Love In The Making:
A photographer's look at relationships and how they are made.

An Honors Thesis (ART 480)

by

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Abstract

Romantic relationships are the inspiration for countless stories, poems, ballads and other forms of artistic expression throughout history. The constant idealization of love and romance has caused many in society to become cynical about love and marriage. In a series of black and white photographs, I capture different forms of romantic love that exist in modern society and display a realistic look at what relationships really are behind the scenes.

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I would like to thank all the couples who allowed me to photograph their lives. I could never have completed this project without their help.

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The basis of our society is built upon the relationships that people have with each other. Parents to children, doctors to patients, friends and particularly those of a romantic nature. Current society often sees romantic relationships as transient, insignificant and without purpose or direction. Dating has become something you do for fun, and marriage has lost its appeal to many young couples. Our culture needs to rediscover a respect and appreciation for this kind of relationship. Society is made up of families and strong families come from strong relationships, particularly between a husband and wife, so if we lose our understanding of their importance, we will continue to see a deterioration of our society’s social bonds.

Human relationships can be very complex and because they involve unique individuals, every relationship is different. Despite this, there are some characteristics that many good relationships share. This project shows the many differences that can exist between different couples, but also discovers some of the things they have in common. By revealing the beauty found in the intimate moments between two people, I hope to work toward restoring faith in love and marriage which has been destroyed by things like one night stands, cheating and divorce.

This thesis project consists of a series of photographs titled *Love in the Making* regarding the ordinary lives and interactions of couples. The emotion of love cannot be sustained without time and effort, so these photos show the activities and interactions that a couple uses to maintain their love. The photos are taken in the home or a familiar place, with minimal staging or direction. My goal while photographing is to capture the moments that are usually hidden and to reveal what is ordinarily unseen.

My first inspiration for this project was a story I heard many years ago about a foreign exchange student who misunderstood the meaning of the phrase “making love”.
The student interpreted the phrase as referring to the constant attention and work that goes into making a relationship meaningful and strong, rather than the colloquial meaning it has in society today. This story sparked my curiosity and I began thinking about what it is that makes a relationship strong and how men and women work to make love last.

As a traditional Roman Catholic, my deeply religious background has been an important influence on the development of the work. While the overall subject matter was influenced by the story, my choice of subjects was heavily influenced by my own personal beliefs on gender roles, femininity, and traditional values. I chose to focus on the traditional male-female relationship, which meant that I did not include any divorced couples, homosexual couples or any other manifestations that fall outside the realm of the traditionally accepted.

Laura Letinsky, *Untitled (Adrienne and Stephan)*, 1992

The style of the images was inspired by the series *Venus Inferred* by Laura Letinsky. She photographed heterosexual couples in environments that they were familiar with and comfortable in. The couples in her photograph, particularly this one, seem to have more complex relationships than just friendship, yet with elements of
frustration or distance between the man and woman. They capture intimate moments between the two and show something we wouldn’t normally be able to see.

*Love in the Making* is printed in black and white to help achieve a sense of timelessness that the *Venus Inferred* images lack and to be reminiscent of a time many years ago when traditional values were more widely held.

The photos of Steve Giovinco were an influence on how I wanted to approach photographing my subjects. His series *On the Edge of Somewhere* shows a couple that is completely comfortable with themselves and with being photographed. I wanted to strive for that feeling of familiarity with the couples I chose to photograph for this series. The two appear to be in their own home and in their own space, comfortable enough for the man to just lie down. The relationship is such that the two can be together and yet be occupied by their own activity without feeling the need to interact. This photo has a sense of silence free from awkwardness or discomfort.

Steve Giovinco, *Untitled (New Hope, PA, #1121)*, 2009

Another inspiration was the *Niagara* series from Alec Soth. I wanted to emulate the emotion and complexity that is expressed in his images, but with less straightforward images and shots that were candid and in motion. Many of the couples he photographed are inactive, sitting or lying down, and looking straight ahead, near or
even directly at the camera. I liked how he showed couples that clearly had strong emotion between them, but I wanted my subjects to be more active and unaware of the presence of the camera. I wanted my viewers to feel as though they had been given a sudden and unexpected glimpse into the daily lives of these people. I didn’t want it to feel like the subjects had been posed a certain way or even asked to participate in the project.

Alec Soth, *Martha and Anthony*, 2004

The first step in the process of creating this series was to identify couples to photograph. I began by reaching out to friends and family members that I knew were married, engaged or in a dating relationship who might be willing to be photographed. During the actual shoot, I spent up to several hours with the couple that I was photographing, while they continued with whatever they would normally be doing during that time. Some couples cooked dinner, others sat down and talked, enjoyed a cup of coffee or a glass of wine and still others danced and enjoyed each other’s company.

A recurring theme I saw in the images was communication and discussion. Several of the couples chose an activity that was simple, like drinking coffee or wine, but allowed them to relax and reconnect with each other. It is common relationship advice
to focus on communication, but it was interesting to see the various activities where it was actually carried out.

Alea Bowling, *Engaged, 4 months*, archival inkjet print, 8x10, 2014

One aspect of the entire project that I truly enjoyed was getting to know the couples that I photographed in a different and more intimate way. I was allowed to witness a part of their lives that is usually kept very close and shared only with each other.

