Thirty, our matchmaking service that is informed by psychological insight. She openly admitted that she suspects she is addicted to the buzz she gets from expensive gifts. Jas explained that she didn't have very much materially growing up compared to her peers - clothes and trainers were never like everyone else's at school, and she was desperately unhappy at home with both parents drinking and out of work. 'I guess I learned at an early age that money would solve my

problems, help me fit in and make me happy. Now, when I get something I really want, I'm on a high for days.'

Modern society emphasises the importance of money, and creates the illusion that all you need to be happy in life is the purely material. Insecure people who compare their own situation with those of celebrities are very susceptible to these messages, and come to the conclusion that money is all they need in order to feel fulfilled, happy and content.

At the extreme edge of this trend, gold diggers are looking for a quick fix with a temporary but tangible 'reward'. This alleviates their feelings of dissatisfaction and emptiness in the same way that alcohol or drugs do for others: but of course when the effects wear off, a gaping emotional hole is left that still needs to be filled, and so the cycle continues.

The late Anna Nicole Smith is a classic example of a gold digger. Born Vickie Lynn Hogan in Houston Texas in 1967, Playmate of the Year Smith famously married at 26 the ancient and much impaired billionaire J. Howard Marshall, 89, in 1994. Typically for a gold digger, her childhood was disturbed by her mother's random love life. Smith's half-brother, possibly born earlier the same year as her, was fathered by her mother's stepbrother. Her father left soon after her birth, and her mother went on to contract multiple brief marriages. Vickie probably developed a distorted view of the satisfaction that marriage ideally can provide.

When emotional security has been absent, and life has been chaotic, the tangible security that money represents is very seductive. Gold digging will only ever be a short-term fix for the real underlying issues. Sadly Smith's life ended prematurely when she overdosed accidentally following her son's death from drugs.

There is nothing wrong with being attracted to a successful man or woman if this is because they have qualities such as drive

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and ambition that are appealing. It is attraction to wealth regardless of other qualities that becomes a 'gold digging' issue.

A key characteristic is detachment between emotions/feelings and thoughts/cognitions. 'Romantic' decisions will be for them entirely rational and based on achieving their short-term fix (money); without any consideration for feelings, morality or integrity. They are capable of detaching themselves mentally and emotionally from their behaviour to the point that sex is devoid of emotional content. Although they can claim to feel great adoration for their partner, in actuality sexual relationships involve no real sentiment or emotion.

More often than not they will use rational logic vehemently to justify their actions to themselves, and will certainly not see gold digging for what it really is. Indeed, they do not even realise how 'wrong' their behaviour is, because they are so emotionally withdrawn that they literally cannot comprehend quite how hurtful it is to those they are deceiving.

But the 'gold dug' too have a role in these unbalanced relationships. Many wealthy people have worked very hard for their financial success. At risk of attracting gold diggers are those who have developed their own material wealth at the expense of their emotional life. So both the gold diggers and the gold dug have strong values around money (over and above other, more emotional and intellectual, aspects of their lives).

If unfulfilled in any aspect of their life, yet successful in other ways, they may use the area in which they are bountiful to fill the gaps. So the rich man or woman who is self-doubting about their attractiveness to others, whose partner has recently left them or who is worried about being too old, may unconsciously use their plentiful resource (money) to balance the situation out. Buying attention, companionship and admiration become normalised, especially when such a deal is never made explicit by either party and is more of an unspoken psychological contract. Of course these things cannot be bought, only the illusion of them – and in the short term this may be enough. But it is highly unlikely to yield any long-term gains if money has been the main driver.

You may ask if this kind of relationship can ever be positive for either partner. The question about the positives depends on how much financial status has played a role its development, and also whether any genuine mutual attraction and compatibility exist.

In many successful relationships one partner provides the financial support. Indeed in Smith's marriage, both partners insisted on their total happiness and mutual love and respect. But after her husband died, and until her death, she was embroiled in a lengthy and depressing court case to recover money from his estate – which perhaps highlights where his attraction for her lay.

In the longer-term, these relationships can exaggerate the issues damaged people always carry with them. As the relationship develops there is obviously a lack of trust; a constant worry that a better option will turn up – blonder, younger and slimmer, or simply much much richer. This can act to heighten insecurities which in turn can lead to controlling behaviour, power struggles, increased likelihood of affairs and loneliness and depression.

Even if it doesn't work long-term, it can feel positive in the short-term as everyone seems to get what they want. However, neither partner is really fulfilling the intimacy area of their life; and neither will ever get the true rewards that come from a genuine loving relationship based on respect, compatibility and mutual chemistry.

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