

Falling in love is  
considered a norm  
psychology essay



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Falling in love is considered a norm in modern society since arranged marriages are not forced upon the majority of today's generation. The purpose of this essay is to investigate and discuss the different factors involved in falling in love. One of the factors that contribute to falling in love is physiological needs, which involves hormones and needs for sexual fulfillment in relationships. Next, there are affiliation and intimacy needs, which require constant contact with other people. Besides that, there is also physical and non-physical attraction that contribute to falling in love. Research indicates that physical attractiveness help people estimate the individual's personality. Non-physical attraction focuses on the personality and other internal factors of the individual that contribute to attraction. Then, there is emotional security and protection as the need for someone to engage in romantic relationship. Also, individuals falls in love based on their self-concept.

Keywords: love, intimacy, affiliation, attraction

## **Why do We Fall in Love?**

"All you need is love". This famous lyric has been sung countless times by the famous English band, The Beatles. Many individuals today however, disagree with this line and emphasize the importance of other factors apart from love in life. If this is truly the case, what causes human beings to still fall in love even in today's society where it is acceptable to live one's life without a partner? Why do we still feel the need to have a romantic partner? Is it due to animalistic instincts installed within every person to find a mate for reproductive purposes or is it to help fulfill our psychological needs by making us feel less lonely?

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According to the famous philosopher, Plato, love is defined as the "...desire for the perpetual possession of the good" (Amir, 2001). It is also defined as the "...search for our alter ego, the part of us that will make us whole again" by Aristophanes (Amir, 2001). From a psychological perspective, love is still an ambiguous variable as psychologists are still finding reliable and valid ways to measure it. From our understanding, love may be referred to as the unconditional feeling of sentiment and affection towards another person of either the same or opposite sex. In this particular study, we will be focusing on romantic love, which can be defined as the intimate relationship between two individuals.

The significance of researching and analyzing why we fall in love is to understand the different factors that contribute to us falling in love and forming relationships with certain people.

## **Physiological Needs**

There are many biological factors that may help an individual to fall in love. Biologically, the brain controls and functions most parts of the human body. To understand the main aspect as how the brain retorts to love, an individual has to do a detailed examination in terms of all the structures involved in the human body. For one, the limbic system which is the part of the brain that deals with an individual's emotional retortion. The system is a combination of structures which includes the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus controls both the sexual and behavioural actions towards the human body. Looking at both the sexual and behavioural functions, an individual can contemplate the importance towards the limbic system in terms of falling in love.

Secondly, would be the chemical reactions discharged when an individual first sees a person and falls in love. The chemical reactions discharged are neurotransmitters and hormones. The first hormone discharged would be the epinephrine hormone and the sympathetic nervous system activates it in order to make a decision as to whether it should go against the attack or to fight it (Ellen, 2008). There are many physiological aspects that occur during this reaction, these include an individual's pupils to dilate and increase heart rate. Due to this, the brain becomes more focused and this gives out a feeling as though someone is in love (Kelle, 2005). Other hormones that are discharged when one experiences love at first sight would be endorphins, oxytocin, dopamine and vasopressin (Silver, 2003).

There was a study conducted by Brown (2003) whereby individuals who are in a relationship and define themselves as passionate lovers were asked to look at a picture of their significant other and each time they were looking, their brains were examined by a Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The results found that the number of times an individual views the picture, the larger the amount of neurotransmitters is released. Hence, the larger the amount of neurotransmitters released, the more likely individuals want to spend time together (Peterson, 2006).

Another factor that can contribute to an individual falling in love would be pheromones. A study conducted by Alex (2004) stated that people are attracted to different smells and if that smell is appealing to that individual, they tend to want to be with them. Therefore, an individual's scent is important in terms of attraction.

## **Affiliation and Intimacy Needs**

The need for affiliation is another reason why people fall in love. People who have high need of affiliation usually prefer to be around people and to be accompanied by others. They have no problem in making friends easily, communicating with others, and they also usually join new groups very often (as cited in Donelson, 2010). According to Amoroso & Walters (1969), affiliation would even reduce the stress and fear of a person when they have someone to accompany them. They feel very safe and protected and at the same time, they are able to distract themselves from all the stress issues that they are going through, especially stress at work.

