

I do find it helpful to write something, and I also find it helpful to keep fairly detailed notes after each session as the work progresses. There is a lot to remember – in the names and personalities of the family, friends, colleagues, and fantasies and dreams – of the two individuals.

Interlude: on love

Here goes, Baby
Here goes
Every worry, every fear goes
Every dull day in the year goes
I'm about to fall in love . . .
(Frank Sinatra, "Ratpack") (composer unknown)

Falling in love

As psychotherapists and psychoanalysts we do not have an exact definition of love; still, we are all certain that we know what the term means – it is just hard to articulate.

"Sexuality," "romance," "love:" words that should be easy for the psychoanalyst, for they refer to direct, reportable experiences with visible behavioural consequences. Words that draw on common knowledge requiring at the start neither the microscope of analytic treatment nor the dark glass of metapsychology. But these words are not easy to encompass.

(Stoller, 1991, p. 413)

We know the feeling of longing; the fortunate among us know the ecstatic joy of being submerged in love; and most of us know the aching experience of the lack of it. We know

this bittersweetness through our deepest selves, and we know it vicariously through the love affairs of our patients and our friends. Almost every book we read and film we see is based on love; in fact, nothing is interesting without it. Most of us, sophisticated as we are about life and even about analysis, would subscribe to the Beatles' dictum "All you need is love." After all, isn't that what we secretly think "cures" in psychoanalytic therapy? Some of you may be reading this chapter right now in the hope of learning something new about this mysterious and elusive state. I hope you will not be disappointed.

"Falling in love is the nearest most of us come to glimpsing utopia in our lifetimes" (Kipnis, 2003). When we think about the happy beginning of love, being uncritically adored and adoring, it seems like an altered state. Are we in our right minds? Shakespeare wrote: "Love is merely a madness." The extreme highs and lows are reminiscent of a bipolar disorder; the preoccupation with our lover could very well be an obsessive compulsive disorder; the splitting of that precious object into all good – with others as not measuring up – smacks of a borderline personality disorder; our aching desire to be with the person classifies us as having a pathological need for symbiosis – or at the very least as being co-dependent; and our sudden intense hike in sexual passion feels like a large dose of nymphomania. In fact, changes in brain and blood chemistry of those who claim to be madly in love have been found scientifically to be close to the changes observed in people with severe obsessive compulsive disorder.

From the psychoanalytic vantage point, as from the perspective of certain parts of society, the desire and longing for another person inevitably threaten the status quo, the institutions that regulate and contain people. Thus, the emotions of love threaten the rule of the mind, and may be disturbing to psychoanalysts, as they have been to so many philosophers (Ross, 1991).

Stoller states that what differentiates the concept of love in all its iterations from the concept of romance, or *being in love*, is

minimal fetishizing. Which implies, in varying amounts, empathy; identification; the need to need and the need to be needed; high-pleasure altruism; reduced inventing the other to fit our primordial fantasies; not too much ego ideal or other idealizations; the capacity to survive one's own and the other's rage and fear (stoically, with good spirits, even with humor); curiosity; . . . respect: admiring and unmalicious envy; capacity to keep one's boundaries in the midst of merging; . . . happy vulnerability.

(1991, p. 414)

This sounds like a perfect recipe: a soupçon of this, a dollop of that; if only one could manage and measure out the ingredients, one could produce a perfectly delicious stew. The capacity to retain one's senses and one's reason while one is being joyously swept away in idealizing and merging with another is sometimes too much to ask, even from an experienced chef.

Idealization

"Idealization is the mental process by means of which the object's qualities and values are elevated to the point of perfection" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 202). Most analytic writers (e.g. Garza-Guerrero, 2000) have understood a lover's idealization as the projection of the ego-ideal onto the object of their love, a seeking to re-encounter a paradisiac state of lost childhood narcissism. With this interpenetration of self and other in passionate love, falling in love seems to make for an expansion, rather than a depletion – as was earlier hypothesized – of the sense of self, and for an awareness of the complex nature of the beloved (Ross, 1991) – albeit as seen through the rosier of glasses.

