



I N S T I T U T E

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Know When To Hold 'Em: When Falling Out of Love Can be Good for Your Relationship - Part 1 of 2

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In the world of poker playing and five card draw, the temptation to draw 3 and go for the inside straight or full house is a lingering seductress waiting for the fool hardy to bet large and invite fate to bless or curse. So many of us know that sinking, somewhat airsick feeling of watching whatever fortune we risk slide smoothly across the table into the waiting grasp of the one upon whom fortune smiled so sweetly.

Falling in love and devoting our time, money, energy to capture the object of our desire is a bit like drawing those three cards. Even as we dream, plot, scheme, pursue, wait, distance or even become depressed, this special relationship can have us staring at our cards, with a lot on the table, contemplating the best draw and hoping we've played the best odds.

The book, Getting the Love You Want by Drs Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt was a break through for thousands of couples, giving hope and proven tools to help manage what seems to be a natural process of falling out of love. This approach identified what is known as the "Imago Match". Imago is Latin for the word "image" and the theory proposes that within each of us is an unconscious map that drives the choices we make when selecting a mate or any significant relationship. The Imago approach outlines a predictable maturation of the long-term committed relationship that identifies separate stages that a couple will experience. In this two-part article, we will present the first two of six stages; Romantic Love and The Power Struggle. Our intent is to help couples understand what is really occurring in the world of attraction and the selection process and to explain why the romantic love experience is not supposed to last. We're supposed to fall out of love.

For most of us our relationship didn't begin with a hard cognitive assessment of strengths and weaknesses, or life skills or family and religious compatibility. We chose our beloved because of a convergence of factors, some conscious, some biological, some unconscious that all came together to produce the experience of romantic love that propels us to make deep a commitment to this person. All of these important motivations

and interests i.e.: availability, attractiveness, life stage, and the inevitable neurotransmitter releases brought you to the table. For most of us the business of compatibility was, at best, a nice addition to the composite of romance, nurturance and lust that helped pull the trigger of commitment and bet on the potential “full house”. Nowhere else would we make a life decision based primarily on the emotional high of romantic love. In fact, most of the world, even in this day and time, believes that making the choice of a life partner should not be left to the whims and emotional undertow of romantic love. They might even say: “Can you imagine choosing your life’s mate based on the fact that he has nice eyes or her legs are magnificent or he’s funny or brave or generous or a very bad boy.” Of course these kinds of choices do take place.

We’ve made a commitment either because we were attracted; infatuated or just plain head over heels in love with our beloved, while we were under the influence of nature’s most potent chemical cocktails. Nature’s agenda has the house odds and is calling the bets while we’re just starting to figure out how to play the hand we’re dealt.

Although we may find it difficult to navigate this journey of Romantic Love when we are in it, we can often see the phenomenon taking place in our friends, relatives or, worst case, our children. It’s almost a cosmic joke, that the one who drives us crazy with passion or the promise of a better life, will later, just plain drive us crazy. It is a trick of nature that what attracts us in romantic love drives us nuts later. We are, perhaps, too familiar with the trick. He was brave when they first met and now she complains about his recklessness. She was beautiful and now she’s vain. She was nurturing and now she’s invasive. He was discerning and now he’s critical. He was direct and now he’s rude. These once positive traits that turn negative will surface in the relationship once the commitment is strong enough to handle the differences and incompatibility of the partnership. That’s right, incompatibility is the natural state of committed couples. Learn to accept that fundamental reality and you are ready for the adventure and personal growth that will come from the most important relationship most of us will ever have.

So whether love shows up as a super sonic jet, a touring sedan or a pick up truck, we know that the experience of romantic love has the same destination. The vehicle doesn’t seem to matter. The destination is the second stage of the committed relationship and what we call the Power Struggle. It is the first major stop along the highway of the committed relationship. And, how well you play the cards you’re dealt along the way can make a huge difference in your enjoyment of the game and your personal growth as a spiritual being.

The Imago Theory provides a pathway for moving through these first two stages of relationship. We think it is predictable that the initial Romantic Love, characterized by attraction, bonding, hope and even ecstasy, is followed by the Power Struggle, most typically characterized by frustrations, anger and sometimes even disillusionment and impasse. Many couples are captured by the Power Struggle and either live miserably, end the relationship or in some cases engage in the nexus of personal change. This journey of change and growth begins through the Recommitment stage of relationship. The turn we can take at this junction begins moving away from the unconsciousness of

Romantic Love and the Power Struggle, into the intentionality and authenticity of the conscious relationship.

The next stop along the relationship journey is Doing the Work. Moving into Conscious Relationship is accompanied by the accumulation and application of new skills and discipline that can help couples achieve an extraordinary relationship. This fourth stage seems dependent on the three that have gone before. Living through the disillusionment of naïve relationship attachment into the power of awake and intentional attachment requires deliberate creation of new patterns and habits.

Doing the Work leads to the fifth stage: Transformation. The theory holds that through the utilization of dialogue, and creation of a new climate in the relationship, couples learn how to take care of themselves and actively engage in the healing of their partner and growth of the self. This stage is characterized by new insights, more positive and accepting perceptions of the partner and of ourselves. This is the time when we become competent in being in relationship; we know what is happening when we fall into a hole and we know how to get out of it. We also know how to nurture, protect and enliven our couplehood. We think that it is required that couples make this journey in order to live in the final destination of relationship: Real Love.

In part two of this article, we'll be looking at the second stage of the relationship journey, The Power Struggle. We'll be sharing ideas for understanding this important stage and tips managing the natural incompatibility of the committed relationship. The stress of this challenging time, when viewed in the context of the whole partnership process, becomes something of great learning and stretching. Check us out next time!

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Robert W. Patterson, LMFT, LPC has practiced in Atlanta for over 20 years and received certifications from Dr. Hendrix as an Imago Therapist in 1990 and as a Certified Imago Workshop Presenter in 1992. Both Wendy and Bob have presented at national and state conferences including the Psychotherapy Networker and for the GA Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.

Wendy and Bob have been married for over 25 years, have raised two precocious children, and have been humbled, at times confused and exhilarated, in the process of becoming a couple. Their offices are located at P2 Partnerships, Inc., 956 Euclid Avenue, NE, Atlanta, GA 30307. Phone: (404)584-7500.

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