

7 Love and Emotion

When “Love Marriage” Needs a Little Help

After decades of fixing arranged marriages for their children, Indian parents are taking on a new challenge: trying to orchestrate their kids’ love marriages. A new generation of young Indian professionals has refused to follow the arranged-marriage route, with its emphasis on caste, family ties, wealth and skin color—with the blessings of their parents.

But as these kids tread toward their 30s, some parents say they fear their offspring’s chances of finding a marriage partner are evaporating entirely. These parents, while trying to respect their children’s wishes, are trying other measures, like pushing their offspring to singles networks and online dating sites.

Take Pramodini Srinivasan, a former trainer in the information technology industry and now a writer for a wellness Web Site. Ms. Srinivasan has a Bangalor-based nephew who is nearing 40 and Bangalore-bred son in London who is hitting 30. Both are indifferent to marrying within their traditional south Indian community.

But neither has made any headway in finding a wife on their own, even though Ms. Srinivasan has declared that she would be happy for them to fall in love and marry.

—Sarita Rai, india.blogs.nytimes.com, April 23, 2013

Few relationship issues have fascinated people as thoroughly and consistently as love. Songwriters, philosophers, poets, and even religious scholars have speculated on the antecedents, features, and consequences of love. Some have suggested that love is a many-splendored thing; others have offered that love hurts and stinks; and still others have focused on the nature of different types of love, such as platonic love, brotherly love, and Christian love. For most Westerners, love is considered a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for marriage, whereas other cultures have traditionally awarded it a more secondary consideration.

Psychologists, in general, and social psychologists, in particular, entered the study of love at a relatively late stage. This is not surprising in light of the various paradigms that dominated the discipline at one point or another. Freud’s seemingly obsessive preoccupation with sex as a major motivator of human behavior compelled him to define love as a compensatory mechanism that kicked in whenever the desire for a sexual union was blocked. Presumably, sexual frustration of this sort leads to idealization of the other person along with a feeling of falling in love (Freud, 1922). For the behaviorists, with their exclusive focus on stimulus-response connections, sex was important for the experience of love in a very different way. Specifically, Watson (1924) considered it an innate response elicited by the cutaneous stimulation of the erogenous zones. Finally, social psychologists

of the 1950s and 1960s treated love as an attitude that predisposes one to think, feel, and act toward another in certain ways (Rubin, 1970).

Presumably, if Ivanka thinks that Jared is a pretty neat guy, she will have positive feelings about him and may consequently entertain a proposal for a dinner date with some degree of seriousness. Such a sequence of events is suggested by one prominent view (e.g., Breckler, 1984; Eiser, 1986) that looks at attitudes as consisting of three components: (1) a *cognitive component*, which consists of everything we know and believe about an object or a person; (2) an *affective component*, which describes our feelings toward the object or person; and (3) a *behavioral or conative component*, which contains our behavioral intentions toward the object or person.

Thus, someone with a favorable attitude about broccoli is likely to have favorable beliefs about it, along with positive feelings and an urge to consume it whenever the opportunity presents itself. Similarly, if Fred has favorable beliefs about Linda, then he is likely to have positive feelings about her, along with a tendency to seek out her company. Note that there is an underlying assumption of consistency here. Favorable or unfavorable beliefs about an object or person usually fall in line with positive or negative feelings and their corresponding behavioral intentions. As it turns out, this assumption is more troublesome than one might suspect. Frequently, our belief about the healthiness of broccoli does not translate into liking, much less into a desire to eat it, and the same can hold for our attitudes about people (e.g., Tesser & Shaffer, 1990). As a result of such complications, research on attitudes became more preoccupied with resolving issues of consistency among its components than with delineating the nature of their affective components.

In defense of academic psychology, it is important to note that laypeople appear to be just as confused about the nature and meaning of love. Visitors to the United States are frequently struck by the effusiveness with which Americans express what appear to be simple preferences. We claim that we *love* (or hate) skateboarding, arugula, and mojitos when in fact we merely *like* (or dislike) them. This seems to imply that love is simply intense liking. Then again, people often go to great lengths to assure us that they like us but not necessarily love us. The suggestion to “just be friends” is not really an indication that a reduction in love should ensue but instead implies that liking should be the predominant sentiment in the relationship.

Liking and Loving: A Conceptual Distinction

Given the profound implications of labeling one's feelings for another as “love” rather than “liking,” psychologists were eventually forced to abandon the idea that love was nothing more than intense liking (Heider, 1958). Interestingly, the first crack at differentiating between the two types of sentiments came out of an attempt to develop attitude scales that would distinguish the extent to which a person *likes* another and the extent to which a person *loves* another. Specifically, Rubin (1970) developed two attitude scales to measure love and liking. A few samples follow:

Liking Items

1. I think that ___ is unusually well-adjusted.
2. I think that ___ is one of those people who quickly wins respect.
3. I think that ___ and I are quite similar to each other
4. I have great confidence in ___'s good judgment.

Love Items

1. If I could never be with ____, I would be miserable
2. I feel very possessive toward ____.
3. I would do almost anything for ____.
4. I feel I can confide in ____ about virtually everything.

A look at the items of both scales shows several things. First, liking appears to be a matter of favorable evaluation of the other (e.g., “I think that ____ is unusually well-adjusted”), respect for the other (e.g., “I think that ____ is one of those people who quickly wins respect”), and the perception of similarity (e.g., “I think that ____ and I are quite similar to each other”). Love, on the other hand, seems to consist of an affiliative and dependent need component (e.g., “If I could never be with ____, I would be miserable”), an exclusiveness and absorption component (e.g., “I feel very possessive toward ____”), and a predisposition to help (e.g., “I would do almost anything for ____”).

