

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Why Do We Hate Love?

By Robert Firestone, Ph.D.  
2013

*Loving another person and accepting love from another person can sometimes be a difficult or painful experience. In his article "Why Do We Hate Love," Robert Firestone, Ph.D., explains why this may be the case. As you read, take notes on Dr. Firestone's outline of and theory on love.*

[1] Love—kindness, affection, sensitive attunement, respect, companionship—is not only difficult to find, but is even more challenging for many people to accept and tolerate. In my work with individuals and couples, I have observed countless examples of people reacting angrily when loving responses were directed toward them.



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- One man felt a flash of anger at his wife when she said she was worried about him riding his bike in an unsafe neighborhood. Even though he knew she was not being controlling or judgmental, and despite being aware that her apprehension was based on the fact that she really loved and valued him, he felt rage.
- A woman became outright nasty when her boyfriend told her that he loved her so much he wished that they could have children together. She had never expressed hostility toward him before, and the man involved was not pressuring her or even suggesting a course of action. He said it was just a sweet feeling.
- In a therapy session, a usually calm and quiet man revealed that he felt fury when people praised him.

Unlike these individuals, many people are unaware that being loved or especially valued makes them feel angry and withholding. Indeed, this paradoxical reaction is largely an unconscious process. Even a simple compliment, although initially accepted at face value and enjoyed, can later arouse feelings of disbelief or anger toward the person giving the compliment, or can trigger negative attitudes and critical feelings towards oneself.

But why do love, positive acknowledgment and compliments arouse such animosity? There are a number of primary causes of this phenomenon discussed in this blog.

**1. Being loved arouses anxiety, because it threatens long-standing psychological defenses formed early in life in relation to emotional pain and rejection, therefore leaving a person feeling more vulnerable.**

- [5] Although the experience of being chosen and especially valued is exciting and can bring happiness and fulfillment, at the same time, it can be frightening and the fear often translates into anger and hostility. Basically, love is scary when it contrasts with childhood trauma. In that situation, the beloved feels compelled to act in ways that hurt the lover: behaving in a punitive manner, distancing themselves and pushing love away. In essence, people maintain the defensive posture that they formed early in life. Because the negative reaction to positive events occurs without conscious awareness, individuals respond without understanding what caused them to react. They rationalize the situation by finding fault with or blaming others, particularly those closest to them.

## **2. Being loved arouses sadness and painful feelings from the past.**

Being treated with love and tenderness arouses a kind of poignant sadness that many people struggle to block out. Ironically, close moments with a partner can activate memories of painful childhood experiences, fears of abandonment and feelings of loneliness from the past. People are afraid of being hurt in the same ways they were hurt as children.

## **3. Being loved provokes a painful identity crisis.**

When people have been hurt, they feel that if they accepted love into their life, the whole world as they have experienced it would be shattered, and they would not know who they were. Being valued or seen in a positive light is confusing, because it conflicts with the negative self-concept that many people form within their family.

- [10] In the developmental process, children idealize their parents at their own expense as part of a psychological survival mechanism. This idealization process is inextricably tied to maintaining an image of oneself as bad or deficient. However painful it may be, people are somehow willing to accept failure or rejection, because these are harmonious with the incorporated negative view of themselves, whereas the intrusion of being loved or having positive responses directed toward them is disruptive of their psychological equilibrium.

## **4. Accepting being loved in reality disconnects people from a fantasy bond with their parents.**

Early in life, children develop fantasies of being fused with a parent or primary caregiver to compensate for what is emotionally missing in their environment. The imagined connection offers a sense of safety, partially gratifies the child's needs and relieves painful feelings of emotional deprivation and rejection. This fantasy persists into adult life, although it may be largely unconscious. As a result, the hurt individual maintains a sense of pseudo-independence, an attitude that they can take care of themselves without a need for others.

As a result of merging with their parents in their imagination, people continue to both nurture and punish themselves in the same way they were treated by their parents. In addition, as love relationships become more meaningful, deep and threatening, people tend to revert to utilizing the same defense mechanisms that their parents used to avoid pain. Reacting in a manner similar to their parents offers a sense of safety, regardless of any negative consequences. Once the fantasy bond takes hold, people are extremely reluctant to take a chance again on real love and gratification from a romantic partner.

