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# Are we attracted to romantic partners who tend to resemble our caregivers?

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Rebecca K. Kohrman  
Are we attracted to romantic  
partners who tend to resemble our  
early caregivers?

#### ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction. It sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners and asked the following research question: Are we attracted to romantic partners who tend to resemble our early caregivers?

Twelve participants were interviewed as part of this qualitative study, which included three men and nine women. At the time of the study participants ranged in age from 20-57 years old and were all in a heterosexual relationship ranging from seven months to 21 years.

The findings of this study support the possibility that imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) "lives" in romantic relationships, i.e., that people may be attracted to partners who are similar to earlier caregivers and that individuals may duplicate their relationship dynamics with childhood caregivers in their adult romantic relationships.

The implications of this study are that it may be beneficial for clinicians to discuss and utilize imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) when working with couples or individuals. In addition, it may be helpful for clinicians who utilize this theoretical framework to have gone through self-analysis of their own relationship dynamics with this particular theory in mind.

ARE WE ATTRACTED TO ROMANTIC PARTNERS WHO TEND TO RESEMBLE  
OUR EARLY CAREGIVERS?

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Social Work.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The following study focused on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) states that individuals are unconsciously attracted to partners who encompass their caregivers' positive and negative traits in an attempt to resolve unmet needs from childhood. The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction. This study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. This study is important because if the dynamics of attraction were more thoroughly understood, perhaps more individuals could be in fulfilling partnerships.

Many theories were used throughout the course of this study. Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) were used as a foundation and segue into imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). Because there is a limited amount of research on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) will be reviewed to expand on imago theory's belief that childhood relationships with caregivers influence mate selection.

As the researcher, it is my hope that this study will resonate with many therapists, couples, and individuals so that the connection between childhood wounds and attraction

can be utilized in therapy or in ones own personal growth. Romantic relationships are a crucial part of many people's lives and often play a large part in our overall happiness. Through learning about the complexities of attraction I believe that individuals will be able to have more fulfilling and longer lasting relationships. I also feel that this study will enable us to become more forgiving and compassionate with ourselves and towards our partners.

Due to the lack of literature that exists on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) this study is important because it will expand on a scant body of literature. The following literature review will provide an in depth analysis of romantic attraction.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction. This study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. The following literature review seeks to examine a broad range of theories that are used to understand romantic attraction. Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) will serve as a baseline for understanding romantic attraction. In addition, imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and related theories such as psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) will also be examined. All of these theories will address the various reasons why individuals are attracted to their partners and will root this study in a theoretical framework.

#### *Introduction to Imago Theory*

This section on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and imago relationship therapy serve to provide the reader with an understanding of imago theory and how it relates to additional theories that are discussed throughout this literature review.

Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and imago relationship therapy (IRT) was founded by Harville Hendrix. In 1988 Hendrix (1988) wrote the book, *Getting the Love You Want*,



which provides a road map for partners to heal their wounded relationships. Harville Hendrix (1988) began as a pastoral counselor, but he gravitated toward marital therapy after experiencing a painful divorce of his own. According to Hendrix (1988) imago therapy is about being conscious in a relationship and about understanding the dynamics of attraction. Identifying childhood wounds and how they are displayed in a romantic relationship are pertinent to coming together as a couple and healing the past.

Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) proposes that we are unconsciously attracted to partners who resemble our caregivers' positive and negative traits in order to resolve our unmet needs from childhood.

According to Shulkin (2001) "there is an unconscious repetitive need to seek partners who offer-for good or for bad-the familiar love of childhood" (p.246). In many cases, the "familiar love of childhood" may be a negative trait, such as, controlling or even violent behavior. As a result, there is often a desire for couples to want or even try to change one another, especially their negative traits. It has been found that an attempt to change a partner may be routed in ones need to complete unfinished business or unmet needs from childhood (Shulkin, 2001). Often the desire to change a partner or the need to unconsciously resolve childhood wounds can cause a conflictual partnership. For many couples understanding the connection between childhood wounds and partner selection can drastically improve a romantic relationship. The latter is the role of imago relationship therapy (IRT) and the goal of IRT founder, Harville Hendrix (1988).

Being "conscious" in a relationship is about individuals recognizing their own wounds and their partner's wounds (Shulkin, 2001; Slade, 2001). Once the unmet needs of childhood have been acknowledged and each partner is conscious of the other, healing

can begin. Of course, healing is not as simple as it sounds. Healing is complex because it involves increasing knowledge of the individual and of the partner (Hendrix, 1988). This means that the individual and the partner must uncover childhood wounds and identify unmet needs together. For many, this process is challenging and painful. It is for this reason that Harville Hendrix (1988) has created imago relationship therapy (IRT), which is a form of couples counseling.

### *Imago Relationship Therapy*

Imago relationship therapy has been found to be an effective form of couples therapy (Hannah, Luquet, and McCormick, 1997). For example, one study (Hannah et al., 1997) examined the effectiveness of a brief structured couple's therapy program that was based on IRT. This study (Hannah et al., 1997) asked people to complete four COMPASS scales, which are used to measure intrapersonal distress and to evaluate the efficacy of mental health treatments. Couples were also asked to complete three marital satisfaction inventory scales, which are used to assess an individual's marital distress. Pre and post-tests were conducted on nine couples. Results from the pre and post-tests found that couples therapy that incorporates IRT may be an effective modality for the treatment of intrapersonal difficulties and that individual distress should be measured and utilized in the evaluation of the efficacy of marital therapy.

