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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS



HOW DEEP IS YOUR LOVE | POPULAR IDEAS ON ROMANTIC LOVE |
COPING WITH BREAK UPS & ATTACHMENT STYLES | NAVIGATING
ONLINE DATING | MINDFUL COUPLE COMMUNICATION | FAMILIAL
LOVE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES | AND MANY MORE

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EDITORIAL

Mok Kai Chuen | Editor-in-Chief
Annelise Lai | Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Nicole Chong | Associate Editor
Juanita Ong | Associate Editor

DESIGN

Xavierlyn Tan | Lead Designer
Andrea Ong
Alexandra Rodrigues
Charmaine Wah
Jasmine Chia
Nicole Yeo

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrea Ong
Anutra Guru
Carrie Lee
Charmaine Wah
Daniel Chan
Jessy Yong
Laura Jonathan
Michael Thong
Nicole Chong
Xavier Lim
Dr. Shawn Ee
Dr. Sunita Rai

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS

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EDITORS' NOTE

Love is, perhaps, the most complex notion to be fully understood. According to the ancient Greek philosophers, love is at once passionate, intense (*eros*) and also affectionate, friendly (*philia*). It could also be a spontaneous and unmotivated sense of transcendental regard for all of humanity (*agape*). We do not, however, experience love in such an organized and theoretical manner.

More often than not, love is both uplifting and devastating; nurturing and destructive; physiological and abstract. Love is both the butterflies in our stomachs and the surest warmth in our hearts. It is at times the greatest source of inspiration and, at other times, the saddest tragedy. In Wandavision, Vision mused "*What is grief, if not love persevering?*"

Could love be as simple as an emotional state, phenomenologically experienced? Or is it the culmination of the interaction between two lovers' emotional states, dynamically experienced and evolved over time? According to Baier (1991), "love is not just an emotion people feel toward other people, but also a complex tying together of the emotions that two or a few more people have; it is a special form of emotional interdependence". Love, thus, becomes immeasurable if it is unique to each relationship and its narrative.

In this issue, we aim not to categorically define or solve the mystery behind this conundrum. Instead, we showcase the psychological research into love and relationships (e.g., romantic love, neuroscience of love, attachment styles and love) and hope to elucidate some lay theories and misconceptions about love. We wish to also highlight the importance of self-love and how turning love inwards can sometimes bring forth new insight outwards.

With this, we conclude the three-part series on psychology and lifestyle (i.e., eating, sports and exercise, love and relationships). We are happy to announce that **Dr Denise Dillon**, former SPS Research Chair (2019-2021), will be taking over as Editor-in-Chief after this issue. Her experience as an academic will surely propel Singapore Psychologist even further and give it the recognition it deserves! We would also like to thank all our writers and designers who have stood by us and contributed immensely to this precious creation.

Read on and get psyched!

Mok Kai Chuen
Editor-in-Chief
Vice President (Outreach)

Annelise Lai Ke Yin
Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Publicity Chair

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

*She is water
Soft enough to offer life
Tough enough to drown it away
– Rupi Kaur*

Love – a powerful word that brings extreme emotions on both ends of the spectrum. Love encompasses the idea of pain and joy, hurt and comfort. Without these extremes, one would not experience this intense state of mind in its full glory. Love – something we crave, desire, and loathe all at the same time.

Love and Relationships have been researched on and studied for years. Since the times of Sigmund Freud to more current researchers from The Gottman Institute, love has been defined through different physical and psychological domains.

Through our next edition of the series, The Singapore Psychologist dives into the deep realms of love and relationships – uncovering how love is formed and cultivated between people, understanding the languages that we respond to and in turn how our attachment styles impact on the way we navigate and eventually end the relationships that we get into. Love has transcended from a physical space to one that is now very much virtual through our latest dating apps and dating sites, making it more complicated than ever before.

As psychologists, we work with relationships and emotions every day. The ability to walk this journey with our clients, friends and family is one that is important and necessary as we navigate love and relationships in all its forms. As we maintain our low COVID-19 infection numbers and as work from home arrangements are lifted, we feel the push to close our tumultuous year and pivot our focus to our *new* "new normal" that moves away from isolation and fear to one that celebrates communication, love, and connection.

As One Psych Community, let us continue walking this journey together with each other and may these articles be great conversation starters to build love and relations with all who matter. We hope that these resonate with you as much as they have resonated with us.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cherie Chan'.

Dr. Cherie Chan
President, SPS



How Deep is Your Love?

