

From Wedding Bells to Wedding Blues

Falling into a post-wedding funk? You're not alone. Some brides and grooms experience bouts of depression after the ceremony. Here's how to cope.



By **Alix Strauss**

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It was after midnight when Kaitlin Chad Moss, her new husband, Jeremy Moss, and a handful of devoted wedding guests lingered as long as they could before they were politely informed that the celebration was over and it was time to go home.

“That’s when it hit me,” said Ms. Moss, 29, who was married last September at the Green Valley Ranch, a lodge and events space in Coram, Mont. “I’m never going to have everyone I love in one room like this again. It was hard to accept. I felt sad, and it didn’t go away.”

Ms. Moss broke down that night in front of her girlfriends. “I wish someone had warned me that this was something you could feel. Why is no one talking about this?” said Ms. Moss, who lives in Denver.

Thomas Meehan, 28, a government relations liaison officer for the Texas State Office of Risk Management, who married his husband, Philip Arnold, last New Year’s Eve in New Orleans, posed the same question to his mother, sister and friends. “I had six months of intensive planning and after our wedding was over there was this void. I felt alone,” he said. “Everyone was shocked a guy could feel like this — depressed, lonely, and like I didn’t have a purpose.”

Post-wedding sadness is not uncommon among the newly married. Laura Stafford, a professor and director of the Bowling Green State University’s School of Media and Communication, and Allison Scott Gordon, an associate professor at the University of Kentucky’s Department of Communication, have jointly conducted two studies on depression, specifically concerning newly married women.

“In 2016 we looked at 28 women, half of whom said they felt sad or let down after their wedding,” Ms. Stafford said. Last year they interviewed 158 women. Twelve percent of the women interviewed in the second study expressed feelings of depression after being wedded.

“These women were the center of attention, and planning a wedding takes up so much of your time, it would be weird to not feel some kind of let down,” Ms. Stafford said. “We also found there was more focus on the wedding than on the marriage. There was also uncertainty about their goals, their role as a wife, their relationship and partner choice.”

The pair are working on a third study where the same 158 women will be interviewed again to see if their moods have changed a year later.

“I kept waiting for my wedding bliss but instead I fell into this funk. I’d just gotten married to a great guy and I couldn’t understand why I wasn’t happy,” said Ms. Moss, the founder of theeveryhostess.com, a website covering lifestyle and entertaining. “It was like losing a job you love. That feeling lasted for three months.”

Brittney Drye, 34, who got married in 2015 and is the founder and the editor in chief of Love Inc. Magazine, had a similar reaction. “I was very down and felt bad for six months. It was very confusing. I just got married, why am I not on Cloud 9?”

There are many reasons behind the emotional crash. For some, it’s returning to everyday life. For others, it’s the elimination of planning and anticipating such a big celebration or the loss of looking forward to that cultural, life-altering event. Then there’s the diminished attention, social letdown and the pressures and expectations that come with your new life and spouse.

To distract herself from her melancholy emotions, Ms. Drye hosted dinner parties. “I thought doing something that had elements of my wedding, but on a smaller scale, like home décor projects or entertaining friends where I’d mix cocktails, do floral arrangements, and make a meal would help,” she said. “But it was temporary and the sadness would return.”

Elizabeth Sloan, a licensed professional counselor and a clinical fellow at the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy in McLean, Va., said the wedding glow eventually dims.

“It’s normal to have mixed feelings about the life changes you’ve just made, which are now permanent, and somewhat out of your control,” **Ms. Sloan** said. “It’s easy to look at your gains: a wedding, a spouse, and new life. But there are also losses: the life you used to have. And when we feel loss, there’s sadness.”

Ms. Sloan added that changes in the level of neurotransmitters in the brain, could be a contributor. “There’s a dopamine rush that comes with planning a wedding, and a dopamine cliff afterward because you’re not always doing exciting things,” she said. “You’re back home paying bills and going to work and figuring out what to make for dinner. That drains dopamine, it doesn’t increase it.”

Scott Stanley, a research professor and co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, cited social media and an inability to be present during the wedding as additional triggers.

“People are experiencing performance pressure because everything is announced on social media, including successes and achievements,” Dr. Stanley said. “There’s also more pressure for perfection, and to find the perfect person and not make a mistake. Physically and emotionally it’s exhausting. Some people struggle to rebound.”

Mr. Meehan, the government relations liaison officer, isolated himself after his wedding. “I lost the desire to socialize,” he said. “People started asking if I was O.K. And people couldn’t understand why I wasn’t.”

Some had assumed, he said, “something was going on with me and Philip, but we were fine. It was hard to verbalize because how do you get depressed from your wedding.”

Mr. Meehan said he believes the emotional attachment to the event, paired with the fact that he was the driving force behind the planning, were partly to blame. “People think this is a women’s thing or a gay thing — it’s not,” he said. “Men don’t want to be perceived as weak or vulnerable. I’m just one of the first to be vocal about it.”

Bret Levesque, 36, an academic adviser for the University of Miami who got married in March at the Living Sculpture Sanctuary in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., spoke similarly. “Gay or straight, male or female this is a thing that’s happening. I just didn’t know what it was called. I didn’t know why I felt lonely or that I lost a sense of purpose except that all the stimulation from planning our party was gone.”

Gone, too, is the couple’s professional wedding posse.

“They lost an insta-family who wanted to create their vision,” said Michelle Rago, the founder of Michelle Rago Destinations, an event planning and design firm based in New York. “The constant conversation they’ve had for the past year with this team of

people, who they liked and whose attention and dedication was focused on them and producing their wedding, can be very intoxicating.”

But then, she continued, “There’s a huge drop of connectivity and that’s difficult for people. There are no more phone calls, meeting for drinks, or support system. It’s hard to give up the attention that was on you for over a year.”

Mr. Meehan used FaceTime to stay in touch with friends. He talked about his feelings with his husband. He forced himself to reconnect and to become more extroverted. Eventually the loneliness lifted.

Ms. Drye, the editor in chief of Love Inc. Magazine, was easily angered and on edge after the wedding. “My new husband and I fought more than normal,” she said. “We have a strong marriage, we got through it, but it’s more serious than people give it credit. I should have seen a therapist, it would have helped me and my marriage. The blues is like this cutesy word people use. This is a real, concerning issue that should be taken seriously.”

Professionals agree. “For most, this kind of sadness is temporary,” said **Ms. Sloan**, who added that these melancholy feelings generally lessen during the months that follow your wedding. “First talk to other married friends, then talk to your spouse. Holding a secret creates distance,” she said.

Other positives that can emerge are greater connections with your spouse.

“Going through an intensive experience only to return inward can evoke emptiness, anxiety, loss and loneliness,” said Dr. Orna Guralink, a New York based clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst. “But these feelings can inspire curiosity about the next stage for your life, and ask you to figure out how you want to live as a married person. That can lead to a better discussion or a good opening for a new kind of conversation.”

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/18/fashion/weddings/from-wedding-bells-to-wedding-blues.html>