

The Imago

Susan Peabody

According to Harville Hendrix we are attracted to our Imago—what he calls our dream partner--an image of which we carry around in our brain.

The Imago is like a puzzle. As we are growing up, every time someone significant in our lives stimulates us it becomes a piece of the puzzle--a memory. Even with our parents this can be a sensual imprint, but not always.

The most common Imago is a composite of our parents' traits. Unfortunately our parents often lacked a healthy personality so this is what we look for when we grow up. Sometimes the Imago is based on an ideal person who is just the opposite of our dysfunctional parents, but because he is just perfect we go looking for the perfect partner and never find him.

At the end of adolescence, we are not really sure, the last piece of the puzzle is in place and we have a picture of our Imago.

Most love addicts go searching for the Imago with a vengeance. Normal people just wait for the Imago to come along, and build a successful happy life, including high self-esteem, in the meantime.

When normal people meet their Imago they are attracted and, sometimes, fall in love. Love Addicts go nuts. Everything is magnified.

Normal people eventually discover that their Imago needs a little bit to be desired, and seek out compatible people, assuming their Imago is not compatible.

On the other hand, love addicts get addicted to their Imago and pass up on others who might fulfill them in other ways besides the magic of passion.

My Imago was my father. He was an alcoholic. I was attracted to alcoholics, or at least taking care of them. When I got to AA, there were all these sober alcoholics and I was thrilled.

I saw my dad crying one day, and tried to cheer him up. So I was also attracted to weak men, and I wanted to help them.

My Imago is not just sexual. He is intelligent and well-spoken. Obama has the characteristics of my Imago.

In recovery, we must do an inventory of our Imago. Put the negative things we can't have on one side of the page, and the positive things we can keep on the other.

We must reconstruct our Imago.

The hard part is becoming attracted to our new Imago. This is difficult. It is like being told by the doctor that we can no longer eat sugar (give something up) and start eating our vegetables (adding something healthy) In time, we really do learn to love our veggies and we live happily ever after.

Attraction, what love addicts call love at first sight is not enough. Be patient and let the love grow.

I used to have a list of what I was looking for in a partner. It was all Imago stuff. I left out compatible and, most of all for me, AVAILABLE. I don't have a list anymore. It is in God's hands.