Andrea Ong

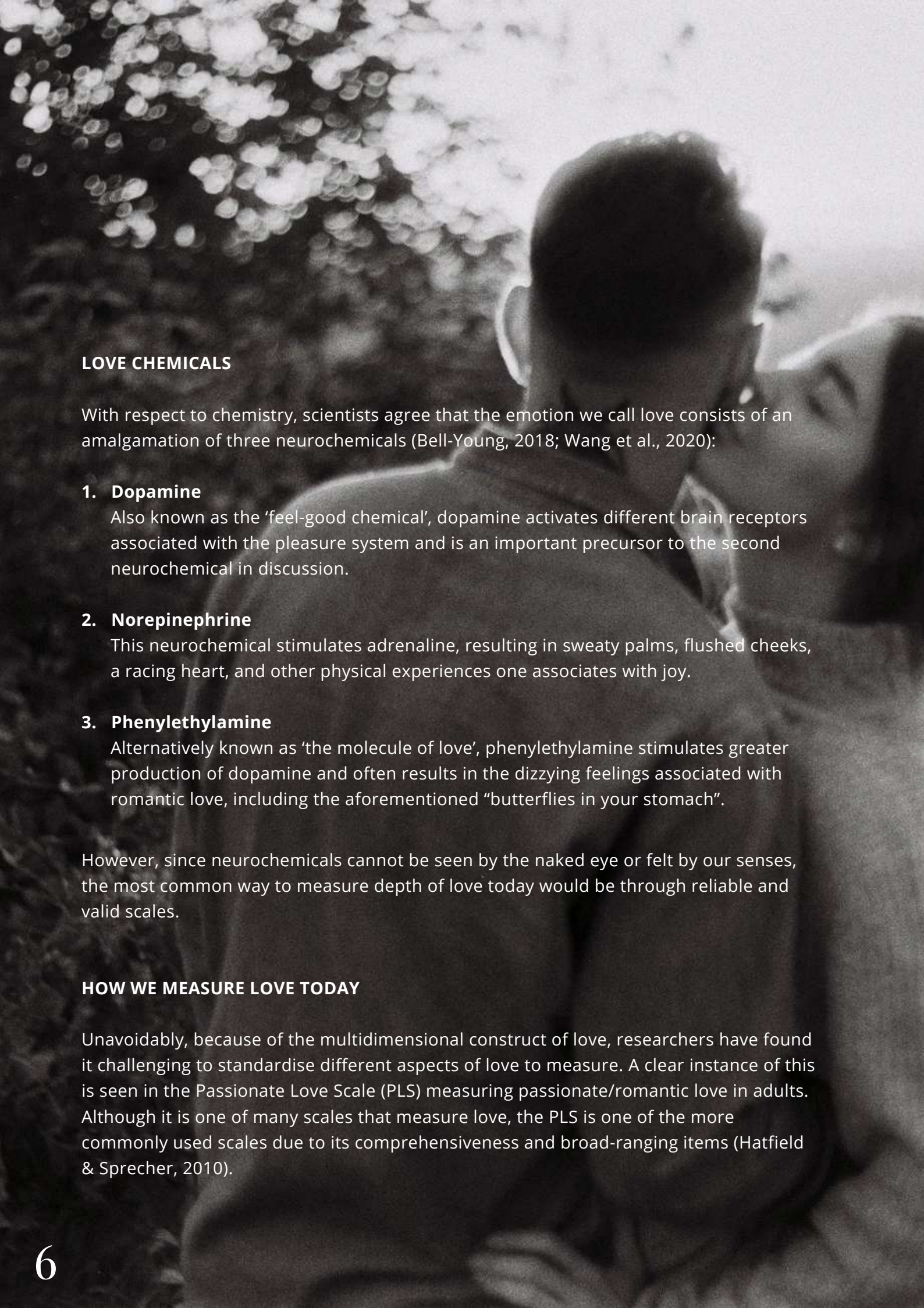
“What is your MBTI?” This question has been tossed around in conversations more often in recent years, as people have become increasingly interested in the subject of personality and how it affects their relations with people across various settings. However, although the Myer-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) might seem to be a popular measurement of personality, research deems other personality instruments more reliable and valid (Boyle, 1995).

How about love then? Is there such a reliable instrument to measure how wide, long, high and deep one’s love for another may be?

CAN LOVE BE MEASURED?

In my social circle, most friends opt for “The 5 Love Languages” quiz to discover their primary love language. They subsequently utilise this information to connect with their loved ones with greater effectiveness. These 5 love languages comprise words of affirmation, quality time, giving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch (Chapman, 1995). Although this quiz may reflect the *type* of affection you or your romantic partner may prefer, it does not measure the *level* of affection you both may have for each other.

The theory behind the love languages suggests what love may **look** like; but is an external act of love a truthful measurement of an internal feeling? How does one measure the colloquial “butterflies in your stomach” feeling? Perhaps, a biological measure is one way to go about it.



