

# A Couples Line of Development

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### Abstract

A couples line of development is proposed from an integral perspective. The couples line specifies developmental stages, tasks for each stage and describes cultural messages that impede development. It reveals the nature and effects of an integral concept called a pre/trans fallacy, unique to early intimate relationships, and how this often results in arrested development at the second and third stages. It locates the efforts of therapists who provide conjoint therapy, identifies developmentally targeted skill training, while providing both couples and therapist much needed direction for future growth. It also locates lower right (LR) quadrant structures that provide “rules for the road”, thus increasing stability and promoting couple progression. The couples line of development recognizes the need to deconstruct lower left (LL) quadrant cultural messages that are misleading and inhibitory to greater intimacy. Finally, preliminary empirical verification of the pre/trans fallacy was attempted.

Imagine you are sick and you have this wonderful neighbor who went to the drug store to get medicine for you. They also cooked your lunch, did a few loads of laundry, fed your children and vacuumed your house. Wouldn't most of us feel *what a great neighbor!* Our level of appreciation and resolve to reciprocate, once we were feeling better, would be enduring and enormous.

Now think of your intimate partner and note the similarities in effort made day-after-day to build a life with you. Is the appreciation and gratitude felt toward your partner anywhere near the level it would be for the hypothetical “great neighbor”?

Many therapists who have provided couples counseling have likely observed that the average couple can do 85% of their interactions well, yet the less than perfect 15% becomes a disproportionate focus of their concern and negative feelings about their relationship. What is it that interferes with our feelings of gratitude so easily felt for our “great neighbor”? I will propose that this proclivity toward disenchantment in part, stems from a collective expectation of love that is highly erotic and lacking empathy. Why? Because too many of us are looking backward in a futile attempt to resume the earliest stage of romantic love. A love we chronically long for and one that entraps our gaze in the wrong direction. New love has the ability to do this. New love is, admittedly, a wonderful experience. A love where the intoxicating feeling lasts for hours rather than minutes. A love that envelopes us and permeates our thoughts throughout the day. A love felt at a visceral level. A love we never want to relinquish and hope to keep burning. A love that is free from the extinguishing dose of reality that arrives with more time (Bonds-Raacke, et al., 2001). A love that can only exist in the earliest stages of intimacy, prior to our eviction from the Garden of Eden after we have eaten from the tree of knowledge. To further our understanding of the entrapping power of this stage and to prevent its inhibitory influence, we need to consider the pre/trans fallacy's (Wilber, 2000) ubiquitous cultural message and the impact upon the intimate relationship.

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## **Pre/Trans Fallacy**

A pre/trans fallacy is the *mistaken interpretation* that a behavior, motive, or understanding originates from a higher stage of development than it has. The pre/trans fallacy has been described in integral theory by Ken Wilber (2000a). Wilber frequently cites narcissistic baby boomers with authority issues, who were nevertheless proclaiming peace, love and harmony, as an example of an individual or group operating under the erroneous conclusions of a pre/trans fallacy. He also offers as example religious fanatics (proclaiming a message of love while often judging) and the disastrous German nationalism of the 1930's (catastrophically believing they were building a greater society) as fallacious pre-transcendent thinking. Wilber (2000a) ominously warns that a pre/trans fallacy occurs when one *confuses emotional enthusiasm fired by bodily sensations with the much more developed capacities of empathy and understanding*. This article proposes that a similar failure to achieve empathy and understanding for many couples is impeding development and has other negative consequences at an individual and societal level.

A five stage model for a couples line of development is shown in Figure 1. It hypothesizes a pernicious pre/trans fallacy (ptf2, elevationism) originating from the predominant cultural values of the LL quadrant, adversely affecting the intimate relationship and inhibiting couple development. Unchallenged it undermines couple satisfaction, dyadic stability and consequently, the family. Popular culture drives these fantasies and we are gorged in the erroneous suggestion of the sustainability of early romance. Unmistakable and unrelenting LL messages in advertising, movies, romance novels, fashion styles, plastic surgery and a highly eroticized and romanticized interpretation of relationships perpetuates the mistaken expectation. The cultural message leads one to believe that we can remain in the garden of early love, the admittedly wonderful “subjective feelings heavily influenced by the sensory body” (Wilber, 2001). Other lines of development inform us that this experience is not “sustainable...or recoverable” (Wilber, 2006). The result is countless couples unconsciously looking back, in the wrong direction, in a futile attempt to recapture this experience. What is the cost of this societal fixation with this stage of love, one might ask? A black hole that effectively freezes progress for most couples, at either the *Roles* or *Relational* stage of development while love stagnates or withers. Couples do not know where to look for the rich state experience in intimacy nor do they have a direction. By looking back to recapture what has passed rather than looking forward to what can be realized, many couples fail to reach the fourth stage, *First Love*.

