Issue 9: Introduction

Love and Marriage Go Together Like . . .?

Is love the basis for marriage? If so, should it be? For most of human history, people married for mostly practical reasons, such as survival or to preserve or add to wealth and power. For example, royal families contracted marriages of their children to expand their landholdings, sometimes even when their children were infants. Love and marriage were not associated with each other until relatively late in human history. Now, however, "I married him because I love him" is not only the most common reason given for marriage, it often is the sole reason. We seem to take it for granted that individuals who get married do so because they love their partner. In fact, we may look to other reasons as superficial ("Because she is cute"), irrelevant ("Because he is from a prominent family in town"), or insufficient as a reason by itself ("Because we have a lot in common"). Music, movies, literature, and culture in general seem to support the idea that love is both necessary and sufficient for a satisfying marriage.

The following articles about the intersections between romantic love and marriage were written originally for therapists and physicians who work with couples. However, the messages in these articles are relevant to anyone who is married to someone who thinks they might marry, and almost everyone in the United States does marry—at least once. Both Grunebaum and Silverman seem to agree that most people believe that love is the basis for marriage. However, their perspectives on the wisdom and effectiveness of this belief are quite different.

Silverman examines what he calls fallacies regarding the connection between love and marriage. His thinking is based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), a psychotherapeutic approach developed by psychologist Albert Ellis. One of the premises of this approach is that a lot of what people believe to be true is untrue and irrational. When people act on these irrational beliefs, they make poor decisions, have unrealistically high expectations, and engage in self-defeating behaviors. Therapy consists, at least in part, of learning to think rationally about problems and how to solve them. Silverman treats love and marriage just as any subjects would be handled from the perspective of REBT.

Grunebaum, a physician and family therapist, takes a different stance on love. Grunebaum's views are similar to those of most people regarding the connection between romantic love and marriage, that love is a basis for marriage. He presents insights from his clinical experience in working with couples and individuals.
Thinking About Romantic/Erotic Love

Henry Grunebaum

Romantic/erotic love is a powerful force in the lives of ordinary men and women. Indeed, many, if not most, people hope to find and to experience romantic love, to find a partner whom they love and desire. The ideas I will discuss here are based on my clinical experience of more than 30 years of working with couples. My purpose in this essay is to explore and identify some of the salient characteristics of romantic/erotic love.

What Is Romantic/Erotic Love?

A review of the literature yields no agreed-upon definition of being in love as distinguished from other emotional bonds such as friendship, affection, or sexual desire. Moreover, the part this kind of love plays in a person's life differs widely from individual to individual, depending on the importance they give it. The definition of romantic/erotic love used here is based on my clinical experience. It identifies three main features:

1. Feelings of longing for the other, including the desire to be intimate with them both sexually and psychologically, and feelings of loss and loneliness during separations.

2. The experience of the beloved as special, idealized, necessary for one's happiness. There is often a desire to know and share many details about the other.

3. The preoccupation with and over evaluation of the loved one. Lovers place great importance on appearance and may spend many hours looking in each other's faces.

I have deliberately linked romantic with erotic love because in life they are usually linked. Because romantic/erotic love exists in all cultures for which we have adequate data and because it does not appear to vary in its characteristics as a function of age or mental health, it is likely that romantic erotic love is an emotional experience based on a biological propensity.

Characteristics of Romantic/Erotic Love

Romantic/erotic love has certain features that clearly differentiate it from other kinds of loving feelings. Based on my clinical experience, the following characteristics of romantic/erotic love are of the greatest significance for the therapeutic process.

We Do Not Have Control Over Our Feelings of Romantic/Erotic Love

We cannot choose whom we love, nor predict when the feelings will occur, and we usually cannot recapture the feeling when it has disappeared. That we use the expression falling in love suggests how precipitately the event can occur. I have surveyed a number of groups of people in long-term committed relationships, asking how long it took to know that the person they were to become involved with was a special person. More than half of them said they knew during the first or second meeting, and some said they knew immediately. Many added that it was not just a matter of attraction to the other person but a case of "actually fall
ing in love." Since people cannot choose whom to love, they may find themselves loving at inopportune times or with inappropriate partners. And people cannot make themselves love appropriate partners.