LOVE CHEMICALS

With respect to chemistry, scientists agree that the emotion we call love consists of an amalgamation of three neurochemicals (Bell-Young, 2018; Wang et al., 2020):

1. Dopamine

Also known as the ‘feel-good chemical’, dopamine activates different brain receptors associated with the pleasure system and is an important precursor to the second neurochemical in discussion.

2. Norepinephrine

This neurochemical stimulates adrenaline, resulting in sweaty palms, flushed cheeks, a racing heart, and other physical experiences one associates with joy.

3. Phenylethylamine

Alternatively known as ‘the molecule of love’, phenylethylamine stimulates greater production of dopamine and often results in the dizzying feelings associated with romantic love, including the aforementioned “butterflies in your stomach”.

However, since neurochemicals cannot be seen by the naked eye or felt by our senses, the most common way to measure depth of love today would be through reliable and valid scales.

HOW WE MEASURE LOVE TODAY

Unavoidably, because of the multidimensional construct of love, researchers have found it challenging to standardise different aspects of love to measure. A clear instance of this is seen in the Passionate Love Scale (PLS) measuring passionate/romantic love in adults. Although it is one of many scales that measure love, the PLS is one of the more commonly used scales due to its comprehensiveness and broad-ranging items (Hatfield & Sprecher, 2010).

Indeed, in its construction, Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) refer to a plethora of other scales in an attempt to reconcile the many measures of love. The terms they eventually included in the PLS examine the cognitive, emotional and behavioural indicants of love through the use of statements such as “(insert name) always seems to be on my mind”, “No one could love (insert name) like I do”, and “Sometimes my body trembles with excitement at the sight of (insert name)”. These items do seem to lean slightly towards an unhealthy, over-possessive, and maybe even slightly extreme way of loving someone (or at least to me it seems so). But Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) also found that such feelings would plateau at the more committed stage later in the relationship, in spite of how passionate love may increase in the early stages to the “exclusive” stage.

In any case, over the past four decades, the notion of love – and consequently, research on love – has flourished. When examining not love itself, but the individual capacity to love (CTL), researchers have found six consistent and significant dimensions in committed romantic relationships: interest in the life project of the other; basic trust; humility and gratitude; common ego ideal; permanence of sexual passion; and acceptance of loss/jealously/mourning (Kapusta et al., 2018). Although the idea of the previously mentioned increase-to-plateau timeline remains current, items on subscales have since been refined. Moreover, research has started to take into account the age-appropriateness of scales as well. The PLS has since inspired the development of a Juvenile Love Scale (JLS) – an adapted version created to measure when passionate love first appears in children (Hatfield et al., 2008).



Notably, while this article has mostly examined how depth of romantic love between two individuals is measured, it was interesting to discover that there are also many scales being developed that pertain to love directed at non-humans as well. For instance, Perkins (2010) developed a 15-item Love and Care for Nature (LCN) scale, while Bagozzi et al. (2017) created a scale measuring brand love. Moreover, concerning the latter's unique consumer-object context of love, it has been found that attempts to create such a scale to measure non-interpersonal love began in the 1990s (Heinrich et al., 2012). These scales mainly honed in on the "cold" short-run decision to love someone (or in this case, something) and the commitment to maintain that love in the long term (Heinrich et al., 2012).

Since assessing consumers' brand love was an unexpectedly consistent search result that came up while I was researching for this article, it appears that it may well be an area that will continue to inspire more theories on how depth of love may manifest itself. Although there is so much more to delve into regarding research on love, it seems evident from current research that the closest measure of how deeply one loves another is through the tangible expressions of intangible emotions – how trust, gratitude, passion and more are physically expressed (Kapusta et al., 2018). Given the many dimensions of love, I believe that the most accurate means to measure the depth of love is to use different scales constructed in the most similar situations to your own (e.g., if you were a 25-year-old Singaporean female adult in Singapore with a 27-year-old Singaporean male adult partner, finding a scale with participants of similar age range, race, cultural background, etc. would be ideal and most representative).

That being said, given that the scoring systems of many scales are not freely available to the general public, taking quizzes such as The 5 Love Languages could be useful as a rough guide in informing decisions on how one should express their internal feelings of affection for someone they love.

Most importantly, I think all of us (myself included), could afford to reflect more deeply on how the scores of the quizzes or questionnaires we take would impact how we love "better". Regardless of what the scores on these scales reveal about how much we currently show love, should we not always be striving to love better? There is no end to demonstrating more compassion, gratitude and understanding.