Other than that, love and belongingness needs are also stated in Maslow's Hierarchy needs which are categorized under the deficiency needs. These needs are met through the satisfactory relationship, with their family members, friends, classmates, peers and many other people with whom they have connections and keep in touch. Moreover, individuals who are quite pleased with their physiological and security needs usually now go around and have an attempt to find a steady relationship from which their need for love and belonging can be met (as cited in Martin & Joomis, 2007).

Furthermore, people also fall in love because of intimacy. Intimacy is defined as a person who shares everything with another person, getting to know the good and bad characteristics of a person, to tell of anger and love and to accept everything about them just the way they are (Jude, 2011). Most of the people said that intimate relations were connected with the feelings of affection and warmth and with happiness and contentment. This is shown by

an experiment conducted by a scientist where he asked a few college men  
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and women about what they felt when they get intimate with someone they care about. These students stated that they share their personal information and share a lot of activities together when they and their partner get intimate. However, for those who have distant relationships have a different point of view on intimacy, where their relationships are usually associated with anger and sadness (Elaine & Richard, 1994).

## **Physical Attraction in Romantic Relationships**

The question regarding what qualities ought to strive for in friendship, romance and marriage have existed for a long period of time. What is sought after by both men and women in searching for their significant half? Despite the fact it is agreed physical attraction is at the top of the list, there are those who favor other qualities such as personality. In searching for a partner, common among society to believe that men are easily attracted to women based on physical looks, whereas women are more drawn to men who are either financially stable or equipped with a great personality. In matters of physical attractiveness, it differs according to the perception of each member of society.

The belief of what is beautiful is good has long been supported by theories. This can be seen in a study called by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster in 1972, "What is Beautiful is Good" which stated one's physical attractiveness has an effect on one's personality traits. A clear elucidation would be that physical and facial beauty serves as a symbol of an individual with positive personality and social characteristics. In addition, physical distortion translates to unattractiveness, which serves as a negative sign that one carries horrendous qualities (as cited in Langlois, Kalakanis, Rubenstein, <https://assignbuster.com/falling-in-love-is-considered-a-norm-psychology-essay/>

Larson, Hallam & Smoot, 2000). Physical appearance does not symbolize a good personality, nowadays the social media influences the community by giving them the impression that attractive people are kind with this society pay more attention to attractive people because of their self-interest in becoming their other half. Undoubtedly that physical attractiveness is the golden ticket of the dating preferences on any individuals, according to Regan and Berscheid. Apart from attractive people are desirable target of romance, it is likely that attractive men will attract attractive women and vice versa (as cited in Lee, Loewenstein, Ariely, Hong & Yong, 2008). When an attractive person is in the relationship with someone who is attractive as they are, society portray them as an ideal couple and they become a role model to the others.

In matters of searching for our life partner, do we yearn for physical attraction or do we simply live by the proverb for it is a trend? Regardless ones' perception of attractive differs according to the individual, at the end of the day physical attraction serves as an important role in the act of consideration. Curious it is why physical attraction is more vital than personality. One of the grounds why this curiosity exists is due to the fact that it is a culture norm that we respond better to physical attraction rather than personality. By referring to a cross-cultural study, infants prefer couples with attractive facial features as compared to unattractive couples (Langlois, Ritter, Roggman & Vaughn, 1991). However, infant usually responds to individuals that they are attached to or interact more instead of looking at their appearance, this is because of infant's visual limitation. Moreover, "similar principles" is one of the factors why physical attractiveness is crucial

through the eyes of certain individuals. Similar Principles refers to everyone chose those who are physically attractive to go on dates, however, those who are less attractive favors those who are less attractive as well. Study shown less attractive individuals tend to have less expectations towards physical attractiveness and values more on personality instead (Lee et al, 2008). This is because of inferiority. For some, they feel as if they are less attractive, therefore they feel they are not eligible to be with anyone who is attractive. However for some, when one is aware how unattractive they are, they develop a sense of value through observation or experience. For example, an attractive person mistreated the less attractive person badly and thus, resulting them to choose personality over look.

