

Romantic Love

THE PATHOLOGICAL STATE RARELY CONSIDERED WORTHY OF TREATMENT

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Sleepless nights, anxiety, mood swings, euphoric energy bursts, obsessive thinking, and a strange feeling in his chest. That is what Matt was experiencing when he first entered my practice. Rather than being concerned, he was loving every minute of it. He came to see me for a knee injury but had just met the woman who would, two years later, become his wife. His were a few of the many symptoms associated with falling in love and he was delighted!

While most of us think unusual symptoms and behaviors are a "normal" part of the highs and lows of romance, I suggest we regard them as a reflection of the body's health. What if we viewed them with the same critical eye that we use for all energetic states? If we treat patients who are suffering (or ecstatic) due to romantic influences, might we make their transitions into or out of loving gentler, kinder and more effective? Could we help them achieve greater stability and peace even in the face of love's destiny? And might patients avoid future problems in health and romance (no matter the outcomes of their love affairs) if we helped them become stronger and better educated? I think so. When I address romantic love-related symptoms, I get better results overall.

I recently taught a class on the energetic dynamics of falling into and out of love at the TCM Kongress in Rothenburg, Germany. My students were asked to list signs/symptoms of their experiences falling into and out of love. While everyone had a unique combination, each could relate to having had several items listed below. Each is a reflection of a specific internal organ or chi and blood related state. Under any other circumstances, these bodily expressions could be considered pathology.

What does one feel when falling in love? Obsessive thinking - can't get that person out of your head. More space in the chest. Glowing. Feeling of overflowing and abundance. Anxiety. Boost of energy. Increased sexual desire - (sometimes uncomfortable). Euphoria. Sleeplessness. Brightness in the eyes. The world looks better. More energy in the senses. Heart rate increases. Feeling of "connection." Feeling in a "bubble" - isolated from others but unified with that person. Lack of appetite.

What does one feel while falling out of love or breaking up? Sadness and grief. Obsessive thoughts. Feeling crushed (in the chest). The "sparkle" goes away - loss of interest. Lack of fullness. Emptiness. Disconnected from self. Sleeplessness. Emotional uncertainty. Asking yourself: Was this the right decision? Should I have handled things differently? Enhanced empathy and compassion for that person or others. Fear of revenge. Boredom, relief, annoyance or a feeling of being overwhelmed. Lack of appetite or insatiable appetite. Sugar or alcohol cravings. Self doubt or depression. Loss of sexual desire or increased sexual desire. (I am collecting a comprehensive list so if you have a symptom or sign to add would you share it with me at felice@felicedunas.com?)

Why do We Fall In Love?

Evolutionary psychology, a field of study that helps us understand our motives as functional

products of natural selection, views love as a mechanism that inspires the species to recreate itself and to protect its offspring. It is the emotional skin that covers the biological imperative to sustain the species. The capacity to experience love has evolved as a signal to potential mates that the partner will be a good parent and able to pass genes to future generations. Once offspring exist, love promotes mutual support of children for an extended time. STDs may reduce fertility, injure a fetus, and increase risks during childbirth. Love inspires monogamy and would have us favor exclusive, long-term relationships reducing the risk of STDs and threatening the next generation.

What is romantic love?

Psychology tells us that romantic love is a ... "state of intense longing for union with another. A complex functional whole including appraisals or appreciations, subjective feelings, expressions, patterned physiological processes, action tendencies, and instrumental behaviors. Reciprocated love is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy, unrequited love with emptiness, anxiety, or despair." - Hatfield and Rapson, 1993

Both definitions suggests that a complex machine is running the engine of love and many of the body's energetic systems are involved.

The beginnings of romance

The heart is the root of life, the seat of shen... This elevated position is due to the omnipresence of shen: shen resides within *qi*, and *qi* resides within jing. Only the heart's jing is always abundant, enabling it to dispatch subordinate shens to the other four zang organs and enabling it to draw the jing into the six fu organs. Shen Jin'ao, Dr. Shen's Compendium of Honoring Life (Shen Shi Zunsheng Shu), 1773.

Dr Gu, tells me that love begins in the heart, which controls the brain. Then energy moves to the liver, inspiring emotions, then to the kidneys igniting sexual passion. The heart, he says, is initially stimulated by the karma we have with another person. When someone comes into our lives with whom we share karma, the roller coaster begins. It is our job to determine the path that karma should take. Everything between heaven and earth that is made of chi and blood has the instinct to mate. Zhang Huang, A Compendium of Illustrated Texts (Tushu Bian), Ming Dynasty.

Evolutionary Psychology's suggests the spark first ignites in the kidneys. It reflects two Five Element Theory features; the Kidney/Heart relationship on the Ko cycle and the Kidney/Liver relationship on the Shen cycle. The mating instinct is fire generated by water, i.e. mingmen. Genetics and sex stimulate the heart, though the Ko cycle causes an altered view of the beloved and an opening of the mind. Effects on the Shen explains why we feel reborn upon finding love or "lost" when we break up. On the Shen cycle, the Kidneys "nourish" the liver, facilitating feelings of loving, rage or sadness depending upon which side of the circumstance one is on.

The water and fire elements govern our neuro-chemistry a cascade of hormones and neurotransmitters is sparked through the power of the heart chi and mingmen. Nerve growth factor, estrogen and testosterone are associated with lust.

Epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine and serotonin are associated with attraction, oxytocin and vasopressin with attachment and bonding.

Earth - digesting and metabolizing love. The earth element runs our capacity for digesting and absorbing nourishment, including that provided by a beloved. How are we to recognize a worthwhile companion or give and receive love if we cannot digest who someone is? If earth is overwhelmed by chi from the heart (Five Element Shen Cycle), one's cognitive and physical

digestive abilities are effected.

Metal - discerning quality and connecting to love. To breathe is to live. To live is to bond. How successfully one bonds determines their capacity to love. How successfully one loves is determined by the quality of contributions to and from a partner. The metal element helps us ascertain the quality of connection with a person. When not in harmony, we may be poor judges as to someone's character, viewing him or her too favorably or unfavorably. This is especially true after sex. When the water element is actively engaged (sexually) in a new love affair, one loses their critical eye.

Wood defines, delineates, determines and decides about love. The wood element serves to organize our lives, to find a place for everything and to regulate our emotional response. When a beloved comes into or leaves our lives, it is the wood element that helps us integrate and regulate our flow and intensity of emotions. Decisions must be made as to the viability of this potential partner, how to integrate or extricate him/her with minimal damage to all. Sometimes every step in a budding or fading relationship requires thoughtful decisions. If you look at your own romantic history, you may see where your wood element has valiantly tried and succeeded or failed to function healthfully.

When love is sparked, a series of biochemical and perceptual changes happen inside us. Their patterns are as old as our species. And while loving can inspire health, it can also weaken us. The process creates and requires energy, even if you love it, believe you have made a good choice and know you are going in the right direction. Whether you are excited to enter or relieved to exit a relationship, the body must work hard. Our weakest links are reflected in the symptoms we have, how intense they are and if we feel in or out of control. Perhaps you will consider asking your patients about their love lives and regard their answers as being as important as their physical symptoms when you next meet.

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