Alea Bowling, *Dating, 1 year 6 months*, archival inkjet print, 20x24, 2014
This image is a personal favorite because of the emotion that is shown in the photo. You can tell that this moment and this relationship is a source of joy for both people, but especially for the woman. Her face shows the happiness that a fulfilling relationship with another person can provide.

Their ability to have such enjoyment in this moment shows the importance of small, everyday actions that build up the bond between two people. They aren't dancing at a grand ball or a lavish restaurant, the room is cluttered and disorganized, but that doesn't prevent them from simply enjoying a beautiful moment in the midst of their everyday lives.

Alea Bowling, *Married, 7 years 6 months*, archival inkjet print, 20x24, 2014

Another powerful image from the series expresses how having children tends to change the dynamic between and husband and wife. The woman is in a position of trying to balance her responsibilities towards her kids, who are demanding her attention, while also being aware of what her husband is doing. In the image, the man is helping to prepare dinner, which is often considered a woman's responsibility. His
actions show the kind of partnership and communication that a healthy relationship requires.

I chose to title the images with the current state of the relationship, whether it was dating, engaged or married, and how long they had been in that stage when the photograph was taken. I wanted to include something to inform the viewer about who the people in the photograph are, but I felt that since the relationship is what I am focusing on in the photos, that information is more important and relative to the photograph than the couple’s name or location.

The final installation of Love in the Making features ten couples of different ages and stages in life. Ten images, one for each couple, are printed 8”x10”, 16”x20”, 20”x24” and framed in wooden frames before being arranged and displayed. I chose to print the photos I considered to be the most successful or the most impactful in larger sizes. The photos I printed largest at 20”x24” have the most visible interaction between the individuals and contain many of the elements that I consider to be important in building
a fulfilling relationship. I also printed three 16”x20” images that had strong compositions or visible emotions that I felt should be seen larger.

My concept for Love in the Making developed from a perspective of interest in the structure and inner workings of the traditional male/female romantic relationship. This is significant as it relates to the decay of traditional values in modern society and the devaluing of purposeful discernment and commitment in favor of emotional and sexual attraction. The photos capture the moments that identify and characterize how the individuals interact with one another and how they intentionally work to both contribute and benefit from the relationship.

Furthermore, the photos are successful in showing that current society is not as far removed from the past as it may seem. Technology and innovation have advanced so much in the last few years that it seems as if the world changes on a daily basis. Love in the Making shows certain relationships that exist today but still feel as if they could belong in the past. Respect for a husband and wife or mom and dad as the head of a family, and families as the building block of society, is an ideal that has declined in recent years, but these photos show how it is still alive in many ways.

I have always had a fondness for romantic stories and ‘happily-ever-after’ type fairy tales; however, I know that love in real life is not what movies and books show. I think it is important for our society as a whole to realize that ‘true love’ doesn’t just last forever, but requires hard work to be maintained. Love in the Making draws attention to the importance of choice and intentional actions over feelings and transient attraction, as well as the continuing existence of traditionally structured families and couples. Each couple was chosen specifically due to their dedication to their relationship and they each display in a different way their beautiful love and devotion to each other.
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Love in the Making
Alea Bowling

As a professional photographer of weddings and engagements, my job is to capture the love between a couple during some of the happiest moments of their lives. For Love in the Making, I wanted to go behind the outward appearances to take a look at the daily lives and activities of these individuals.

Current society treats relationships as transient, impermanent and important only for as long as they make you happy. With this series, I wanted to challenge that view and photograph couples that inspire me with their devotion and respect for their relationship and each other. I chose to photograph couples who illustrate relationships based on more than just feelings and enjoyment. The photos are presented in black and white to give a sense of timelessness and tradition, reminiscent of a time when marriage and the family unit was revered as the basis of society.

In my photographs, I feature people of varying ages and stages in their lives. Each couple expresses different emotions depending on their circumstances. The two who have been dating for less than a few years are still enthralled by each other’s presence, while the couple who has spent many years dating long distance have a more bittersweet feeling to their time together.

Respect for the importance of marriage has deteriorated over the years, resulting in things like one-night stands, cheating and divorce. Dating has become something you do for fun instead of an important step on the path to marriage and actually getting married has lost its appeal to many. Love in the Making works toward restoring faith in traditional love and marriage and provides a hopeful look on inspiring relationships that exist today.
1. *Married, 56 years 4 months*
   Archival Inkjet print
   2014
   16x20

2. *Engaged, 1 year 3 months*
   Archival Inkjet print
   2014
   8x10

3. *Married, 1 year 8 months*
   Archival Inkjet print
   2014
   8x10

4. *Engaged, 4 months*
   Archival Inkjet Print
   2014
   8x10

5. *Dating, 2 years 8 months*
   Archival Inkjet Print
   2014
   20x16
6. *Married, 3 years 5 months*
Archival Inkjet Print
2014
16x20

7. *Dating, 1 year 6 months*
Archival Inkjet print
2014
20x24

8. *Married, 30 years 2 months*
Archival Inkjet print
2014
8x10

9. *Married, 10 months*
Archival Inkjet print
2014
8x10

10. *Married, 7 years 6 months*
Archival Inkjet print
2014
20x24