## **Stage One: Safety & Attraction**

The name of this stage captures two of the most important prerequisites to get a relationship going. This is an intoxicating trancelike experience that serves to bond couples, potentially into life-long units with an evolutionary imperative to bring-forth the next generation. The chemistry combines with idyllic hope (and many other positive qualities) to prepare a couple to undertake the changes and the passage of time. If the bond developed early on is strong enough, and the couple sufficiently mature, they will survive reality's damage to the dream. New love is defined by a dreamlike pre/trans fallacy that is installed at the lowest stage on the couples line of development. It is at the earliest stages of *Safety & Attraction* where this fallacy begins. Nevertheless, despite the initial positive experiences and qualities, there is a huge eros

consuming black hole at the center of this stage that threatens the intimate couple with permanent residency in a *purgatory of hope* (Habib, 2004).

The fantasies that are frequently experienced as a result of the LL fallacy include unrealistic romanticizing, typically by women, and excessive sexualizing typically by men (Farrell, 1986). Commercially successful romantic movies contain various depictions of these fantasies and

often end with the couple basking in the glow of a new love, the first stage, *Safety & Attraction*. They preserve each sex's fantasy and seemingly imply it's sustainable and they'll live happily-ever-after. The suggestion is that the highest stage of couple development has been achieved at the very beginning of the relationship and by merely meeting the right person. Similarly, many men maintain a highly erotic view of women. The object of this fantasy was recognized in ancient Greece in the form of Aphrodite. It is my clinical experience when this erotic view of women is reality tested and deconstructed in therapy with a man, depression emerges, feelings of deception are verbalized and the loss of the fantasy is acutely mourned. Once a man completes this process however, they are able to reintegrate their sexuality and feelings of love into their relationship more fully with their significant other. When and if the men's movement ever widely begins, these erotized and objectified views of women are likely a substantial portion of the emotional work to be addressed. Kenneth Clatterbaugh (2000) noted the inability of the men's movement to gain traction and said it was in "serious decline" and "weakened by sectarian battles...and only continues to exist in academic departments." I suspect there is still powerful unconscious resistance to give up the respective fantasies held by both genders. These early relationship dynamics are tenaciously clung to and heavily embedded in many aspects of our social milieu. Without an effective challenge to the disorienting power of these LL fantasies including the pre/trans fallacy occupying the lower three stages, couples have not been able to raise their gaze and identify an alternate direction in which the love between two more fully realized and embodied individuals resides.

<b>Couples Line of Development</b>	
Universal /Transpersonal	<b>Spiritual</b> Non Dual Transparency Beloved
Construct Aware /Strategist	<b>First Love</b> Acceptance Focus on Good Contentment & Grateful
Pluralist /Achiever	<b>Relational</b> Flexible Roles Communication Exchange
Expert /Conformist /Rule Oriented	<b>Roles</b> Husband/Father Wife/Mother
Ego Centric /Impulsive	<b>Safety &amp; Attraction</b> Sensation/Sexual Emotion & Projection Pre/trans fallacy (expulsion from garden of eden)
(O'Fallon, 2010)	<b>Figure 1</b>

Figure 1 outlines the proposed stages of couples development alongside Terri O'Fallon's (2010)

individual stages of development. Some of the experiences and challenges associated with O'Fallon's individual stages are translated into the couple experience, from the impulsive stage to the construct aware stage. Other issues unique to the intimate dyad, such as the pre/trans fallacy and other developmental task are included in each stage description.

As with any line of development, no stage can be skipped, levels unfold sequentially, and previous stages are accessed and available to those at higher stages, such as when reverting to a simple role assignment. This article is an ongoing effort to identify and empirically verify a proposed line of development <sup>1</sup> unique to couples, emerging from the LL quadrant. <sup>2</sup>

## **Stage Two: Roles Stage**

As mentioned, the reality of our partner's humanity, *for better and for worse*, ejects all of us from the glowing feelings associated with *Safety & Attraction*. This is a challenging transition for couples frequently accounting for the end of most relationships especially for those early in the dating process. That is, a person chooses flight rather than accepting the limitations of the roles stage. Tolerance for the limitations of this second stage is acquired with the accumulation of experience which increases perspective despite the incongruences set-up by the fantasies. As previously said the initial attraction during the relatively brief stage of *Safety & Attraction* (heavily influenced by bodily sensations and chemistry) and the decision to come together as an intimate couple is often swift and impulsive.