Certainly, at the start, every good characteristic of our lover is heightened. This individual becomes the most desirable person in the world, embodying the powers of understanding of Winnicott, the sexual preoccupation of Freud, and the capacity for empathy of Kohut. As we have seen,

initial idealizations reflect not only the warm glow of past loved and idealized objects, but also our hopes and dreams for the future, projected onto this one person. Negatives or flaws that may slip out in the idealized one can often be recognized intellectually, but they are usually either disregarded, or rationalized as endearingly special. In our state of idealization, if we don't readily see all the personal characteristics we require for loving someone, we just *assume* that our chosen lover possesses all of them. Idealizing is another of those key processes that distinguishes falling and being in love from loving (Sharpe, 2000).

Some of us are better idealizers than others, primed for the fulfilment of the wish for the perfect partner who will make us feel wonderful about ourselves and about being alive; a lover who will complete us – be our “better half,” be the longed-for minutely attuned selfobject, who will compensate for perceived deficiencies in our own selves, and who will be an external match for the love relationship we have already created in our minds, based on loving and being loved by important people in our lives, or the lack thereof. Others have trouble idealizing, sometimes due to the premature discovery of some unlucky object's feet of clay, and these individuals remain cynical as a defence against the pain from the inevitable disappointments in love; they have more difficulty falling in love. As Fairbairn and the object relations theorists have stated, our way of connecting with new objects will be based on the quality of connection we had with our early objects. Being loved for some people may mean being nurtured, for others being revered, for some being devalued, or even abused.

Merging

As has been mentioned, the process of falling in love also includes the sense of merging with the idealized person, a blurring of boundaries between self and partner. In a way, we *want* to lose our limits – despite Stoller, cited above – to understand completely another person, to live for them more



"I'll be right back—I'm going to blink."

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than for ourselves. Bak (1973) comments that the state of being in love aims towards the fusion of self and non-self, and undoubtedly, too, the imagined blissful fusion of the infant with the mother. The almost obsessive preoccupation of the lover with the face of the beloved may well be a regression to the beginning of object formation: the recognition of the mother's face. Lovers gaze adoringly into each other's eyes, engage in a lot of physical touching, and want to be together all the time.

Sex and passion

We hope to at least begin our love relationship with wild passion. Passion, it turns out, involves more than sex and orgasm. Passion involves a yearning to be with the loved one – which implies there has been a separation – and it is

passion that is infused with ambivalence. Consider these lyrics from one of Leonard Cohen's songs of desire:

If you want a lover
 I'll do anything you ask me to
 If you want another kind of love
 I'll wear a mask for you
 If you want a partner
 Take my hand, or
 If you want to strike me
 Down in anger
 Here I stand
 I'm your man.

(Leonard Cohen, "I'm your man")

He speaks of passion as a mixture of sacrifice and potential pain. This powerful mixture combination in Cohen's lyrics is inherent in all passion, which encompasses erotic excitement, aggression, hurt, and tender feelings. As Freud said throughout his writings, hate, the opposite to love, is its constant companion, therefore ambivalence, the co-existence of love and hate for the same person, is the most natural and most common of conditions. For the lovers, sexual excitement has to incorporate aggression in the service of love (Kernberg, 1991).

Lina Wertmuller's 1974 film, *Swept Away*, in which an upper-class Italian woman and the yacht-hand aboard her ship are stranded on a deserted island, is a moving and disturbing (and unsublimated) example of this. Mariangela Melato is the classic "rich bitch." She defends against her anxiety at being lost at sea with someone of the lower classes by coming on strong – alternatively striking provocative poses in her revealing clothes and sounding off about politics and other topics. Her loud and grating voice dominates the first half of the film. Giancarlo Gianni seems to be quietly enduring this display, with only minor eye-rolling, while struggling for their survival. He retains his role of the servant until they reach the island. The film then turns on his rage

and aggression, which are finally expressed in his denying her food and shelter, in excruciating humiliation, and in disturbing physical violence. It all leads to such fiery passion that the audience itself is swept away. There are very few tender moments in this film; yet we marvel at the obvious poignancy of their love for each other.

