

LOVE

Adapted from Notes Toward the Second Year

The word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes, and this is one cause of the serious misunderstandings which divide them. — Simone de Beauvoir

The traditional differences between men and women concerning love come up frequently in parlor discussions of the double standard, where it is generally agreed that: women are monogamous, better at loving, possessive, "clinging," more interested in (highly involved) "relationships" than in sex per se, and that they confuse affection with sexual desire. That men are interested in nothing but a screw (Wham, bam, thank you M'am!), or else romanticize the woman ridiculously; that once sure of her, they become notorious philanderers, never satisfied; that they mistake sex for emotion.

That women live for love and men for work is a truism. Freud was the first to attempt to ground this dichotomy in the individual psyche: the male child, sexually rejected (the Oedipus Complex) by the first person in his attention, his mother, "sublimates" his "libido" — his reservoir of sexual (life) energies — into long-term projects, in the hope of gaining love in a more generalized form: thus he displaces his need for love into a need for recognition; the love of one person is transformed into love by the community. This process does not occur as much in the female. Most women never stop seeking direct warmth and approval.

Of what does love consist? Contrary to popular opinion, love is not altruistic. The initial attraction is based on curious admiration (more often today, envy and resentment) for the self-possession, the integrated unity, of the other and a wish to become part of this Self in some way (today, read: intrude or take over), to become important to that other equilibrium. The self-containment of the other creates desire (read: a challenge). Admiration (envy) of the other becomes a wish to incorporate (possess) its qualities. A clash of selves follows in which the individual attempts to fight off the growing hold over him of the other.

Love is the final opening up to (read: surrender to the dominion of) the other. The

lover demonstrates to the beloved how he himself would like to be treated. ("I tried so hard to make him fall in love with me that I fell in love with him myself.") Thus love is the height of selfishness: the self attempts to enrich itself through the absorption of another being. Love is being psychically wide-open to another. It is a situation of total emotional vulnerability. Therefore it must be not only the incorporation of the other, but an exchange of selves. Anything short of a mutual exchange will hurt one or the other party.

Romantic idealization is partially responsible, at least on the part of men, for a peculiar characteristic of "falling" in love: the change takes place in the lover almost independently of the character of the love object. (We have all noticed how people we really think a lot of fall in love with utter creeps.)

Such idealization occurs much less frequently on the part of women. A man must idealize one woman over the rest in order to justify his descent to a lower caste. Women have no such reason to idealize men — in fact, when one's life depends on one's ability to "psych" men out, such idealization may actually be dangerous — though a fear of male power in general may carry over into relationships with individual men.

But though women know to be inauthentic this male "falling in love," all women, in one way or another, require proof of it before they can allow themselves to love (genuinely, in their case) in return. This idealization process acts to artificially equalize the two parties, a minimum precondition for the development of (an uncorrupted) love — for we have seen that love requires a mutual vulnerability that is impossible to achieve in an unequal power situation.

Thus "falling in love" is no more than the process of alteration of male vision — through idealization, mystification, glorification — that renders void the women's class inferiority.

Men have difficulty loving

While men may love, they usually "fall in love" — with their own projected image. Most often they are pounding down a woman's door one day, and thoroughly disillusioned with her the next; but it is rare for women to leave men, and then it is usually for more than ample reason.

Being unable to love is hell. This is the way it proceeds: as soon as the man feels any pressure from the other partner to commit himself, he panics and may react in one of several ways:

1) He may rush out and screw ten other women to prove that the first woman has no hold over him. If she accepts this, he may continue to see her on this basis. The other women verify his (false) freedom; periodic arguments about them keep his panic at bay.

2) He may consistently exhibit unpredictable behavior, standing her up frequently, being indefinite about the next date, telling her that "my work comes first," or offering a variety of other excuses. That is, though he senses her anxiety, he refuses to reassure her in any way, or even to recognize her anxiety as legitimate. For he needs her anxiety as a steady reminder that he is still free, that the door is not entirely closed.

3) When he is forced into (an uneasy) commitment, he makes her pay for it: by ogling other women in her presence, by reminding her in front of friends that she is his "ball and chain," by calling her a "nag," a "bitch," etc., or by suggesting that if he were only a bachelor he would be a lot better off.

His ambivalence about women's "inferiority" comes out: by being committed to one, he has somehow made the hated female identification, which he now must repeatedly deny if he is to maintain his self-respect in the (male) community.