Overall, the limited research that exists on the efficacy of IRT suggests that IRT or couples therapy that utilizes the concepts and/or techniques of IRT is an effective model for improving individuals' romantic relationships (Hannah et al., 1997).

The following sections will discuss other theories of romantic attraction and how they relate to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt &

Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) will be used as a foundation for understanding romantic attraction. Because there is a limited amount of research on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) will be reviewed to expand on imago theory's belief that childhood relationships with caregivers influence mate selection.

### *Theories of Romantic Attraction*

Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) are used to examine romantic attraction. Unfortunately most of these theories address heterosexual relationships. Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) and exchange theory (South, 1991) are both examples of how theory is limited in this way. Despite this limitation all of these theories are helpful in providing a foundation for understanding romantic attraction.

Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) are important in understanding imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), because they serve as a foundation for how romantic attraction is understood.

### *Evolutionary Theory*

Romantic attraction has been explained by evolutionary theory or the biological need for reproduction (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995). For example, evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) suggests that men seek out

fertile woman (women who appear youthful, healthy, and attractive) by displaying their status. In addition, women present their physical attributes to draw in a mate (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995). This courting process creates competition between men, which in turn leads men to display their status.

For example, two studies (Buss, 1998; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) found that romantic attraction is based on the need to reproduce and that men become competitors during this process. In one study (Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), it was found that walking pace correlates with employment status. Men who are successful walk faster than unemployed or less accomplished males. In addition, male occupational status has been found to correlate with female attractiveness (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995). For instance, a successful male is more likely to be with an attractive female than a less successful male. Women's walking pace is not directly correlated with occupational status, which supports the historic belief that men are providers (Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995). In addition to the correlation between walking pace and employment status it has also been found that men brag about their resources and that women accentuate their physical attributes during the courting process (Buss, 1997).

Both of these studies (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) suggest that men are the competitors during a heterosexual courting process and that the process of courtship is based on the human need to evolve or reproduce. These theorists (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) support evolutionary theory, because they reinforce the traditional roles of men and women. Hence, men are providers and women are caregivers.

Clearly, evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) is very different from imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), because imago theory suggests that romantic attraction stems from an unconscious desire to resolve unmet needs from childhood rather than a biological need to reproduce. However, since the purpose of this study was to explore romantic attraction and to understand the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to peoples' choices of romantic partners, understanding of how theories of romantic attraction have evolved is critical to comprehending the newer concepts behind imago theory (Hendrix, 1988).

#### *Exchange Theory*

Another theory of attraction is exchange theory (South, 1991). Exchange theory states that "men place higher value than do women on physical attractiveness and youth, while women are less willing than men to marry someone with low earnings or unstable employment" (South, 1991, p.928). The more balanced a couple's exchange the more successful its relationship will be. In terms of attraction this theory supports the belief that both men and women are looking for a good exchange. For instance, according to this theory an attractive woman will seek out a successful male partner.

Exchange theory (South, 1991) is similar to evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), because the qualities that men and women are seeking are related to our roles historically. Men are seeking attractiveness, because physical beauty represents fertility, whereas women are seeking occupational status, which in men represents a good provider. Although exchange theory (South, 1991) and evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) are unlike imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) they provide a foundation for comprehending romantic attraction.

### *The Law of Attraction*

Unlike evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) and exchange theory (South, 1991), the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) can be used to understand both heterosexual and homosexual couples. This law embraces the belief that we are attracted to people who are similar to us in important ways.

In a study of this theory (Senn, 1971) 60 male undergraduate students at Franklin and Marshall College were asked to complete tasks with another individual. Partners were divided into categories, both unsuccessful, both successful, one successful, one unsuccessful. The findings of this study concluded that strangers who perform successfully at a task together are likely to be strongly attracted to each other (Senn, 1971). In addition, positive similarities were also found to be linked with the willingness to initiate and form new relationships (Senn, 1971). For example, Senn (1971) also concluded that the continuation of a relationship depends on increasing intimacy and emotional investment.

Thus, although the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) may not always pertain to romantic attraction, it does imply that similarity plays a large role in determining when romantic relationships may be pursued. This finding relates to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), because imago theory suggests that people are attracted to partners who match their imago. An imago is a composite picture of one's caregivers' positive and negative traits (Hendrix, 1988). Therefore, someone who matches an imago is more likely to become a romantic partner than someone who does not share this connection.

### *Imago Theory and Similar Theories*

As previously introduced, Harville Hendrix (1988) is the creator of imago theory, which proposes that we are unconsciously drawn to partners who share the positive and negative traits of our caregivers in an attempt to resolve unmet needs from childhood. Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and IRT has grown in popularity only very recently, so that there is little research on this theory of relationships and on its accompanying approach to treatment.

Fortunately, other theories of relationships can be used to help us better understand imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). Similar to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) they also assume that childhood relationships with caregivers play a role in adult romantic relationships. Two such theories are psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), each of which is discussed below in relation to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988).