Falling out of love is also a not uncommon clinical problem over which the individual has little control and the therapist, in my experience, little influence. For instance, Bill and Janet were an unusually successful, attractive, and likeable pair who had been married for three years and had no children. Sex before the marriage had been satisfactory, but afterwards it went downhill. Bill had expected marriage to make for increased variety; while Janet had hoped it would make Bill sensitive to her more conventional desires. Therapy had no impact on these expectations. Both remained hurt, and they separated; but neither was able to proceed with a divorce. They continued as best friends and could not go on with their lives. Their feelings of romantic love could not be resurrected.

Therapy cannot create feelings of love; it is also of little use in quenching them. Unrequited love is a uniquely painful, and often long-lasting, experience. John fell wildly in love with Sandra. She was passionate, exciting, just the opposite of his ex-wife, whom he experienced as unemotional. Never had he been so wonderful. Unfortunately, Sandra had not ended her relationship with her former lover and finally went back to him, leaving John bereft. It took several years of therapy for him to regain his emotional stability. When he remarried 5 years later, he continued to miss the passion he had once known, although his life as a whole was much happier. In my clinical experience, when romantic/erotic love is lost, it is almost always gone for good.

We Are Likely to Experience Romantic/Erotic Love Only a Few Times in a Lifetime

Although one retains the capacity for romantic/erotic love throughout one's life, it is my clinical and personal experience that these feelings arise relatively infrequently. Since I found nothing in the literature about the frequency of romantic love, I carried out a small, informal questionnaire study of a sample of 30 middle-class health care professionals. My respondents believed that the usual frequency of romantic/erotic love was about three to six times over a person's life.

My clinical experience suggests that one is likely to experience romantic/erotic love perhaps once in high school, once in college, once or twice more before marriage, and perhaps once after the loss of a spouse due to divorce or death. Typically, then, one experiences romantic/erotic love between three and six times over all. Precisely because most people experience romantic/erotic love relatively infrequently, we do not have much experience in assessing what it means and what course of action to take.

Because love is rare, people consider it precious, enduring enough to stay with a beloved other. In addition, people not infrequently even search out a former beloved after years of separation and attempt to renew the relationship.

A Third Characteristic of Romantic/Erotic Love Is That It Is Regarded by Most People as a Good, a Positive Value

This good can and often does come into conflict with other values, and the criteria for resolving this conflict are themselves problematic. Love is a good, but it is not the only good. It often comes into conflict with other goods such as reason, personal goals, family, and ethical obligations. And the power of romantic/erotic love can lead one—even knowingly—into a relationship fraught with conflict, into moral and emotional minefields. Some of these conflicts are external, arising when a love relationship impacts negatively on other bonds and loyalties, particularly those involving one's family of origin, one's friends, and sometimes one's spouse and children. Still other conflicts are internal, focusing on the potential effect that loving a certain person will have on one's own values and what one needs to enjoy life.

The challenge in thinking about the consequences of romantic/erotic love is to de-
tertiary what criteria to employ. For instance, some Jewish families treat as dead any member who marries outside the faith. How does one weigh the joy of being with the loved one against the positive and negative effects this love may have on oneself and on others?

What values should be considered when deciding what to do about a loveless marriage? Steve was not sure he wanted to marry Ann. He married her, but during the 20 years of that marriage, Steve had numerous affairs. At some point Steve met Myra, a passionate affair ensued, and they left their spouses and built a fulfilling life together.

The issues posed by affairs complicate and obscure the value that most people give to love. For while extramarital affairs sometimes involve love, they almost always involve lies, deceit, and betrayal. Thus the conflicts about the value of love may be better illustrated by cases in which affairs have not occurred. After her first date with Jonah, Virginia predicted to her mother that he would propose to her and added that she did not love him. She did not want to marry Jonah because she felt no real passion for him, but he pursued her so ardently that she finally yielded to his entreaties. Twenty years later she is still married to Jonah but feels no love for him and does not really want to live with him. On the other hand, they have a child, and her life is financially secure. She looks curiously at friends who do love their partners even though she is well aware of the difficulties in their marriages. She wonders, in therapy sessions, if spending the rest of her life without experiencing love is to have lived a good life.

