

Falling In Love: How We Choose The Lovers We Choose

Ayala Malach Pines

Routledge (August 1999)

Unknown \$42.50 (304pp)

978-0-415-92046-9

Pinning down love's light wings and examining what makes them soar is what psychologist Pines does in her tenth book. Concentrating only on romantic love—"the hunting grounds of Eros"—and using results of both empirical and clinical research (her own and others?), Pines convincingly argues "that we fall in love neither by chance (n)or accident." The first part looks at how people fall in love by examining seven variables, such as, proximity, arousal, beauty, and character, and how different and often conflicting theories interpret the research.

The second and third parts of the book examine the why of love by drawing from clinical studies and taking a close look at "the role played by internal images and unconscious forces." A research appendix, endnotes and a substantive list of references are also included. Pines raises the bar for her readers by not only offering the usual "concrete tips for finding romantic love" without resorting to the language of psychobabble, but also by presenting lucid interpretations of the ideas of Freud, Kohut, Mahler and Reik to name just a few. Theodore Reik, she notes, believes people fall in love for selfish reasons, seeking in a lover what they feel is lacking in them.

By interpreting data through the lenses of evolutionary, social and psychoanalytic theories, along with criticisms of each, Pines challenges her readers to think about their romantic choices as having been shaped by forces both conscious and unconscious. She believes that since romantic love has replaced religion for many in today's world, its importance as a means of growth cannot be dismissed.

Each chapter offers informational gems of interest to people hoping to find love as well as to couples wishing to re-find it.

This would be a good primer for couples therapy. For example, women prefer dominant men over submissive men only if the former were also helpful and cooperative. Especially good is the chapter on arousal, "the elixir of love." Pines notes that people are more likely to fall in love after "an unusual and exciting experience that involves the use of...mystery, loneliness, or powerful emotion." She describes an experiment in which the number of telephone calls male participants made to an attractive female research assistant increased shortly after they were asked to cross a wobbly suspension bridge with a 230-foot drop.

Other noteworthy chapters concern the topics of falling in love as process, gender differences in love, and the internal romantic image, based upon similarities between one's partner and the opposite sex parent.

"Because falling in love is such a unique experience," Pines writes, "a definition... is never offered." Instead she provides a trenchant analysis of this most exciting, most significant experience without once diminishing its "divine madness."

(September / October 1999)

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