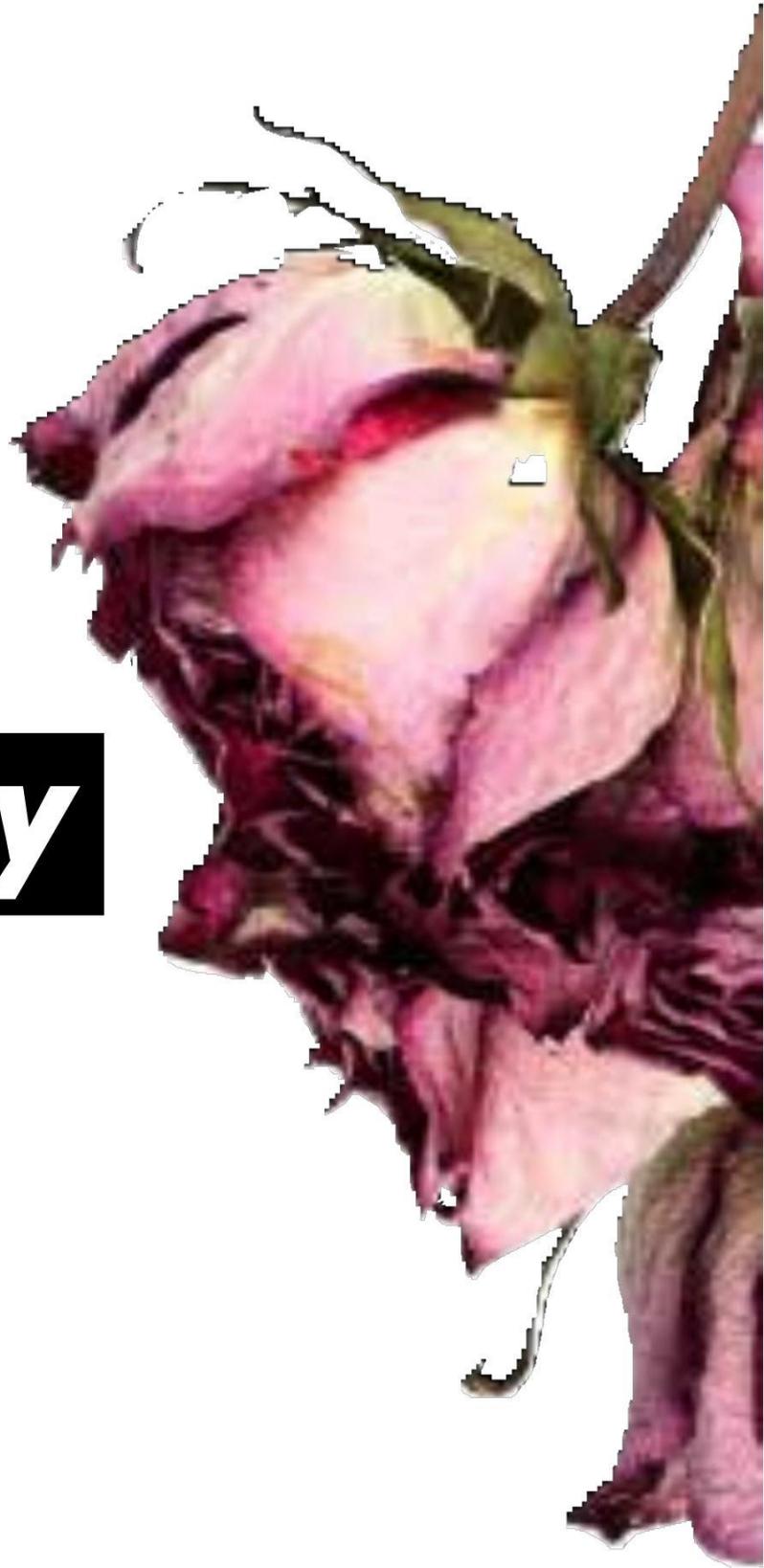


The False Intimacy Trap

Some people are addicted to dangerous new romance. But in our frantic, high-tech world, anyone might mistake charm and speed for true closeness, leaving them abused and shattered in love

BY PAMELA GARBER





Rachel Resnick arrived home one

afternoon to find her hard drive, containing her life's work – thousands of emails, short stories and novels, her correspondence for work- destroyed by someone who broke into her apartment and poured water through her machine. The culprit was Resnick's latest boyfriend, Spencer, an amateur chef and who once cooked her gourmet meals every night and made her special deserts like "Rachel's Kiss." But slowly the criticisms started pouring in, culminating a 20 page list of correctives sent by email, driving Resnick to try to alter herself and figure out where she went wrong. He finally left her, but that wasn't enough –now he'd broken into her apartment to trash everything of value she had left.