#### *Psychoanalytic Theory of Mate Selection*

Psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) is similar to evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) and to exchange theory (South, 1991) as well, because it assumes that mate selection is a heterosexual interaction. Psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) also makes the assumption that individuals come from a two-parent home, which is obviously not always the case, limiting their ability to explain relationships and choice of romantic partners for many people. Still, there are many principles of psychoanalytic theory of mate selection

(Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and similarities that can help us to understand imago theory (Hendrix, 1988).

According to the psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Geher, 2000) “people choose romantic partners similar to their opposite-sexed parents” (p.194), and numerous studies (see, for example, Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) have been carried out to examine and explore this theory. One finding suggests that physical attributes of an individual’s opposite-sexed parent contribute to mate selection (Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987), while two studies (Jedlicka 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) have found that individuals are attracted to partners who share their opposite-sexed parents’ physical characteristics. These studies (Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) suggest that in heterosexual families opposite-sexed parents’ physical characteristics may influence mate selection.

In one study (Jedlicka, 1984) conducted in the early 1980’s the nativity of children’s parents were compared to the nativity of their spouses. The study found that people are predominantly attracted to partners of the same racial background as their opposite-sexed parent. However, it was also found that mothers have a greater influence on their sons’ mate selection than that of their daughters and that fathers have a greater influence on their daughters’ mate selection than that of their sons. Interestingly enough, the study (Jedlicka, 1984) also indicates that mothers have a greater overall influence on their children’s mate selection than do fathers. Hence, this study (Jedlicka, 1984) does not clearly determine which parent is most influential in regards to mate selection.

Another study (Wilson & Barrett, 1987), conducted in the late 1980’s that consisted of all female participants found that women are more likely to be attracted to



men who share their opposite-sexed parent's eye color. Women in this study were also found to be attracted to men who share their fathers' mental attributes. Consequently, women with dominant fathers appear to be attracted to domineering men or men significantly older than themselves. Female participants also seemed to be romantically attracted to men who were the same age as their fathers when they, the women, were born. According to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) these women recreated their past by choosing partners who are similar to their fathers in order to resolve unmet needs. Unfortunately, this study (Wilson & Barrett, 1987) did not comment on these women's mothers' physical or mental attributes and how they correspond to their current romantic partner.

Opposite-sexed parents and same-sexed parents have also been found to influence partner selection (Geher, 2000). In a fairly recent study by Geher (2000) 532 people (adults and parents) were interviewed in order to determine whether or not parental influences lead to particular partner selection. Because subjects and their parents were interviewed, both actual and perceived similarities between partners and parents were able to be acquired.

Similar to previously mentioned studies (Jedlicka 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) the results of this study (Geher, 2000) propose that opposite-sexed parents influence mate selection. However, the perceived results (Geher, 2000) reveal that (1) people perceive their romantic partners to be similar to both of their parents and (2) that there are more similarities between same-sexed parents and partners than there are between opposite-sexed parents and significant others. This suggests that there is a discrepancy between

the perceived results and the actual results of the study and that how participants choose to view their relationship may impact a study's findings.

While these studies (Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) all suggest that opposite-sexed parents influence mate selection, another study (Aron et al., 1974) suggests something different.

Aron et al. (1974) found that men and women tend to repeat the relationships that they have with their mothers in their romantic relationships (N=98). While these results (Aron et al., 1974) are different from those of other studies (Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) it is important to note that Jedlicka's (1984) study found that mothers have a greater influence than do fathers.

Clearly, studies (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) on relationships such as those discussed above present various theories and findings about the selection of romantic partners and the degree to which selection is made according to parental resemblance. As evidenced (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987), there does not appear to be a consistent finding that concludes that opposite-sexed parents influence mate selection. However, all of these studies (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) have shown that caregivers influence mate selection. In addition, imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) also agrees that caregivers influence romantic attraction. Contrary to previously discussed studies on psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987), imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) also introduces the idea that both caregivers contribute to the process of romantic attraction, rather than the opposite-sexed parent.

Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) is both similar to and different from psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987). Unlike imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) only applies to heterosexual individuals who come from heterosexual two-parent homes. On the other hand, imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) speaks to individuals who have caregivers and who are in a homosexual or heterosexual relationship.

In regards to theory, imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) is similar to psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) in that both theories presume that caregivers influence mate selection. However, the definitive difference between imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) is that imago theory presumes that whoever raises an individual influences mate selection whereas psychoanalytic theory of mate selection claims that the opposite-sexed parent influences the process of romantic attraction.

#### *Attachment Theory*

The concept behind attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is similar to psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) because it also claims that relationships with early caregivers are critical in determining an individual's pattern of behavior in adulthood. As Feeney and Noller (1990) put it, attachment theory "offers a useful perspective on adult

love relationships” (p.281), because attachment style may contribute to the process of romantic attraction.

According to this body of theories, attachment style from infancy carries through to our adult romantic relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In addition, it also suggests that attachment style is largely influenced by childhood relationships with caretakers (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The theory of attachment (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), in and of itself, is not similar to imago theory (Hendrix, 1998) or psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) but the phenomenon of attachment is considered in all three.

Attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) assumes that adult romantic relationships are influenced by childhood, which is also suggested by psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). In addition, according to attachment theory (Zelinski, 1999) replication and projection may occur in adult romantic relationships, which recreates a familiar attachment style. This concept of duplicating the past is also true to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). However, contrary to attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) proposes that we recreate our relationship dynamics in an attempt to resolve unmet needs from our past (Hendrix, 1988) and that in an attempt to do so, we recreate in some ways our childhood in order to have the opportunity to work through unresolved conflicts.