It is difficult for psychoanalysts to conceptualize what is sexy about sex. All this talk about libidinal impulses and achieving genital primacy just doesn't cut it somehow. Ross (1991) tells us that whatever happened to Sigmund Freud's relationship with Martha, his voluminous letters to her as his fiancée are among the most moving examples of passionate feeling "in the Western world." Somehow, his theories, and those of his followers, were unable to capture these emotions.

Stoller (1991) throws into the mix that there is often erotic incompatibility between men and women, and an incompatibility, in males more than females, between erotic excitement and love. He cites research on "pornography" that shows that most women prefer scripts that include tenderness, intimacy, and caring, whereas men may prefer fetishes, or dehumanized objects. "A woman's aphrodisiac is a man's soporific," he states.

But somehow, heterosexual lovers do manage to experience great pleasure together, and homosexual lovers find enough differences to trigger intense passion.

Object choice

Freud's (1910, 1912) hypothesis about *object choice* was that it should be understood as the re-finding of an old object. This idea is still prevalent, in different iterations, in contemporary analytic theory. The struggle for the individual of needing an object that is reminiscent of a past idealized love, i.e. mother, but at the same time of needing to avoid or keep under repression incestuous wishes, is one which Freud said neurotics often cannot manage. Every new love contains a triumphant overcoming of the incest barrier.



"I married Norman when minimalism was all the rage."

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There is a German expression, "For every pot, there is a top." Sometimes it is hard for us to understand a person's object choice, especially when we are not familiar with their background; sometimes the triumph over the incest barrier seems pretty thin. Why did the relationship between John Lennon and Yoko Ono shake the world the way it did? OK, so it broke up the best band there ever was – but there was an eeriness to it that was hard to name. Yoko was older, her face was hidden by her long, black hair, and she hardly ever spoke (the perfect projection screen). Yet, it was remarkable how John needed her. She enabled him, he thought, to be his real self (the perfect mirroring selfobject). What power did she have over him? In reading about John's early life

(Lennon, 2005), one is impressed with the absence of both of his parents – his father, a seaman, was away all the time, and then left his mother when John was 4 years of age; his mother, who had an affair when John was 5, got pregnant again and, as a result, was forced to give John up to the care of an aunt during this turbulent (oedipal) time. Did Yoko represent his memory of his mother, from the age of 0 to 5 years? Was she the wished-for idealized mother he never had – totally focused on him? Did she represent the ultimate oedipal victory over all his mother's lovers? Or was she the absent father, recaptured; or the strict aunt, triumphed over, and now giving permission for him to do as he pleased?

In *On the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love*, Freud (1912) discusses the Madonna/whore resolution to the difficulty of triumphing over incest: in his words, men seek as sexual objects women they do not need to love in order to keep their sensuality away from the ones they can love. Debasement, therefore, is a defensive manoeuvre to protect against the object being too closely associated with the prohibited incestuous object which must remain pure, unlinked with sensual desire, and thus overvalued.

It is interesting to think about Freud's theory as one of the possible components in the psyches of partners who have affairs after marriage, sealing off sexual excitement from their committed relationship. (Is this what Freud was up to – in a highly sublimated form, of course – with his sister-in-law Minna?) Often people who masturbate with pornographic magazines or the internet will be conscious of keeping this "sleazy" (to quote one of my patients) part of themselves separate from their spouses.

Romantic, passionate love seems to manifest itself in much the same way in all age groups – most closely resembling the flowering of love in late adolescence. Many older patients, even elderly ones, who fall in love, whether for the first time or not, talk about waiting for telephone calls, the first hand-holding, and the first kiss – all blushing described. It is as if they are embarrassed by the intensity of these steps in the process, believing that when one is older, one should not be

“necking,” but should proceed, without much ado, to perfectly compatible consummation. This is not the case – which is why everyone can relate to love songs, movies, and stories.