"Maybe I suspect I'm dark, and rotten, and unworthy," Resnick says of the episode in her brutal book, "Possibly I need to be swept up and seduced, obsessed over, then degraded. Built up, then shattered. Why, I do not know. But ever since Spencer, the most devastating relationship I've yet been in and the one that constituted 'hitting rock bottom,' I've taken a temporary vow of celibacy so I can step back and try to figure it out."

Like Resnick, some of us are truly "love junkies" – addicted to dangerous romantic relationships, repeatedly gravitating toward partners who inflict abuse or hurt. The most vulnerable

have a cluster of symptoms pointing to borderline personality disorder, marked by childhood abandonment, early promiscuity, and desperate attempts to avoid real or imagined abandonment. Much like someone with an alcoholic parent might marry an alcoholic, someone who has been abandoned when young could chose a remote, rejecting or disturbed sort of partner as an adult, unwittingly reliving their pain time and again. But in this fast-paced world, where relationships have been defined by reality TV and every date is just a click away, no one is immune from false intimacy –rushing into

a situation and imagining they are close or bound to someone who doesn't feel the same.

Even the most balanced among us can misstep, projecting feelings onto others without any way to ascertain true reciprocity. Making sure your instinct is correct and feelings are returned takes time, but when families haven't even taught their children to relate during a regular dinner hour, when speed dating is the coin of the realm, it's hard to take a breath and verify that your attachment is rooted in something real.

"Anyone who has ever fallen in love knows that there is a lot of chemistry involved, says psychologist





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Scott Stanley, co- director of The Center for Marriage and Family Studies at The University of Denver, “But people can mistake that rush of chemistry for intimacy.”

Life in the Fast Lane

In the past, we’ve tended to pathologize those drawn to dangerous, rejecting lovers (the Anna Karenina’s among us) and thus, ruined in love. The romantically shattered were often considered “love addicts,” and psychologically ill –much like battered women, who sometimes stayed in relationships so long they reached a breaking point, exuding a kind of angry energy suggesting they were bristling for a fight. Now psychologists know that while some of us are more vulnerable than others, being hurt in love isn’t a psychiatric disease but a normal response to misinterpretation, rejection and misuse.

In fact, life in the 21st century has primed us for romantic missteps, and not done much to teach us the true rules of love. On *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, two of the most popular reality TV shows ever produced, the protagonist easily selects and even marries one of a limited pool of contestants over a dozen episodes of TV –hardly a prescription for real-world intimacy. When moms and dads are more concerned with material gains and pleasure than spiritual growth and parenting, more interested in soccer wins and Ivy league admissions than kindness and empathy, it creates a crushing level of shallowness that is all encompassing on a societal scale. Add in the

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advent of internet dating and the hook-up culture, and we see why the phenomenon of false intimacy has been normalized across the culture, writ large.

On campus, says Stanley, young people can mistake expedience for intimacy and sink into despair when reality sets in. The experience is common: When someone eager for family and love meets another who shows promise for attachment and security, it is logical that they would jump for this without properly vetting the person on the other end.

Every so often, adds Stanley, these hook-ups lead to true love –when the people realize they have more in common than sex, and begin to share interests, hobbies, activities and thoughts.

Red Flags and Love Bombs

Some people, of course, are especially vulnerable to intensity masked as love and the emotional danger that ensues. Wendy Patrick, a criminal trial attorney and author of *[[ITAL When Bad Looks Good]]*, noticed some familiar patterns among women caught in abusive relationships: They had so badly wanted to find a partner that they overlooked overt red flags at the start, including three dark traits: Narcissism, characterized by self-admiration and grandiosity; Machiavellianism, a cold cynical attitude that includes using people for material gain or sex; and outright psychopathy or sociopathy, antisocial disorders marked by extreme lack of empathy and remorse. Yet despite the toxicity of this “dark triad,” the vulnerable among us

may allow themselves to be seduced, charmed, and fooled. “He will choose you, disarm you with his words, and control you with his presence. He will delight you with his wit and his plans. He will show you a good time, but you will always get the bill.” The quote, an oft-cited favorite of Canadian criminal psychologist Robert Hare, comes from an anonymous essay signed “A Psychopath in Prison.” Hare, author of *The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us*,] points to the calculated

take the test

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR FALSE INTIMACY?