To further explore the differences between liking and love, Rubin administered both scales to 158 dating couples and asked them to respond once with their dating partner in mind and once with a close same-sex friend in mind. The finding from this study corroborated many of Rubin’s speculations about the differences between liking and love, although there were a few surprises, as well. First, the two scales were only moderately correlated, suggesting that although liking and love often go hand in hand, they are not the same thing. As we all know, we can like others without loving them, and sometimes we may love others without really liking them all that much. Along these lines, participants liked their dating partners only slightly more than their same-sex friends, but they loved their dating partners much more than their friends. Somewhat surprisingly, scores on the love and liking scales were more highly correlated for men, suggesting that men are perhaps more confused about the true nature of their feelings, whereas women are prone to make more subtle distinctions. Finally, women tended to like their boyfriends more than they were liked in return. This difference was almost entirely due to differences in the ratings of task-related dimensions, such as good judgment, intelligence, and leadership potential. Keep in mind, however, that this study was conducted over 40 years ago. It may be that in these days of increased gender equality, this type of finding may no longer be obtained.

The Prototype of Love

In thinking about the differences between love and liking, Rubin (1970) was initially inspired by the writings of anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists. Their speculations about the nature of love became the basis for many of the items that subsequently formed the love scale. In using this approach, Rubin ended up with a sample that was strongly biased in favor of highly educated academics marked by peculiar ways of thinking.

But what about people whose thinking has not been contaminated by years of intellectual immersion in an academic discipline? Would they think of love in the same way as a psychologist or an anthropologist? Maybe. Maybe not. What love is in most people’s minds may be an empirical question. To that end, all one would need to do is to ask a sufficient number of people to list the features of love as they see it and look for a consensus about which features are considered more or less central by most people.

Table 7.1 The 10 Most Central and the 10 Most Peripheral Features of Love According to Fehr (1988)

<i>Most Central</i>	<i>Most Peripheral</i>
1. Trust	1. Scary
2. Caring	2. Dependency
3. Honesty	3. Uncertainty
4. Friendship	4. Butterflies in stomach
5. Respect	5. See only other's good qualities
6. Concern for other's well-being	6. Gazing at the other
7. Loyalty	7. Euphoria
8. Commitment	8. Heart rate increases
9. Acceptance	9. Energy
10. Supportiveness	10. Thinking about the other all the time

Source: Fehr (1988). Reprinted by permission.

This would establish a prototype of love; that is, the results would yield the features most commonly associated with love. Fehr (1988) took this very approach by first asking a large number of undergraduate research participants to list as many features of love as they could think of in 3 minutes. This procedure resulted in a list of 68 features that were listed by two or more people. Fehr then asked a second group of undergraduates to rate each item on the list in terms of how central this feature is to love, using an 8-point scale ranging from 1 ("extremely poor feature of love") to 8 ("extremely good feature of love"). The 10 most central and 10 least central features are listed in Table 7.1.

The picture of love painted by this study is slightly different from that of Rubin. On the one hand, Rubin's predisposition to help seems to be reflected in "Concern for the other's well-being" and "Supportiveness." Similarly, Rubin's affiliative and dependent need appears to be reflected in "Want to be with the other" (not shown in Table 7.1). On the other hand, "Friendship" and "Respect," which were among Fehr's most central features of love, had been classified by Rubin as being part of liking. However, before we can brand academics as sadly misguided in their thinking, we need to acknowledge one possible shortcoming of Fehr's (1988) study. It may be that participants' responses were at least partly influenced by their normative expectations regarding what love should be rather than what love is. This could explain why "Sexual passion" (not shown in Table 7.1) was rated as a peripheral rather than a central feature of love.

These shortcomings aside, it is probably safe to conclude that for most people love is a curious mixture of trusting, caring, helping, wanting, and commitment. With this in mind, we can now look at some theories that deal with the issue of how this particular emotion comes about in the first place.

Causal Theories of Love

The Evolution of Love

Love is generally considered a uniquely *human* emotion. If we adopt this view, the human capacity to experience love may be related to reproduction and genetic survival.

Humans face some unique reproductive challenges that have required unique adaptations. Compared to other primates, human offspring are weak, slow to develop, and dependent on adult caretakers until well into their teens (Martin, 2003; Hill & Kaplan, 1999). At the same time, human offspring are weaned at a much earlier age than most other primates, which allows for shorter intervals between births. One adaptation to the challenges of raising several highly dependent children at the same time is bi-parental care (Pillsworth & Haselton, 2005). Simply put, two parents are better than one at providing for high-maintenance offspring. Fathers in particular provide nutritional and social resources, protection against predators, and models for learning (e.g., Marlowe, 2003).

Successful bi-parental care requires a strong parental investment on the father's part, which in turn requires a high degree of certainty regarding a child's paternity (Trivers, 1972). Pair bonding provides a basis for that certainty, maximizing the parental investment on the father's part. Love enables pair bonding and, along with commitment (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001), provides the emotional glue to hold the bond together (Pillsworth & Haselton, 2005).

To the extent that love is part of an adaptation to evolutionary pressures, one would expect to find corresponding processes in the human brain (see Table 7.2 for a listing of the specific neurological substrates of lust, romantic love, and attachment). A study that looked at what happens in the brains of participants as they thought about their romantic partner identified dedicated neurotransmitters that correspond to our experience of three different processes common in the experience of love: lust, romantic attraction, and attachment (Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Li, & Brown, 2002). *Lust* and sexual attraction were associated with high levels of androgens and estrogens. *Attraction* and romantic love were associated with high levels of dopamine and norepinephrine along with low levels of indoleamine and serotonin. Finally, *attachment* was associated with processes involving oxytocin and vasopressin (Fisher, 2000; Fisher et al., 2002). More recently, oxytocin has been implicated in parental, romantic, and filial attachment in humans (Feldman, 2012), and many of its effects appear to be mediated by increasing perceptions and behaviors related to trust (Bartz, Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2011). At any rate, from an evolutionary perspective, lust, romantic attraction, and attachment

Table 7.2 Neurological Substrates of Lust, Romantic Love, and Attachment

Process	Neurological substrates
Lust (sexual attraction)	Androgens: testosterone, estrogen—sex drive, libido
Romantic love	Dopamine—pleasure/reward system Serotonin—modulates anger, aggression, body temperature, mood, sleep, appetite Norepinephrine—fight-or-flight system, modulates alertness, arousal, influences reward system
Attachment	Oxytocin—letdown reflex (lactation), uterine contractions, released during orgasm, involved in social bonding, trust formation; in humans, released during hugging, touching Vasopressin—involved in aggression, blood pressure regulation, temperature regulation, released during sex, supports pair bonding, induces male-to-male aggression

are the processes that regulate the emotional function of mating, reproduction, and parenting respectively.

