

Contents



Preface	13
Introduction	14

PART 1

The dance: pursuing and withdrawing

1 Are you love-phobic?	20
2 The dance steps	23
Phase 1: The opening	23
Phase 2: Incompatible steps	25
Phase 3: The dance is nearly done	28
Phase 4: The inevitable end	32
Phase 5: After the final steps	35
3 Love-phobic partners	37
The conflict between being together and apart	37
What's the dynamic?	39
Recognising the dance	43
Different dance steps	52

4 Do I fear commitment?	54
The characteristics of fear of commitment	54
Summary: the symptoms	65
5 Or do I fear abandonment?	66
The characteristics of fear of abandonment	66
Summary: the symptoms	73
6 The dance — from beginning to end	75
Examples from the dance floor	75
The final steps	92
Differences and similarities	93
The essence of a love-phobic dance	94

PART 2

*There are no bad men
or bad women*

1 There are only wounded people	98
Insecure attachment as a trigger	98
The underlying causes	102
The effects	116
2 I need you	119
Secure attachment	121
Insecure attachment	122
Entanglement versus connection	128

3 Relationships with or without a backdoor	129
The attachment pattern of abandonment-phobic people	131
The attachment patterns of commitment-phobic people	133
4 Will you solve my problem?	137
Supply and demand in romantic relationships	137
Help, my partner resembles my parent	152
Daughter married to father, son to mother	154
The role of the dynamic	159
5 Removing the fear from the wound	160
The traits listed	161

PART 3

*From survival
to healing*

1 How do I survive?	166
Fight, flight or freeze	167
Rationalising and condemning	168
Merging and dissociation	168
Illusions and fantasies	170
Self-sabotage	171
Internal split	172
Separation of love and lust	175

2 Friend or foe?	177
The survival dance	177
Summary: the survival steps	180
3 The healing movement	182
The healthy part	184
New steps	185
Vertical healing	188

PART 4

*Healing steps for a
true love dance*

1 The circle of attachment	192
Step 1. Contact or isolation	194
Step 2. Attachment or withdrawal	197
Step 3. Separation or clinging	199
Breaking free from entanglement with the partner	200
Breaking free from entanglement with the parent(s)	205
Step 4. Grieving or denial	208
Step 5. Finding meaning or harbouring grievance	219
And now: an opportunity, or the same old dance?	221
A relapse	223
A healthy relationship based on connection	225
Connecting is a cyclical process	227

PART 5

*Ingredients in
available love*

1	Give yourself the right to exist	232
2	Connect in the moment	235
3	Reconcile opposites	237
4	Choose real autonomy	241
5	Respect yourself	244
6	Open your heart to yourself	248
7	Speak your truth	253
8	Forgive yourself	255
9	Aim for unconditional love	257
10	Connect in freedom	260

.....

That is life	262
Conclusion	265
Acknowledgements	267
Bibliography	270
About Hannah Cuppen	273
Notes	274

Preface



As humans, we're driven by a need for love. We want to love and be loved. For some love is near, for others it feels distant, and for others still love seems unattainable. If we can't open our hearts to love, there's usually an underlying reason. Somewhere along the way we've been hurt, death has broken into our hearts, loss has left indelible scars, our dreams have made way for sorrow and we've been left clinging to fantasies about love. We've taught ourselves to deal with this sad reality and learned to hide our feelings of longing and loss. In life, love can hurt us more than anything else. However great our desire to find love might be, we have become fearful and we've learned a dance that keeps love at a distance, instead of bringing it closer. We've lost ourselves in this dance, and to change this we must start with our own steps.

Hannah Cuppen

Introduction



Pursual and withdrawal is a dance I'm intimately familiar with. I was brought up with it. It has marked all of my relationships, even my earliest crushes in primary school. Whenever I fancied a boy he wouldn't respond; but as soon as I'd let go of my feelings, he'd fall in love with me. Little did I know then that this was to become a central theme in my life. I only realised this much later. At first glance it appeared as though my relationships followed the same course as everybody else's. In hindsight, however, I've learned to recognise the many faces of my fear of abandonment and to understand how it's hidden deep beneath the surface of love — like a hunter lying in wait to ambush love — just when this budding feeling takes a few tentative steps closer, like a vulnerable, wide-eyed deer. Before my love had any real chance, it would often be rudely shattered. I've learned that love isn't simply there for the taking but tied in with fear. This is something I grew up believing, not because anyone taught me this, but because it worked out that way.

I always fell for men who, for whatever reason, were unavailable. I was drawn to them like a magnet. The men I fell in love with were either already in a relationship or they were too scared to start one. When men fell for me, I did everything I could to sabotage the love. And so the dance of pursuing and withdrawing became my life, and love was left without a chance.

The more I began to see my own fear of abandonment and fear of commitment, the more I recognised the function of these interacting poles in other people's relationships. With this new, but well-developed sense I often 'know' instantly when the twin fears of abandonment and commitment ruin relationships. I see it happening all around me: the interaction of these two poles, which I refer to as a 'dynamic', follows an unmistakable pattern. It's almost a law of nature. No matter how badly people want to change, this invisible hunter is always there, ready to kill love.

Having gained a clear insight into this dynamic, I wrote an article in 2010 about 'abandonment and intimacy' which dealt with how these two fears interact. Judging by the numerous reactions I received, it struck a chord with many, and one of the most common questions I received was how to deal with this complex issue. In this book I want to answer this and other queries and explain the many, often invisible, layers of the dynamic.

