

Falling Out of Love?

Self-justified reasons are often not the true causes of disappearing love.

by Maansi Shah

Love is a human emotion that can captivate an individual in such a way as to render him or her incapable of acting or feeling in a reasonable manner. Often, when teenage couples fall in love, they tend to stray away from their existing friendships in order to indulge in their new-found union with another's soul. A new sense of self comprising both bodies emerges as emotions of trust, care, and compassion are elevated. Some couples describe this state of being as subliminal. Also, outsiders can misconstrue this state to be irrational. This belief of irrationality leads some cultures to de-emphasize unions based on love and to seek arranged marriages instead. Nonetheless, even these cultures may attest to the fact that love does exist. Easterners and Westerners may have different conceptions of what love is, but humans are universally awed by its strong presence.

There is also a global belief that "Love is blind." However, is it really the case that people are blindly affected by love? In our educated society in which intellectuals challenge all ideas, it seems as though a concept such as this cannot survive without rational justification. Thus, scientists and social psychologists have come to the forefront to change this statement from "Love is blind" to "Love is unconscious." This can more carefully exemplify the complex phenomena of love as controlled by subliminal forces that are difficult to realize through the rational, conscious mind.

While many people readily believe that falling in love is blind and inexplicable, they paradoxically give conscious rationalizations for break-ups, divorces, or simply falling out of love. Thus, people commonly assume that at some point in the relationship the unconsciousness of love disappears and that love starts to be driven by awareness. Yet, as this article will proceed to explain, the phenomena of love often never ceases to be subliminal. When couples separate, they usually inaccurately attribute the loss of love to situational shortcomings of the partner when, in fact, it is the activities and feelings generated by the unconscious mind that deem a relationship to be successful or futile. When underlying feelings of incompatibility surface, the couple admits that the relationship is, in colloquial terms, no longer 'working out.' This article will suggest that many of these relationships stopped working because the uncon-

scious finally reached the realization that the individual's necessary self-needs of love were not being met appropriately.

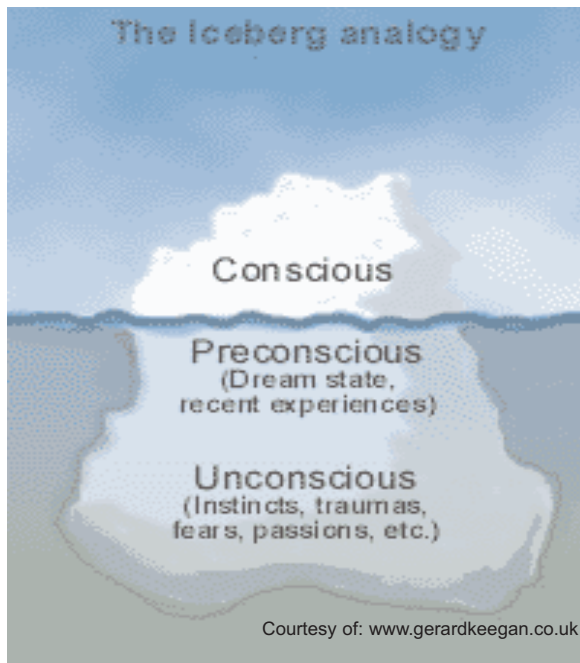
Exploring the Unconscious Mind

Before explaining the effects of the unconscious, it is important to show that the unconscious does exist. Many psychoanalysts have endorsed its presence and have theorized its purpose for centuries. Freud perceived the unconscious as "withholding feelings, memories and desires well-buried below the surface of conscious awareness" (Matta 2006). The research and evidence-based 21st century, however, demands more than just a theory as presented by Freud and others. Therefore, cognitive neuroscientists continue to conduct research to locate the precise residence of the unconscious mind in the human brain. For instance, a study conducted by Dr. Badgaiyan of Harvard Medical School found that conscious recognition of stimuli is in fact not necessary for activation of cognitive processing (Badgaiyan 2006). This indicates the presence of subliminal recognition. Moreover, in another study, The Architecture of Cognitive Control, scientists found that it is the pre-frontal cortex of the brain that is most activated in response to unconscious stimuli (Koechlin, Ody, Kouneiher 2003).