Specific hormonal fluctuations have also been linked to the experience of love. Maraziti and Canale (2004) compared the neurobiology of men and women who had recently fallen in love (i.e., the “love group”) to those of single men and women and long-term couples. They found that men in the love group had lower levels of testosterone than either single men or those in long-term relationships. Conversely, women in relationships had *higher* testosterone levels than women from the other groups. It appears that this “hormone equalizing” serves to create greater similarity between the couple and further enhances continued pair bonding.

Finally, it appears that evolution has provided us with another foolproof mechanism for the experience of love and the success of pair bonding. Regions of the brain associated with dopamine also overlap with those rich in oxytocin and vasopressin receptors, which have long been associated with the reward centers of the brain (Curtis, Liu Aragona, & Wang, 2006; Aragona et al., 2006; Aron et al., 2005). Take a look at Table 7.2 for a comprehensive list of the neurological substrates of love: As far as our brains are concerned, experiencing love is rewarding!

Love as Misattribution of Arousal

Evolutionary principles provide a compelling yet somewhat distal explanation for why and how humans experience love. Misattribution theory (Schachter & Singer, 1962), which we discussed at length in Chapter 4, provides a more proximal account. As you may recall, within the framework of this theory, any emotion is a result of a change in the level of physiological arousal (e.g., increase in heart rate, perspiration, pupil dilation, etc.) that becomes labeled according to the cues available in the situation. And although no single study has explored the effects that misattribution of arousal may have for the specific experience of love, it is safe to speculate that any arousal-producing event or situation has the potential to at least intensify feelings of love. Trouble at work or school, parental or social disapproval (e.g., Driscoll et al., 1972), and the need to keep a relationship a secret (Lane & Wegner, 1994; Wegner et al., 1994) are but a few factors that may serve as sources of arousal with similar effects, as long as there is at least some ambiguity about the origin of the arousal in the first place.

Love as Preoccupation With the Other

The misattribution perspective on love primarily takes into account the importance of unexplained arousal, and it awards thinking a somewhat subsidiary status, as it limits its role to the task of explaining the arousal. However, it may be the case that thinking, particularly thinking about the other, may be an important component for the generation and subsequent intensification of subjective feelings of being in love. To outside observers, people who are in love often appear as though they have lost their minds. Not only do they go around with strange smiles on their faces, but they also seem to have a hard time concentrating on the most elementary tasks of life, such as working and enjoying time with their friends.

There is, of course, a good reason for this. People in love simply cannot help thinking about the object of their love at practically all times. But given the pervasiveness of this

preoccupation, it may be that thinking about the other has a causal effect on the experience of love. If nothing else, thinking about the other may intensify feelings of love in ways similar to how our evaluations of a variety of things seem to change the more we think about them. If, for example, we just left a movie theater with a sense of disappointment, further thinking is likely to increase our bad feelings. By the same token, if we liked the movie, thinking about it more is prone to increase our initial liking. Presumably, continued preoccupation with the movie brings to mind thoughts that are largely congruent with our initial evaluation, and thus additional thinking is likely to further polarize them (Tesser, 1978).

That this type of reasoning may explain the intensification of love over time is suggested by the results of a study in which members of dating couples recorded how often they thought about their partner over a period of two weeks (Tesser & Paulhus, 1976). Additionally, research participants in this study also reported on how much they felt they were in love at the beginning and end of the two-week period, using the love part of Rubin's liking and loving scales, as well as the number of dates during that time. Finally, research participants were asked to keep track of any discoveries they made about the other that could give rise to decreased feelings of love (e.g., strange and intolerable personal habits). This measure served as an indication of the reality constraints within which research participants' thinking about the other took place. The general idea was that discovering that their partner is an alcoholic or an ax murderer might substantially alter the nature of research participants' thoughts about their partner and ultimately attenuate the love they feel.

The results, as expected, showed that the frequency with which the members of the couples thought about each other was strongly correlated with their subjective experience of love. This manifested itself in a couple of ways. First, the frequency of thought at Time 1 (the beginning of the two-week period) was highly predictive of how much in love research participants felt at Time 2 (the end of the two-week period). At the same time, how much in love research participants felt at Time 1 predicted the frequency of thinking at Time 2. In other words, the more participants felt in love, the more they subsequently thought about the other, with the ultimate outcome of intensified feelings of love. Not surprisingly, dating frequency and love were positively correlated, but encountering reality constraints was negatively correlated with love. This latter finding is important for it suggests that love is not totally blind. Obsessive preoccupation with the other may to some extent border on idealization, but discovering things that we dislike about the other seems to impose an important constraint on this process. Furthermore, it suggests that obsessive thinking may have its most profound impact when we are lacking a lot of information about the other, perhaps because the relationship is in its very early stages and little self-disclosure has occurred, or perhaps because the lovers are kept apart by circumstances (Beach & Tesser, 1978).