As stated above, attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is not theoretically similar to imago theory (Hendrix, 1998) or psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) but the phenomenon of attachment is present in all three theories. Overall, the major theme shared among attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987), and imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) is that childhood relationships with caregivers serve as a major contributor in determining an individual's pattern of behavior in adulthood.

#### *Summary*

As previously noted, many theories explain and try to help us to understand attraction. Evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995), exchange theory (South, 1991), and the law of attraction (Senn, 1971) all contribute to the formulation of romantic attraction. In addition, these theories (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995; Senn, 1971; South, 1991) also provide a foundation for understanding romantic attraction. Psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) are also crucial components to understanding how romantic attraction relates to imago theory's (Hendrix, 1988) conceptualization of mate selection.

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of romantic attraction. This study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. This study posed the following research

question; do people tend to be romantically attracted to individuals who have characteristics that resemble those of their early childhood caregivers?

Many studies (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) that have examined romantic attraction have found varying results and have sought to determine whether or not opposite-sexed parents are influential in determining mate selection. This study was unlike other studies (Aron et al., 1974; Buss, 1997; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995; South, 1991; Wilson & Barrett, 1987), because individuals who identified as being in a homosexual relationship or who were not raised in a heterosexual two-parent family were able to participate in this study. As a result, the findings of this study may hold implications for more diverse populations and their selection of romantic attachments. Also, caregivers were identified as individuals who raised the participant, not just mothers or fathers. Finally, it should be noted that a major assumption of this study was that both caregivers influence mate selection, and no attempts were made to determine distinction or degree of influence.

The following chapter describes the sample and its characteristics, sampling, data-collection procedures, and approach to analysis.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods that were used in this study and will describe the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of romantic attraction. This study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. As illustrated in the literature review, a variety of theories that embrace traditional heterosexual families predominate the exploration of romantic attraction (Aron et al, 1974; Buss, 1997; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995; South, 1991; Wilson & Barrett, 1987). The Literature Review (see Chapter II) also revealed that there is limited research on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). This fact minimizes ones ability to understand romantic attraction from a psychodynamic perspective.

#### *Sample*

Individuals who participated in this study were asked to meet the following criteria: (1) 20 years of age or older, (2) in a monogamous committed relationship for at least six months, (3) able to read and write in English, and (4) able to identify two significant caregivers during their childhood. Participants were not able to participate if they were going through a separation or divorce at the time of the study.

The participants for this exploratory study were recruited through the use of a purposive sampling strategy. Fliers were given to acquaintances (see Appendix A attached) with the request that they distribute them to acquaintances who fit the criteria profile and who might be interested in participating. For the researcher's convenience participants were recruited from the New York City area.

#### *Data Collection*

Data collection was carried out through the use of semi-structured interviews at mutually convenient and private locations. Procedures to protect the rights and privacy of participants were outlined in a proposal of this study and presented to the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) at Smith College School for Social Work before data collection began. Approval of the proposal (see Appendix B attached) indicated that the study was in accordance with the *NASW Code of Ethics* and the federal regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects.

Before each interview participants were given an Informed Consent Form, which described their participation and their rights as human subjects as well as any potential risks or benefits of participation (see Appendix C attached). After signing the form, participants completed a short set of demographic questions, followed by a set of open ended questions (see Appendix D attached) intended to explore their thoughts and feelings about imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and about romantic attraction with regard to their current relationship. On occasion, the researcher clarified questions, allotted time for the participant to elaborate on questions, and asked additional questions to clarify the participant's response. The entire process took approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and all interviews took place between March 1, 2007 and March 31, 2007.



### *Data Analysis*

Demographic data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics; data collected through the open-ended interview questions were transcribed and analyzed using thematic content analysis (Anastas, 1999).

The next chapter presents the major findings from this study. The findings were formulated through the use of thematic content analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction. This study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may influence people's choices of romantic partners. The findings of this study were analyzed using thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Names of participants are disguised to protect confidentiality.

#### *Demographic Data*

##### *Participant Demographics*

Twelve individuals participated in this study, which included three men and nine women. At the time of the study participants ranged in age from 20-57 years old. Participants have various religious backgrounds: Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Non-denominational, Unitarian, and Christian. A racially diverse sample was obtained, with participants identifying themselves as African American, Asian/Korean, Caucasian, White European, Italian American, Puerto Rican, Hispanic/Columbian, and Jewish American. All participants are from the New York City area and were, at the time of the study, in a heterosexual relationship from seven months to 21 years. Individuals were asked to identify two primary caregivers from their childhood, and all but three chose their mothers and fathers. One participant identified a father and stepmother; another identified a mother and eldest sister, and a third identified an uncle and mother.

### *Major Themes*

The findings are organized in the following manner: (1) agreement with imago theory (1988), (2) similarities between caregivers and partners, and (3) duplication of relationship dynamics.