How long do you wait before becoming exclusive with someone?

- a. Over two months (0 points)
- b. A month (2 points)
- c. That night (3 points)

Do you have several stable relationships with family and friends?

- a. Yes (0 points)
- b. No (5 points)

Describe your level of emotional neediness on a scale of 1-5.

Write the number _____.

Have you tolerated past abuse in any relationship?

- a. Yes (5 points)
- b. No (0 points)

Give the length of your most recent or current relationship?

- a. Less than 1 month (3 points)
- b. One year or greater (2 points)
- c. More than a year (0 points)

How much dishonesty and infidelity have you tolerated in your relationships?

- a. None (0 points)
- b. Some (1 point)
- c. A lot (3 points)

How highly do you rate being understood.

- a. Highly (0 points)
- b. Somewhat (1 point)
- c. Not at all (3 points)

Do you place a premium on finding partners with shared values across a range of areas, from finance to lifestyle?

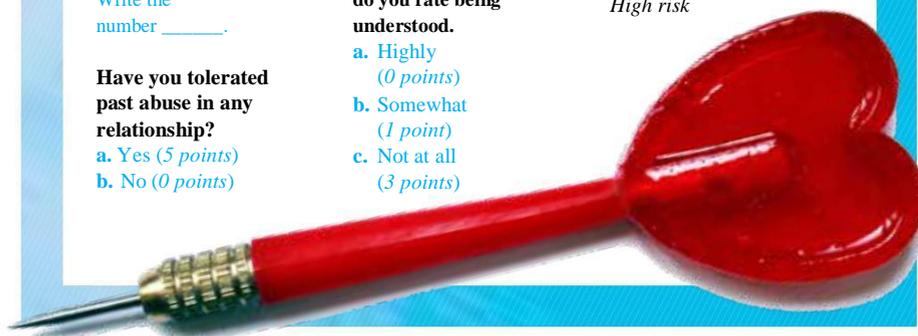
- a. Always (0 points)
- b. Usually (1 point)
- c. To a moderate degree (2 points)
- d. Rarely (3 points)

KEY

UP TO 15 POINTS:
Low risk for false intimacy

16-23 POINTS:
Moderate risk

23 POINTS OR MORE:
High risk



maneuvering sociopaths bring to each relationship. For them, every encounter is an opportunity to gain something, from material possessions to professional advantage to sex. When they are no longer sufficiently gaining benefit from their target, they decide it is time to move on.

Sociopaths and psychopaths lack true empathy, have an uncanny ability to project the image that best suits their ulterior motive and matches what the other person is looking for. Along with Hare, countless legal professionals

and mental health experts describe being taken in by the allure and manipulation of a sociopath. If seasoned expert legal and mental health professionals are at risk, then it follows that vulnerable, lonely people looking for relationships are even easier marks. “Something is wrong, but I just can’t put my finger on it” is how Hare describes the frequent sensation people feel when dealing with a sociopath. In intimate relationships, the sociopath has all the power and information and keeps the other person off-balance

and in the dark --for some people, and exciting state of affairs. If confronted about their behavior, the sociopath immediately shames the other person as paranoid, neurotic or insecure.

In her book, [ITAL: The Sociopath Next Door,] psychologist Martha Stout cautions that sociopaths are often narcissists, enhancing their need to charm, woo and discard. Narcissists need to cultivate admiration in others in order to feel alive, and accomplish this during early stages of a relationship by showering the target with

“love” –gifts, romantic phone calls, letters, and endless gestures communicating unyielding adoration. Psychologists call it “love bombing.”

Fighting Toxic Attachment

If you become the slightest bit susceptible to the psychopath's bait, it won't take long until you feel dependent on of the constant cadence of praise. Once that happens, it is only second nature to confide more of your hopes and dreams and day to day struggles and deepest fears to

your new prince or princess. It doesn't matter that this is only someone you have practically just met because what matters most here is that this is the safest person you know and anything you share will be met all the nurturing, love and kindness you could possibly conceive.

Now the first phase of the scam is in place, your sociopath can move into devaluing you. The devaluing phase is not typically physically abusive, though it can be. It often starts as some subtle gesture, like not returning a call until the next day or just acting aloof. One young woman reports that,

after being love-bombed endlessly by her professed boyfriend, he resorted to a casual carelessness for weeks and then started “confessing” his desire for other women she saw every day. Her roommate, he said, was his “cunnilingus fantasy,” and that new girl in their mutual calculus class –he could not stop the thoughts. Once the sociopath and narcissist has extracted the sex, the social connections or other material gain, they take pleasure in serving up pain. Eventually even that bores them, and they are in their way to someone new.

