

psychodynamics of the loving relationships

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Why do affectionate relationships begin so well, and do they change so much after quite some time?

What happens in the loving dynamics that causes so much wear and tear, until the point of converting those passionate lovers in just "cordial enemies" or merely guests of the same house?

Why does such wear and tear take place in a relationship that began in such a captivating way and full of dreams and fantasies?

With all those questions and several others, besides my natural personal curiosity, I have begun an incessant bibliographical research, twenty-five years ago, enriched subsequently by a great-accumulated experience in the day by day of my professional practice as an individual, group and of couple therapist.

What motivated me exceedingly was the possibility of, as becoming an expert in this subject, to apply this knowledge not only in my own advantage but also and mainly in favor of my countless patients. Quite frequent they bring me as their chief complaint for consultation, a relational problem in his/her couple role, making their lives so unhappy.

As I consider the matrimonial relationship the most significant and important one for the personal happiness, it nurtured and I still nurture the hope that this knowledge, herein published, may come to be fundamental for anyone well-being and life quality.

Among the countless bibliographical research sources, the one that more inspired us initially it was the Masters & Johnson book: "On Sex and human loving", particularly the chapter nine: *To love and to be loved*. From it we extract a cyclical outline concerning the romantic love, and we started to observe and verify it in our psychotherapy practice, validating it as a useful model to organize our thoughts on the loving dynamics.

Now, enriching the original model, we arrived to the following outline, in which we framed the vast majority of our clients' cases, with slighted variations as to chronology and some details of each stage, due to individual variations.

Here is the final diagram modified by us. This version will be utilized as our guideline to illustrate and orientate this issue.

We will analyze, to proceed, what of more common and repetitive happens in each one of these stages of the loving relationship. Our aim is to enable and allow the reader to know its main aspects, in your personal life. In other words, giving him/her the chance of applying this knowledge in his/hers own relationship, in order to avoid, what could be feasible, to keep it away from wear and tear and perfecting his/her quality and enjoyment.

1. LOVING PREDISPOSITION

It is a state-of-spirit in that the person meets, when feeling capable to love, somebody facing this possibility goes to find somebody to share, in a bond or relationship for two, of something special and indescribable called love. It imagines that as a desirable, sublime and gratifying feeling, in the molds stereotyped by the soap operas and romantic films. Somebody is idealized with a certain profile and he/she enters into it, in a very predisposed way to the encounter of this akin spirit, too much longing for intimacy and companionship. With the help of his/her powerful intuitive sense to search someone to full filling all psychic, affective and sexual needs with somebody that perhaps also wants the same thing - to love and to be loved.

2. FALL IN LOVE

It is a magic moment in the life of each one of us! Anybody can check, here-and-now, and find out something more or less similar has happened with you. It goes like that; once upon a day, being in that state of readiness and predisposition to the love, suddenly appeared somebody that affected you somehow. In addition, among so many people that you have been contacting with, that one waked you up, to pay a special attention. A crescent and almost uncontrollable desire to get intimately and closer and closer aiming to know more and more thoroughly, to identify points in common with that person, to know his/her name, tastes and interests, what does and where lives and, mainly some approach chance to find out if there is any chance to establish a loving bond.

All of the available resources, from a common friends' help even taking the risk of a daring solemn self-presentation, either in person or by phone call, e-mail etc. These are part of the group of tactics, formerly reserved to the male individuals and that nowadays it is unisex, thanks to the feminine liberation. Now they may start doing the same approaching movements toward the potential partner, without excluding an intense and extensive physical as of a first kiss or a long embrace contact. The more happen signs of welcomes, it grows inside the person the belief that it is nearer to make their dreams and fantasies come true. The hope of getting a favorable acceptance by that charming person turns him] her on, as believing to be capable to satisfy their needs. These entire take to a mixed of happiness and of affliction, in being accepted and to do a loving bond, or not to obtain approval, and to be rejected. Then the strong fear of displeasing that he/she feels mixed the concerning about the loved person's thoughts, and a certain dependence of their actions, words and gestures.

In this meantime, the growing curiosity in knowing somebody more intimately provokes daydreams, dreams and bad slept nights.

The cerebral chemistry is frankly modified, turning the passion phase in an incredible experience, highly exciting and producing an altered state of conscience edging even the unrestricted and uncontrollable irrationality.