Often it is clear in treatment that conflictual early relationships are recaptured and restored through complex re-enactments in marriages. In these situations, individuals repeat familiar, painful aspects of the early relationship and rework them in an attempt to master them. It sometimes appears that the couple in treatment have consciously, manifestly chosen the exact opposite of past objects, perhaps in an effort to override unconscious incestuous wishes. It is these superficial differences that attract; for example, what Bob loved about Carol was her tall, gangly body, her dark hair, and her sweet face. His mother and sisters were stocky and blonde, quite different looking from Carol. Yet, as they grew to know each other better, he found that he perceived Carol, like his mother, to be demanding more from him than he could give. Because this “similarity” unconsciously became an interference with their previously passionate sexual relationship, we focused in therapy on the *differences* between Carol and his mother to jump-start things between them. Brad, from a western WASP family, loved the fact that Chantal was French Canadian – her voice, her dress, her closeness to her family were all characteristics he associated with this difference in cultures. We could hypothesize, in fact, that the prevalence of interracial and inter-religious marriages in our society represents a strained attempt to bypass incestuous wishes.

In addition to oedipal issues, the role of siblings mentioned earlier, in an individual’s life can also play a part in their choice of a lover. Growing up with an opposite-sex sibling can launch one into the sexual arena with more comfort and confidence – that is, if the relationship has been untraumatic. This has been referred to in the first chapter. However, sexual and aggressive impulses may be acted on by either-sex (usually older) siblings, which can leave a mark in terms of later relationships.

Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) used the term *oedipal sibling triangles* to describe the triangles that develop between

siblings and between siblings and a parent which exhibit many of the characteristics of the traditional oedipal triangle. They state that love and hate between siblings can be very intense, as can erotic feelings, whether fantasied or acted on, and that an idealized sibling can have a profound effect on object choice – for example, in one couple they describe, the husband could not compete with an idealized older brother. I have seen a male partner who often enough made the slip of referring to his wife by his younger sister’s name; in another couple, the female partner was married to someone like her father, but had a torrid love affair with someone who reminded her of her older brother. Some couples relate as siblings more than others – competing, joking around, teasing each other, and having difficulty with the passionate expression of sexual feelings.

Actual, usually explorative, sexual experiences with a sibling are common enough and are not talked about in the history-taking, but if they have been traumatic, their effect can be inferred from some of the problems that arise. Intense, if fleeting, erotic activity with a same-sex sibling can have an effect on sexual identity in choosing a partner.

Sibling aggression comes up more often. In the case of Lisa and Eric, Lisa reported having been victimized by one of her older brothers. He used to pin her down on the floor and pretend to spit in her face. Sometimes he would torment her with insults. In fact, it was hard for him to pass by her without punching her. Eric’s parents had been divorced when he was a teenager because of his father’s angry outbursts. Before the divorce, Eric used to pick on his younger brother. In one session, he talked about throwing his brother’s blankets and his clothes out the window onto him when he came home from school. Since his parents’ divorce, his need to identify with his father had decreased, and he had become quite mild mannered. When he talked about his victimization of his younger brother, Lisa cringed. Here was an example where an aggressor had married a victim, each trying unconsciously to tame, or do right by, the other. During the treatment, this broadened the discussion, as Lisa began to

understand more deeply her sensitivity to any sign of irritation in Eric. As well, her fights with her mother were seen as an opportunity for her to identify with the aggressor and also to express her anger at her mother for not having protected her during those hurtful times.

After one has found one's lover in spite of, or because of, the above, how do things go?

Mitchell (2002) is of the opinion that this unconscious location of oedipal objects may reproduce our miseries. We think we are marrying the good parent, but then we find out that our partner has the qualities we hated in the bad parent. This could be because the presenting feature of the person with whom we are about to fall in love often operates as a defence against its opposite.

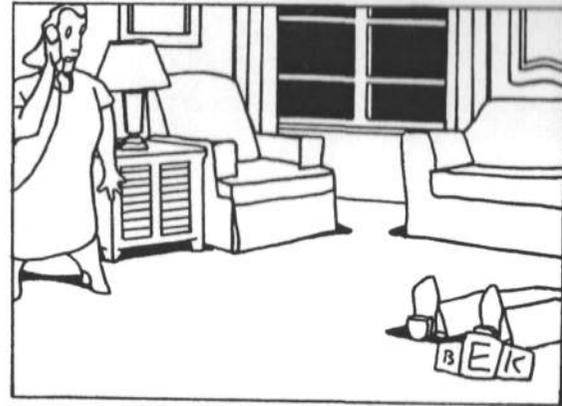
Lover beware.

