

The ex factor

Invite your old flame to the wedding? It's the latest thing,

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There are certain words even the most mature women dread hearing from the ex. "I'm getting married!" is one of those sentences. Nowadays, there are a few more words being added. Instead of just hearing that the ex is starting a life with someone new, we're also getting asked to share in the festivities.

The old question of sex with the ex is giving way to: "Should I go to my ex's wedding?"

"When I told my girlfriends that my ex invited me to his wedding, there was a raging debate around me," says Marcella Munro, a communications consultant in Vancouver. When her ex e-mailed to tell her the news, she called to congratulate him. Then she heard him say, "I'd really love it if you were there."

Even though they broke up four years ago after a two-year relationship, they're still friends. "Most people thought it was weird that I went," Munro says. "Most of my girlfriends didn't understand it and my family didn't understand it. I was the only one who thought he wanted me to come for the right reasons. That is, we were in love when we were dating, then we became very close friends after we broke up. He became like a big brother."

Maria Vella, a Toronto-based wedding planner for the company Thee Wedding, says, "It's absolutely a good thing to invite the ex. It definitely happens all the time. If they are still good friends, why not?" she asks. "The first thing I say to brides is to ask the groom. If he's comfortable with it, why not? But all three of them have to be on good terms."

Vella cautions, however, that an ex should never have any direct involvement in the wedding. "They should be there as a normal, encouraging guest and nothing more."

For Munro, the wedding invitation was like having an invisible therapist suddenly appear in the room. "I knew I would have mixed feelings, but it did make me examine where I was at. I had to be clear with myself that the reason I was upset was because of the past and letting go of that last little bit of romance. The last thing I wanted was to attend the wedding and be a problem my ex had to manage. I wanted to go with a good heart."

For her, the hardest part was everyone telling her not to go. She went, without a date. "I had a very good time," she says.

"But we had resolved our relationship. Trust me, there are some men I've dated where things are still uncomfortable. If I received a wedding invitation from some of them, I would take a pass."

Dara Fleischer, 33, a shopping editor at Loulou magazine, invited her former live-in boyfriend to her wedding in September.

The Montreal wedding was the first time her husband and her ex had met. "It was a little bit strange, but I'm glad I did it," she says. "It's nice to have a good relationship with your ex. I was happy that I could share what was happening with my life with someone I care about."

This is not to say that Fleischer always agrees with inviting the ex. When her husband's ex-girlfriend invited them to her wedding, she was upset, mostly because the bride asked him to sign the Ketubah, a Jewish marriage contract, an honour usually reserved for a best friend or family member.

"It flipped me out that she asked him to sign it. I started bawling on the way there, asking why out of everyone there did she pick him? That made me uncomfortable. But he didn't think anything of it."

Ciara Daykin, 25, a wedding planner for Calgary-based Firefly Occasions, and a recent bride, says she and her fiancé debated the issue. "My husband and I came to the decision together that we weren't going to invite anyone we dated, many of whom we were still friendly with. We explained to them that we wanted to walk down the aisle and only meet each other's eyes."

Daykin has seen first-hand what can happen when you invite an ex to the wedding.

"I just did a wedding where there was a kissing game, and every time a guest threw a ball in a cup, someone had to kiss the bride or groom, or they had to kiss each other, depending on what cup they threw the ball into. Well, the very first person who got a ball in a cup was the bride's ex, and it was a cup where he had to kiss the bride. It ignited so many snickers," she says.

Inviting an ex to your wedding is not just about whether the bride and groom can deal with it, she says. "When you invite an ex, you really have to make sure you talk to the emcee, everyone who is doing a speech, the bridal party if they have anything planned. They may think it's all in good fun to make a joke out of past relationships, but it could not turn out that way," she says.

While most ex-inclusive weddings don't turn out like the episode of Friends where Rachel is the maid of honour at her ex-fiancé's wedding and gets ridiculed by the best man, there can be inadvertent snubs. Munro, for instance, heard a woman at the rehearsal dinner claim the groom hadn't met anyone appropriate before meeting his bride. "I was like, Hello? Does she not know that I was his ex?"

Daykin suggests that if you're thinking about inviting an ex, have a test run by inviting him over for dinner first. "One of my girlfriends ended up dating a guy that I had dated," she says. "He had crushed me, but it was now two years later and he was dating my friend. So we decided to invite them over to see how uncomfortable it was, because I certainly didn't want to be reminded of him on my wedding day." Turns out, the test run was a bust. Neither her friend, nor her ex, was invited to the wedding.

Amy Hopkins, who works for wedding-planning company Wedding Guru, says inviting the ex is more common nowadays because people are waiting so long to get married. But she says it can be an iffy thing to have an ex at the wedding. "Especially when alcohol gets into the mix. It's such an emotional day anyway."

Calgary's Paul Rosenberg, 39, invited his ex-fiance to his wedding. She, however, didn't invite him to hers. "She got married sooner after we broke up, so maybe it was too soon. But the time I got married, she was happily married with two kids. We still kept in touch, and I'm friends with her husband."

Do you have to invite an ex if they are in your social circle? Yes, says Hopkins. Daykin doesn't agree. "I tell all my brides that it's their wedding. Yes, people were hurt at my wedding because we didn't invite them. But the truth is, some of the people . . . you pretty much know that in two years you're not going to be friends with them anyway."

For Munro, her ex's wedding provided closure. "I was watching it all and it occurred to me that this was not the kind of wedding I'd ever have for myself," she says. "Not that it wasn't wonderful, but it was hard to feel any jealousy knowing that I'd never do it that way."

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