Cognitive experiments thus suggest that the unconscious may exist, but this does not yet provide evidence for the age-old belief that the unconscious can actually process emotions of love. Any human can attest to the grandness of thoughts motivated by feelings of love. Is it true that the unconscious can be so vast as to automatically execute care, hatred, trust, and jealousy? Freud, at least, believed this to be the case. In Project for Scientific

Psychology, Freud states, "We are effectively cognitive icebergs, with most of our 'thoughts' occurring below the water line, out of conscious perception" (Freud 1895). Besides this qualitative aspect, we can try to quantify the depth of the unconscious by measuring the neurological activity of the unconscious mind in response to certain stimuli. Laul and Passingham conducted a study in which they used subliminal priming (exposing the subject to unconscious stimuli to be recalled later unconsciously), to illustrate that a "great deal of complex cognitive behavior could take place without conscious awareness" (Laul and Passingham 2007).

People tend to justify break-ups by believing that they have simply "fallen out of love," which might be a misconception.



A depiction of Freud's iceberg analogy which shows significance of the unconscious mind.

How Childhood Shapes the Adult Unconscious Mind

Many psychoanalysts believe that these findings will implicate the unconscious mind's greater role in cognitive behaviors such as love and marriage. Some further propose that one's unconscious mind is embedded with childhood experiences that become the subliminal motivating force for behavior later in life. One such psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, developed the "eight stages of life model" (Grotjahn 1951). In this model, he proposed that every conflict that a child encounters will become negatively engrained in his personality if left unresolved (Cloninger 1996). Below is a sample of his theory.

- + In the first stage, "trust versus mistrust", if a baby's basic biological needs for hunger and shelter are not satisfied, the child develops a neglected, pessimistic, and distrusting view of the world.
- + In his second stage, "autonomy versus doubt", if the parents are too critical or demanding of a child's efforts while he is exploring his sense of responsibility, the child develops a sense of shame and doubt and matures into an adult who is anxious, has low self-esteem, and feels insecure.
- + Erikson's third stage, "initiative versus guilt", occurs when the child begins to act upon his own imaginations and ideas. During this stage of development, if the parents are not supportive, the child will mature with feelings of guilt and low self-worth.
- + The fourth stage encompasses the conflict of "inferiority versus competency" in which the child learns social skills and, based on his experiences, develops a sense of self-competence and achievement.

Case Studies

In the book, *Relationship Sabotage*, American Medical Psychiatrist William Matta finds these first four stages of Erikson's model most crucial to understanding how the unresolved issues in parent-child relationships can be lethal to a marriage (Matta 2006). A case presented by Matta, which portrays an application of Erikson's eight psychological stages, involves Charles and Marion, a middle-aged married couple experiencing marital crisis. Matta counseled them and discovered that Charles experienced a lack of trust while Marion had a sense of low self-esteem since childhood. As their marriage progressed, Marion wanted to start college again in order to gain self-esteem. Charles allowed her to do so at first, until the day he spotted his wife talking to a male student. This brought Charles' characteristic lack of trust to the surface and he forced Marion to quit college. This, in turn, once again prevented Marion from building her much needed self-esteem. Thus, both individuals in the relationship failed to heal each other's childhood wounds and their marriage became increasingly conflict-ridden.

Psychiatrists suggest that one of the best ways to resolve issues is to bring them to the surface and to talk about them. If Marion had explained her dire need to gain an education because she equated this with self-worth and if she had cleared up the misunderstanding about the male student, then Charles could have realized that he was unnecessarily mistrusting his wife. This would have been his first step in reducing his lack of trust for others. It has long been known that communication is vital to successful marriages. These are exactly the type of issues that need to be resolved in order to reduce misunderstandings and thereby prevent break-ups.



Courtesy of: http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/centers/child/images/favepic_mother_child1.JPG

Motherly love is internalized into an attachment pattern.

Erikson's stages of personality development

Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Oral	Basic trust vs. mistrust							
Anal		Autonomy vs. shame, doubt						
Phallic			Initiative vs. guilt					
Latency				Industry vs. inferiority				
Genital					Identity vs. role confusion			
Young adulthood						Intimacy vs. isolation		
Adulthood							Generativity vs. stagnation	
Maturity								Ego integrity vs. despair

Courtesy of: <http://fac.hsu.edu/langlet/lectures/dev/Erikson/Erikson8.gif>

A chart portraying the development conflicts that lead to the development of personality.