At the *Roles Stage*, conflict is inevitable since the relationship is based upon a rudimentary perspective of the partner resulting in a compromised evaluation of their needs and perspectives (O'Fallon, 2010). Inevitably there are predictable ruptures in connection (Hendrix, 2001). The interpretation of this diminishment of love is heavily influenced by each participant's unrealized idealization and projected shadow. Although substantial feelings of love frequently persist the perception of one's partner is becoming less idealized along with an inevitable cooling of the state experience felt in the first stage *Safety & Attraction*.

There is little anticipation or support in the culture to prepare us for this transition from *Safety & Attraction* to the *Roles Stage* nor to assist us in moving into any stage. This is missed opportunity to promote couple development sans a couples line of development making it all the more difficult. All of this unfolds within a cultural mythology suggesting the sensation loaded love associated with the *Safety & Attraction* stage are sustainable. Doubt and fear that a mistake has been made selecting a partner is a persistent fantasy as is the mistaken belief that other people get to live with the intensity of the *Safety & Attraction Stage*. This is needless pain and confusion that could be replaced by a recognition and anticipation of the transition from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> couple stages. Prepared or not, the reality of one's spouse's imperfections combine with our own limitations, all functioning to end the idealized, wonderful trance of the *Safety & Attraction Stage*. This ushers in the *Roles Stage*.

As the couple's center of gravity moves into the *Roles Stage*, often within in a matter of months, many, but not all, are aware of the loss of some of the potency of the early idealized love. Couples can now see differences in their partner and the limits of their unity is becoming apparent. The focus increasingly becomes the development of needed complimentary roles such as boyfriend/girlfriend, wife/husband, mother/father, leader/supporter. The couple may initially adopt traditional rules and patterns. The felt interior "we" is still very preliminary and undeveloped. Desires are strong and when conflicting needs arise they are negotiated without the established problem-solving patterns achieved in the *Relational Stage*. In the *Roles Stage* those early powerful positive feelings associated with the before mentioned pre/trans fantasy return for briefer periods and seem re-attainable. This loss of intensity raises doubt and anxiety all the while the couple does the considerable work to establish the LR dyadic operating patterns.

If the couple survives the transition through the early *Roles Stage* they begin to stand back and evaluate their desires and behaviors and make some of the needed adjustments. The quality of their evaluations of self and partner improve although the distortion rate or inaccuracy of interpretation is still quite high. On the positive side there are shared and maturing feelings of the subtler aspects of love. These feelings can revolve around shared goals, comfortable familiarity and eventually, devotion to their children if they have them. *The Roles Stage* was the highest level of intimate dyadic evolution for countless millennia. In the latter *Role Stage* the couple is beginning to separate out cultural messages from their early joint perspective. Friends and families are integrated into their relationship. The rate of change is rapid at this stage and can feel chaotic and consuming.

There indeed are many couples who will be content with a state (feeling) experience associated with having a partner, a roof over their head and food to eat, all available at this stage. The *Roles Stage* was heavily challenged in the mid-sixties coinciding with post-modernity. Subsequently, many sought to build a relationship with more capabilities and flexibility that was the advent of the *Relational Stage*. The seasoned couple at either stage is not over-reacting to the loss they feel in the diminishment of romantic love associated with the *Safety & Attraction Stage*. Masters (2012) has suggested they are exposing, facing, and directly working with whatever is immature within. Aspects of the UL such as each member's developmental history concurrently impacts upon the couple's success. The less healthy couple is much more prone to "anxious reactivity" (Lerner, 2013). Either must cope with a clear diminishment of the previously known intensity as they carry out the tasks to feed, clothe, and house their family. In the latter part of this stage the independence of each partner continues to emerge which will later serve as a source of renewal as two people move between separation and communion.<sup>3</sup> A potentially deleterious impact of too much independence at this stage results in the imposition of rigid role patterns by the partners that will later manifest as conflict. These can include a mother/son or father/daughter pattern reflecting the couple's failure to develop the trust associated with more vulnerability and mutual exposure of need. At the latter part of this stage these partners can experience problems prioritizing needs especially if children are present. Finally, there is a strong tendency to blame one's partner when interactions fail. The ability to look at the relationship objectively has not emerged at this stage which feeds distorted interpretations fueling conflict or withdrawal.