## **5. Positive acknowledgment arouses guilt in relation to surpassing the parent of the same sex.**

[15] Achieving success in one's love life or career can make a person aware of their parents' weaknesses, limitations and failures to find gratification in their lives, in particular the parent of the same sex. Being chosen or preferred by a loved one in a relationship, or being acknowledged for a success for which others are striving in the workplace, tends to precipitate guilt reactions and self-recriminations. When the guilt of surpassing one's parent or associate is operant,<sup>1</sup> people fear retaliation and tend to limit or go against their own development.

Furthermore, people often feel angry at being acknowledged and, because the feeling appears to be irrational, it is suppressed. They distort the very people who made them feel loved or who supported or acknowledged their success or achievement, and act out aggression towards them. Many mistakenly perceive positive acclaim as an expectation or a demand to continue the behavior that earned them the appreciation and praise. All of these painful emotions are relieved to some extent as people withhold their positive or lovable qualities, adjust their performance downward and unconsciously attempt to diminish or sabotage their success. It is extremely difficult to get out of that kind of withholding pattern. ;

## **6. Accepting being loved stirs up painful existential issues.**

In a previous work, *Fear of Intimacy*, I wrote, "Being close to another in a loving relationship makes one aware that life is precious, but must eventually be surrendered. If we embrace life and love, we must also face death's inevitability." In particular, the experience of being loved makes one place more value on one's life, and the anticipation of its ending becomes tortuous. For this reason, people attempt to modify those loving exchanges rather than go through the painful feelings. Often close moments in a relationship are followed by attempts on the part of one or both partners to take the edge off the experience or to withdraw to a "safer" distance. Many people have spoken of heightened feelings of death anxiety after feeling especially close emotionally and sexually, and of later reacting with anger and withholding behaviors that lead to deterioration in the relationship. ;

For the most part, people create the emotional world in which they live. In actuality, they attempt to recreate the world they lived in as children to maintain psychological equilibrium. Positive events and circumstances, particularly the experience of being loved, seriously interrupt this process. In order to maintain a false sense of safety and security, people utilize the defense mechanisms of selection, distortion and provocation in their relationships. They tend to select partners who are like people in their early lives, because they are more comfortable with people who fit their defenses. Secondly, they distort their partners and see them as more like the people in their past than they really are. Thirdly, they try to provoke responses in their partners that duplicate interactions from their past. The end result is antithetical to maintaining happy and satisfying relationships.

[20] Lastly, most people are not aware of their negative reactions to being loved or the dynamics described above, nor do they recognize their own withholding behavior and its effect on themselves and their loved ones. The hope is that becoming aware of these core defenses and challenging them can help people to be liberated from these detrimental effects.

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1. **Operant (adjective):** change of behavior by the reinforcing or inhibiting effect of its own consequences

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central idea of the text? [RI.2]
  - A. Humans need connection and affection in order to survive.
  - B. Love can be painful or hard to accept; sometimes it even arouses hate.
  - C. Abusive or toxic relationships should be ended immediately and never further explored.
  - D. Imbalanced brain chemistry is the main cause of people's negative reactions to love.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "...many people are unaware that being loved or especially valued makes them feel angry and withholding" (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "...the experience of being chosen and especially valued is exciting and can bring happiness and fulfillment...." (Paragraph 5)
  - C. "...they attempt to recreate the world they lived in as children to maintain psychological equilibrium." (Paragraph 19)
  - D. "The end result is antithetical to maintaining happy and satisfying relationships." (Paragraph 19)
  
3. PART A: What does the word "punitive" most likely mean as used in paragraph 5? [RI.4]
  - A. Secretive
  - B. Harsh
  - C. Comforting
  - D. Vulnerable
  
4. PART B: Which of the following phrases best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "to act in ways that hurt the lover" (Paragraph 5)
  - B. "distancing themselves" (Paragraph 5)
  - C. "pushing love away" (Paragraph 5)
  - D. "without understanding what caused them to react" (Paragraph 5)

5. Explain how childhood affects people's responses to love and romantic relationships [RI.3] in later years, according to Dr. Firestone. Cite evidence from the text in your answer.

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