Romantic/Erotic Love Is Regarded Today as an Essential Element for a Happy Marriage

Although falling in love and romantic/erotic love are wonderful, other capacities are necessary to sustain a long-term relationship. The characteristics which foster enduring romantic/erotic love in marriage are the ones which lead to strong relationships generally and are those of the mature person. By enduring romantic/erotic love I do not mean that couples remain in a state of romantic bliss, but rather that they know they love each other and feel romantically and erotically toward each other from time to time.

There are no easy solutions available to the clinician whose clients are experiencing problems with romantic/erotic love. There are no easy solutions because love itself is complicated and perplexing. We desire to have another to love, for without one we will be lonely and there will be no one who truly knows us. We desire to become one with the other, to be selfless, and to lose ourselves in sexual intimacy. But we are also afraid of losing ourselves, for we know that the person we love is other, independent, and that we can never truly know him or her. This is the predicament of love.

What makes matters even more challenging is the fact that we ask a great deal of marriage, of any serious intimate relationship. Perhaps the greatest demand we make is that it should combine passion and stability, romance and monogamy, transports of tenderness and excitement from the person who will also perform the many mundane tasks of daily living—in other words, meld everyday love with romantic/erotic love. Somehow, most of the time for most women and men, this seems to work. And when it does, it is love at its best.

Fallacies About Love and Marriage

Joseph S. Silverman

This article, originally written for physicians in order that they are better prepared to deal with their patients’ concerns about relationships, sheds interesting light on myths and misconceptions underlying problems in dating, mating, and separating. Behavioral specialists, and probably family physicians as well, sometimes consider with their patients questions about romance and marriage. As in many areas where physicians are consulted, profession- al wisdom is often based on their life experience. Authoritative sources are not readily available.

In reviewing these topics with patients and others, I have found an actual prevalence of what I believe to be misconceptions. Perhaps the following discussions, based on limited research but ample theory and clinical experience, will be of interest and value to other physicians and counselors.

Fallacy #1. Being in love is the best reason for getting married. Historically, romantic love as a basis for marriage has not for very long been the decisive factor. Indeed, in many parts of the world right now arranged marriages are the long-established cultural tradition.

What is this thing called love? Freud described romantic love as what evolves when an attractive and valued member of the opposite sex elevates one’s self-esteem, rout- ing personal insecurities. Romantic love, as someone has said, is therefore mainly nervousness—or, more precisely, nervousness relieved. There is no doubt that the fortu-}

itous cycle that Freud described produces glorious reassurance. But as a mechanism for reaching the most important decision of one’s life romantic love is a poor substitute for rational evaluation—or, at least, for accurate intuition of one’s fundamental emotional needs.

In decision-making of any kind, a certain amount of excitation intensifies commitment. And where a society lacks a tradition of marital commitment (e.g., prohibition of divorce), then heightened commitment to a relationship is a good thing. But a safer route to decades of satisfaction and harmony lies through such qualities as compatibility, particularly in areas of values, genuine liking of the other person, respect for that person, joy in sharing experiences, and concurrence on family goals (number of children, the ratio of togetherness to apartness; assignment of domains—who is in charge of what).

Fallacy #2. Having fallen out of love is a good reason for getting divorced. Because of this overestimation of the importance of romantic love, some persons, especially those with a strong histronic element in their personalities, feel deprived, hollow, empty if excitement, particularly romantic excitement, evaporates as the years roll by. T. Byram Karasu, a noted psychoanalyst, taught a course at a national psychiatric meeting a few years ago. The audience was to be limited to 40 persons. One thousand psychiatrists applied for the course. Obviously what Karasu would have to say, clear- headed conclusions drawn from years of ex-
experience, was highly valued by his fellow psychiatrists. But during the coffee break halfway through the seminar Karasu found himself in the midst of a small group of young women, members of the convention's temporary staff. When Karasu, in informal light conversation, discussed about the unimportance of romantic excitement in marriage, these young women greeted him with stony disbelief. In their young lives they had had abundant exposure to the notion that love is the primary issue in marital relationships; they were not ready to relinquish that cherished belief, no matter how prestigious the tutor. Some understandings require a certain amount of life experience and a certain amount of personal matura-
tion.

Fallacy 83. Love is a feeling, a wonderful feeling. In its highest expression, love is not passive (how you feel about someone else) but rather active (how you display loving behavior toward others—kindness, concern, timely assistance). Infatuation is frequently confused with mature love. Infatuation is typically triggered by unconscious stimuli, the mystery of its appearance adding to its enchantment. The ancients pictured love as Cupid's arrow, zinging in out of nowhere to strike the unsuspecting victim. There is some validity to that metaphor, since the workings of the unconscious, at least initially, surpass our ordinary understanding.