Donna Anderson, a counselor who now works with those who have survived a sociopath, married into this type of hell. At the age of 40, she met a man who seemed at once worldly, emotionally available, and extremely charismatic. “Montgomery” was a wolf in sheep's credibility- he had tons of military papers, photos with famous people and the material trappings of luxury and wealth. Anderson

was eager for marriage and family. It seemed she found her knight, but even early on there were inconsistencies in his story: After a therapist suggested he might be a sociopath, Anderson did her homework. Though he was cheating on her, he questioned her inquiries and called her paranoid. In the end, it turned out that the military papers were a scam, he'd been through a series of ex-wives, and the trappings of wealth were just that.

The Road Back

Anderson stresses a new chapter in her story. She is now happily married and

explains that “recovery from the broken trust is possible.” She channeled the experience of being conned by her ex-husband into a book, [[ITAL: Love Fraud]], and now teaches others how to recognize sociopaths from signs, including instant charm, desire for others to have pity on them, love bombing and lies, illegal activity, and lack of remorse.

Even those most at risk for seduction by sociopaths can find a road back. Rachel Resnick, has taken control over her life by having a relationship with herself, at last. This alone time involves honest, straight self-talk where she sets her sight on what she is feeling and why she is making the choices she does.

For those like Resnick who have been addicted to love, for the love junkies among us, a 12-step program can help them openly discuss their experience of getting chemically high off of a new relationship and diving in before really knowing who the person is. Group therapies

real deal

FIVE SIGNS OF LOVE

When you're being love-bombed, it's hard to separate authentic feeling from BS. Scott Stanley says that professions of love, exclamations about wanting to have your baby, and even cohabitation may not signal commitment. Instead, look at how your partner behaves. Here are 5 promising signs:

1

Your partner will change his or her schedule at times for you.

2

Your partner will do fun things that you know he or she does not like as much as you do.

3

Your partner shows up early to help you get ready for some big event.

4

Your partner stops what he or she is doing to tune into something that's stressing you.

5

Your partner puts your comfort first. Stanley recalls a scantily-clad young woman getting on a plane. Her partner protested her desire to put on something warmer because his image with her came first.



can help such individuals make better choices and cope with the feelings of isolation that have drawn them in. Her new life is hard work, Resnick says, but she gathers strength from knowing she is no longer at the mercy of her emotions and can maintain a healthy life if she continues to put the work in each day. The Twelve Steps teaches rigorous honesty and that includes acknowledging that being addicted to relationships will cost you in big ways," Resnick says. "Recovery" she says, "is a way of life".

Getting it Right

Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, an Israeli philosopher who writes about

both internet romance and the deepest levels of profound love, says investment of time is the primary ingredient for true closeness. "And true closeness leads to true happiness," he states. We must take time to take time, he notes.

David Snarch, the well-known sex therapist from Colorado, notes that intensity early in a relationship can cause us to get our signals crossed. We all have stories of first love, childhood trauma, and other experiences and life stories we trot out these life narratives every time we get to know someone new; it can feel like exchanging our tales of hurt, love and loss makes us

It's an inside job to maintain the insight that I was getting high off too much, too fast, intensity

close and truly known. After all, discussion with a total stranger can sometimes be freeing compared to the effort we must put into explaining complex feelings and events to those we know well. Fact of the matter is, after the first flush of intensity has passed and all those stories have been told, it is the ability to sustain a relationship day-to-day that makes us truly close.

The slow build-up to intimacy is hard work, often a

slog compared to the instant excitement of online dating and apps, which promise something new and better with each click and swipe – or the first heady weeks of a romance with someone we don't really know. The current dating culture barely gives you a chance to focus on one person before other tantalizing candidates come into view. This fits with the current mindset of "more, better, next," always being one step away, Ben-Ze'ev explains.

But that early rush fades. Instead, the more intimate the bond between two people, the more intimate the chemistry is as well. It takes time for meaning to develop. With true love, even a touch means a lot.

"It's an inside job to maintain the insight that I was getting high off of this too much, too fast intensity with another. This is the same level of rush as from a drug," Resnick explains. She stresses that when in the throes of intensity and loss of one's sense of self, always ask yourself, "what are you doing?" Authentic intimacy trumps a cheap fake every time.