

How to Know If You're Truly 'In Love'

Today's young people have a hard time saying, "I love you" to their significant others. At least that's one of the conclusions Lisa Bonos draws in a recent [Washington Post article](#). As she explains, the rise of technology, the increase of options, and the anxiety of being 'perfectly sure' causes young adults to be slow pulling the trigger and expressing their true feelings.

Caution is good, but too much caution can be paralyzing. So how do we avoid this paralyzation? How do we know what true love looks like?

C.S. Lewis offers several profound insights in his book [The Four Loves](#), using the term "Eros" to refer to the romantic "state which we call 'being in love'...." These include:

1. Desire for Exclusivity

Forget polyamory. True love, writes Lewis, will not want to share the beloved with another lover:

If one who was first, in the deep and full sense, your Friend, is then gradually or suddenly revealed as also your lover you will certainly not want to share the Beloved's erotic love with any third.

2. Delight in the Lover's Friends

True love won't share with another lover, but it *will* happily spend time with those nearest and dearest to the beloved:

Nothing so enriches an erotic love as the discovery that the Beloved can deeply, truly and spontaneously enter into

Friendship with the Friends you already had: to feel that not only are we two united by erotic love but we three or four or five are all travelers on the same quest, have all a common vision."

3. Preoccupation

Continual thoughts of the object of one's affection are another sign of true love. But contrary to what many think, these thoughts are not sexually-laced:

Very often what comes first is simply a delighted pre-occupation with the Beloved – a general, unspecified pre-occupation with her in her totality. A man in this state really hasn't leisure to think of sex. He is too busy thinking of a person. The fact that she is a woman is far less important than the fact that she is herself. He is full of desire, but the desire may not be sexually toned. If you asked him what he wanted, the true reply would often be, "To go on thinking of her." He is love's contemplative.

4. Not a Scorekeeper

Reciprocity is huge in our society: you scratch my back, I scratch yours, and if you haven't scratched mine first, then don't bother asking for a favor. True love doesn't work like this, for, as Lewis notes, "[0]ne of the first things Eros does is to obliterate the distinction between giving and receiving."

5. A Sense of Humor

True love finds couples sharing a laugh with and at each other:

Eros, as well as Venus, is the subject of countless jokes.

And even when the circumstances of the two lovers are so tragic that no bystander could keep back his tears, they themselves – in want in hospital wards, on visitors' days in jail – will sometimes be surprised by a merriment which strikes the onlooker (but not them) as unbearably pathetic. Nothing is falser than the idea that mockery is necessarily hostile. Until they have a baby to laugh at, lovers are always laughing at each other.

6. Selfless

Love puts self second and the beloved first:

In one high bound it [falling in love] has overleaped the massive wall of our selfhood; it has made appetite itself altruistic, tossed personal happiness aside as a triviality and planted the interests of another in the centre of our being.

These signs of love are wonderful, and unless I miss my guess, most of us have experienced all of them at some point in time. The trick, however, is what we do with that love.

The brave individuals who experience these elements of Eros will take the leap and make the commitment to marriage. Unfortunately, it is after marriage that many will slip up on the recognition of whether they are truly in love, for according to Lewis, these feelings of love do not always continue:

Can we be in this selfless liberation for a lifetime? Hardly for a week. Between the best possible lovers this high condition is intermittent. ...

But these lapses will not destroy a marriage between two 'decent and sensible' people. The couple whose marriage will certainly be endangered by them, and possibly ruined, are those who have idolized Eros. ... They expected that mere

feeling would do for them, and permanently, all that was necessary. When this expectation is disappointed they throw the blame on Eros or, more usually, on their partners. In reality, however, Eros, having made his gigantic promise and shown you in glimpses what its performance would be like, has 'done his stuff.' He, like a godparent, makes the vows; it is we who must keep them. It is we who must labour to bring our daily life into even closer accord with what the glimpses have revealed. **We must do the works of Eros when Eros is not present. This all good lovers know...**

So, are you in love? If so, wonderful! Perhaps it's time to do something about it.

But when you do, make sure you determine in advance to be a "good lover" – one who continues to exhibit the attributes of true love... even when the euphoric feelings are no longer there.

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