Fallacy 84. Adultery is a good reason for divorce. Learning of one's mate's romantic involvement with someone else, a person will usually suffer a heavy blow to vanity and maybe even self-esteem. "What is wrong with me that he chose her over me?" (On another level there may well be hurt feelings over the deception involved or over a promise broken, the promise of loyalty.) Blows to the ego are universally unappreciated, yet the rational response to such a trauma is the recognition that one's loved one is not one's property but is a free agent. It would be preferable if the "violated" mates, rather than falling into self-pity and viewing themselves as injured parties (male victims have been termed cuckolders, for instance), recognized that a partner's infidel-
ity does not necessarily imply dissatisfaction with the marriage. Infidelity does indi-
cate that there are some desires that the marriage does not satisfy, but then how can even the most important relationship in one's life fulfill every desire of both part-
ers? The crucial issue is whether the cou-
ples have a problem and whether it can be remedied. A conflict may require resolu-
tion. A need that has gone unmet may crave gratification.

Fallacy 85. There is a right package for you out there and when you find it (her, him), you get married. Many persons form a mental image of the ideal life partner. Typically the image is visual. The loved one must be attractive in whatever way the indi-
vidual conceives attractiveness. Particular physical features may seem important. The Package Theory of mate selection is flawed because it overlooks one thing: it is the in-
relationship of two people, how they feel with each other and how they feel about themselves when together with the loved one, that is critical—not any particular qualities of the romantic stimulus.

I propose the Color Theory of mate selec-
tion. If, for example, the male is represented by the color yellow and the female by blue, then let the mixing of hues to produce a partic-
ular shade of green symbolize the nature of the relationship. One partner may look at that green and find it pleasing. The other partner may look at the same green, finding it unpleasing. It takes two strong affirmat-
tives to produce a decision to unite.

Fallacy 86. There is a perfect someone out there for everyone. Two principles seem to me to be valid: There is no perfect partner, and no partner is perfect for you. Still, persons with a good deal of tolerance and flexibility in their makeup could suc-
cessfully marry a number of people whom they encounter in the course of their lives. Most people—including individuals who are grossly overweight, unusually tall of short, unprepossessing of face and/or figure—end up with a mate, at least at one point in their lives. Luckily, all do not share the same image of dreamgirl or dreambo-
In any case, marriagability seems to be much more related to personality than to physique. But not everyone can or will mate successfully. Some people simply do not "partner" well. Fortunately, not everyone needs to mate. Some people do better single.

**Fallacy #7. Jealousy is natural and normal.** Jealousy shows that you care. Jealousy of one's mate, suspicion that the mate is having an affair, may indicate more than anything else the insecurity of the suspicious one. Jealousy also reflects an attitude that the mate is property rather than that the mate is a partner. One can rail against someone taking one's property without one's permission. But surely one's partner must decide for himself or herself about whether to enter into a romantic relationship outside of marriage. Love, in its noblest expression, involves valuing one's partner's happiness almost as much as one's own. This is the High Road, a road definitely less traveled in my experience. From the rational viewpoint, if you lose your mate to another whom your mate sees as for some reason more desirable, you are entitled to regret the loss. But if you truly esteem your mate, then you want that person to be happy even if happiness is purchased at the expense of the current union.

**Fallacy #8. Lose a highly valued partner and your life will be second-class forever.** In matters of romance, things always work out for the best. In general, a relationship between two people will not survive for long unless both parties regard it positively. If now there is one disgruntled party, eventually there will probably be two; marital dissatisfaction felt by one partner breeds dissatisfaction in the mate. Relationships gone sour are abandoned, typically with a good deal of relief. But when finally two people commit to each other, reaffirming their mutual fulfillment repeatedly over time, each party is blessed indeed.

Note that I am not contending that there is no virtue to remaining in a flawed and disappointing marriage. Sometimes the reasons for staying together surpass reasons for separation and divorce. Not every marriage has to be violins and roses. There is a place for a marriage of convenience, a marriage continued because the advantages of staying together outweigh the disadvantages of staying together.

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