Intense preoccupation with another person may be part of a *motivational state* that drives the preoccupied person to seek the companionship of or union with the target of their desire. Rempel and Burris (2005) suggested that specific situations create these motivational states or drives that compel us to seek proximity to a loved one. They identify unique sets of circumstances that trigger the experience of six types of love: erotic love, dependence, enrichment, companionate love, regard, and altruistic love. This drive approach suggests that there are different *types* of love. Their scheme corresponds with much of what researchers on type theories have proposed.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The results of Fehr's (1988) study may be partially attributed to participants being influenced by normative expectations about love. If that is the case, how might participants from non-Western cultures respond? How would their answers speak to the universality of love?
- If love is an evolved mechanism meant to ensure successful bi-parental care for the children, what implications does this have for single parenthood?
- Beach and Tesser's (1978) model of love as preoccupation with the other predicts that the more you dwell on your love, the more it intensifies. Can you think of circumstances where this would not be the case? Can you think of circumstances where the opposite might happen?

Type Theories of Love

In some ways, causal theories of love focusing on the role of arousal and obsessive thinking are neat and tidy theories as they isolate some of the factors that help translate attraction into love and lead to a further intensification of love. The tidiness of such mini-theories (Bentler & Huba, 1979), however, is not without its cost. For one thing, cynics might object to these theories as treating love as a “secondhand emotion,” originating primarily from physiological arousal and obsessive thinking. For another, by focusing primarily on increases (or decreases) in the experience of love, these theories look at love mostly in terms of its *quantitative* aspects. At the same time, they devote little or no attention to the *qualitative* differences in the experience of love from one person and one relationship to the next. Obviously, the kind of love we have for our siblings is different from the kind of love we feel for our romantic partners. Moreover, in reviewing our past intimate relationships, we often remember qualitative differences in infatuation, companionship, and the like rather than differences in the amount of love we felt for another. That love has many manifestations, even in the context of intimate relationships, has been addressed by various theories stressing *individual differences* in love. Common to these approaches is the theme that there are different types of love that vary more or less systematically among people.

The Colors of Love

In many ways, the intellectual godfather of all individual difference approaches to love is John Lee's (1973, 1988) typology of love as colors. By drawing on the color metaphor, Lee was able to come to some interesting assumptions about possible differences in love styles among people. First, just as we have different color preferences, we have idiosyncratic preferences for different love styles. Second, just as we prefer different colors for our wardrobe and our home, we prefer different love styles for different people. Third, just as color preferences change over time, preferences for love styles as well may change as we get older, perhaps as a result of our relationship history. Finally, just as

primary colors can be mixed to produce new ones, primary love styles can be mixed to produce secondary ones.

Armed with this set of assumptions, Lee went on to examine everything that had been written about love by poets, philosophers, and social scientists throughout history. Using the conclusions from his readings as a framework from which to understand people's experiences, he collected structured accounts of how people experience love. On the basis of his combined analysis, Lee (1973) initially identified 12 different love styles that characterized the way most people experience and think about love. Eventually, this initial classification was pared down to six different love styles, composed of three primary love styles and three secondary love styles, which represented mixtures and compounds of the primary styles. In order to correspond to the different types of love described in the classical literature, Lee gave them Greek and Latin names rather than the names of colors.

Primary Love Styles

The first love style Lee identified was **Eros**, which describes the passionate love often caused by a strong attraction to the physical attributes of the other. Eros is love that is certainly *not* blind. Moreover, people characterized by this love style tend to think that finding the perfect mate is the most important thing in life. Once they have found their mate, the relationship is frequently characterized by a strong desire for abundant physical and verbal acknowledgments of their love. The polar opposite to Eros is **Storge**, a kind of companionate love style that develops out of friendship and interaction. It is most common in agrarian societies, where partner choice is limited by virtue of people's proclivity to stay in one place for most of their lives, and is less typical for societies with high mobility. Unlike Eros, overt expressions of love and passion are rare; instead, the focus in Storge is on commonly shared interests. In addition to Eros and Storge, there is **Ludus**, which describes a sort of playful love mostly for the short term. Ludus lacks a "falling in love with all its trimmings" element as well as commitment in either time or exclusivity and thus is characteristic of people who prefer to remain single.

Secondary Love Styles

Mixing the proper amounts of Eros and Ludus results in a love style called **Mania**, the kind of dependent and possessive love characterized by obsessive preoccupation and intense jealousy. Similar to Eros, Mania requires constant and tangible assurances of love, but just like Ludus, there is no preference for any particular type of person. As the term implies, lovers characterized by Mania appear to have lost their senses as they vacillate between demonstrating their love and getting control of the relationship. As such, manic love has an element of pathology, which is further amplified by the tendency of manic lovers to project desired qualities onto their partner of choice.

Mixing Storge and Ludus results in the very different love style of **Pragma**, which describes a love style anchored around matters of logic and practicality. For pragmatic lovers, finding the compatible mate is first and foremost a practical problem that can be solved through effort and persistence. Just like Storge, Pragma tends to develop slowly, as pragmatic lovers are wary of warning signs. And, like Ludus lovers, pragmatic lovers

are restrained about commitment and the future, at least until they find the right partner. Sexual compatibility is considered to be important, but it is perceived to be a matter of sharpening skills rather than chemistry. Not surprisingly, pragmatic lovers like to join organizations, such as singles clubs, to find a partner.

Finally, mixing Eros and Storge yields **Agape**, a form of love that is selfless, giving, and altruistic. Lovers characterized by Agape consider love as a duty to respond to the needs of the other, even if their love is not reciprocated. And while Agape is espoused in the New Testament as the ultimate form of love (1 Corinthians 13: 4–7), it is perhaps the least common form of love in adult romantic relationships. Instead, it may be descriptive of the kind of love parents have for their children.