### **Non-Physical Attraction in Romantic Relationships**

Non-physical, or emotional attraction, plays a significant role in the formation of romantic relationships. In order for individuals to be attracted to one another on a personal level, they need to reciprocate each other's feelings towards one another. It is theorized that individuals show more attraction towards others who like them. This is known as the reciprocity principle (Luo & Zhang, 2009). This principle also states that if the person is unsure if another person likes them or not, the individual should like the other person less because the lower the certainty of the individual on whether or not another person likes them, the fewer social rewards this individual experiences and the less certain this individual is that the other person has a good or bad attitude towards themselves (Whitchurch, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2010). This can be considered as one of the reasons why two individuals can become attracted to one another.



This can be shown in a study conducted by Luo and Zhang (2009). In this experiment, a speed-dating session was simulated with a total sample size of 108, 54 males and 54 females. The results of this experiment indicated that there was some support for the reciprocity principle, meaning that when one individual found out that the other person they were interacting with liked them, they rated their liking for that particular person more.

However, studies have shown that reciprocity of liking between two individuals does not mean that it produces the highest amounts of attraction. This is where the element of mystery comes in, where an individual is unsure about another person and is consequently intrigued and drawn in by the other person, thus producing more attraction out of curiosity. The desire to find out more about this person is also brought into consciousness. As stated by Jacobs (2010), "...ignorance may not be bliss, but it sure is intriguing".

This can be proven by a particular study conducted by Whitchurch et al. (2010). In this study, a sample of 15 to 20 female college students volunteered to participate. The female participants viewed the profiles of four men who previously viewed their profile. The females were divided into three groups prior to the viewing of the males' Facebook profiles. The first group viewed 4 Facebook profiles of the men who rated them the highest, meaning the males who liked them the most, the second group viewed the 4 profiles of the men who rated them average, and the third group viewing the 4 men's profiles were not sure whether the men liked them or not. After viewing the profiles, they were asked to rate how much they like the men whose profiles they had viewed. It was found that the third group, who were

unsure of whether the men liked them or not, produced the greatest levels of attraction to the men out of all three groups.

This shows that we like the element of mystery as it motivates us to learn more about a certain individual. This can be linked to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. From the perspective of intrinsic motivation, which focuses on the fulfillment of certain tasks for personal reasons (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the mysteriousness of an individual motivates one to solve the mystery behind the individual in order to gain peace of mind, thus achieving closure. Apart from that, we can also link the mystery element to extrinsic motivation, which is the drive to attain external rewards such as admiration. The main goal of 'solving the mystery' of a certain individual is to find out if this person is attracted to us and whether he or she reciprocates the attraction we feel towards him or her. In short, we are motivated to seek admiration from the person of interest as the result of our investigation of this individual.

Apart from that, attraction between two individuals can also occur when they share similar characteristics such as attachment characteristics, for example. An individual will become more attracted to another person when their personalities, likes, dislikes, and other internal characteristics closely match. According to the self-similarity hypothesis, individuals are predicted to be more attracted to other individuals who share the same attachment characteristics as their own (Klohn & Luo, 2003). This may be due to the fact that people are motivated to find someone with whom they can relate to on different levels, and someone who can understand as well as

communicate with them, which can fulfill their needs for affiliation and intimacy.

To support this argument, the results of a study conducted by Klohnen and Luo (2003) found that individuals with similar attachment characteristics were more attracted to one another compared to individuals with different attachment characteristics, thus affirming the self-similarity hypothesis. It was theorized by them that people are more attracted to people similar to them because they are more comfortable with characteristics they are familiar with.

It can also be said that individuals develop stronger attractions to people who have similar attitudes and opinions and that the self-similarity hypothesis can be applied to attachment characteristics as well as personal attitudes or preferences towards specific things. This was proven in a study conducted by Yabrudi and Diab (1978), which investigated the effects of attitude similarity, dissimilarity, and religion on interpersonal attraction. This study was carried out among 50 male and 30 female Lebanese introductory psychology students. The results of this study indicated that the participants were more attracted to people with similar attitudes towards a certain topic.