This steady derogation is not entirely put on: for in fact every other girl suddenly does look a lot better, he can't help feeling he has missed something — and, naturally, his woman is to blame. For he has never given up the search for the "ideal"; she has forced him to resign from it.

There are many variations of straining at the bit. Many men go from one casual thing to another, getting out every time it begins to get hot. And yet to live without love in the end proves intolerable to men just as it does to women. The question that remains for every normal male is, then, how do I get someone to love me without her demanding an equal commitment in return?



Women's "clinging" behaviour is required by the social situation

The female response to such a situation of male hysteria at any prospect of mutual commitment was the development of subtle methods of manipulation, to force as much commitment as could be forced from men.

Over the centuries strategies have been devised, tested, and passed on from mother to daughter in secret tete-a-tetes, passed around at "kaffee klatches" ("I never understand what it is women spend so much time talking about!"), or, in recent times, via the telephone. These are not trivial gossip sessions at all (as women prefer men to believe), but desperate strategies for survival. More real brilliance goes into one one-hour coed telephone dialogue about men than into that same coed's four years of college study, or for that matter, than into most male political maneuvers.

It is no wonder, then, that even women without "family obligations" always arrive exhausted at the starting line of any serious endeavor.

Women who choose to drop out of this race are choosing a life without love, something that, as we have seen, most men don't have the courage to do.

But unfortunately The Manhunt is characterized by an emotional urgency beyond this simple desire for return commitment. It is compounded by the very reality that produced the male inability to love. In a male-run society that defines women as an inferior and parasitical class, a woman who does not achieve male approval in some form is doomed.

But because the woman is rarely allowed to realize herself through activity in the larger (male) society — and when she is, she is seldom granted the recognition she deserves — it becomes easier to try for the recognition of one man than of many. And in fact this is exactly the choice most women make. Thus once more the phenomenon of love, good in itself, is distorted by a given political situation: women need love not only for healthy reasons but actually to validate their existence.

In addition, the continued economic dependence of women makes a situation of healthy love between equals impossible. Women today still live under a system of patronage. With few exceptions, they have the choice, not of either freedom and marriage, but of being either public or private property. Women who merge with a member of the ruling class can at least hope that some of his privilege will, so to speak, rub off. But women without men are in the same situation as orphans: they are a helpless sub-class lacking the protection of the powerful.

This is the antithesis of freedom when they are still unfavorably defined by a class situation: for now they are in a situation of magnified vulnerability. To participate in one's subjection by choosing one's master often gives the illusion of free choice. In

reality a woman is never free to choose love without external motivations. For her at the present time, the two things, love and status, must remain inextricably intertwined.

Now assuming that a woman does not lose sight of these fundamental factors of her condition when she loves, she will never be able to love gratuitously, but only in exchange for security:

1) the emotional security which, we have seen, she is justified in demanding.

2) the emotional identity which she should be able to find through work and recognition, but which she is denied — thus forcing her to seek her definition vicariously through a man.

3) the economic class security that, in this society, is attached to her ability to "hook" a man.

Two of these three demands are invalid in terms of love itself, but are imposed on it, weighing it down.

Thus in their precarious (political) situation, women can't afford the luxury of spontaneous love. It is much too dangerous. The love and approval of men is all-important. To love thoughtlessly before one has ensured return commitment would endanger that approval.

For once she plunges in emotionally, she will be helpless to play the necessary games: her love would come first, demanding expression. To pretend a coolness she does not feel, then, would be too painful, and further, it would be pointless: she would be cutting off her nose to spite her face, for freedom to love is what she was aiming for. But in order to guarantee such a commitment, she must restrain her emotions, she must play games. For, as we have seen, men do not commit themselves to equal openness and vulnerability until they are forced to.

How does she then go about forcing this commitment from the other person? One of her most potent weapons is sex — she can work him up to a state of physical torment in a variety of ways: by denying his need, by teasing it, by giving and taking back, through jealousy, etc. A woman under analysis wonders why:

There are few women who never ask themselves on certain occasions "How hard should I make it for a man?" I think no man is troubled with questions of this kind. He perhaps asks himself only, "When will she give in?"