If everything runs well, inside that person expectation, the reciprocity happens and he/she begins the affectionate bond, ending in the "Being in love" following stage. In case things doesn't go right, nothing hinders that a "perhaps" or "may be" might be converted into a date and followed by several physical contacts that take place

like, kisses, hugs and other strokes according to the reference frame of each one involves in the courtship.

Those strokes serve to mitigate the so-called "contact hunger" - and to stop the approach or to continue it into another new phase – the "passionate love".

3. THE PASSIONATE LOVE

It is the glory! Starting from the moment in which is steady the affectionate reciprocal bond, begins a period of a lot of happiness and joy. It is usually very common the smiles - they laugh at random without knowing why! Both of them desire to be together the whole time, and in the largest possible physical proximity. In this period are heard spontaneous pronouncement of typical sentences of the romantic love: *"I only go if you go"*, *"Without you it doesn't have any grace at all!"*, *"Only when with you I feel myself complete and happy"*, etc.

Although it is said that the romantic love is only true if it happens at the first sight, in the real life this prompt action is much more the exception than the general rule. The most common way is to happen in a gradual process of involvement, facilitated by the physical proximity in the work atmosphere or by repeated encounters, mainly when they start to go out together. Once again, takes place repeats the fundamental duo for a given chemical reaction to be processed: affinity and contact. It is not uncommon that, from an intimate friendship with a growing complicity that turns out to be converted in a loving bond. Starting from favorable conclusions, from the daily observation got in a seemingly unsuspecting way, of that person's qualities. Thus, one may be acquainted and may know well as well as the verification if there is affinity or not.

It is already proved that someone loving presents an alteration of the cerebral chemistry in that is prevalent the presence of the neurotransmissions done by dopamine and encephalin, besides the liberation of an endogenous morphine-like substance (= endorphin). This explains the ecstasy and inspiration that the passionate lovers exhibit, with a certain omnipotence and happiness sensation. This state of mind happens independent of any reciprocity feeling or not, and even before the slightest mutuality signal from the partner.

It is worthy registering that there are three factors that make the passion becomes stronger and intense, in a directly proportional way, namely: distance, reproach and obstacles. Let us notice, since here, that these three factors tend to disappear naturally, – as time goes by - with the marriage! However, the passionate love period, independent of marrying or not, it has a limited duration between one and two and half years, in agreement with trustworthy researches.

The changes in the cerebral chemistry affect the feelings, the thoughts and the loving partners' actions, which independently of their good purposes turn out to transmute this romantic phase into another transitional stage, i.e. "The companion love".

4'. LOVE IN TRANSITION

It means the most common development in that spontaneously the passionate love happens to be converted in 95% to 99% of the couples. It is a quite essential

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phase, which keeps a direct relationship with the period of the passion, because everything that was left of being seen or noticed due to the intense vibration, idealization and fantasies, now all will be verified with every rigidity and demand. In this crucial period that, according to the best statistics, it happens between two and a half years and five and a half years of relationship, following a predictable series of events, among which we marked:

· An implosion of the fantasies causes a true revelation of the nude reality - here anything more remain unnoticed and a strong criticism, and the collection of bad feelings – so-called “trade stamps” will be inevitable. Even for banal things that over there, in the passionate love were discounted, now are emphasized and never more ignored at all. For instance, now one scold because the other presses the tube of the dental cream on the middle or on top, instead of pressing at the bottommost. Nevertheless, if before she to snore, or no problem her chewing with her mouth opened, and until did not bother him found it something "cute", now all these acts are reason of criticism, impatience and protest.

· It is also observed that each one in the couple tends to collect bad feelings (Trade Stamps) and do endless demands, in order to request toward the other to become what he] she fantasized that would be and trying to accomplish all his [hers expectations. It is very common: the occurrence of some resentments, sorrows and frustrations accompanying the painful verification or even the sensation of being cheated.

The typical sentence, of this moment, is: "he (she) is not indeed anything of what I have thought that would be!"

In addition, it can appear the jealousy in high intensity, frequently based on that personal detail, an element that was the principal an attraction factor in the “fall in love”. For instance: the sensuality, his affectionate way of treating other people, mainly the one of the opposite sex, and even that physical details that attracted him more, now becomes an issue of protests for the use of certain clothes.

· The vibration decreases and it gets to disappear, translated by the drastic reduction of the sexual frequency, accompanied or not for a certain boredom, indifference and easy impatience.

It can also happens a testing of oneself, or of the other person and of the own relationship, translated the frequent thought, and verbalized or not:

I can live without this person, who can live without me; I can get along without this relationship.

