

# How to Find Love

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The Sorrows of Love

How to  
Find Love

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II  
Why We Fall in  
Love With  
Particular People

It is tempting to describe our instinctive attractions to particular people as simply *mysterious*. It feels, as we put it tellingly, ‘Romantic’ not to analyse our feelings, and merely to follow their dictates with awe and abandon.

However, our feelings are not the mysterious yet intelligent lodestars we might wish them to be. They are, for the most part, plainly misleading. A sense of being in love with someone is seldom a prelude to long-term contentment. If we intend to get better at relationships, we must attempt to examine the calls of Romantic love rationally. This isn’t a question of abandoning instinct, but of improving upon it.

The most notable aspect of our instinct in love is its *particularity*. We aren’t capable of falling in love with just anyone; we are powerfully led by our ‘types’. We may reject many good candidates who, on paper, could sound perfect. We may not be able to explain much more about their inadequacies other than to say weakly that they didn’t ‘feel right’. Alternatively, we can be powerfully impelled towards other candidates, this time less clearly suitable, for reasons wholly beyond our conscious command. We are extremely, *fascinatingly choosy*.

Why, then, do we fall in love with particular people and not others? Why do we have the types we do? What guides our attractions? We can identify *three* components:

## 1 An instinct for completion

One of the most powerful forces within love is the Instinct for Completion. All of us are radically incomplete: we lack a range of *qualities* in our characters, psychological but also physical. We might be missing calm, creativity, practical know-how, wit, strength or sensitivity. It is as if, somewhere within us, we recognise this incompleteness and experience an attraction whenever we enter the orbit of someone who possesses a complementary quality. Through love, we seek to make good a defect and to complete ourselves.

As all of us have very different kinds of incompleteness, it stands to reason that we will find very different people attractive. Certain candidates will have qualities that leave us cold, because we have these in spades already: we may not need, for example, someone who is as calm as we are. Things would threaten to get dangerously quiet. We might need an injection of creativity and irreverence instead. Our tastes will be as varied as our deficiencies.

This mechanism of attraction in love is similar to the

mechanism of attraction we have around styles of architecture and design. When it comes to buildings and interiors, we also operate with an instinct for completion. The places we call ‘beautiful’ (like the people we call ‘attractive’) are often those that have qualities we want but don’t yet have enough of. Consider these two very different buildings (right). We are most likely to be drawn to one or the other on the basis of a quality we don’t feel we possess enough of in ourselves. People who feel a painful lack of exuberance, drama and extravagance, and are overwhelmed by drabness and sobriety might be drawn to Vienna’s Peterskirche. Those who feel an anxious lack of calm, coherence and serenity, and have too much chaos, activity and intensity, might feel moved by the simplicity of the St. Moritz Church in Augsburg.



Peterskirche, Vienna, 1733



Baptism Chapel, St. Moritz Church, Augsburg, 2008–2013

## 2

### The instinct for endorsement

There is a second instinct that drives us in love: the Instinct for Endorsement. We have many issues and feelings that we are lonely with, misunderstood for and that most people don't get or are uninterested in: perhaps we dislike certain people who are generally popular; maybe we are anxious about things that others are robust around; we might have sorrows that no one else seems to share, or we could have excitements and interests that carry no echo in others.

We might then be powerfully attracted to people who seem to understand the lonely aspects of us. We love them for their ability to endorse fragile, isolated, offbeat traits. They 'get' us, in contrast to the legions of the insensitive who cannot.

When we are finally with the ideal endorsing candidate, we feel engaged in a small conspiracy against the rest of the world. We don't have to explain very much about ourselves. They just *know*. They 'get' things *quickly*, without us having to speak. They *read our souls*, so we don't have to

spell out their contents in the normal, arduous way. Our love is a dividend of gratitude for their magical ability to understand.

Perhaps we really like doing jigsaw puzzles – an interest that our more intellectual friends scoff at. Or we have a sexual quirk that we have never dared to share with past partners. Or we have sympathy for a political figure that everyone else seems to despise. Or we really love but also feel suffocated by our mother, and that has always sounded odd to people. Or no one seems to understand and forgive us for just how stressed we get around administrative tasks. Or we used to love crawling under our bed when we were a child – and we still like that part of us but we don't find it easy to bring it into the open. All of this the ideal partner will – on their own – simply *know*.

The way we approach love as adults is highly shaped by how we experienced love as children.

### 3 The instinct for familiarity

The way we approach love as adults is highly shaped by how we experienced love as children. In adulthood we will be attracted to people who remind us – more or less unconsciously – of the people we loved as children. The idea seems unnerving because of a natural feeling of disgust around thinking of parental figures as sexual. But this is not the point. It isn't that we are attracted to people who are in every way like our parents. It's just that, with unnerving symmetry, some of the qualities we find most attractive in adults are those that were once manifest in our caregivers from childhood. The affection of our partners can end up tinged with a feeling of familiarity. In their arms, in an emotional sense, we come home.

And, without anyone giving the matter too much thought, they sweetly call us 'baby'.