### **Stage Three-Relational Stage**

Once they achieve stability at the *Roles Stage* and enough time has passed so that relational processes and structures have been successfully worked-out their center of gravity has reached the *Relational Stage*. These accomplishments would include balance associated with giving and taking, problem solving that is dependent upon calming UR physiology, boundaries establishing when to approach and when to be separate and various role issues. It is reasonable to assume that the achievement of this stage also correlates with positive developmental experiences in each partners background such as the absence of divorce (Amato and Keith, 1991) or the deleterious effects of being raised by a single parent (Amato and Kane, 2011). As expected each individual's earlier years adjustment to childhood (Sturge-Apple, Davies & Cummings, 2006, Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001) and later, as adults in marriage (Dinero, et. al., 2011; Amato & Both, 2001; Conger, et al., 2000; Caspi & Elder, 1988) correlates with success in marriage and furthers the likelihood of progress along the proposed couple's line of development.

At the *Relational Stage* the couple has successfully laid down interactional patterns in how they relate to each other, which includes intimacy, problem solving, tasks assignments, alternating leadership, reciprocal regression and more. They also have established, or are in the process of establishing, how they parent and engage family and friends. Problem solving actually accomplishes a positive outcome at a modest frequency. As mentioned this is dependent upon entering conflict while firmly regulating intensity. Reciprocity is practiced. Flexibility allows adaptation and creativity. The couple is beginning to work together at a functional level and they are able to accommodate the regressive needs and sensitivities unique to the intimate dyad. The development of these complimentary patterns to accommodate regressive needs is of critical importance to mastering this stage (Habib, 2014). Individuality is not in as much conflict with partnering as seen at the *Roles Stage*. In this stage reprioritization of self and others takes place which more centrally includes one's partner. The existence of a strong self is necessary to maintain the dynamic process of separation and communion. Strong individuality also means powerful needs and development can take place outside of the couple's relationship; an anxiety producing awareness most couples will not attempt to process until the latter stage of *First Love*. At the relational stage they are open to reinterpretations of their partner's motives although the use of projection strongly persists. There is a shared narrative about their relationship. Problem solving skills increasingly open the couple to new information and perspectives on their relationship. Introspection and reflection by each person contributes to this process. The couple enjoys the tranquility of reliable and predictable patterns while minimizing unproductive conflict. In the later part of this stage, awareness of subtle energies by both members emerges with their ability to achieve fourth person perspectives.

Nevertheless, at the relational stage they still live *without* a fully developed empathic appreciation of how much their partner does and who their partner is. Their respective gaze is still backward, all fed by the LL cultural messages. They are yet to mourn the not so distant pre/trans fantasy and the intensity and frequency of romance their relationship used to have. This gaze backwards continues to diminish their appreciation of their partner and thus both of their state experiences in the present. It isn't until their respective drives for authenticity emerges (O'Fallon, 2010) the couple fully rejects the ubiquitously held pre/trans fallacy of early love. This signals the couple's closeness to enter the stage called *First Love*.

Much of couple's therapy begins in the *Roles Stage* and an effort is made to move the couple along to the *Relational Stage*. Understandably, couples in the *Safety & Attraction Stage* do not typically seek therapy. If a couple achieves the *Relational Stage* through therapy this is often a satisfactory outcome for most couples and the highest stage most couples will attain. This level of connection, however, is "...a betrayal of potential for each individual for the sake of the safety and comfort provided by their relationship" (Masters, 2012). It is due to "...over-attachment to autonomy and their aversion to deep connectedness" yet to be surrendered, Masters states. This widely held fear of over exposure and vulnerability perhaps accounts for the use of deception rather than honesty noted by Bader et al. (2000) and frequently observed by couple's therapist.

My use of eye gazing procedures during shared poignant moments to develop *First Love* experiences reveals the over exposure and vulnerability cited by Masters and Bader.

Collectively, it takes time to grow. Awareness and the pursuit of the *Relational Stage* of development was only more widely adopted in the late 1960's with the onset of feminism and evolutionary expansion into green levels of conceptualizations (Beck and Cowan, 2005). Consequently, there are relatively very few couples at the next stage, *First Love*. It takes two awakened people to sustain *First Love*....one is not enough<sup>4</sup>. Sudden illness, loss, or extended separation can lead to a temporary state experience of *First Love* without rejection of the pre/trans fallacy. The death of a spouse in a relationship that has achieved the *Relational Stage* can permanently elevate the experience to *First Love* for the surviving member. For most however, once life returns to normal the couple will find it's not sustainable. The center of gravity for most couples who are doing quite well is within the *Roles* or *Relational* stages often with an unspoken disappointment for the dearth of loving feelings and unnecessary doubt found within these narrow confines. By taking an all quadrant approach, especially one that includes challenges to the ubiquitous pre/transcendent fallacy and other cultural messages in the lower left quadrant while defining the structural patterns and rules of the lower right, it becomes possible to refocus and elevate some couples to the centauric level of *First Love*.