Falling from grace

Why does idealization always have to be paired with de-idealization. This is not a question, but a lament. Like all lovers, I wish for the extension of that blissful state of being held in the loving gaze and arms of someone who really knows me, understands me, accepts all my faults, always – or at least whenever I have the time for it. (I'm pretty busy, actually, so I can't gaze for very long periods of time.)

However, idealization is, unfortunately, often described as the main *defence mechanism* in couple relationships, as it makes love "blind" (Dicks, 1967). Because idealization involves the projection on to the chosen lover of the features of our ideal image, whether or not he or she actually has these qualities, it can be seen as defensive. If there is a great deal of discrepancy between the real person and the ideal, as we come to know them, then we may have to strain the idealization to continue it, or else disappointment and devaluation may set in.

As we all know, disappointment is inevitable no matter how solid our defences seem to be, even though when we are in the process of falling in love, and trying to maintain this state, we push this knowledge aside.



"It's so silly. Now I can't even remember why I killed him."

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Since love and hate are two sides of a very thin coin, we can understand how even those most in love feel ambivalent about their lover, struggle as they may to keep the negative side of the ambivalence repressed. These intense feelings can, of course, be destructive if they are not discussed, but are acted out.

The fact that the editors of the *New Yorker* magazine knew that both the above cartoon, and the first one in this chapter (see p. 53), would be funny to their millions of readers speaks to everyone's secret knowledge about the intense feelings of hatred and anger that we all experience in close, loving relationships, beginning, of course, with our families of origin.

Altman describes the process of de-idealization in this way:

In latency and adolescence, love acquires more intensely instinctualized altruistic and self-seeking components – components that war with each other. A little later, in the full flush of the springtime of life, love will surmount all obstacles – nothing must stand in its way. It is a compulsion. For the moment, love for someone other than oneself has the upper hand. Then marriage – husband,

wife, children – puts love to new tests. No small bitterness crops up at the dashing of expectations. The love object is found to be in default of all those perfections attributed to it by overestimation – that projection of one's own narcissism; now, taking inventory, the stock is found to be short.

(1977, p. 40)

When this happens, especially the first time, often the reaction is to perceive the now all-too-visible annoying characteristics in the lover as intolerable. If the discrepancy between how the other actually is and our former idealization of them is too large and cannot be denied, then we either have to modify our internal wished-for ideal or we find ourselves devaluing our lover, sometimes to anyone who will listen, other than him or her. The devaluation may be motivated by a disappointment that is too painful to bear; by the need to be the ideal partner by comparison, as in “he’s the bad one, I’m the good one”; or by the fear of our partner having the same disappointment in us. Sharpe (2000) states that how partners manage the first sign of a fall from grace is often predictive of how the relationship will evolve. If partners’ internal ideals are too rigid, then they cannot be modified to include and integrate an awareness of the other’s faults, and the dreaded devaluation will set in. If a partner is too accommodating, then they may find themselves in a relationship that does not nurture them as an individual.

It is at this point that couples often seek help. The first threat of a landslide of de-idealizations often makes the partners feel hopeless. *You are not me, you are not who I thought you were, in fact, I don't know why I married you – I should have listened to my mother!* For some people, there were unconscious contradictory wishes involved in the choice of partner – for example, the wish for mirroring of the self was opposed to the wish to find the characteristics one lacks. These contradictions become difficult, if not impossible, for the other to fulfil. Some individuals, who use splitting as a defence, in part due to maintaining a representation of one

parent as all good and one as all bad, cannot allow for a grey area – for the idea that we all have our faults and flaws, and that they themselves are not either all perfect or all flawed. For these people, the partner has to be restored to their former idealized state to be lovable.