Research on Love Styles

Lee's typology certainly has face validity, as most of us are able to sort ourselves and our love styles into one of his categories. Thus, it is not surprising that social scientists were quick to explore its utility and apply it to a variety of relationship phenomena, including partner choice, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. Facilitated by Hendrick and Hendrick's (1986) 42-item Love Attitude Scale (LAS), several studies revealed generally positive correlations in the love styles of two partners, especially on Eros (Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Of course, there is always the chicken-and-egg problem with interpreting correlational research: Are matching love styles the basis of choice, or do partners in a relationship come to share each other's views?

The results on the relationship between love styles and satisfaction are less difficult to interpret. Consistent with the importance people generally place on passion and altruism, Eros and Agape are generally associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas Ludus and satisfaction tend to be negatively correlated (e.g., Bierhoff, 1991; Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987; Hendrick et al., 1988; Levy & Davis, 1988). Further, matching levels of Eros and Agape, along with Pragma, seem to predict relationship stability as well as the number of children a couple has (Bierhoff, 1991). However, as was true for partner matching, the question of whether love styles themselves or *outcomes* of the love styles (i.e., commitment, investment) predict stability more directly remains an open one.

In some ways, the interpretational ambiguities inherent in much of the research on love styles are mirrored by a number of conceptual ambiguities surrounding the very concept itself. As some (e.g., Clark & Reis, 1988; Davis, Kirkpatrick, Levy, & O'Hearn, 1994) have pointed out, Lee's theory is essentially a descriptive typology of relatively complex syndromes containing components that are not necessarily found together in ways that an ideal type would suggest. What is lacking is a sense of which of the various components are more or less central to the various love styles. This lack of specificity, moreover, makes it difficult to assess the degree to which any one person matches each style. Lee's theory is also silent on the issue of how different love styles evolve in the first place and how they change over time. However, because of the inductive way in which Lee generated his theory, further theorizing may not lead to answers to these questions: The lack of theoretical guidance makes it difficult to modify the theory in ways necessary to provide a maximally useful framework from which to understand just why and how "love is a many-splendored thing."

A Triangular Theory of Love

Despite its shortcomings, Lee's (1973, 1988) typology has been influential in setting the stage for other typologies of love that, although still primarily descriptive in nature, avoid some of the problems inherent in Lee's theory. Working in a less inductive manner, Sternberg's (1986, 1988) **triangular theory of love** proposed that love consists of three basic ingredients: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. The *intimacy* component refers to feelings that promote closeness, bondedness, and connectedness and includes such feelings as concern for the welfare of the other, subjectively experienced happiness, positive regard, sharing, support, mutual understanding, and intimate communication. The *passion* component refers to sources of arousal that promote the experience of passion, such as sexual needs and needs for self-esteem, affiliation, submission, dominance, and self-actualization. Finally, the *decision/commitment* component refers to the decision that one is in love with the other and the commitment to maintain that love.

Intimacy, passion, and commitment follow a unique time course as a relationship develops. In successful relationships, intimacy increases steadily, much in the way as self-disclosure increases. Conversely, dying relationships are characterized by a decrease in intimacy. Passion develops rapidly in the beginning of a relationship and is eventually replaced by habituation. However, drastic decreases or even a loss of passion may lead to a somewhat cyclical pattern by returning a relationship to its beginning. Of course, the larger question is: Where do increases and decreases in passion come from in the first place? One possibility is that passion is a function of intimacy. At the early stages of a relationship, passion will be high because of initial increases in intimacy (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999). Simply put, learning about another, sharing experiences, and finding out that the other person cares about you are arousing and thus provide the basis for passion. By the same token, as two people reach the point where they feel they know everything about each other, have run out of new experiences to share, and feel they understand each other completely, passion decreases accordingly.

The temporal pattern of decision/commitment depends somewhat on the success of a relationship, which to some extent is influenced by the development of intimacy and passion. In successful relationships, with rapidly increasing passion along with gradually increasing intimacy, commitment initially develops somewhat slowly. Dramatic events, such as having sex for the first time or moving in together, generally mark a drastic increase in commitment. Once couples are established because they are married, own a home, and have children, commitment levels off primarily because it reaches a ceiling; that is, it cannot increase any further.

The three components of love are present in all close relationships to various degrees. Assuming that in any given relationship, intimacy, passion, and commitment can be either low or high, Sternberg (1986) came up with eight forms of love that are characteristic of qualitatively different relationships. Consummate love describes the kind of relationship in which all three components are present, and consequently is the type of relationship for which many strive, yet few achieve. Realistically, most romantic relationships may be lacking in one or more components (see Figure 7.1).

Sternberg's (1986; 1988) typology is useful in understanding how different forms of love result in qualitatively different relationships. However, at this point, there is little if any research supporting its utility in explaining relationship satisfaction and stability.