The widely held cultural belief that love is "finding the right person" is due in part to the ineffective challenges to LL cultural messages which impede couple's in their development. This culturally saturated misinformation must be replaced with the awareness that love is created by two individuals with presence, unencumbered by idealized projections. Love must be recognized as an emergent that is only sustained in an evolutionary process by two unique selves (Gafni, 2012) showing-up and choosing to dance on the fluid edge of discovery and creativity. Love is not so much a quality of the relationship, Marc Gafni tells us, as a quality of the presence of two individuals. When this is realized we have achieved *First Love*. The experience of who our spouse now can finally have similarities to that of our "great neighbor".

### **Stage Four-First Love**

The fourth stage is given the term *First Love* because you are actually more fully in love with the person by diminishing projection and by readjusting how you relate to the ideal in general. Finally free from the powerfully ubiquitous and disorienting beacon beginning in *Safety & Attraction* love, the *First Love* couple is now more fully committed, and thus able to appreciate

and love the person who is actually before them. Unencumbered from mistaken expectations, this couple does not spend as much time working on issues arising from unrecognized shadow and the subsequent misinterpretations that exhaust resources and lead to fruitless destinations. Less burdened by the enormous distortions that uniquely characterize the intimate relationship,<sup>5</sup> they are beginning to keep space open for alternate interpretations of their spouses' motivations behind any event. This space allows for a more accurate interpretation and understanding of their spouse. Consequently, they handle ambiguity or Hendrix's ruptures in connection without panic that is often manifested as anger, withdrawal, or contraction in less developed couples. In effect, they are responding less to their projections and more to the immediate presence of their partner who is attempting to communicate. These are the words that go painfully unheard among couples at the *Roles* or *Relational Stages* of development.

Couples at first love finally feel heard and understood. Subsequently, this couple reacts much less chaotically to irritations, disappointments and temporary emotional unavailability. The process of communication is agreed upon and employed. The process of how they connect does not need to be developed while working through content...painfully confounded at earlier stages. They employ LR rules of the road (Habib, 2014) especially concerning give-and-take and boundaries. Aware of the all-important difference between content and process, this 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective does not allow an emotionally charged interchange to overwhelm finite emotional resources. Knowledge of each other and oneself is cumulative and available for future interpretations that are consequently, increasingly less distorted.

At the stage of *First Love* this couple can integrate or loop back into aspects of the *Roles Stage* in their current process without fear of losing themselves or their identity. This can be seen in assigned duties where they can temporarily work in a hierarchical and complementary configurations. This helps avoid conflict other less developed couples would experience. In their sexual relationship, where maintaining the polarity between the masculine and the feminine (Deida, 1995) is combined with aspects of power (Schnarch, 2009), the couple is able to maintain a vibrant sexual encounter. David Deida describes how the healthy masculine can open up a woman into her full femininity. A man in a relationship at the lower *Relational Stage* of development for example, occasionally moves too far and too quickly away from his power learned at the *Roles Stage* of development. Rather than bringing forth power and including "equality is...often overvalued so that differences tend to get flattened, marginalized or drained of vitality" (Masters, 2012). In this instance we are referring to Deida's masculine and feminine polarity. The diminishment of male power in the *Relational Stage* I have found sometimes correlates with problems in sexual attraction and performance. It appears that in an effort to become more mutual and equal, the man rejects and thus fails to integrate masculine power to the detriment of himself and his lover. Transcending without including masculine energy precludes a fully charged dyadic sexual polarity, David Deida and David Schnarch independently concluded.

At the stage of *First Love* there is a fully mourned and emphatic acceptance that the love of the *Safety & Attraction Stage* can never be exclusively sustained. The couple live with a readily available awareness of their partner's efforts and dedication. Many day-in and day-out behaviors are recognized and completed as a declaration of love. The focus is upon the present, and the



loss of that fleeting interlude with attraction love is finally accepted. Nothing was really lost...only an illusion. At this stage they are actively choosing to feel grateful, and this feeling grows in frequency. Similar to individual cognitive discipline through mindfulness practices, the couple tap the abundance of contentment that is most always available. They are not heavily distracted by the images or recollection of new love that was never sustainable. Their gaze is finally in the direction of their partner rather than toward the false images widely present in popular culture. This mindful discipline clears room for an experience of loving appreciation and acceptance.