#### *Agreement with Imago Theory*

All of the individuals who participated in this study were asked about their personal opinion of imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). It was concluded that fifty percent of the participants agree with imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) completely, whereas 50% of participants feel that imago theory applies conditionally. None of the participants disagree with imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) in principle. Some individuals stated that the theory is applicable to their own relationship, which is why the theory rings true. For example, Ellen feels that imago theory is true because of her own pattern with men:

Um, well, probably, it is true, because I tend to pick the same men and my needs are never met, and yet I continue to pick the same men. So, it's got to be coming from somewhere. And it's a real source of angst for me, because on some level I think my life is together in so many ways, but always in the relationship I feel like it just doesn't click.

For Ellen, her own tendency to feel that her needs are not met is a common feeling.

Unlike other participants, Ellen chose to discuss imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) in relation to her own experiences immediately. Other participants did this only after responding to several questions.

Another theme that arose when participants were asked about their thoughts on imago theory was the belief that we as humans tend to repeat the past. As Kristen put it:

I agree with the fact that you get brought up in a situation and as you get older that's what you know. I think that people are scared and even unconsciously scared and they go with what they know.

In fact, for some participants the idea of repeating the past seems logical. For example, when Jenna discussed her feelings about imago theory her response was similar to

Kristen's:

I think it makes sense, I think its true, I think we do it without realizing and you start to realize it more and more as the years go on.

While Ellen, Kristen, and Jenna agree that there is something to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) in understanding adult romantic attraction, other participants feel that the pertinence of imago theory is conditional. For instance, several participants believe that individuals are attracted to people who are unlike their caregivers. For example, as Jill said:

I agree with it. Yes, but I also think that some people choose consciously partners unlike their parents, because they didn't like their parent's quality. You know like a parent that was an alcoholic, they might choose to be with someone that doesn't drink.

Yanna stated that she is an optimistic person and that she only looks for the positive in her partner; and this act of searching only for the positive traits of our caregivers in our partners rang true for several participants.

The consensus for this sample is that imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) holds complete truth or some truth. No one reported disagreeing with the basic premises of the theory, suggesting that imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) has at least for this sample some validity.

#### *Similarities between Participants' Caregivers and Partners*

Overall, participants feel that their caregivers share commonalities with their partner. Participants were asked to review the positive and negative traits of their caregivers and of their partners and to identify any major similarities. Initially, some

participants saw no commonalities between their caregivers and their partner, but after further discussion and exploration, some similar traits were in fact revealed.

Oddly enough, other participants began to identify similarities between their caregivers and partner before being asked specifically for their similarities. For instance, when Jill was asked to identify her mother's positive and negative traits she responded:

My mother is very loving, very warm, um, very caring, empathic. On the other side she can be very controlling and um, the Jewish mother, controlling Jewish mother, hysteric, needy, my husband can be needy.

Other participants even identified the exact traits they used to describe their caregivers when identifying their partner's traits. For example, when describing her mother Yanna said, "She's caring, she's always willing to listen, giving." Then, when she identified her partner's traits, she said, "He's caring, willing to listen, he's not self-centered, he's very open, whenever you need it."

Thus, when participants were asked to share the similarities between their caregivers and partners, many commonalities began to emerge. For some, these shared traits are upsetting. Ellen, who described her stepmother as rigid, angry, abusive, and paranoid, shared the following about her partner:

Oh, there are definitely similarities. Well, it's interesting, I am with someone now who is someone who could be perceived as a bully.

When asked directly about the similarities between her stepmother and partner, Ellen stated:

Yeah, he's angry, there's a bit of a bully to him. Sometimes he'll go off, and I'll look at him like where is this coming from and he's paranoid.

Participants were also asked whether or not they had ever informed their partners of these perceived similarities. Some said yes; some said no. For example, when Jill was

asked if she had ever said to her husband. “You treat me just like my (caregiver’s name),” she laughed and responded:

Absolutely, uh, I don’t tell him you treat me like them, but you sound like my mother now.

Similarly, Ellen said, “Oh, yeah, more my father. I never accused him of being like my stepmother although there is that bully.”

Other participants also reported discussions with their partners about shared traits.

As Yanna stated:

I’ve spoken to my partner and told him that he reminds me of my mother and my sister...he has to be right all the time. My sister is the same way and my mother ...it has to be her way.

Participants were also asked if they had ever been informed by their partners that they are similar their partners’ caregiver(s). The majority of participants said yes or said that they simply know that they are alike. For instance, Reuban had the following response when asked if his wife had ever informed him that he is similar to her caregiver(s):

Um, no, but oddly enough her mother has said plenty of times that I remind her of her husband...there are other people that have said I remind her of her father.

Jenna and Ellen both said that they think they are similar to their partner’s mother even though they have not discussed it explicitly. As Jenna stated:

I have realized that his mom and me are similar. She is very social, she loves having people over, and she is very comfortable having conversations, we are the same kind of shoppers, we both go out of our way to help others, we are both helpers, its in my nature and in her nature.

On the other hand, Ellen believes that her partner would never want to admit the overlap between Ellen and her partner’s mother:

Oh, I know I am like his mother. I know he has a tremendous amount of psychological awareness for who he is but I don't know if he ever has actually said or thought that, I think it would be upsetting to him if he thought that...I know I am like his mother...Like, especially if I raise my voice...he'll tell me stories where his mother had meltdowns and screech and scream at him and his brother, and I laugh to myself that that's why sometimes when he reacts to me its not me its to his mother.

