

Projection

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I was ten years old and sitting with my mother at the movies. “Where do movies come from?” I asked. “They come from Hollywood,” she replied. “No,” I said, where in this room do they come from?” She turned around and pointed to a small window with a light shining out. “The movie is coming from the projector,” she said. It is being projected on to the screen,” she added. “Is the movie real?” I asked. “No,” she said it is the product of someone’s imagination.” Unfortunately, I did not believe her and took the movie quite seriously. I was very impressionable at that age.

The movie was “Splendor in the Grass,” with Natalie Wood. It is about a young girl who has a nervous breakdown when her boyfriend leaves her, and she ends up in a mental hospital. In hindsight, I realize that this movie normalized love addiction for me. I thought it was the most romantic movie I had ever seen. I wanted to love somebody that much.

If you know my story, then you know what happened next. For the next twenty years I fell in love quickly. I fantasized about the person obsessively. I believed that he loved me too and ignored all the signs to the opposite. I projected all of my childhood dreams of falling in love and living happily ever after on to this one special person. The rest in history.

Love addicts project—immediately. They ask themselves, “Is this the

one I have been waiting for?" I hope so. If not I am going to die. Then they pursue the fantasy at whatever the cost. They become love addicts.

The saga of the poor suffering love addict is well known in this day and age. It has been around for hundreds of years but not really understood until the 1980's. (Although Soren Kierkegaard talked about the dangers of passionate love back in the 1800's.)

In my own recovery, I find myself still projecting now and then. Recently, I told myself that my new friend was going to be my best friend for life.

Fortunately, the LAA Promises have been fulfilled for me and I can now pretty quickly "tell the difference between fantasy and reality." And I can let the fantasy go.

If you project too much . . .

1. Check your fantasy against all the fantasies you have had in the past. It is even close to being a healthy fantasy?
2. Check with someone in recovery for a second opinion.
3. Stay focused on reality. Look for what is real. Cling to that. Be practical.
4. Make sure you have a recovery plan for getting to know someone. Follow that plan carefully. Don't just leap from one emotion to the next.
5. Do not act on your projections. Keep them to yourself as you sort them out. (Not from your sponsor but the person you are projecting

on to.)

6. Proceed slowly.
7. Continue to check your fantasies with others in recovery as you proceed in the relationship.
8. Take seriously any red flags that come up. Act on them. Do not follow your heart . . . yet.
9. Do not be too hard on yourself for fantasizing and projecting. It is just the way our minds work.
10. Give up your romantic idealism.

In my first year of recovery, I went to my twentieth high school reunion. I met the man I had obsessed about in high school and right up to the time of the reunion. He asked me out. I projected all my dreams on to this guy immediately. All I saw was the boy I had loved and assumed he was everything I had fantasized that he was. It took three long months to wake up and realize he was just an alcoholic and drug addict. I persevered and asked him to give up the drugs and the alcohol. He said, “no.” I walked away. My recovery was really working. I could see things clearly. I could act on them. I could take care of myself and put my fantasies on the shelf.