Dangers of the later stages of *First Love* include possibilities of love outside of the couple union and a transparency that makes it difficult to ignore. Gafni (2015) has speculated that monogamous love may no longer be possible. The transparency in joint witnessing and awareness threatens fidelity and no solution may be immediately apparent. Furthermore, old interpretations of the relationship may no longer seem adequate and doubt may rise when both partners have construct awareness (O'Fallon, 2010). This can make communication difficult at times. Absorption into concrete duties can help while acknowledging and accepting the confusion.

### **Stage Five-The Spiritual Stage**

The *Spiritual Level* of love, the highest stage this writer can envision, is rarified ground attained by very few. It only becomes visible after we fully turn our gaze away from *Safety & Attraction* and have achieved a center of gravity at *First Love*. Prerequisites for this stage is that both members of the dyad have completed large amounts of individual and couple growth work and each one can open into second tier space<sup>6</sup>. In other words, they have grown-up, cleaned –up, and woken-up all contributing to fully showing-up. At *Spiritual Love* the relationship is easily capable of transparency. Because of this availability interpretations are empathic and increasingly accurate. There is a strong “clear and empowered authenticity” (Ramirez, et al., 2013) contributing to the stability. Each person has familiarity with the nuances of their inner world and are beyond feeling ashamed or defensive. There is the simultaneous capacity for “Unitive Diversity” characterized by “heart felt presence, authentic compassion...and extreme facile engaging with others” (Kiehl, 2018) despite differences. This couple is in an ongoing narrative that recognizes influences uniquely generated by their respective developmental histories. There are useful re-occurring patterns and they clean-up those which inhibit presence. This interchange reshapes and positively influences remnants of earlier identities in a downward, dynamic, healing process (Forman, 2010). The narrative is continually supplemented via an evolutionary dialectic (McIntosh, 2015) and rarely derailed by defensive road blocks inhibiting this exploration in earlier stages. New uncovering’s are sought by both members of the dyad and received as the gift they always have been.

The ease of the narrative is supported by well-established LR<sup>7</sup> interactional patterns capable of mediating intimacy, regression, cooperation, problem solving and disappointment at the *Spiritual* level. These well-developed LR interactional patterns are capable of transmuting powerful regressions that challenge all previous stages. When archaic issues or patterns surface such as

encapsulated identities (Noam, 1988; cf. Forman, 2010) they are responded to and soothed into recognizable patterns in the present. Feedback, divergent opinions and desires are received without disruption or chaos. Both members are aware of dyadic ambiance and their words are chosen to preserve it. The inauthentic nature of anger is recognized and rarely relied upon to convey complex or sensitive feelings. Partner or interactional deficiencies are neither catastrophized or allowed to stagnate as a source of hurt or rupture. Deficiencies are expected and noted. Time is carefully applied for reflection, decision making and for the emergence and integration of that held as shadow. This couple is aware of the steady flow of cultural influences which are held outside of them unless they decide it works for them. The process of relationship evolution is expected and viewed as an ongoing expansion of the “We”.

When this couple’s love peaks, they are using intuition and other subtle energies for exploration or to heighten presence. Both members of the dyad are simultaneously opening space into an area greater than either could do alone. Choices are woven into patterns that serve the couple in ways that were previously unrealized. The couple can co-create intuitive bursts of insight and revelations. This couple may make radical changes in where and how they live. Convention may be ignored to the dismay of others. There are consistent experiences of spirituality and occasional altered states, jointly witnessed cognitions, and morally guided concern for self and partner (Forman, 2010). They do not always need to nor can they verbalize what’s felt and witnessed. These are universal and illuminated experiences (Ramirez et al. 2013) jointly held as they creatively advance into novelty (Whitehead c.f. Gafni, 2012). They move through never ending areas of exploration, as cosmic tourist, curtailed only by their finite energy. The non-dual periods of their connection allow them to experience the “One”, to sample the *One Taste* (Wilber, 2000b). The experience is of the beloved, the soul level of development.

