

The Three Phases Limerence (Being Madly in Love)

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When American psychologist Dr. Tennov introduced this concept in the 1970s, it was mostly rejected. Today, anthropologists, biologists, and sociologists study it now that there are ample qualitative and quantitative data to back up the claims. This concept is called limerence and it is a state of being “madly in love” to the point that it becomes obsessive and affects the way a person feels, acts, and thinks. It is powerful. It can be beautiful. It often is destructive.

Dr. Helen Fisher was involved in some of the important limerence research by conducting fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) tests on participants who claimed to be “madly in love.” While their brains were being scanned, assistants showed them random pictures as a baseline. There was no unusual brain activity.

Next, they were shown a picture of the person they claimed to be in love with and the brain lit up in all the right places. Limerence is not bad when two single people develop this for each other--this helps develop a relationship that could potentially lead to marriage. The limerence in this article however, is not referring to being madly in love with a spouse but rather madly in love with a lover.

Limerence during an affair can be of an emotional or sexual nature, or both simultaneously. Why might one feel the need to be in limerence with someone other than their spouse? Someone may have had bad past experiences and in reaction to those, may have a sense of abandonment; this may cause them to be very needy and always in search of love, admiration, and/or validation. Certain people are more vulnerable to limerence. A man or woman might begin to grow a special relationship with a co-worker, gym partner, or even friend's spouse; this could lead into something more, especially if they are feeling cared for emotionally and perhaps physically and that if that is not happening at home.

When there is reciprocity of communication, sharing feelings and emotions, and of physical touch, strong feelings will likely occur. When you start spending time with someone you are attracted to, in any way, you are setting your marriage up to fail. You know what you are doing and you are allowing yourself to be tempted.

People who leave their spouses because they are in limerence with someone else need to realize that it is highly unlikely, based on statistics, that they will end up with their lover forever...because limerence is temporary.

To learn about limerence more in depth and to be able to decide if you have a spouse who might be in limerence, or even you might, it is beneficial to understand the three stages of limerence and the characteristics of being in limerence.

Stages of Limerence

Scenario: You are having a sexual and emotional limerent affair with a co-worker.

Infatuation Stage: Feelings for your co-worker go up and down—you may even be second-guessing yourself while wondering if the feelings you have are real or not.

As the infatuation grows, you begin wanting to see this person very often, even outside of work, and think of nothing else.

You may begin hiding your interactions with them and making up excuses to your spouse as to why you are not home as often.

At that point—you have already crossed a boundary in your marriage.

Eventually, the infatuation gets out of hand and your behaviours begin to be sneaky and secretive.

Crystallization Stage: In this stage, you try to diminish or enhance certain aspects of your limerence relationship.

The negatives about the limerent object (your co-worker and lover) become invisible, which is called 'the halo effect.'

Euphoria and misery can occur as well as intrusive thinking and emotional dependency.

You may try to vilify your spouse or try to rewrite history by telling your new lover untrue and negative things about your spouse.

Deterioration Stage: Things begin to fall apart—you start to lose the halo effect and interest in this person.

Things don't seem as perfect any longer.

The “honeymoon” is over.

Common Characteristics of Being in Limerence

1. The limerent (your spouse) sets the limerent object (the other man or woman) apart from the rest. Limerence can only work for one person at a time.
2. The ‘halo effect’— everything associated with that person becomes special.
3. The limerence life becomes crazy from a physical and emotional point of view. Those involved can experience euphoria, insomnia, mood swings, and/or rapid heart beats. This is like being on an emotional rollercoaster; there can be an increase in dopamine (ecstasy chemical) and decrease in serotonin (helps calm you down).
4. In times of adversity, the limerent can feel even more of an attraction to the limerent object. **For example, if they both get caught together.** Or adversity can jar them into waking up...but the former is more common, unfortunately.
5. The limerent may obsessively think about the limerent object up to 85% of the waking day, according to researchers; this is called intrusive thinking.
6. Emotional dependency can occur including fear of rejection, possessiveness, jealousy, and separation anxiety.
7. The limerent feels a deep longing for an emotional connection and affirmation.
8. Powerful sense of empathy for the limerent object and willing to sacrifice for them.
9. The limerent tends to reorder their priorities, habits, or beliefs and values to try to become more attractive for the limerent object.
10. The limerent feels a strong desire for sex with the limerent object, which results in possessiveness and jealousy of others.
11. The limerent wants an emotional connection more strongly than the sexual connection.
12. The limerent feels s/he cannot control their emotions and passion.
13. Limerence is not permanent and eventually subsides.

If you know someone in limerence, especially your own spouse, keep in mind that the state of being in limerence is always temporary.

Limerence can last anywhere from 3 to 48 months on average—based on research. Remember- it has to end. The characteristics of being in that state of mind are just too extreme for someone to live like that for such a lengthy amount of time.

If your plan is to confront your spouse and/or give him or her an ultimatum, know that anyone trying to keep your spouse and his or her limerent object away from each other can be perceived as the enemy. After waiting as long as you can stand it, and nothing has subsided, an intervention of sorts may be needed if you plan on staying with your spouse that is. There is hope, you just need to have patience and complete love for your spouse.