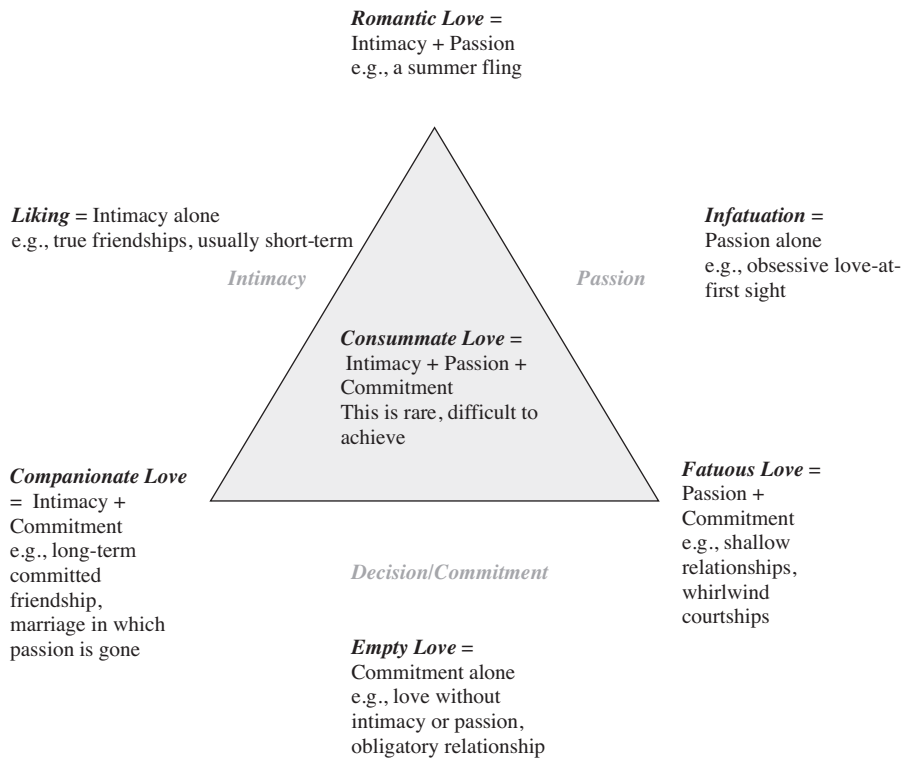


Figure 7.1 Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Model of Love

Nonetheless, one could argue that people will be happy with their relationship if it meets their mutual expectations. For example, two people may be satisfied with a relationship low on commitment as long as they both agree that commitment is not important. Mismatches in expectations as to the relative importance of any of the love components is likely to lead to conflicted relationships. Further, Sternberg felt that all three components were of equal importance to relationships, and hence one might also assume that relationships slanted toward one component may be under pressure to achieve a more balanced state.

Passionate Love and Companionate Love

The eight different types of relationships described by Sternberg (1986; 1988) represent the range of theoretical possibilities created by the varying levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment. By themselves, they give no indication of which ones are more likely to occur empirically. Some (Hatfield, 1988) have argued that most close relationships fall into one of two categories: passionate and companionate love.

Passionate love is characterized by an intense longing for a complete union with the other and is represented by both the unadulterated passion of infatuation and the intimate passion of romantic love in Sternberg's typology. According to Hatfield, passionate love comes in

two forms. Reciprocated passionate love creates a sense of fulfillment along with feelings of elation and perhaps even ecstasy on the part of both members of the couple. Unrequited passionate love often results in feelings of emptiness, anxiety, and despair on the part of those whose love is rejected. As it turns out, unrequited love is difficult for the would-be lover as well as the rejecter. Would-be lovers often look back on the relationship with a mixture of positive and intensely negative emotions. They feel that the love had been mutual, that they had been led on, and that the rejection had not been communicated clearly. Contrary to what one might believe, rejecters are by no means better off. Looking back on the relationship elicits mostly negative emotions. And while rejecters feel morally innocent, they feel guilty over their inability or unwillingness to return the other's love. At the same time, however, they perceive any attempts on the part of the would-be lover to keep the relationship going as intrusive and annoying (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992; Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

Hatfield (1988) proposed that passionate and companionate love have a lot in common with attitudes to the extent that they contain cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Passionate love, for example, entails intrusive thinking, a general preoccupation with the other, and an idealization of the other and the relationship. Emotionally, passionate love includes attraction, especially of a sexual nature, and both positive feelings *and* intensely negative feelings when things are amiss. Additionally, there is a longing for reciprocity and a desire for complete and permanent union. Behaviorally, passionate love compels actions toward determining the other's feelings, a proclivity to study the other person, and a desire to do things for him or her.

Companionate love, on the other hand, lacks some of the longing of passionate love and instead describes the attraction we feel toward another person with whom our lives are deeply intertwined. Cognitively, it entails sharing information about one another—even if it is embarrassing. The emotional component is characterized by the *possession* of intimacy rather than the longing for it, while behaviorally the continued proximity creates a sense of comfort rather than arousal. Although both types of love feel great, many are loathe to imagine spending a lifetime being in companionate love rather than being madly, passionately in love with their partner.

However, successful relationships probably have elements of both in the sense that for many people their lover is also their best friend. Moreover, as relationships mature, they may undergo a transformation from being primarily passionate to being primarily companionate. After all, as Sternberg (1986) has argued, passion is subject to habituation, and the focus of a relationship may shift as a result of specific events. It is thus not surprising that life satisfaction, or our subjective well-being, is more closely linked with companionate rather than passionate love (Kim & Hatfield, 2004).

How well does this distinction between passionate and companionate love explain differences in relationship satisfaction and stability? One could argue that the experience of passionate love is perhaps more rewarding in part because of the overwhelming experience of longing for a union with the other. One could further argue that companionate love may be more predictive of success in the long term because it lacks the emotional turmoil often created by the experience of passionate love. Unfortunately, there is little research that addresses these issues, although one study (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995) reports that women who experienced a great deal of passionate love were happier, more satisfied with their relationship, and more excited about their relationship than women who experienced little passionate love. Interestingly, these same associations were not found for men, suggesting perhaps the existence of gender differences in love.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Lee's typology of love has been criticized for describing syndromes that contain components not necessarily found together in ways that an ideal type would suggest. Do you agree or disagree with this criticism? Can you provide an illustration for your position?
- Kim and Hatfield (2004) found that life satisfaction is more closely linked with compassionate rather than passionate love. However, Aron and Henkemeyer (1995) found that women who experienced more passionate love were happier and more satisfied with the relationship than women who experienced less passionate love. How could you explain these seemingly contradictory findings?
- Elements of passionate as well as companionate love are usually found together in most successful relationships. Moreover, as relationships mature they are thought to go from being primarily passionate to being primarily companionate. Do you think that movement in the opposite direction, from primarily companionate to primarily passionate, is also possible?