Finally, Kristen said that her partner has told her that she is similar to both of her partner's parents:

He'd say, 'you remind me of my mother'. Like, you're really open, open to all kinds of experiences, you cook well, you're really patient. He's told me that I remind him of his father too, in both ways.

Overall, respondents seem to believe that their partners share both positive and negative traits of their (respondents') caregivers. Even participants who initially felt that there are no such similarities eventually identified some through the interview process. Some participants had verbalized these similarities to their partners or had at least thought about these similarities; others had not. Furthermore, some respondents (and even their partners) find themselves to be similar to the caregiver of the other.

The following section addresses the tendency for relationship dynamics to be repeated.

#### *Duplication of Relationship Dynamics*

Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) suggests that people recreate the familiar environment of childhood in order to resolve unmet needs from their past. As stated in the previous section, all participants in this study seem to be attracted to people who share the traits of their caregivers. In addition, the findings of this study also suggest that people experience dynamics in their romantic relationship that parallel or resemble those that they have or have had with their caregivers.

Throughout all of the interviews many participants talked about experiencing a similar feeling or unmet need stemming from their childhood, which transpires into their current relationship.

For instance, when Kristen was asked about her unmet needs in her relationship she said that feeling unappreciated is common for her and she was able to link this feeling back to her own childhood:

I do commonly feel unappreciated...I think that's also the way it was with my mom and dad. My dad never appreciated my mother...So, I think when me and (partner's name) are fighting I feel like he's being self-centered, and I don't want that repeating itself.

Paul also spoke about having an unmet need from childhood carry into his present romantic relationship:

Yeah, well, I was the youngest of four boys and she was the youngest of two girls. Neither one of us had the benefit of being the baby because we had siblings that were problematic and a lot of attention went to them. What gets replicated is that once again I am being neglected.

He also spoke about feeling neglected in his relationship with his wife:

Yeah, the theme that comes up is paradoxical in that she can be assertive and unbelievably organized when it comes to helping my son with his homework. But, if I were to ask her 'do you think you could get an application for your license in (state)' I have to fill out all the forms because she regresses almost to the point of like a child where she cant do anything, probably because she doesn't want to.

For many individuals these unmet needs are the root of the conflict or frustration that occurs in their romantic relationship. For Yanna, conflict is directly related to her unmet needs. For instance, as Yanna stated:

Um, well, what we argue about is when he tells me he is going to do something and then he doesn't do it. It's similar to my past when my mother or my sister made me assume I was going to have something and then I never got it.



Regardless of its exact nature, there seems to be, at least for this sample, an overwhelming pattern of recreating past dynamics of the caregiving relationship in the current romantic one. Respondents reported experiencing dynamics in their romantic relationship that parallel or resemble those that they have or have had with their caregivers. For some, duplicating their relationship dynamics with caregivers in their current romantic relationship contributes to conflict or negative feelings within the romantic relationship.

#### *Summary*

In summary, the findings of this study support the possibility that imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) “lives” in romantic relationships i.e., that people may be attracted to partners who are similar to earlier caregivers and that individuals may duplicate their relationship dynamics with childhood caregivers in their adult romantic relationships.

In the following chapter the findings of this study are compared and contrasted with the literature as it is reviewed in Chapter II. In addition, implications for practice are offered, strengths and weaknesses of the study are identified, and suggestions for future study are identified.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction. More specifically, this study sought to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. The results of this study suggest that for at least this sample, imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) seems to be relevant, either in great measure or to some degree. Thus, for at least some people, they seem to be attracted to individuals who resemble their early caretakers. Whether they do so unconsciously to recreate relationship dynamics in an attempt resolve unmet needs from their childhood, which is the fundamental premise of imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), is still unknown and warrants a further explanatory study. However, in general, people who participated in this study recognize that their romantic partners share many of the same characteristics as those of their early caregivers and thus, the two relationships bear significant resemblance.

#### *Comparing and Contrasting these Findings to the Literature*

Historically, romantic attraction was attributed to the biological need for reproduction and based on traditional male and female roles (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995). Currently, various theories are used to make sense of the process of mate selection. As discussed in the literature review, exchange theory (South, 1991) proposes that romantic attraction is based on a woman's level of physical attractiveness

and a man's level of occupational accomplishments. Thus, the more physically attractive a female is the more accomplished her male counterpart will be. Contrary to evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) and exchange theory (South, 1991), the law of attraction strays away from the traditional roles of males as the provider and females as the children. The law of attraction (Senn, 1971) proposes that romantic attraction is driven by individuals who have similarities.

To the extent that they do not conceptualize romantic attraction as relating to unmet needs from childhood or childhood relationships with caregivers, these theories (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995; Senn, 1971; South, 1991) are predominantly unlike imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). For example, evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988; Schmitt & Atzwanger, 1995) and exchange theory (South, 1991) in particular address heterosexual dynamics and traditional male and female roles, which is unlike imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). However, despite their differences these theories are important to understanding the concepts behind imago theory and creating a foundation of romantic attraction.

