Journal 3: Measurement of Romantic Love

Citation:

Overview:
The article by Zick Rubin, titled *Measurement of Romantic Love*, presents initial research aimed at verifying a social-psychological construct of romantic love. Though social psychologists have studied interpersonal attraction in depth, no research has attempted to establish love as its own independent essence. This study was based on the assumption that love is independent from liking, with romantic love being defined as “love between unmarried opposite-sex peers, of the sort which could possibly lead to marriage” (Rubin 2).

The research process was divided into three phases: a paper-and-pencil love scale, a questionnaire of student couples, and a laboratory experiment.

The love scale was created by correlating responses from a questionnaire composed of both speculative and theoretical thoughts of the nature of love with panel responses indicating the personal insight from students and faculty on the notions of love and like. The connections pointed to three major elements of romantic love: affiliative and dependent need, predisposition to help, and exclusiveness and absorption. Subsequently, the questionnaire included those factors from both the love and liking scales and was administered to 158 couples at the University of Michigan. They unexpectedly found that love and liking were more highly related among men than women, providing some evidence for the perception that women distinguish more significantly between the two emotions. They also found that women tended to love their same-sex friends more than men, consistent with the social norm that women love their girlfriends more than men will admit to loving their “bros.” Additionally, feelings of closeness to marriage were strikingly correlated with the amount of time the couples had been dating.

Finally, although the questionnaire yielded proof for the construct validity of the idea of romantic love, it was still unknown whether love scale scores could predict actual behavior. Researchers predicted that partners who loved each other a lot, as graded by the love scale, would gaze into one another’s eyes more. The participants were categorized into “strong-together,” “weak-together,” “strong-apart,” and “weak-apart” groups based on whether they were dating (-together or -apart) and how they measured on the love scale (strong or weak). Two observers measured the lab experiment, one assigned to watch one person in the couple group. They used three clocks – one for each individual, pressed when they were looking at their partner, and a third clock that began when both previous clocks were pressed simultaneously, so as to measure mutual gazing.

As hypothesized, strong-together couples engaged in more mutual gazing than weak-together couples. However, the amount of individual gazing did not differ
substantially between strong-together and weak-together couples, following the exclusive and absorptive aspect of romantic love found in the love scale. The findings also showed that throughout all the groups, the women spent more time looking at the men than the reverse. The implications for this study are significant, as it creates the framework for the necessary distinction between love and liking, and provides further insight into the correlations between love and marriage.

Connections:

- The three main components of romantic love discovered in the creation of the love scale for this study relate remarkably to past literature on interpersonal attraction. The affiliative and dependent need component elicits a clear resemblance to both Freud’s (1955) channeled sexuality perspective of love and Harlow’s (1958) research into attachment behavior. The second component, the predisposition to help, corresponds with Fromm’s (1956) exploration into the various aspects of love, which he concluded were care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Lastly, the absorption component of romantic love identifies most notably with Slater’s (1963) work examining effects relationship intimacy (i.e. public display of affection) has on social situations.

- Caryl Rusbult’s investment model of interpersonal relationships presents a direction that romantic love can take over time. She maintains that the three things that make partners more committed to each other are rewards, alternatives, and investments. Over time, these factors (whether rewards outweigh costs, how many alternatives there are for the individuals in the relationship, and the amount of investment each person has put into the relationship) will determine the level of commitment partners have. This in turn will help romantic partners to engage in more prosocial behavior, and consequently feel more trust and satisfaction in the bond they share. The components of romantic love coincide with this model as well. The affiliative and dependent need relates to the commitment level of couples, while the predisposition to help component correlates with prosocial behavior, such as care and forgiveness. Lastly, the exclusiveness and absorption component discussed in the article pertains to the trust and satisfaction element of Rusbult’s model.

Questions:

- With the divorce rate in the U.S. near 40%, I wonder if further research into romantic love and potential marriage could remedy that. This study found three components – affiliative and dependent need, predisposition to help, and exclusiveness and absorption – that contribute to how strong the romantic love is between two individuals. How could pre-marriage counseling utilize this information to evaluate and give suggestion to potential married couples? If counseled couples were not reaching adequate levels in all three categories, could they be persuaded to hold off on getting married to let their relationship develop more fully?
• The fact that those subjects in the apart-groups engaged in as much eye contact as those in the weak-together groups leads me to this question: What is the balance between mutual gazing due to romantic love versus acquaintance seeking? When couples have been together for a long period of time, they may become comfortable and communicate in more implicit ways rather than using eye contact. However, individuals meeting for the first time may engage in more eye contact in order to get to know each other and gauge their personalities and relationship potential.

• Some people are convinced by the “love at first site” cliché, while others believe it takes more time to witness the love they have for another individual. According to this study, the latter would be true because strong-together couples showed more mutual gazing than those pairs that were not together. Can the notion of love at first site actually exist, or is that feeling the mere physical attraction that is the start of so many relationships?