Individual Differences in Love

Gender

Whether the experience of love is different for men and women has been a matter of almost perpetual debate. Newspaper advice columns as well as talk shows are flooded with complaints from people who feel their partner does not love them. Frequently, such complaints are based on a perceived lack of companionship, intimacy, or sex. Keep in mind, however, that for every person who registers complaints about his or her love life, there are probably thousands who appear to have no problems in this regard. Not surprisingly, then, research on gender differences paints a somewhat sketchy and inconsistent picture. It appears that for every study that reports gender differences on such measures as Rubin's Love Scale (Black & Angelis, 1974; Dion & Dion, 1975), romanticism (e.g., Sprecher, 1989b), or passionate love (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995), there are an equal number of studies that fail to find gender differences (cf. Cunningham & Antill, 1981; Hatfield & Rapson, 1987; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a; Rubin, 1973). Thus, it appears that any effects of gender on the specific experience of love may be mediated by other variables.

Age and Relationship Duration

Age is one variable that may affect the experience of love among men and women. Surprisingly, there is reason to believe that even very young children can experience feelings akin to Hatfield and colleagues' passionate love (Diamond, 2001). Children aged 4 to 18 who completed the Juvenile Love Scales, a children's version of the Passionate Love Scale, indicated that they experienced just as much passionate love as 18-year-olds (Hatfield, Schmitz, Cornelius, & Rapson, 1988). The only exception to this pattern was the finding that boys around the age of 12 reported experiencing little in the ways of passionate love, perhaps because they are at an age where they tend to be uncomfortable or even disinterested with

anything having to do with girls. On the face of it, the finding that even young children can experience passionate love may be taken as an indication that Freud was perhaps correct in proposing that there is sexuality in childhood. However, there is a more likely explanation. Hatfield, Brenton, and Cornelius (1989) found that among children, passionate love was correlated with dispositional anxiety as assessed by the trait part of Spielberger's (1966) state-trait anxiety scale. Thus, it may be that in an attempt to explain anxiety-related arousal, highly anxious children imitate adult models by attributing it to passionate love.

Comparisons of romantic experiences among young adults, their parents, and their grandparents suggest an influence of age on a romantic view of life (Hieger & Troll, 1973). Whereas young adult women were more romantic than males, the exact opposite was found when the researchers looked at the entire sample. Furthermore, the grandparents in the sample were less romantic than the young adults.

This finding is interesting for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it appears that young couples are more inclined than older couples to engage in behaviors indicative of passion and romanticism, such as embracing and kissing in public and holding hands. For another, one theory (Berscheid, 1983) suggests that the experience of love and other emotions in relationships decrease over time. This is the case because of the kinds of things that bring about emotions in the first place. According to Simon (1967) and Mandler (1975), emotions result from interruptions of ongoing behavior. Many activities we perform throughout the day are either so well practiced (e.g., driving a car) or so engrossing (e.g., reading a novel) that performing them results in little or no emotion. However, when they are interrupted by external events, such as a text message notification on your phone, or a fiery car crash in the next lane, a variety of emotional reactions can occur.

Couples whose relationships have reached a state of maturity have usually found ways to handle the chores of everyday life, perhaps relying on a **transactive memory** or a more general division of labor (Wegner et al., 1991). Furthermore, such chores as getting the kids ready for school, shopping for groceries, and preparing meals often require highly interdependent and sequential contributions from both adults. For example, Jane can load the kids in the van for the trip to school only after John has made sure that they are properly dressed; Bob may be able to fix dinner only if Ann made a stop at the grocery store on the way home from work. According to Berscheid (1983), there is little room or cause for strong emotions when things go smoothly. However, when these interdependent sequences of behaviors are interrupted because John sleeps through his alarm or Ann has to work late, considerable emotion can result. Although these examples suggest a potential primarily for the experience of negative emotions, the theory predicts the occurrence of positive emotions, as well.

Moreover, it predicts a steady decrease of love over time. Basically, falling in love constitutes a major interruption in our lives and thus results in strong emotional experiences. As the focus of a relationship shifts toward raising children and making ends meet, the experience of love is somewhat diminished, although the potential is still there. It generally diminishes again once the kids leave the house and financial security has been achieved. Under these circumstances, people's lives become less intertwined, thus decreasing the potential that interruptions will lead to the experience of love and other emotions.

Several things are appealing about Berscheid's approach to love and emotion in close relationships. The theory appears to explain the data reported by Aron and Henkemeyer (1995) fairly well, and it provides hope for those whose lives revolve around dirty diapers, night-time feedings, and providing taxi service to ballet lessons and basketball games. Equally important, it suggests that apparent decreases in love, passion, and romanticism

may not be an inevitable outcome of age per se, but instead of relationship duration. This is important in part because there is little we can do about getting older, yet we can arrange our relationships in a way that they can provide us with the experience of love over a lifetime.

Love Over Time: Does It Get Better or Worse?

It is disheartening to think that the love two people have for one another would decrease as their relationship matures beyond its early tumultuous stages. Interestingly, Berscheid's theory is not the only one that makes precisely that prediction; it is implicit in at least one other theory. Aron and colleagues (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) conceptualized "falling in love" as a process by which the self is expanded to include another person. This means that forming a close relationship with another involves integrating the other's perspective, resources, and characteristics into the self, resulting in self-expansion. Of course, as people get to know each other more and more as their relationship matures, opportunities toward self-expansion may decrease at the same rate. To the extent that self-expansion and love are linked, reduced opportunities for self-expansion may be accompanied by decreases in love.

Fortunately, these somewhat dire predictions about decreases in love as relationships mature are not well supported by actual data. Tucker and Aron (1993) reported results from a study that measured the amount of passionate love couples experienced at three important transition points: Before and after they got married, before and after they had their first child, and before and after the children were old enough to leave home. The amount of passionate love declined steadily over time and from before and after the transitions, suggesting that the relationships took on a more companionate nature. However, these decreases were relatively small. Even couples who were contemplating or experiencing the "empty nest" still reported at least moderate amounts of passionate love.