This book looks at the ways in which we have unwittingly learned to keep love at bay for fear of losing it. We tell ourselves that as long as we don't connect, we won't be abandoned either. As a consequence the old pattern is repeatedly reinforced and we miss out on the love we so crave.

I hope this book will help you recognise the pattern of pursual and withdrawal and show you how to break it. By sharing the insights I've acquired, I want to give you the tools and the support you need to set yourself free from this dynamic so that you can embark on relationships that are less likely to cause pain and have a stronger foundation of trust and self-love.

Above all, I hope that this book will contribute to greater recognition, understanding and acceptance of people who have difficulties truly connecting. It can be comforting to know that you're not the only one struggling with these issues. Many people are, to a greater or lesser degree, afraid of establishing a true intimate connection. And these are not just people who

aren't in a relationship. Many people who do have a partner, and perhaps have lived with them for many years, may have developed strategies to make themselves and each other feel secure, however unsatisfying or even destructive those may be. Take a good look around and you'll see that you're not the only one.

This book is built on many years of self-examination, on my work as a therapist and on the stories and experiences of the many people who were willing to share them with me (and whose names have been altered to protect their privacy). The interviews I conducted give this book a wealth of authentic, practical examples, as does the inclusion of my own experiences. I felt it was important to illustrate how I too have danced the dance in my life.

Because the different elements of the dynamic are not gender-specific, 'he' and 'she' are interchangeable throughout the text. I would also add here that the dynamic is not found exclusively in heterosexual relationships, it can be found in all forms of relationships regardless of sexual preferences.

This book is my brainchild. It's my way of passing on life. By bringing fear of abandonment and fear of commitment out of the shadow and into the light, I hope to help all those who struggle with these issues. I invite you on a journey into the love-phobic dance, so that ultimately you can let more love into your life.

PART 1

*The dance of
pursuing and
withdrawing*

THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

*For one human being to love
another: that is perhaps the
most difficult of all our tasks, the
ultimate, the last test and proof,
the work for which all other work is
but preparation.*

R.M. Rilke¹



In Part 1 I describe all the aspects of a
fear-based love dance and its steps.

By the end of this first part you'll know whether
you are love-phobic and what part you play in the
dynamic. You'll know the difference between fear
of abandonment and fear of commitment and
understand how the two sides of the dance –
pursual and withdrawal – interact.

Are you love-phobic?



‘Love-phobic’ isn’t a term used to refer to people who have failed in life; on the contrary, it often applies to people who are extremely successful in many areas of their lives. But when it comes to matters of the heart, they keep repeating the same patterns: love either never lasts or it never leads to the desired relationship. If you feel like love always seems to slip through your fingers, and you suspect that there might be a pattern behind this, then there’s a fairly good chance that you’re love-phobic. Do you fall in love quite often but find your love is usually unrequited? Or do you not fall very easily, but when you do it’s for the wrong person, for someone who’s unavailable, already in a relationship or incapable of emotional intimacy for some other reason? Do you have an image of what your ideal partner should look like? Do you never get beyond short-lived relationships or do you bolt as soon as a real connection is on the cards? If so, then it looks like you are love-phobic.

Alternatively, you may be in a relationship but not experiencing the reciprocity you long for. You’re lacking true intimacy or closeness. Often the partners in such a relationship behave more like a brother and sister. They may be best mates and effective managers of their family, but the intimacy you would expect in a romantic partnership

is nowhere to be found. These two create distance by living side by side while pursuing completely different interests, for instance, or by losing themselves in work, sports or their devices. When intimacy becomes all but non-existent, they sneak out of the back door and reach out to others. Those others may or may not be in a relationship of their own and have similarly seen the intimacy dry up.

You may ask yourself why it's always your predicament to have a partner who refuses to commit to a real connection or closeness. You tend to put all your time and energy into making your relationship work, but sooner or later you find yourself beating a dead horse. It takes courage to ask yourself whether you have a problem allowing true intimacy into your life. The strong urge to connect with another person, one who deflects your attempts, could be an unconscious way of camouflaging your own fears. This unconscious fear is like a saboteur who keeps manoeuvring you into the same painful role.

If you struggle with intimacy, you often have a strong desire to maintain your single lifestyle, your freedom and independence. You probably need space, both in and out of romantic relationships. You won't easily settle down or truly connect but keep searching for the 'perfect' partner — someone who doesn't actually exist.

Of course, there could also be genuine reasons why you might be afraid to commit or why you want to end a relationship. For example, you may have a strong wish to have children while your partner doesn't, or you may feel that your personal development is being stifled or that you have nothing left to say to each other. These are legitimate reasons. What this book is about is the recurring pattern of being unable to connect because fear keeps eclipsing love. This fear manifests in varying degrees of severity. Some people are able to embark on a long-term relationship and develop coping mechanisms that mask their discomfort and commitment-phobia. And for others, the mere thought of an intimate relationship causes

anxiety. They may be so overcome by fear at the first signs of love that a crush is never given the chance to get off the ground. In their bestseller *He's Scared, She's Scared*, Julia Sokol and Steven Carter define commitment-phobia as 'a claustrophobic reaction to being in a relationship'.²

In short, 'love-phobic' applies to people who are looking for a partner, but who are unable to enter into a long-term, close and reciprocal relationship for fear of intimacy. And it also applies to people who already are in a relationship, but without the desired level of intimacy and genuine connection. If this happens too often and it becomes a pattern, it's time to accept that it is more than a coincidence. Until you understand how this conflict plays out, you run the risk of falling into the same trap again and again and you will continue to attract relationships that revolve around pursuing and then withdrawing from love.