

lowering her lids while trucking her chin slightly down, in an effort to bring him closer. After averting her gaze to the side, she will, within moments and almost without exception, put her hands on or near her mouth and giggle, lick her lips, or thrust out her chest while gazing at the object of her intended affection. And it's consistent, regardless of language, socioeconomic status, or religious upbringing. For men, says Rodgers, the fascination ritual is less submissive but no less standardized. A man will puff out his chest, jut his chin, arch his back, gesture with his hands and arms, and swagger in dominant motions to draw attention to his power (not unlike the way a male pigeon puffs his chest, or a male gorilla struts). Like a woman's flirtation, his motions advertise critical cues about his reproductive fitness.

Fascination. Flirtation.

Just as we're born to be fascinated by specific signals from potential mates, we're also born knowing how to fascinate potential mates as well. Flirtation is the most elemental of all fascinations, one of a handful of instinctive cues on which all life depends. No flirtation, no mating. No mating, no offspring. No offspring, no family, no passing of the genes, no species.

Fascination Is a Force of Attraction

This force of attraction heightens intellectual, emotional, and physical focus. Couples in the Saint Paul airport Marriott fall into this captivated grip, and you experience it, too. When you impulsively decide to see a certain movie, when you crave your favorite chocolate almond ice cream, or when you hit repeat on your iPad to hear that song one more time, you're experiencing a similar, if less intense, attraction.

Attraction doesn't have to make sense. In most cases, attraction is highly irrational. We generally don't decide to be fascinated any

more than we decide to be attracted to a certain person, because the root causes of our fascinations are hardwired into us long before we have any say in the matter.

Fascination takes many forms, but all tap into instinctive triggers, such as the need to hunt, to control, to feel secure, to nurture, and to be nurtured. Some fascinations last only a heartbeat, while others last beyond a sixty-first wedding anniversary. No matter how long it lasts or what behavior it motivates, or which trigger inspires it, every fascination binds with a singularly intense connection. We are, if only for a moment, utterly spellbound. Herein lies the power of fascination: it strips away our usual rational barriers, exposing our minds, leaving us vulnerable to influence, naked to persuasion.

Speaking of naked, let's check back in with our couples flirting in the Saint Paul airport Marriott lounge.

At the bar, a paralegal is progressing nicely through her flirtation with the service engineer from Sacramento. They're performing their steps in the mating dance with predictable precision. Yes, it's all a bit crazy. But if the notion that you're not in control of your flirtation seems crazy, take heart: you're not as crazy as you will be once you're infatuated.

The Mental Disorder Known as Infatuation

As things progress during flirtation, our neurochemistry rewards us with "infatuation." Fascination and infatuation both originate in the limbic area of the brain, the part that houses rage, ecstasy, sadness, sexual arousal, and the fight-or-flight response.

In his book *Love Sick: Love as a Mental Illness*, Frank Tallis writes that if we take the symptoms of falling in love and "check them against accepted diagnostic criteria for mental illness, we find that most 'lovers' qualify for diagnoses of obsession illness, depression or manic depression." Other symptoms