## **Conclusion**

A couple’s line provides a directional developmental trajectory and the map to assess essential dynamics of intimate dyadic stage development. Without a developmental model the professional counselors and theorists have been limited to teaching or researching skills associated with static assessments of the couple rather than sequential dyadic development. Communications training, problem solving, and the quality of connection are prescribed irrespective of critically focused developmental diagnostics that locate specific challenges a couple is encountering. This article has described the inhibitory developmental influence of the pre/trans fallacy in the early stages of a couple’s relationship. It has deliberately chosen this pre/trans fallacy and has emphasized the central inhibitory role it plays in the progression of a couple’s development. We have touched upon LL<sup>8</sup> messages that need to be reconciled and have mentioned LR structures that support successful dyadic process. It is important that the professional counselor (and other people in a position to influence) challenge the myriad of cultural messages that sustain the pre/trans cultural fallacy and help the couple to become aware of the significant role they play in the arrested development of intimacy. Furthermore, much of the empirical research in the couple’s literature has no unifying framework other than a single theoretical silo that cannot easily incorporate the findings from other theoretical perspectives. The quadrants in integral theory provide this meta framework. A couples line of development in

conjunction with the factors associated with each quadrant identifies the stage and necessary task of each relationship. Integrals organizing meta perspective has been successfully applied to business, education, medicine, environmental studies, diplomacy and more, all using a common language.

An awareness of the juxtaposition of this pre/trans fallacy to the stage of *First Love* might enable the clinician to help the couple reconcile what will be felt as a loss of their respective pre-transcendent fantasies and to reorient their efforts toward appreciation and acceptance that dyadic commitment deserves. I am finding (during moments of calm or exhaustion) that incorporating the eye contact exercises for couples who's center of gravity is still at the *Roles Stage* helps to momentarily shift their gaze from the past and seemingly accelerates their growth toward *First Love*.<sup>9</sup> Couples are hungry for more and need a path to higher stages of development. After mourning and honoring their pre-transcendent ideals, the passageway is clear for movement along the couple's line of development and to discover the direction in which *First Love* resides. For men, Aphrodite becomes somewhat more like Athena and for women, the vision moves from Adonis to Apollo. Guided by the couple line and the impact the four quadrants have upon its development...couples increasingly experience contentment and deep appreciation for their spouse...finally relieved from the pursuit of Eden.

## **Research Questions & Directions**

The role and existence of the romantic pre/trans fallacy, central to this proposed couples line of development, is a new concept in the couple's literature with no empirical corroboration. Prior to this 2018 paper revision we (Habib and Baser, 2017) designed an emotional Stroop study to ascertain if there is a delay in response time (RT) when women (n=248) were presented with romantic cues that suggest that this fallacy is active. In this investigation we employed a dual task attention paradigm, the emotional Stroop task, to assess prolonged attention to subliminal words associated with this romantic pre-transcendent fallacy. The study was an unbalanced 2x3 design. The initial independent variable (IV) with two levels was a romantic and nonromantic short videos presented to half of the subjects as part of the study instructions. The other IV with three levels is 3 categories of words (lexically balanced, Balota, et al. 2007) that were presented subliminally prior to a Stroop test. The 3 word levels were *romantic words* (adore, hot), *words that describe people but without romance or physical attraction* (smart, consistent) and finally, *neutral words* (door, sidewalk). Both interaction and main effects were hypothesized. A log-transforming data analyses was utilized. The hypothesized effect was *not* supported at any level. This may reflect that the hypothesis has no validity or that there is no emotional Stroop effect with positive words.

Numerous studies had suggested that when attention is drawn to negative words, subjects experience cognitive intrusion impairing performance on these emotional Stroop task. This has been demonstrated, for example, when the emotional concerns involve anxiety including panic disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (Williams et al., 1996, Matthews and Klug, 1993),

sexual abuse (Freeman and Beck, 2000), and depression (Joormann and Gotlib, 2007). Specifically, there is a significant delay in mean response time for words subliminally presented that have emotional concern for the subjects, presumably leaving less attentional resources for naming colors. In the above study it was hypothesized that a threat would not be responsible for over attention but rather a preoccupation with the persistent pre-transcendent fantasy (positive images and words) unique to the intimate relationship. Similarly, we proposed that there would be less cognitive resources available as suggested by other studies. We are in the process of redesigning the next study.

Finally, the integral community can only prosper by integrating the rigors of the scientific method. This integration is a manifestation of our claims to hold the modern with the post-modern in a dialectical tension. Although we know the strengths and limitations of empiricism, it can demand evidence for a proposed truth claim that is exact, and at times frustrating and disappointing. Nevertheless, this integration can only advance integral theory and meta-theorizing development.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A previous less developed form of this topic was published. See Habib, T. Eulert, D. *Perspectives, The Journal of Humanistic Studies*. October/November, 2011 pgs.13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Masters (2012) has proposed four stages of intimate relationships. They are me-centered, we-centered codependent, we-centered codependent, and the highest stage, being centered. Ucik (2010) lays out the eight stages of spiral dynamics in a matrix suggesting compatibility issues arising out of sixty four altitude combinations. Bader et al. (2000) delineates four marital stages, the honeymoon, emerging differences, freedom, and together as two and the role of deception rather than honesty.