"What rhymes with 'failed marriage'?"

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Despite Fairbairn's observations, many traumatized patients seem to fall in love not with the person who reminds them of their parent, but with the person they hope will heal the wounds the parents have inflicted. To fall in love with the rescuer, or with the person one has rescued, is a frequent theme of romantic love (Bergmann, 1982). This is also, of course, a source of transference and countertransference love. When partners in this situation find that the wounds have not been healed, or that, on the other side of it, they cannot fix another person, they may become angry and begin to feel they are no longer in love.

Some individuals use devaluation as a way of justifying the need to separate. If they can work up a big enough list of defects about their partner, and they do separate, this type

of devaluation can operate as a defence against the sadness and pain they feel in the loss of a former loved one.

In the safe haven of a therapeutic environment, couples in the throes of disappointment and de-idealization begin, however tentatively, to be able to acknowledge ambivalent, and even rageful, feelings about the other. As they work their way through and unravel the arguments, they begin to see that both have been victims and both have been agents. "The pain of each is real and requires acknowledgement; the failure of each is real and requires accountability" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 154). With this in mind, they are relieved to find that the mere mention of these feelings usually does not destroy their love, but can lead to helpful exploration and interpretation.

Gail and John met when Gail was a graduate student in John's department. John, a mild and somewhat passive professor, had had two unsuccessful marriages, one to a woman with whom he had two daughters, who was diagnosed with severe bipolar disorder, and one very brief, seemingly reactive, marriage. Gail had never been married, and was an energetic young woman, fifteen years John's junior. Their courtship began with a very exciting affair, while John was extricating himself from his second marriage. John had never had such a young, alive, responsive partner; Gail, who had first idealized John as the all-knowing professor (the teacher-student idealization is probably *almost* as powerful as the therapist-patient idealization), had never had such a caring, loving partner. They decided to marry while they were still in a state of infatuation with each other, and the struggles began soon after. They had two children of their own, in fairly rapid succession, but their most intense battles were over John's daughters, who lived with them because their mother was unable to care for them. One of the complaints this couple presented was that John could not tolerate Gail's rage and intense emotional outbursts, and Gail felt that John was not prepared to act in terms of her difficulties with his children. They were both grieving the loss of the passion that had swept them away in the beginning of their relationship. John, particularly, wanted to paper over the cracks of their fights, in

case this, his third marriage, failed; Gail, however, was not letting that happen.

In our work together, John talked about his father, an angry and abusive man, who once locked him in a closet for several hours. His father's rage seemed unpredictable and arbitrary, and John tried hard to be "good" growing up, in an effort to avoid it. The dynamic that seemed most clear with this couple, once both partners could acknowledge how they felt, was that John's lack of responsiveness to Gail's outbursts was based on fear. He was not only frightened of Gail's (*qua* father's) rage, but he was also frightened of his own assertiveness and aggression, which he had projected onto her. This caused Gail to perceive him as weak and ineffectual; the fall from bliss was well in progress when they came for help.

Andrea and Steve, a South African couple in their mid-thirties, came for treatment because of an unwanted pregnancy. They had one planned child, and Steve was having significant work problems. Their courtship had been enhanced by the fact of their both being strangers in a foreign land; they felt like soulmates, with the same longing for a homeland to which neither wanted to return, and because they experienced similar reactions to life in Canada. They were certain their relationship was special because of this. Andrea had a fairly high-paying job, and after they decided to marry, they had their first child within two years. When they started therapy, Steve was taking business courses and had the dream of starting his own lucrative business. He had made two false (and costly) starts when the second pregnancy occurred. The event of the pregnancy had released a tirade of rage from Andrea, who said she wasn't sure she wanted the baby, due to Steve's inability to support the family. They were no longer merged soulmates. They had all but made the decision to abort the pregnancy when their family doctor referred them to me.

This marriage was in a huge crisis – and we had a deadline to meet. In three weeks, it would be too late to decide in favour of abortion. The emotions of both partners were

understandably intense in the first two meetings (no history-taking for these two) as I heard from each about the pros and cons of keeping the baby, their projected financial situation, and their anger at each other. Watching Andrea's eyes well up when she touched her stomach and talked about the baby inside her, and indeed watching her body change as time went on, it became impossible for me to remain neutral.

