

Is It Love or Love Addiction?

This Isn't Love – It Could Be A Fix by John Bradshaw

Until very recent years we never heard anything about addictive relationships.

To be wildly, helplessly in love was considered a desirable thing, not a hang-up. If we weren't crazy in love ourselves, we were jealous of those who were. Song lyrics have always celebrated the condition "My Man", "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered", "Mad About the Boy" - these are just a few of the golden oldies that immediately come to mind.

I have come to realise that some kinds of love are not necessarily to be envied, and some romantic attachments can amount to nothing less than addiction.

How can you tell an addictive relationship from a healthy one? There are lots of ways, but one reliable tip-off is that in an addictive relationship your focus is entirely on the beloved. You see him or her coming into your life like a god, a saviour. You objectify this beloved, almost as if they were a balm to be applied topically. "I love him because he makes me feel wonderful" is one expression of an addictive love.

In a healthy situation the two parties bring their whole selves to the relationship, and a whole wealth of feelings, good and bad, flows from the exchange. But if you're crazy about somebody purely because of how they make you feel, then it would seem pretty obvious that you're using this person to alter your moods.

People use alcohol and drugs for the same reason. I've had several clients who turned out to be relationship addicts. One, in particular, was in the depths of despair when she began counselling with me, and a significant source of her distress was that she wasn't in a

relationship. After a period of time she came in one day literally dancing on air "I've just met the most wonderful man," she told me. Her mood had entirely changed, and soon after, as the romance flourished, she felt so ecstatic that she discontinued counselling. It was apparent to me that she had got her fix, and because she was feeling no pain she concluded that she didn't need me anymore. I learned what happened only later, when she returned to me after the end of the affair.

Her romance had been intensely sexual — indeed, like most addictive relationships, it was intense in all respects and delivered a lot of immediate gratification. There was no period of causal relating, of developing intimacy and gathering mutual strength, rather, the relationship was at a peak of dramatic excitement from the very beginning, and the excitement and galloping intensity never abated.

As the relationship progressed and difficulties turned up, my client stopped talking to her friends about the man she was in love with, because her friends failed to give her the supportive and encouraging feedback she wanted.

When she complained to them about how he was treating her — sometimes being present and loving, sometimes withdrawing and keeping distant — they advised her to take a stand or to drop him. She didn't want to hear this kind of advice. She wanted to hear her friends assure her that this man loved her the way she wanted to be loved, even though there was little evidence of it. Her friends, she decided, simply didn't understand how wonderful and desirable he was.

She had endowed the relationship with a quality of magic. In her mind it was made in

heaven, “meant to be,” and it was her job to nurture it, tend it, maintain it. Her thinking went like this: “Because of the magic, I don’t have to change myself, I don’t have to grow. Now that I’m in this relationship, everything is going to be all right. My personality disorders will pass away, my idiosyncrasies and neurotic traits will be consumed by love.” But, of course, as we know, healthy relationships are rooted in reality, not in the clouds.

Invariably they involve a commitment of each to each, a dedication to giving each other time and attention, to doing the hard work of communication. Healthy relationships demand of us that we have our own lives somewhat in order and that we know who we are. In a healthy relationship I am responsible for my own vulnerability. I do not make my partner responsible for it. Over the course of a year my client’s beloved consistently proclaimed his love for her but increasingly distanced himself, using excuses that began to sound, suspiciously, very much like lies. There were long silences when he didn’t call at all, and in her growing anxiety and dread she was afraid to leave messages on his answering machine. Surely, she thought, he knows how much it hurt her to wait and wait for calls from him that he could easily make. Could he really love her as much as he said and yet consciously leave her in such anguish? When the pain was great enough, she at last confronted him, broke up

Article #2

IS IT LOVE OR ADDICTION?

by Joanne Tangedahl, LMSW-ACP, LPC, LMFT - www.tangedahl.com

You meet someone and Cupid shoots the arrow. Wow! This is special. It feels dreamy, wonderful and so exciting. It is a truly mind-altering experience. Your brain has released chemicals, such as, dopamine, norepinephrine, endorphins, enkephalin, phenethylamine and serotonin, nature’s natural narcotics - chemicals that encourage a sense of comfort

with him, and returned to therapy. She had had enough. Though sad, she felt better dealing with the truth about herself and the relationship than when she was living all the lies she could manage.

Addictive relationships are always – and incorrigibly – dishonest. They are predicated on fantasy and unreality. They are characterised by each person’s showing only the best side, keeping secret the thing most ashamed of. This stems from the fear that if you know my real character defects you couldn’t love me and would go away from me, thus taking away the wonderful feeling. A common pattern I’ve found in addictive relationships is that intense conflict is generated because of secrets kept and lies told. And periods of intense conflict are punctuated by mind blowing sex, which further deludes each partner into believing that the relationship is something of value.

In my opinion, no addiction is harder to break than the addiction to another person. The grief and pain that result are often excruciating and point to the wounds of fear and loneliness that brought the person to the relationship in the first place. But recovery, however hard-won through therapy and 12-step programs, brings immeasurable dividends in personal freedom, clarity of the mind, and a liberating selfhood that is its own unceasing reward. [rr]

and security and create a mystical experience of oneness. In my book, *A New Blueprint for Marriage*, I referred to this stage of a relationship as the “Happiness Bubble.”