As reported in Chapter II many theories on romantic attraction test the belief that individuals are attracted to partners who are similar to their opposite-sexed parent (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987). The differences that exist between the findings of these studies (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987) imply that perhaps opposite-sexed parents do not solely influence the mate selection process. However, the study reported here suggests that individuals may be drawn to partners who resemble their early caregivers regardless of gender and sexual orientation. In addition, the findings support the belief that adult

romantic relationships are influenced by childhood, a belief that is also supported by attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hannah & Marrone, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and psychoanalytic theory of mate selection (Aron et al., 1974; Geher, 2000; Jedlicka, 1984; Wilson & Barrett, 1987).

### *Implications for Practice*

This study provides clinicians, couples, and individuals with many implications for practice and can help to develop a better understanding of motivations in relationships and as a result, help people build more fulfilling partnerships.

### *Identification of Familiar Themes and Feelings*

First, it would be helpful for clinicians to assist clients with identifying familiar themes or feelings that have transpired in their past and transposed into their current partnership. This identification can help couples understand their own unmet needs. This is important because having awareness is the first step toward change. In addition, uncovering unmet needs may help couples to feel more empathic of and understanding toward each other, also enhancing the quality of their relationship.

### *Discussion of Imago Theory*

Second, it would be beneficial to discuss imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) with clients who are asking for help with relationships and help them explore their thoughts about and perhaps application of the theory. This is important, because simply talking about imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may generate some thought about past relationship patterns, childhood experiences, and recurrent themes and with greater awareness, people may be better able to resolve current issues and conflicts.

### *Importance of Clinicians own Self-Analysis*

It would be probably also useful for clinicians to have had opportunities to engage in self-analysis based on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) in order to help clients make better use of the theoretical premises. Their own analysis would be helpful in that they can then utilize their own learning process to help others rather than rely simply on theory and expertise alone.

### *Focus on Positive Traits and Themes within the Romantic Relationship*

In addition, it would be valuable for individuals to assess the positive traits in their partner and caregivers as well as themes within their romantic relationship when working with individuals who want to strengthen their own romantic relationship. This could be helpful to the couple, because partners may learn to focus more on the positive traits of the relationship and strengthen their bond.

### *Imago Theory and Individual Therapy*

Finally, although imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) is predominantly aimed toward helping couples it would also be helpful to introduce this theory to individuals who are interested in understanding their relationship dynamics and presenting without their partners for treatment. Individual examination of imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) and how it relates to the mate selection process may provide individuals with better understanding of themselves in the context of their romantic relationship and of their partners.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

The limitations of this study were that the sample obtained was small so that even though the 12 members reflect some diversity, it was not large enough to draw any

conclusions of significance. In addition, the sample consisted of only heterosexual couples, also limiting the implications for practice.

On the other hand, this study did seek narrative data directly from people who were in a position to share first-hand observations, experiences, and opinions related to imago theory (Hendrix, 1988). This is particularly important as it relates to the next strengths, which is that because there is very little literature on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988), even as a small study, it yields some interesting and important information to add to our knowledge base on this topic.

#### *Suggestions for Future Study*

For future studies conducted on imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) it may be beneficial to create a study to compare its applicability across gender lines. According Hendrix (1988) imago theory is applicable to males and females. However, gender as a variable has not been researched and could be useful to helping clinicians shape their approach to practice with diverse types of couples.

A second important area of future research is the applicability of imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) to same-sex couples and then to compare and contrast those findings with findings on heterosexual couples.

#### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of romantic attraction in general, and more specifically, to explore the degree of which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to choice of romantic partner.

The implications of this study are as follows: (1) it would be helpful for clinicians to assist couples with identifying themes or feelings from the past and to help

them assess the degree to which they are transposed into their current partnership; (2) it would be useful to discuss imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) with clients and then to help them explore their thoughts about the theory; (3) it would be also useful for the clinician who utilizes this theoretical framework for practice to have gone through self-analysis of his or her own relationship dynamics with the theory in mind; (4) it would be useful to help couples assess the positive traits in their partners and caregivers and positive themes in their romantic relationship in order to focus on them for strengthening the relationship; and (5) it would be helpful to introduce imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) to individuals who are interested in understanding their relationship dynamics and presenting without their partners for treatment.

Overall, participants in this study agree that imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may apply to choices of romantic partners and that early experiences with and traits of caregivers may well influence the mate selection process so that partners may well be selected on the basis of their similarities to early caregivers. Whether this mate selection process is conscious or unconscious, and whether it is an effort to recreate the early relationships, is the next critical question for study.

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Appendix A  
**Recruitment Flier**

**Do you ever wonder why you were attracted to your partner?  
Do you want to find out?**

ARE YOU:

1. 20 years or older?
2. In a monogamous committed relationship for at least 6 MONTHS?
3. Able to identify TWO caretakers WHO WERE SIGNIFICANT TO YOU during your childhood?
4. Are you able to read and write in English?

IF YES, THEN PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN MY STUDY.

I am a Smith College School for Social Work student currently working on A MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT FOR WHICH I AM SEEKING TO INTERVIEW PEOPLE FOR A STUDY OF ROMANTIC ATTRACTION.

**(People going through a divorce or separation are not eligible)**

**If you would like to participate or obtain more information  
please contact me, Rebecca Kohrman, at 718-680-0006.**

**Thank you!**

Appendix B  
**Informed Consent**

Dear Participant:

My name is Rebecca Kohrman, and I am a Smith College School for Social Work graduate student. I am currently conducting a study that seeks to research the degree to which imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) may pertain to people's choices of romantic partners. Imago theory proposes that we are unconsciously attracted to partners that resemble our caregivers' positive and negative traits in an attempt to satisfy unmet needs or wounds from our childhood (Hendrix, 1988). The research obtained from this study will be used for my thesis and in partial fulfillment of the Master's in Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work and for future presentation and publication on this topic.