My sense that they both wanted this baby was difficult to sort out from my desire for them not to abort it. I thought it best to share this difficulty with them. The discussion then shifted to Andrea's disappointment in Steve, and how angry she had been over the past year because of his failures at work. She had planned that they should abort the pregnancy because, if the marriage broke up, she would then only have to deal with one child instead of two. Hearing this outpouring of rage and desperation, I thought about the abortion as Andrea's way of punishing Steve, and asked her about this. She began to sob, and agreed. Steve came over to her chair and held her, telling her how much he wanted the baby. They made the final decision to keep the baby after this session.

As our work continued through the pregnancy, Andrea was able to unravel her feelings of anger at Steve which, it turned out, had been instigated by her wealthy father. At one point, Andrea said: "We would never have come here [to therapy] if not for this pregnancy, so I feel like this baby's brought good stuff already." Steve's self-confidence began to improve, and as he felt less like he had to compete with Andrea's father, he began to look for more realistic job opportunities. The reward for all of us was the addition of a bright orange carriage, with a chubby blonde baby girl inside, to our final month of sessions. Their love for each other was beginning to be rekindled, albeit in a more muted light.

Staying in love

To paraphrase Mitchell (2002): love and marriage may go together like a horse and carriage, but it is crucial that the horse of passion be tethered by the rein of reality acceptance

to prevent runaways. Lyons (1993) puts it this way: "The task involves the attempt to convert what was originally a largely unconscious, instinctive choice into a conscious commitment. The passion that carried the individuals into the relationship has to be converted into the ongoing energy that will make it work" (pp. 44-45).

When we realize, as Altman states above, that our lover's attributes fall far short of what we wished, and indeed believed, them to be, then the capacity to sustain a love that is neither perfect nor devalued is what is at stake. The transition from "in love" to loving can be a difficult one, especially if early loss or deprivation or incomplete separation from parents are part of the picture. The capacity to make this transition can be only somewhat predictable from the history-taking, based partly on partners' experience of their parents' love for them and for each other, and their parents' marriage. Some individuals have never seen their parents fight, as this was always kept secret from the children, and therefore do not have the idea of reparation, working through, and reconciliation as a natural part of adult relationships. Some individuals' experience of the expression of negative feelings between parents is that it leads to devastating divorce; therefore, they will avoid expressing these feelings at all costs. Partners are also affected, as has been mentioned earlier, by how they themselves have been loved, or not, by early caretakers, the reaction to their perceived deficiencies or misdeeds, and also by parents' reactions to their attempts to separate and mature.

Although the capacity to love over time entails the capacity to tolerate and repair hatred, hatred is not all there is when the climate changes. Disappointment may be just that, and the role of the couples therapist can be to help couples understand why the disappointment has come about. That no one can live up to an individual's concept of the perfect lover, even though we enjoy the idea that we might, may have to be explained to the partners. As well, understanding the choice of partner in the light of one's background, knowing something about the tendency we all have

to use projection, and acknowledging the inner push to repeat old patterns, as discussed earlier in this chapter, can all be extremely helpful, in terms of knowing what to do when reality sets in.

Freud (1912) characterized “a completely normal attitude in love” as the confluence of “two currents,” the “*tender and the sensual*” (italics mine). People who cannot desire where they love or love where they desire have become derailed in their development. To be able to experience tender affection and sexual desire with the same person at the same time is, therefore, a highly difficult achievement – for both men and women – and seems to be, quite frankly, an indication of growing up.

Well before Freud, in 1643, John Milton published his *Doctrine & Discipline of Divorce*, an essay addressed to members of the English parliament. In defending divorce, Milton also offered his thinking on what a long-term, committed relationship should consist of. (His own first, unhappy marriage may have contributed to his formulation.) He wrote: “In God’s intention, a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage” (cited in Mead, 2003). Milton’s understanding of the word *conversation* (derived from the Latin verb *conversari*: to live together) would have been a broad one, encompassing not only meaningful talk, but an easy intimacy.

