

Study of love and marriage



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Since the 20th centuries, love was also studied scientifically by psychologists. Lots of theories and studies regarding love had been established. Regarding interpersonal attraction, it has been suggested lower self-esteem (Reik, 1944; Walster, 1965) and proximity (Bossard, 1932; Newcome, 1956; Heider, 1958) facilitate interpersonal attractions. Similarity in personality (Reader & English, 1947) and attitudes (Newcomb, 1961; Byrne & Nelson, 1965) also correlate to interpersonal attraction. Physical Attractiveness (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966) was also found to influence interpersonal attraction. Regarding to the factors leading to a satisfying and long-lasting relationships, the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) proposed that it require a strong dose of passion, intimacy and commitment. It has also suggested that high commitment level contributes to satisfying relationship through relationship maintenance mechanisms (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004). Lastly, the self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986) implies that shared new and arousing activities and self-growth in a relationship contribute to a sustaining and happy relationship.

Research Aim

The present study aims at examining factors causing interpersonal attraction, as well as a satisfying and long-lasting relationship

Method

We interviewed 4 pairs of dating couples and 3 pairs of married couples who have maintained their dating/marital relationships for more than 1 year. Convenience sampling was used. The interview was semi-structured, in

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which there are some guiding questions regarding their love stories but follow-up questions are occasionally used to obtain deeper information.

Results

Regarding the common factors of interpersonal attraction, around half of the interviewees found their partner physically attractive to them when they first met, suggesting that physical attractiveness might play an important role at the early stage of romantic relationships. Besides, similarity in personality is another commonly reported factors, especially by married couples. They explained that it is easier to get along with someone with similar personality. However, there are exceptional case, in which the couples' personality differ greatly. This implies that instead of personality similarity, complementary personality can also be contributed to interpersonal attraction, as suggested by Winch's theory of complementary needs (Winch, 1958). We are not certain whether complementary personality and personality similarity is more likely to link to interpersonal attraction and further study is required. Similarity in values is another factor, probably because people tend to generate positive feelings to those who agree with their values as suggested by the established findings (Newcomb, 1961; Byrne & Nelson, 1965). Proximity is another factors that we have indirectly observed from our interviews as it is often proximity that bring chances to couples to know and interact with each other.

For the factors contributing to a long-lasting and satisfying relationship, we used several scales to measure the interviewee's satisfaction of their relationship, such as asking them to rate the amount of passion,

commitment and intimacy (Sternberg, 1986). All the interviewees were highly satisfied with their romantic relationships. In general, they agree that mutual respect and communication, passion and trust are factors in sustaining a relationship, which are largely fit into the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986). We have found that dating couples are more concerned about the affectionate feelings while married couples are more concerned with family values, probably because married couples care more about the whole family which involves more responsibilities instead of personal affection between two persons. Besides, we found that women were more likely to list communication while men were more likely to list sexual satisfaction and forgiveness in sustaining a relationship. This gender difference may be formed by preexisting gender roles in which men are more likely to apologize first while at the same time they might have a stronger sexual drive.

We also discover some behaviors that may contribute to a sustaining and happy relationship. In general, most interviewee have made sacrifices for their partner and been supportive to each other. For dating couples, they are also more likely to think that anniversary celebration and personal space as important in sustaining their relationship. Perhaps it is because at the earlier stage of love, passion play a more important role (Sternberg, 1986). When they have conflicts, most of them tend to be more rational in repairing their relationship. All these behaviors match with the behavioral maintenance mechanisms (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004) which was suggested to lead to couple well-being. In addition, dating couples often have exciting and new experiences together such as going on trips while both dating

couples and married couples reported that they have learnt a lot from the relationship. The result is largely consistent with the self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986).

Conclusion

To conclude, our present study found that factors that lead to interpersonal attraction are physical attractiveness, proximity as well as similarity in personality and values. On the other hand, we have found that mutual communication, forgiveness, willingness to make compromises, affection, and self-expansion as the factors contributing to a long-lasting and happy relationships. The result are largely in line with the existing findings and theories.

Critical Evaluation

The sample size of the present study is too small. We only interviewed 3 married couples and 4 dating couples, which is too small to generalize the result to the all couples in the world. Besides, as we used convenience sampling as our sampling method, the sample we used was not representative to the population. For example, we usually found our own friends and the friends of our parents to be the interviewee. Therefore, we fail to study couples from different groups of the society. Besides, we also lack dating couples of ages about 30 as well as married couples of old ages due to the sampling method we used. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is very low. Apart from this, our study will be more complete if we can also study some interviewees who are not so satisfied with their relationships and compare their love stories to those who have high level of satisfaction

and account for the difference. The present study is over focused with those successful lovers.

Besides, since we used interview to examine the topic, we cannot draw clear causal relationship. For example, even when the subjects report that they think that they like their partners for their similar personality, we are not sure whether their personality become more similar because of their romantic relationship or it is really the similar personality that generate the feelings of liking. Actually, it is difficult to use experiments to study this topic because it is not ethical nor practical to assign couples with different methods of maintaining relationship, and test their level of satisfaction some time later. Besides, we doubt that if there are possible ways to study love scientifically since every romantic relationships is unique and it will be oversimplifying to say that it is the personality or physical attractiveness that lead those couples fall in love.

Moreover, the study relies on the self-report of the interviewees. This will generate two problems. Firstly, the interviewees may not answer honestly. For example, the interviewees may denied that their partners were physically attractive to them when they first met because they might not want others to think that they only care about physical appearance. Besides, their answers were likely to be influenced by their partners that they tended to overrate their relationship. Secondly, some factors leading to interpersonal attraction and sustaining relationship may not be consciously aware of by the interviewees. For example, some scholars suggested that a person is more likely to fall in love when they are lower self-esteem (Reik,

1944; Walster, 1965). However, the interviewee might not be aware of these kinds of factors.

Lastly, cultural influences of interpersonal attraction and sustaining relationship are neglected. Different cultures may shape romantic relationships in different patterns. For examples, the Western lovers seems to be more expressive while the Chinese lovers are less likely to express their love verbally. Therefore, it is possible that under different cultures, people have different factors of interpersonal attraction as well as satisfying and sustaining relationship. Due to limitations, we failed to have a cross-cultural studies on this topic, which are likely to generate interesting findings.

To improve the study, we should increase our sample size and used the stratified sampling method. We should randomly chooses dating couples and married couples from different age groups so that a more representative sample base could be obtain to generate a more reliable result. In this way, we can also include more couples with lower level of satisfaction so that we can compare the results from two groups.

Besides, a short interview might be too superficial to understand romantic relationship. Therefore, we can select several cases and observe how the couples interact in their daily lives. The method of observation solve the problems of self-report and allow us to study individual cases more deeply, which I think is more applicable to the study of sustaining relationship and help to generate a more valid result

Moreover, when we are doing the interview, we can hide the identity of the interviewees, for example by interviewing online through typing, so that the interviewees may feel safer to speak out their true feelings and responses. This help to give way to more accurate response and higher validity.

If it is possible, we can also try to compare the result of different ethnic groups in Hong Kong to examine the cultural influences in affecting the factors of interpersonal attraction as well as long-lasting relationship.

In short, the low generalizability and limitations of interviews is the main problems of the examining the topic. To improve, we should increase sample size and find ways to improve the accuracy of self-report.