Individuals want to fulfill their needs for affiliation in order to establish and maintain a positive, affective relationship with others as well as feel like they are socially accepted. Individuals tend to gravitate toward people who are similar to them because they want to have someone they can relate to and also to not feel like they are social outcasts. People also require intimacy in

their lives in order to produce positive emotions as a result of warm and close interpersonal relationships.

## **Emotional Security & Protection**

In addition to affiliation and intimacy, emotional security and protection also plays a huge role in why people fall in love. Men and women are known to have the need to feel a certain type of security at a certain point which only the opposite sex is able to provide. The attachment theory proposed by John Bowlby & Mary Ainsworth (as cited in Bretherton & Inge, 1992) states that it is the emotional bond where an individual's feeling of security is bound up in a relationship. Basic types of emotional security also include complementing or just saying I love you to their respective partners, this bring a happy secure feeling in an individual and in a way provides a picture that the other half is loyal and would not leave at any cost.

Protection on the other hand is more to physical whereby an individual feels good or simply safe when the partner is present. Research has shown that women are more likely to fuse protection and affection in a relationship whereas the opposite for men (MacDonald, 1999). A sense of secureness is something most of us need and who better to provide then the other half. Protection from peers, family, and teachers are completely different when compared to protection provided by the romantic partner. It is also agreeable that women are more likely to put together protection and affection as most women always want a man who would listen and give feedbacks in ways that make them feel guarded and where no could possibly harm them in any way.

## **Self-Concept**

One of the reasons why people fall in love is based on one's self-concept. Self-concept can be defined as individuals' own perception of themselves formed through one's experiences and interpretations of their surroundings. These interpretations are highly influenced by attributions, reinforcements, and partner's evaluation on oneself (as cited in Shavelson and Bolus, 1981). In order for individuals to define themselves, they started seeking out for romantic relationships. Most relationships started off with self discovery period, where they attributed their partner's behavior in response to their own behaviour. They started experimenting on their new ideal aspects of themselves and apply it into social context (Aron, Aron, & Paris, 1995). As they are able to have a stable relationship, they are bound to perceive themselves to have a better social role and have a proper way of conduct in the relationship.

According to the Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, teenagers will undergo the stage where they would seek out for their own identity or ended up with role confusion (as cited in Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Engaging in romantic relationships allows the teenagers to achieve the sense of individuality and identity as they are able to develop distinct self-concept in a romantic perspective such as how relatable or identifiable they are towards their partner. Having experiences in romantic relationship results in how one's perception on oneself in the romantic domain. As the teenagers are able to recognize and define their identity, they will have lesser conflict and confusion on their own self. Teenagers with pleasant experience in relationship may perceive themselves as a desirable partner as opposed to

those with unpleasant experiences who may have negative view on themselves on having a successful relationship (Furman & Shaffer, 2003).

Aside from defining oneself, individuals engage in romantic relationships in order to boost their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy hence the desire to fall in love become so socially desirable in our culture. Having a significant other to admire and love oneself enhances the person's feelings of self-worth (Aron et. al., 1995). With higher sense of self-worth, one would feel better about have higher self-confidence in terms of dealing in social situations thus increasing one's self-esteem. In addition, falling in love develops oneself in terms of distinctiveness, perspectives, and also resources which then become the basis of inflating one's self-efficacy thus increasing the individual's self-esteem (Aron et. al., 1995). This is because individuals will then becomes more confident in their capabilities, receive constant supports from the loved ones and also have better resources such as in financial terms; they will have better abilities to perform in their tasks which will then increases their sense of self-esteem.

A longitudinal study was conducted in Stanford University on 365 university undergraduates by Aron, Aron and Paris (1995) on consequences of falling in love in terms of self-concept change. The outcome of this experiment shows an increase in the self-concept and self-esteem domain. This indicates there is a change in self-concept when the participants fall in love. Hence, people are driven to fall in love by the fact that they will undergo positive changes in their self-concept.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this essay, people fall in love due to many factors, such as physiological needs, affiliation and intimacy needs, physical and non-physical attraction, emotional security and protection, and self-concept. The effects of falling in love and being in a relationship include the fulfillment of all the needs that were previously mentioned, contentment with life, and a sense of achievement. Hence, we cherish our relationships.