Further, the human mind seems to have found important mechanisms to offset these small decreases in passionate love and in fact to keep love alive. One study in particular (Sprecher, 1999) asked members of 101 heterosexual dating couples two sets of questions at varying intervals over a 4-year period of time. First, at each wave, couples were asked to report their perceptions about how their feelings of love, commitment, and satisfaction had changed since the last data collection. Second, couples also responded to "objective" measures of their current levels of love, commitment, and satisfaction. The results from those couples who were still together at the conclusion of the study (roughly 40 percent) showed an intriguing pattern. In terms of their *perceptions of change*, most couples reported *increases* in their feelings of love, commitment, and satisfaction. In addition, the *objective measures* yielded *no increases* over time. In other words, even though respondents were no more in love with their partner 2, 3, or 4 years after the relationship began, they felt as if they were!

Beyond Love: A Quick Look at Guilt

Love, in its many manifestations, is undoubtedly of paramount importance for close relationships. Feelings of increasing love are associated with the initiation of close relationships, whereas decreasing feelings of love are often precursors for their termination. Of course, continued feelings of love for the other also help maintain a relationship even in times of conflict and turmoil. However, it appears that **guilt** provides love with a powerful

ally in this process. Just like shame, the experience of guilt is promoted by interpersonal contexts. Whereas **shame** mostly results from failure combined with a concern with others' evaluations, guilt usually stems from moral transgressions involving harm to others (Baumeister, Reis, & Delespaul, 1995; Tangney, 1992), especially valued partners in close relationships (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that guilt is commonly found in relationships that are communal in nature (Baumeister et al., 1994), generally as a result of neglecting the other, skipping out on obligations, and selfish actions.

Interestingly, guilt may be more than just the emotional price one partner pays for committing a variety of transgressions against another. Instead, it appears that guilt may be a powerful mechanism in the maintenance of close relationships, as it can help restore power among the powerless (i.e., the victims of transgression). In other words, guilt can pave the way toward influencing the behavior of the transgressor in terms of eliciting apologies and promises involving corrective behavior in the future. This perspective suggests that victims of interpersonal transgressions are not as poorly off as they may seem, as long as the perpetrators experience feelings of guilt over their transgression. And because guilt is caused by harming a close other in the first place, only the most cynical may be exempt from its experience.

So where does this all leave us? In 1975, the late U.S. senator William Proxmire bestowed the Golden Fleece award for wasteful spending of tax dollars on the National Science Foundation because it had funded a study on why people fall in love. This dubious honor appears to have become somewhat of a rallying cry for social scientists interested in close relationships. Theorizing and research on love have proliferated ever since. Although a lot of it has, in fact, added to our understanding of the role of love in relationships, numerous questions remain unanswered. In light of this, many researchers have recently come to conceptualize love as a form of attachment much like the attachment infants have to their caregivers. We will look at this perspective more closely in the next chapter.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Some researchers believe that emotions result from interruptions of ongoing behavior. According to this theory, established couples experience a decline in love due to the fact that they established smooth routines of interactions and work. To the extent that this is true, how could you go about fanning the flames of romantic love?
- Although various theories predict a decrease in love over time, a longitudinal study involving 101 couples (Sprecher, 1999) revealed that at the end of the 4-year span of the study the surviving couples felt more in love than at the beginning of the study. How would you reconcile the empirical finding with the theoretical predictions?
- According to the research on unrequited love, rejecting another's love is associated with feelings of guilt. Could this same guilt compel a person to have a relationship with another in the absence of romantic feelings? What might motivate the aspiring lover (that is, the one who loves more) to seek and maintain the relationship?

Summary

Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining <i>love</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The difference between liking and loving • Different forms and types of love • Love and the brain connection • The relationship of love to satisfaction and relationship stability • The relationship of gender differences and age to the experience of love • The impact of guilt on close relationships
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin (1970, 1973) first to propose a conceptual distinction between liking and loving • Fehr (1988) defined love by specifying its prototypical features • Love as the misattribution of arousal • Causal theories of love that emphasize the importance of physiological arousal and cognitive preoccupation with the other • Type theories of love <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee (1973) identified six forms of love based primarily on an analysis of literature • Sternberg (1986) suggested that three components of love—intimacy, passion, and commitment—combined to form eight types of relationships • Hatfield (1988) elaborated on the differences between passionate and companionate love • Rempel and Burris (2005) conceptualize love, like hate, as a motivational state with specific triggers and goals
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People distinguish between liking and love • People experience love in vastly different ways as suggested by the various typologies • Specific neurotransmitters and brain regions correspond to the experience of three different types of love: lust, passionate love, and attachment (Fisher et al., 2002) • Both physiological arousal and cognitive preoccupation with the other as important causal factors in the experience of love • Role of love in relationship satisfaction and stability is less clear • Individual differences in the experience of love as well as gender and age differences cloud the relationship between love typologies and relationship stability and satisfaction • Guilt may be important for the maintenance of close relationships once transgressions have occurred (Baumeister et al., 1994)

Key Terms

Eros: a passionate love style, often caused by a strong attraction to the physical attributes of the other.

Storge: a companionate love style, based on friendship and commonly shared interests.

Ludus: playful love, mostly for the short term.

Mania: secondary love style, resultant from mixing elements of Eros and Ludus; characterized by obsessive preoccupation and intense jealousy.

Pragma: practical love, resulting from mixing Storge and Ludus.

Agape: secondary love style, derived from Eros and Storge, characterized by giving, selflessness, and altruism.

Triangular theory of love: a model of love according to which love consists of three basic ingredients: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment.

Passionate love: a form of love characterized by an intense longing for a complete union with the other.

Companionate love: the attraction we feel toward those with whom our lives are intertwined.

Transactive memory: a shared system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information that is greater than the individual memories.

Guilt: social emotion resulting from moral transgressions that involve harming others.

Shame: social emotion resulting from having done something dishonorable, improper, or ridiculous.