Harville Hendrix, author of *Getting the Love You Want* and *Keeping the Love You Find*, calls it “Romantic Love,” and in this stage we experience several things:

1. The Phenomenon of Recognition - "I feel as if I already know you."

2. The Phenomenon of Timelessness - "It seems as if we've been together always."

3. The Phenomenon of Reunification - "Now, I feel whole and complete since I met you."

4. The Phenomenon of Necessity - "I need you and I feel like I can't live without you."

This is a process that happens in healthy non-addictive relationships. It is a phase a relationship goes through as it develops and evolves. But the question for me is: "How do you tell this from addiction?" This applies whether the addiction is Co-dependency, Love Addiction, Romance Addiction, Sex Addiction, or Relationship Addiction. These have a lot in common with other addictions, such as, Eating Addiction or Spending Addition. You can't just completely avoid food or money like you can with drugs or alcohol. You still have to be involved with food and money, and in relationships you still have the rush of "Romantic Love." So what is the difference between love and addiction?

The distinction is that romantic love is a just a passing phase much like eating a meal. You stop. If not, you stay stuck in this process. Just like what happens when compulsive overeating captures you with that sense of powerlessness and you keep eating and keep eating and keep eating. You can't stop. This is addiction. It is obsessive and it is compulsive.

Romantic Love lasts a few hours, a few days, a few weeks or sometimes, especially if couples are apart, a few months, but it does pass on to the other natural stages of a relationship. It is normal, natural and healthy. It is designed to end.

Addiction doesn't pass. It gets progressively worse and with a co-addicted

couple the dance of addiction can become very destructive. You stop having a sense of well-being and that wonderful feeling of oneness. You begin to feel desperate, with a need to be with, to see, to possess the other person. This need is so powerful, strong and compelling and people often call this "Love." It is not love; it is addiction. Love cares about the welfare of the other. There is a quality of being free and expansive, connected to the Oneness in the universe. With addiction, there is the desperation of needing to have the other person, so you'll be okay (classic co-dependency). The thoughts are obsessive; the actions are compulsive. "I have to have you. I can't live without you. I must control you and make you mine." There is no freedom here.

This other person has become a god and you have forgotten your Higher Power. I understand that true recovery is what is referred to as a "Spiritual Recovery," and no longer is your partner your god. With the addiction, the connection to your Higher Power has been broken and replaced with this person / relationship.

I truly appreciate my extensive addiction training with Pia Mellody, and Patrick Carnes. It has given me a clear understanding of addictions and how to deal with them. This is coupled with all the theory, techniques and tools I learned from Harville Hendrix and Pat Love about Imago Therapy. Together they have provided me with a toolbox that is filled with techniques and skills, and a blended understanding of both addictions and relationships. It is so helpful to know the distinction between a relationship problem and an addiction and this is such a fine line at times. This has been invaluable to me when working with couples, guiding them toward "getting the love they want!" [rr]

Is it Love or Addiction?

by Joanne Tangedahl, LMSW-ACP, LPC, LMFT - www.tangedahl.com

What is true love? Is it a burning passion for another, a lifelong commitment, or perhaps an expression of the Divine essence within each of us? I view it as the latter, as real love isn't something we feel for some and not others; it's who we are at our core. When we open to this flow of energy, we extend love to everyone and everything we encounter; even if we don't like their appearance or personality.

But what about romantic love – how do we know if it is true love or just love addiction? At first, it may be difficult to discern. When we experience a strong attraction, a concoction of hormones and chemicals flood our brain, giving us that euphoric 'falling in love' feeling. We may think we've met our soul mate, but how many people have uttered these words only to end up cursing their partner a few years down the road?

Once the hormonal romantic infatuation period has ended, people either commit more deeply or they end the relationship. Whether you've been with your romantic partner 1 year, 5 years or 10 years, if you're wondering whether it is true love or love addiction, ask yourself the following questions:

Do you feel whole within? Do feel complete and whole within yourself or only when you are with your lover? If you feel empty without him or her, you may be filling yourself with their essence instead of your own. This is similar to addiction – filling an empty space within with something outside oneself. It's understandable to miss your partner, but if you are afraid to be without this person, you might want to explore why this is. Sometimes we are drawn to someone who embodies aspects hidden within ourselves. Is it time to expand your self-love, bring out your inner joy and amusement, or start appreciating yourself more?

Do you know who you are? Co-dependant couples don't believe they can survive without the other. Their energy is enmeshed and they derive a sense of identity from being with each other. Do you know who you are outside of the relationship? If you know who you are, not just as an individual human being but as an eternal spiritual being, you can see your partner clearly

for they are and the two of you can be together while having healthy energy boundaries at the same time. This is where true love flows between two people without becoming addictive.

Do you long for the other? Longing and craving are components of addictive behavior. If you feel this level of desire for your partner, it may indicate a love addiction. Their presence may activate a chemical reaction in you similar to a drug. This is why many people enjoy romantic fantasy, because it stimulates this 'high' feeling. Sit with the feeling without judging it – just notice where you feel it in your body and what it does for you. Is it masking or numbing out emotional pain? Or perhaps it helps you to feel more alive.

Do you care for their highest good? When we are trapped in love addiction, we tend to manipulate and control our partner as a way to get our needs met. This may be passive or aggressive. It could include people pleasing behaviors, smothering, controlling, charming manipulation, pouting and complaining, fixing and rescuing, distancing, or dominating. When we truly love another, we want what's best for them. We accept their negative traits and experience unconditional love. We support their dreams and goals, and are okay watching them make mistakes along the way. We allow them to grow and change, even if it means growing apart.

What does your heart and soul say? Deep within, you know if this is love or addiction. Take some time to sit with your eyes closed in stillness. Take a few deep breaths to calm your mind and body. Put your hand over your heart and ask it what it feels for your partner. Ask your heart what it wants in relation to your partner. Then centre within your spiritual self and let your intuition guide you to the truth about your relationship. [rr]

recoveryresources.wixsite.com/slaa