

A CONSULTANT'S GUIDE TO LOVE

When people come to me and ask me for relationship advice (which happens a lot, for some strange reason) I'll always ask them how they feel about their significant other. I'll usually get similar responses like, we're okay. Then I'll drop the big question on them: are you in love? And that's when I'll usually get half-hearted responses from them: I guess so . . . how do you know?

There is something quite unnerving about starting a new relationship. They're always different in many ways, yet are still startlingly similar. I've experienced everything ranging from the occasional one night stand to a ten-year relationship. Was I ever in love? I'd have to say, yes. So what is the difference between the faux love and real love? Honestly, I can't really tell you. Because each person's interpretation of love is completely their own. Notice, I used the word interpretation, quite different from a dictionary definition. Performing a search on google for the definition of love reveals many possibilities:

LOVE (N): (1) strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties (2) attraction based on sexual desire : affection and tenderness felt by lovers (3) affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests.

Hmmmm, not much help there. As expected, the dictionary gives a very concise, concrete definition of the word love. But why try to place concrete boundaries on something that is truly amorphic? How do YOU, as an individual interpret those definitions? Let's take an example. There are many different kinds of drinkers out there. Some have a high tolerance, some modest tolerances, and some are so allergic to alcohol that their faces turn red at even the sight of it!! Now if you were to perform and experiment with three people of varying tolerance levels, take them to a bar, and let them drink whatever they want, as much as they want, I'm willing to bet that eventually you'd see three drunk motherfuckers sitting at the bar. It doesn't matter how many drinks the person had . . . he or she eventually got drunk.

Now that we have our three drinkers lushed-up, we can now start to analyze their personalities while drunk. One person might be the loud, obnoxious drunk while another may be quiet and reserved. Still another could possibly be passed out on the floor or praying to the porcelain god in the nearest bathroom stall. Three different possibilities for us to examine. Not only that, but factor in that a person's reaction to alcohol might change depending on what he or she ate previously, or even how much sleep he or she had the night before, and we have even more possibilities at our disposal!! So what does all of this mean?

Repeat after me. EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT. It doesn't matter if you're in a relationship for one month, two years, or three decades, your experience will be completely different from the next person who's been in a relationship for one month, two years, or three decades. Why? Because it's YOUR relationship. What makes your relationship special is that it's shared between you and your significant other. No one else will ever experience the same relationship. Even if you breakup, and somebody else starts dating your ex, they will never share the same experience that you had. That's not to say that either experience is more or less fruitful, just different.

We are all individuals (thank fuckin God!!) who develop our own feelings based on experiences in life. Even if two or more individuals share the exact same experience, at the exact same time, their reactions to that experience could differ by an enormous degree. So what one person might consider love, or consider being in love with someone might be different from my interpretation of the experience. But that doesn't make either of our interpretations of love any more or less of the correct interpretation. Love is in the eye of the beholder.

I can tell you this much . . . in my mind, when I know I'm in love, I'll be willing to do whatever it takes to make the person I love happy, in every possible way . . . physical, emotional, spiritual . . . with NO

RESERVATION. This is totally independent of what the other person thinks or feels. It shouldn't matter. I know I'm in love with that person.

Now I know what you might be thinking, sounds like blind faith to me. Well, honestly it is. And there's no preventing the possible heartaches associated in giving your all to a relationship and finding out that the feelings and emotions are not being reciprocated by your significant other. Worse yet, there is also the possibility that your own thoughts and feelings may be jaded by involving yourself in a relationship for the first time – the so-called honeymoon phase of a relationship can really cloud a person's better judgment . . . I should know. It's happened to me all too many times. The strangest part about all of this is that at that particular time it was hard as hell to realize whether the love that I felt for someone was real or a pseudo, lust-induced, Bizarro-love. I only realized the truth at the bitter end.

As luck would have it (or is it bad luck), the truth always seems to come to us way too late, no matter how many times the truth is presented to us beforehand. It's like realizing you've just eaten a tofu dog and being shocked that you couldn't tell that it wasn't really meat (I HATE tofu, by the way). Giving me a blind taste-test between real love and faux love, I for one would not have an acuity level with much more than 50% accuracy.

So what is a single person to do? Remember the drinker analogy? Time to break it down again:

1. It doesn't matter how long it takes or how many relationships, eventually, everyone will be drunk or in love.
2. Each person's reaction to alcohol, or love, will be different and unpredictable.

Does it make you feel any more secure that I believe any and everyone will achieve the pinnacle of love some time in their lives? I really do. Someone said that on a long enough timeline, the survival rate for any person equals zero. I have no doubt that given the average life span of the average human, I think that would be 60–70 years, that everyone will find the person that fulfills their needs for a lifelong companion. Yeah, that's pretty optimistic, but don't worry, it gets worse. Not to take the carpet out from under your feet so soon but there's one more obstacle . . . the significant other. He or she still might not be on the same page. You could love this person and be willing to walk a thousand miles, or climb the highest mountain for this person, but guess what? They might not be.

So how do I know that the person I'm in love with is in love with me, and vice versa? Again, I don't really know. But here's a little test that seemed to have worked in the past. Actions speak louder than words. I'll usually see it (and more importantly feel it) in the actions made by my partner. And love doesn't necessarily need to be "stated" for me to realize it's there. However, the statement "I love you," in my mind, is expressed to the person I love as an indication of my wanting to do all of those things I mentioned earlier on. She may know it already by my unbridled dedication to her and all that she is, but like all human beings, it's nice to have that extra reassurance our love is being reciprocated, and that our feelings and assumptions that we are being loved are in fact true, every now and then.

Written by: Jason Bengson, June 24, 2002