In this excerpt from D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Women in Love*, Ursula and Birkin have achieved this, at least for the moment:

She clung nearer to him. He held her close, and kissed her softly, gently. It was such peace and heavenly freedom, just to fold her and kiss her gently, and not to have any thoughts or any desires or any will, just to be still with her, to be perfectly still and together, in a peace that was not sleep, but content in bliss. To be content in bliss, without desire or insistence anywhere, this was heaven: to be together in happy stillness.

(Lawrence, 2002 [1920], p. 261)

Can the ability to integrate passion into loving and sustain it past the eruption of anger and negative feelings be learned, or improved upon, in the environment of couples therapy? This, we all know, is a tall order, and some analytic thinkers say it cannot be done. “Full face-to-face erotic intimacy is too blinding, like looking directly at the sun, for people who have been raised on a diet of emotional scarcity” (Miller, 1995, p. 113).

Mitchell (2002), who has been cited earlier in this chapter, entitled his final book *Can love last? The fate of romance over time*, which should have made it an instant best-seller. His answer to the first part of the title is: yes, but – passion cannot. Mitchell maintains that our needs for safety and passion are conflicting, since deadness is a requirement for security. “Passionlessness in long-term relationships is often a consequence not of the extinguishing of a flame but of collusive efforts to keep the relationship inert in a sodden stasis” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 55). What is so dangerous about desiring someone you love, according to Mitchell, is that you can lose him or her; therefore, we may even consciously or unconsciously find ourselves inhibiting the excitement we felt for our partner earlier on.

Is this the good news? Could we really feel passionate about our partner if only we weren’t so worried about the loss of a secure relationship? In a way, this seems contradictory to what we think we know, that is, that a healthy relationship can mature over time and that many people, after many years together, *can* have a love that at least sometimes includes passion, whether on a holiday, or a date night, or just in genuine appreciation of the other. The appreciation may grow out of their shared history – sometimes by having survived a difficult or, indeed, a pleasurable time together, sometimes by feeling proud of what the couple have accomplished as a partnership, or sometimes even by comparing themselves to other couples they know and feeling grateful for having each other.

The capacity for mature love, for moving from intense infatuation to tender affection and appreciation, is related to



"Come a little bit closer. You're my kind of man."

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the capacity for mature object relations in general, in other words, a sufficient degree of ego development; both can be affected by therapeutic treatment. When partners are at extreme ends of a continuum – for example, to oversimplify: “good–bad” in the case of Anne and Michael – then helping them to move closer to each other and to see how each possesses the potential for both qualities can lead to their having a more mature, accepting perception of the other.

Berkowitz (1999) states that although the literature emphasizes the neurotic fit we often see in couples, there is also a healthy potential in relationships to master a previously bad and frustrating object relationship. In one couple I saw, the male partner had grown up with an inconsistent mother who arbitrarily doled out smothering love and humiliating punishment, seemingly unconnected to any behaviour of his. His parents had an angry divorce when he was 11 years of age and, in their continued acrimony, made use of him and his siblings for their own needs to express hostility to each other. This man chose a relationship with a woman from a steadily loving and caring family. Although it was not her conscious intention to “cure” him, she did – by being consistent and

present even though he was, for a long time, unable to make an acknowledged commitment to her. He used work and an interest in sports to take himself away from her; she stayed with him, however, offering good-enough attunement to his needs, and he was eventually able to love and appreciate her in an intensely genuine way. After ten years of living together, they were married. When they came for therapy, it was to discuss problems with a hyperactive child.

As in Kohut's description of the effect of the repair of empathic failures when they occur between analyst and analysand, the repair of failures in the empathic fabric of a couple's relationship can strengthen the bond between the two individuals.

In some way, the rest of this book is devoted to the subject of staying in love: helping couples tolerate and be patient with each other, forgive each other and themselves, better understand their partner's needs and motivations and better communicate their own, and to increase their capacity to appreciate and enjoy each other. Another tall order.