I am requesting participation from individuals who would be willing to talk with me in an individual interview of about 30-45 minutes. If you agree, I will ask you to complete a short set of demographic questions and then to respond to a set of open-ended questions that pertain to your past relationships with caregivers and present romantic relationship. I will tape record each interview for convenience and then transcribe each tape onto paper. I will be the sole handler of the tapes, and my research advisor will have access to the transcripts, if necessary, once they are completely de-identified.

In order to participate in this study you must meet all of the following criteria: (1) be 20 years or older, (2) be in a monogamous committed romantic relationship for at least 6 months, (3) be able to read and write in English, and (4) be able to identify two caregivers who you feel were significant in your years of growing up. You should not participate in this study if you are going through a divorce or a separation with your partner.

A potential risk of participating in this study is that you may feel some emotional distress from thinking about characteristics of people who were and/or are important to you. It is also possible that you may become uncomfortable as you try to make connections between your early relationships with childhood caregivers and your present romantic relationship. You may also feel some distress as a result of realizing certain feelings, attitudes, or experiences of which you were unaware before reflecting on this topic. If this is the case during the interview please bring this to my immediate attention, and we will end the process. If this should happen after the interview, please see the attached list of referral resources for free or inexpensive counseling services.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, a potential benefit from participating in this study is a feeling of satisfaction from contributing to a better professional understanding of the dynamics of relationships and from helping

professionals enhance their social work practice with individuals and couples. You may enjoy the opportunity to reflect on aspects of your relationships that you have not thought about before. You may also identify positive things about your relationships and/or ways to improve your romantic relationship.

Your confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study. I will ask that during the interview you do not identify yourself or others by name. I will keep all signed Informed Consents separate from completed audiotapes. All of the data collected will be presented in combined form with any vignettes and quoted comments disguised so as to not be able to identify any single participant. Finally, as required by federal law, I will keep all data obtained through this study for three years under lock and key, at which time I will either continue to store it safely under lock and key or destroy it.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw anytime during or after the study until March 31, 2007, at which time I will begin to write my report. Also, during the interview you may refuse to answer any question(s) without any penalty whatsoever.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION; THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

Signature of participant:

Date:

Rebecca Kohrman

Date:

Fort Hamilton Clinic  
8710 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY

Phone: 718-680-0006

Please keep this copy for your records so you can contact me later or use the referral numbers!

## Referral Resources

**Sunset Terrace Family Health Center**  
**514-49<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11220**  
**Phone: 718-854-1851**

**CABS Health Center**  
**94-98 Manhattan Avenue**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11206**  
**Phone: 718-388-0390**

**Betances Health Center**  
**280 Henry Street**  
**New York, NY 10002**  
**Phone: 212-227-8408**

**Child and Family Services**  
**39 Union Street**  
**Easthampton, MA 01027**  
**Phone: 413-529-1764**

**ServiceNet**  
**129 King Street**  
**Northampton, MA 01060**  
**Phone: 413-585-1300**

Appendix C  
**Interview Guide**

**PART A: Demographic Data**

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Race/Ethnicity:
4. Religion:
5. Length of time partnered:
6. Type of relationship (heterosexual, homosexual...)

Please think of 2 primary caretakers during your childhood and identify their relationship to you (mother, father, stepmother, sister, etc..)

**7. A.**

**8. B.**

**PART B: Attraction/Relationship Questions**

Imago theory (Hendrix, 1988) states that we are unconsciously attracted to individuals that resemble our caregivers' positive and negative traits in order to resolve unmet needs from our childhood.

9. Do you think that imago theory is true?

10. Can you take a moment to think about you caregivers' positive and negative traits and your partner's primary traits and share them with me? For example, stubborn, controlling, arrogant, calm, lazy, depressed, humorous, thoughtful, domineering, passive, aggressive, intimidating, kind, loving...etc.

11. Do you see any similarities and/or differences between your caregivers and your partner's traits?

12. Take a moment to reflect on the conflict that occurs between you and your partner. Are there any themes?

13. If yes, do these themes relate at all to unmet needs from childhood? For example, some people may feel like their partner never listens to them because in childhood they had a similar experience of not feeling listened to by their caregiver(s).

14. Do you ever recall saying to your romantic partner, “You remind me of caregiver A or B” or “You treat me just like caregiver A or B”? If yes, please elaborate.

15. Do you ever recall thinking to yourself that your partner reminds you of a particular childhood caregiver? If yes, please elaborate.

16. Do you ever recall your partner telling you, “You remind me of my (caregiver)” or “You treat me just like my (caregiver)”? If yes, please elaborate.

Appendix D  
**Human Subjects Review Approval Letter**

January 18, 2007

Rebecca Kohrman  
8710 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11209

Dear Rebecca,

Your amended materials have been reviewed and everything is now in order. We are glad to give final approval to your project.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your study. This has been such a favorite theory, both in serious and pop psychology. It will be interesting to discover if it really hold up.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Dominique Steinberg, Research Advisor