All the faults and imperfections observed in this transitional loving period serve as background to test the couple's reality and, when both of them notice that their basic needs were not filled out, they use the underlying frustration as an ingredient to merge into a phase still more serious, that it is the own matrimonial crisis or “Love in Conflict).

4". LOVE COMPANION

It would be the ideal transmutation of the romantic love, in which settled down a well-known emotional dependence, while in this the relationship is stabilized with base in a healthy interdependence. Spontaneously, without any psychotherapy help, only 1 to 5% of the couples get to reach this phase in that the five parameters of a healthy relationship may be established and well appraised - confidence, respect, admiration, intimacy/tenderness and sex are well balanced. The involvement, the commitment, the physical, affective and sexual matching might propitiate a pleasant completeness sensation and together with an interior peace are usually described as happiness and affection.

The relationship is gratifying, and holds a rich feeling of welfare and affection. The simple other person's presence in the same environment, although without the drives of the passion. Such pushes induce to a strong physical proximity, translated by the enormous attunement that characterizes the "companion love". There is a genuine interest with the well-being of the other person, being this, maybe the most faithful indicative of the abstract noun called love. As the materialization of this feeling contained in the loving bond is the physical celebration of a pleasing sexual life will come, as much in qualitative than in quantitative terms.

It would be great if the majority of the couples looked for the "companion love" as the goal to reach. On the contrary, they will spend so much time and energy in the persecution of the passion, that becomes exhausted with the committed time, concomitant with the own cerebral chemical changes.

5. THE LOVE IN CONFLICT

Due to the "loving in transition" period happens, instead of the "Romantic love" goes on, naturally, and for the fact that communications become tense, all of sudden s/he feels to arrive - in some moment between five and a half years and eight and a half years - the matrimonial crisis. This so-called as "the seven year itch" or "the seven year crisis", but it does not exist such certain fatality or doomed year linked to the cabalistic number seven. I already saw couples reach this crisis with little more than one year of relationship, as well as I could see couples that - for several circumstances (children, city change, catastrophes etc.) - could postpone this crisis for twelve years of marriage or more!

The reality is that this crisis may prove the strength of a loving bond, and it become a decisive stage in the couple's life, being able even to turn out to be a positive crisis in probing and growing terms.

In fact, the conflict can settle through a predictable fight for the power, a veiled or explicit dispute to establish who give the orders. The climate is much tenser with the power games of that happen, following for hard "argues" instead of constructive dialogues. The conflicts that were exception, now if they turn the rule, with frequent catches, offenses to the other one, or toward their relatives (=a mortal sin!). There are verbal, moral and even physical aggressions. Sometimes they play them in a symbolic way, he/she wants in either - an ostensible and open way, and the storm can be continuous or intermittent, but it can leave irreversible marks.

As the situation is almost unbearable, the crisis can take one of the three following roads: **truce, definitive resolution or disliking**. This last one

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because of the wear and tear of the love and doubts arisen, due to the pernicious action of the process known in Transactional Analysis (TA) as the Psychological Games.

6`. THE RESOLUTION

It constitutes the best solution for the "love in conflict", because it can lead again the relationship to "the romantic love", even granting the right to a second honeymoon, candlelight dinners etc. However, they never return to the initial passionate phase, because all the idealizations and fantasies were already imploded in the "love in transition" stage. There was already a true revelation of the reality, not being more acceptable as before. No more, turn to "seeing how the other person really is". It is possible to occur an invigorating revalidation of the bond and even an upgrade of the relationship, now based upon in the past successful experience.

Although the resolution depends on bilateral motivation, flexibility and cooperation, it is undeniable what a passionate beginning of the relationship can exceedingly influence in the resolution of the crisis. A conciliation process through a couple therapy or even a facilitation through a common friend can help, if both have the desire to preserve and benefit the bond. On the other hand, the imponderable can be a strong factor for a fast and definitive reconciliation. It mean refer to certain unexpected events, however of capital importance, such as a serious disease in the family, a kidnapping, a son's death, a son with drug addiction, etc.

The password can be *"And we are fighting for such irrelevant things! ..."* Then it can occur a definitive resolution of the conflicts, bringing back once again to the "romantic love" and, with a little bit of luck arriving to the desirable "companion love". Unhappily, it sometimes returns to the "love in transition", coming to a new matrimonial crisis.