Men are right when they complain that women lack discrimination, that they seldom love a man for his individual wants but rather for what he has to offer (his class), that they are calculating, that they use sex to gain other ends, etc. For in fact women are in no position to love freely. If a woman is lucky enough to find "a decent guy" to love her and support her, she is doing well — and usually will be grateful enough to return his love.

The situation of women has not changed significantly

For the past fifty years women have been in a double bind about love: under the guise of a "sexual revolution," presumed to have occurred ("Oh, c'mon Baby, where have you been? Haven't you heard of the sexual revolution?"), women have been persuaded to shed their armor.

The modern woman is in horror of being thought a bitch, where her grandmother expected that to happen as the natural course of things. Men, too, in her grandmother's time, expected that any self-respecting woman would keep them waiting, would play all the right games without shame: a woman who did not guard her own interests in this way was not respected. It was out in the open.

But the rhetoric of the sexual revolution, if it brought no improvements for women, proved to have great value for men. By convincing women that the usual female games and demands were despicable, unfair, prudish, old-fashioned, puritanical, and self-destructive, a new reservoir of available females was created to expand the tight supply of sexual goods available for traditional exploitation, disarming

women of even the little protection they had so painfully acquired.

Women today dare not make the old demands for fear of having a whole new vocabulary, designed just for this purpose, hurled at them: "fucked up," "ballbreaker," "cockteaser," "a real drag," "a bad trip," etc. — to be a "groovy chick" is the ideal. Even now many women know what's up and avoid the trap, preferring to be called names rather than be cheated of the little they can hope for from men (for it is still true that even the hippest males want an "old lady" who is relatively unused).

"Emancipated" women found out that men were far from "good guys" to be emulated; they found out that by imitating male sexual patterns (the roving eye, the search for the ideal, the emphasis on physical attraction, etc.), they were not only not achieving liberation, they were falling into something much worse than what they had given up.

They were imitating. And they had inoculated themselves with a sickness that had not even sprung from their own psyches. They found that their new "cool" was shallow and meaningless, that their emotions were drying up

behind it, that they were aging and becoming decadent: they feared they were losing their ability to love. They had gained nothing by imitating men: shallowness and callousness, and they were not so good at it either, because somewhere inside it still went against the grain.

Thus women who had decided not to marry because they were wise enough to look around and see where it led found that it was marry or nothing; men gave their commitment only for a price: share (shoulder) his life, stand on his pedestal, become his appendage, or else. Or else — be consigned forever to that limbo of "chicks" who mean nothing or at least not what mother meant.

Yes, love means an entirely different thing to men than to women: it means ownership and control: it means jealousy, where he never exhibited it before — when he might have wanted him to (who cares if she is broke or raped until she officially belongs to him; then he is a raging dynamo, a veritable cyclone, because his property, his ego extension, has been threatened); it means a growing lack of interest, coupled with a roving eye. Who needs it? Sadly, women do.

Some women are determined to end this destruction

Our healthiest instincts lead into a blind alley: the choice between self-destruction or self-destruction. We ask only to be allowed to love freely. But our love is turned against us, is used as a weapon to keep us down and in our "place."

And yet we are in a dilemma: none of the several choices open to us is without penalty. (Note that the price of freedom is still on the heads of the oppressed rather than the oppressor.)

1) we can emulate men in cutting off our emotions, an awful way to live;

2) we can return to the traditional female games, playing them with a yet unequalled vengeance to compensate for this latest male trick — the "sexual revolution" — but then we will be back where we started, damaging ourselves to avoid a worse damage by our enemies, using the negative strengths of the oppressed rather than changing the law into our own hands;

3) we can join the Search For the Mirage — the man willing to give up his male privilege (not "being a man" in

our society has its own price) — expecting a big run of competition should we ever find him;

4) we can attempt to form total relationships with women: but this solution presents a whole new set of problems, for we would have to undo the fundamental organization of our personalities.

5) we could learn to masturbate without guilt — temporarily sacrificing a social physical love altogether — but this is a price few of us are willing to pay.

None of these are solutions. For at least several more years, until we have a movement strong enough to force change (when he goes to that "other woman," she will be with us), we will have to accommodate ourselves as best we can to whichever of these (inadequate) adjustments each of us can best live with — putting our energy into raising consciousness about the issues, destruction of the institutions which have created the problem, and, finally, the revolutionary reconstruction of society in a way that will allow love to function naturally (joyfully) as an exchange of emotional riches between equals, rather than in its present perversion: agent of destruction.