<sup>3</sup> An article is now being written that will elucidate the dynamic pattern of dyadic boundaries and how this leads to the renewal and enhancement of intimacy. This article will also reveal problems associated with poor boundaries including pursuit patterns that can appear as an attempt to get a reluctant spouse to communicate or the frantic efforts to retain a partner who is threatening dissolution. Treatment suggestions and the relationship of boundaries to a couples LR structure (Habib, 2014) will be discussed.

<sup>4</sup>One member who can sustain and re-enter 2<sup>nd</sup> tier space can briefly open up a 2<sup>nd</sup> tier experience for the couple. Nevertheless, as previously noted by many concerning individual development, this will not be the couple's center of gravity. Brief experiences of this space nevertheless can promote the growth of their partner. It is widely believed among clinicians that most couples at the beginning of their relationship have developmental similarities. This is why there is "a click" upon meeting and a level of comfort. But as time moves on, growth can be uneven and not simultaneous for members in a committed relationship. It would be worthwhile to study couple relationships where there are differences in developmental stage and to empirically verify the variables associated with this trajectory of couple's development.

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the distortion rate in intimacy ranges from 50% for couples doing well to 100% for less fortunate couples. A couple's agreement of perception concerning communication has been shown to correlate with marital satisfaction (Yelsma, 1984). A successful couple is mindful of the likely chance of misinterpretation and has the ability to stay open to alternate interpretations concerning emotionally sensitive events. For example, the mindful couple's dialogue may sound like this: "When you said that, I felt you didn't care that I worried. Is that true?" (remaining open to alternate explanations). Their spouse now clear about the feeling might respond back with "I am sorry, of course it bothers me to know you were sitting here worrying." This couple has repeatedly experienced the difference between what they thought to be true (or an assumed underlying motive in their spouse) and their spouses actual motive or intent. Also, they are not overly reliant upon anger to express vulnerability. Knowing that distortion in interpretations (unintegrated shadow) are at a peak with lower level intimacy, is crucial for successful interaction and a hallmark of the Relational Stage.

<sup>6</sup>Second tier space refers to the upper end of several developmental lines concerning the individual. It is most widely referred to in Spiral Dynamics (Beck and Cowan, 2005). It is theorized to occur when a person reaches the turquoise stage of development that is characterized by an integrative view of one's own development, evolution in general, and what Wilber describes as the spectrum of consciousness. The philosophical underpinning is integral theory. The interested reader new to this area of philosophy may want to read Wilber (2016) that contains both Spiral Dynamics and Integral Theory. I also suggest the first half of McIntosh (2007) to understand the cultural evolution from ancient, to premodern, to modernism, to post modernism, to integral as a comprehensible starting point.

<sup>7</sup> Lower Right quadrant work involves the all important system underlying a couple's interaction. These systemic patterns specify how give and take is realized and the important role of dyadic boundaries. There are multiple systems underlying successful and unsuccessful couple interaction that require a much wider scope of identification. I have found that couples have benefitted by becoming aware of these patterns and laying down pathways that meet their intimate needs. When structured, regression can be navigated without lapsing into dysfunctional patterns that undermine the dyad's bid for connection (Gottman, 2011). The *Roles and Relational Stages* is especially prone to these problematic but ubiquitous patterns of regression. The most common initiation point for intimacy at the first three stages is problem solving after a rupture in connection. The upper stages are less dependent upon initiating intimacy via regression and more often utilizes transparency and vulnerability to establish connection.

<sup>8</sup> The pre/trans fallacy that feelings of love can be sustained as experienced at the *Safety & Attraction Stage* is only one of many that requires deconstruction to make space for other worthwhile culturally held values and expectations. For example, the commonly held idea that love is a constant rather than a feeling that rises and falls (and actually only felt at an estimated *five minutes per day* for a couple at the *Relational Stage*) is important to know. I often tell couples burdened by this idealistic expectation that commitment is the only constant, not feelings of love. The erroneous expectation of love as a constant is one of many pre/trans fallacy fueling discontent. It is important to examine how we live in relationship to our ideals. They are useful beacons that must not be allowed to contaminate contentment. By definition, an ideal is a place we are unable to reach at this time, if not forever. Future articles need to explore LL messages and the positive and negative effect they have upon the intimate dyad.

<sup>9</sup> These techniques have *not* been written-up in a formal academic paper at the time of this revision. However, the specific directives and technique can be found in written and video formats at [drtomhabib.com](http://drtomhabib.com) .

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