However, can experiments verify that Charles had unconsciously developed this lack of trust as a child? More generally, can such unconscious priming from childhood be scientifically proven? In her experiment "Strange Situation," Mary Ainsworth provided evidence for childhood attachment patterns by studying three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious (Ainsworth 1978). Her eight-step procedure involved an infant, a stranger, and a caregiver. The infant was subject to episodes of unions and reunions, and his behavior was assessed. It was found that separation typically caused the infant to feel distressed. Infants whose caregivers responded quickly and reliably to their distress cries were typically more self-assured and were more likely to explore novel environments, albeit with occasional glances back at the caregiver. Caregivers who were not so reliable in their responses, often intruding and rejecting, elicited an anxious attachment in the infant who felt scared and angry in novel environments. Caregivers who rejected their children's fears altogether created an avoidant attachment in the infant. These infants did not explore strange situations and was not needy of the caregiver, often rejecting her attention. This experiment confirmed the immense role that the primary caregiver, usually a parent, plays in a child's development of self-assurance and attachment style.

What is True Love?

Experiments conducted by John Bowlby further solidified the notion that attachment styles that develop during infancy last throughout adulthood, causing an individual to seek the level of attachment that he is most familiar with (Bowlby 1980). According to his attachment theory, infants

seek proximity to an identified attachment figure when they are feeling distressed in unfamiliar situations. The responsiveness and sensitivity reciprocated by the attachment figure or primary caregiver create certain attachment patterns. As mentioned above, Ainsworth classified these attachment patterns into three styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. The primary parental responses make a large impression on the infant who then internally models all other relationships based on his first attachment experiences. These so-called "internal working models" create a set of needs for future love partners. This will guide the type of attachment behavior an individual expects in later relationships (Bretherton 1992).

In his book, *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle shines light on this theory of unmet needs. He believes that an individual's ego will seek out love relationships that in some way meet these needs. When a person like this is found, an individual will feel fulfilled and "in love" (Tolle 2008). True love can be characterized by a complete feeling of fulfillment in love. However, not all couples are lucky to find this true love. Oftentimes, an individual thinks that he has found that perfect person who makes him whole, but in reality, this is not the case. The individuals in the relationship eventually realize this false perception. When this happens, the so-called "honeymoon phase" has worn off and the relationship is labeled as not 'working out.' At this point, the heartbroken individual develops rationalizations as to why the relationship is no longer viable. Reasons such as "She is too stubborn for me and does not call enough" or "He does not buy me presents anymore and is reluctant to invest in my wishes" come to the surface. These apparent justifications, however, are often not the true causes of the breakup.

When couples separate, they usually inaccurately attribute the loss of love to situational shortcomings of the partner when, in fact, it is the activities and feelings generated by the unconscious mind that deem a relationship to be successful or futile.

It is in fact the case that the individual's primed need for a certain familiar type of love or attachment, as suggested by Bowlby, is not being met and the person thus feels insecure. Individuals usually do not consciously recognize that this underlying insecurity, developed to cope with the different type of attachment that his/her partner is providing, actually stems from their own inadequacies. In Ainsworth's terms, the individual does not realize that she is feeling insecure because she is in a "Strange Situation." However, because the insecurity translates into real emotions, the individual seeks reasons to explain why they are experiencing such feelings in the relationship. In light of such confusion, the individual often blames the partner for his certain shortcomings as a person. These shortcomings often have very little to do with feelings of love. For example, a break-up justified on the grounds that "my boyfriend will not stop smoking" has very little to do with the amount of love the boyfriend can provide. That is, there is no known study that can prove that non-smoking boyfriends provide more love. This example thus shows that self-justified reasons are often not the true causes for a breakup.

People tend to justify break-ups by believing that they have simply "fallen out of love," which might be a misconception. A possible truth is that they were never really "in love" to begin with or perhaps a few surface-level incongruities between the couple were magnified to the extent that they overpowered the otherwise positives of their love relationship. As defined earlier in this article, true love is felt when an individual's exact needs of attachment and security are met. If one were to find his match based on these criteria, it seems unlikely that couples would consciously want to end a true love relationship. In addition, because we do not live in a perfect world, it is often very difficult to find the perfect person who can meet our exact needs. There always tends to be a little mismatch between the unresolved issues of the unconscious minds of two individuals who are experiencing love. Moreover, when the going gets tough, couples misjudge the cause of their own insecurities by projecting blame onto their partner's idiosyncrasies which may even lead to a break-up. Perhaps, two things can be done to prevent this common fallacy. After finding true love, we can recognize that oftentimes the certain destructive beliefs or personality traits of our partners are minimal when compared to the grand security that true love can bring. So, in times of heightened self-insecurities, we must work on them ourselves and/or we can raise these issues with our trusted spouse. Working on these issues together will preclude the danger of unmet expectations, and will provide for a longer-lasting love relationship.

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