6". TRUCE

It is the most frequent resolution of the "love in conflict". For, not passing by a more elaborated process, in which the partners can open up and say everything that dislikes and set reasonable proposals as well as acceptable solutions with dignity. It is noticeable that - most of the time - just accept the truce only to interrupt the hostilities. It is very common to accumulate a pernicious collection of chronic bad feelings, only to save the appearances next to the friends, children and relatives, even for an economics or financial lack of autonomy.

Because of these resentments and subjects ill-solved accumulated during the "love in conflict" phase is that, even with the goodwill of reaching a steadiness of the relationship - "love companion" - several couples do not reach their goal and, in the long run, come back to the "loving in transition" again, and soon enter into a new matrimonial crisis. (See graphic #1)

In those crises, the extra-matrimonial relationships can appear, which subtracts energy from the relationship, and contribute to worse the impatience and predispose to the conflicts.

New truces can happen and if they deviate to a new loving transition and toward a new crisis. After a certain number of serial crises, the relationship goes into the detachment or dispassion.

7. DETACHMENT OR DISPASSION

Variable, from couple to couple, the wear and tear will come inexorably, after some successive conflicts. The foreseeable consequences is observed in the communications, which start to be more and more uncommon, tense and with smaller attunement, intimacy and a decreasing interest in the other person's well fare.

Here already one of the two can happen to be engaged in a new relationship, despite of the other person's despair that can be, so far in another phase, and full of hope in rescuing the relationship.

If nothing is made to avoid the imminent rupture of the bond, the relationship will reach - in a variable time from a couple to another, the last stage: "the dislike".

8. THE DISLIKE – NOT LOVING ANY MORE

It is the end of the affectionate linkage – with the total cooling of the relationship, accompanied of the sensation of not loving any long that person, who used to be so significant, and that inspiring of such warm feelings.

In this period, there is no possible return, at least in a short time. It can have the immediate substitution or in the end of that dear object, that now seems so distant and so strange. Such strangeness may be translated by thoughts and feelings of improbability, kind of - *did I already kiss that person!? -- Did I already play with her intimately! Did I indeed?*

It is hard to realize how happened such a melancholic end for a story that began so beautiful and touching.

Surprisingly, that person who took the initiative of the rupture, usually suffers less and seems to be much more vulnerable to go into a new relationship, whereas that that was left, can get along for a difficult period, unless s/he already has somebody stand by to begin everything again. It would be desirable that both of them could give to themselves a time to elaborate the loss, before assuming a new commitment, under the risk of repeating the same mistakes of the last relationship.

CONCLUSION

What to do to prevent against the possible mistakes and current wear and tear caused by the own dynamics of the loving relationships?

The first thing is to keep in mind the existence of these whole events, inherent to the human condition and their unconscious motivations for the loving bond. It is always good to begin the relationship well, "falling in love", but without discounting his/her perceptions, nor either to deify that person, attributing to him/her unreal

qualities. Try to see clearly and accurately that other person just the way s/he is without any discount at all.

Avoid collecting bad feelings about the loved person. If necessary, face the possibility of a good fight, saying to the other what you dislike more without hurting the other one's ego. Also, if you have something positive to declare, feel free to say it, do not save this reinforcement, because it can improve his/her self-image and self-esteem.

It is quite advisable that both spouses get to separate emotionally from their respective nuclear family. In making this individualization, might invest this emotional energy in his/her loving bond. Thus creating this way an identity as couple - which is equal to cut the umbilical cord - may assume his/her full development and maturity.

Such string rupture does not happen by chance, and if they do not sever, it will be predisposed to form symbiotic bonds.

Learning one to respect each other's autonomy, it does not imply to discard intimacy neither companionship. To care for gratifying sexual relationship is fundamental, as much as a level of complicity, acceptance and tenderness are concerned.

Try to maintain the good-humor, the leisure and the happiness, even in the most difficult moments, and in occasions in that, the solidarity is indispensable. Reminding that a relationship will never be ready. It is suitable to reinvigorate it inside of the original proposal, in spite of the changes that the time brings.

Last, but not the least, to inspire you all, still more; I want to do mine Virginia Satir's words, when proposing a TRUE ENCOUNTER.

***I want to love you without dominating,
To appreciate you without judging,
To approach without invading,
To invite you without imposing,
To leave you without blaming,
To criticize you without accusing,
To help you without insulting;
If I can receive the same of you,
Then we can have a true encounter
Enriching each other.***

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