"J'aurais dû être plus gentile – I should have been more kind. That is something a person will never regret. You will never say to yourself when you are old, ah, I wish I was not good to that person. You will never think that."

– Khaled Hosseini

‘How do you spell
love?’ asked Piglet.
‘You don’t spell it, you
feel it,’ said Pooh.

A. A. MILNE



The Five Love Languages: Scientific Theory or Pop-Psych Myth?

Daniel Chan

Words of Affirmation; Quality Time; Receiving Gifts; Acts of Service; Physical Touch. Chances are, you may have heard of these love languages. Better yet, you may have even taken an online quiz (or two) to find out your own love language.

Such is the ubiquity of the ideas originated by Dr. Gary Chapman in his 1992 book, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. In it, he outlines the five ways in which he believes romantic partners express and experience love. He argues that by understanding and thereafter altering one's expressions of love to match a partner's primary love language, the relationship would be radically transformed for the better (Chapman, 1995).

Having been translated into 49 languages and selling over 12 million copies to date, this book remains a best-seller and has spawned an entire "Love Languages" series. The revolutionary idea has permeated cultures, spoken languages and even approaches to fixing relationships worldwide. Reportedly, the Five Love Languages has been used extensively as a model by counselling practitioners (Bunt & Hazelwood, 2017). For instance, it has been used as the foundation for a government-based programme to enhance relationship functioning in Australia (Bunt & Hazelwood, 2017). Additionally, local organizations such as "REACH", "TOUCH" and "Focus on the Family" have also advocated for the model's utility on their websites (Focus on the Family, 2005; REACH Community Services, n.d.; TOUCH Community Service, 2019;).

Given its popularity and influence, this raises the paramount question: does science actually support the Five Love Languages?

Is the Five Love Languages psychometrically valid?

First and foremost, we would need to consider if Chapman's five-factor model of love languages is psychometrically valid. That is, whether the model effectively demonstrates that it measures what it is designed to measure (Borsboom et al., 2004). In this case, researchers would specifically be interested in finding out whether Chapman's Five Love Languages is able to accurately measure and classify people's expressions of love.

The earliest study conducted on this topic was by Egbert and Polk (2006) who conducted a factor analysis that provided preliminary empirical support for the model. Interestingly, psychophysiological support for the model's validation has even been found. Utilizing measures such as heart rate and skin conductance, respondents were found to be significantly more aroused when they listened to guided imagery scripts of their primary love language as compared to their non-primary love language (Leaver & Green, 2015).

However, various studies have also cast doubt on the validity of Chapman's model. For example, results from another factor analysis have suggested that the love languages be conceptualized as sacrificial, intimate, quality time, supportive and comforting love (Cook et al., 2013). Meanwhile, a series of attempts by Indonesian researchers to validate this model have generated mixed results as well. An initial confirmatory factor analysis by Surijah & Septiary (2016) supported the five-factor structure. However, subsequent attempts at replication have been unsuccessful (Surijah & Sari, 2018; Surijah & Kirana, 2020; Surijah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, their most recent study asserts that love languages are likely to have components that differ from the purported five. Hence, they conclude that Chapman's model lacks internal consistency (Surijah et al., 2020). Overall, it appears that there is insufficient evidence to attest to the psychometric validity of Chapman's love languages. Does the central thesis of his theorization suffer the same fate?

Does speaking a partner's love language predict better relationships?

According to Chapman's theory, relationships are strengthened when couples "speak" the same love language. The love language that a partner prefers to receive should thereby match the love language the other partner tends to give, and vice versa. It goes without saying that such couples would have better relationships...right?

Surprisingly, the evidence appears to run contrary to this intuitive notion. Based on their research, Bunt and Hazelwood (2017) concluded that love language alignment does not lead to greater relationship satisfaction. However, the researchers did find a promising alternative to improving relationship satisfaction amongst mismatched couples: self-regulation. Well, at least in the case of females. In their study, female but not male self-regulation was found to be able to moderate relationship satisfaction for both partners when couples had misaligned love languages.

Moreover, based on a follow-up study by Polk and Egbert (2013) themselves, the authors of the pioneering 2006 paper concluded that they had now found little empirical support for Chapman's love languages. In this study, couples were classified into matched, partially matched, and mismatched couples based on the alignment of their love languages. Polk and Egbert were unable to predict the relational quality of couples based on their couple types. That is, couples who were more aligned in their love languages were not more likely to report greater relationship quality than other couples. The aforementioned Indonesian researchers have also concurred with this conclusion, having been unsuccessful in their attempts to prove any significant influence of love language compatibility on marital satisfaction (Surijah et al., 2020).

All in all, these results suggest that Chapman's once convincing thesis has also been discredited.

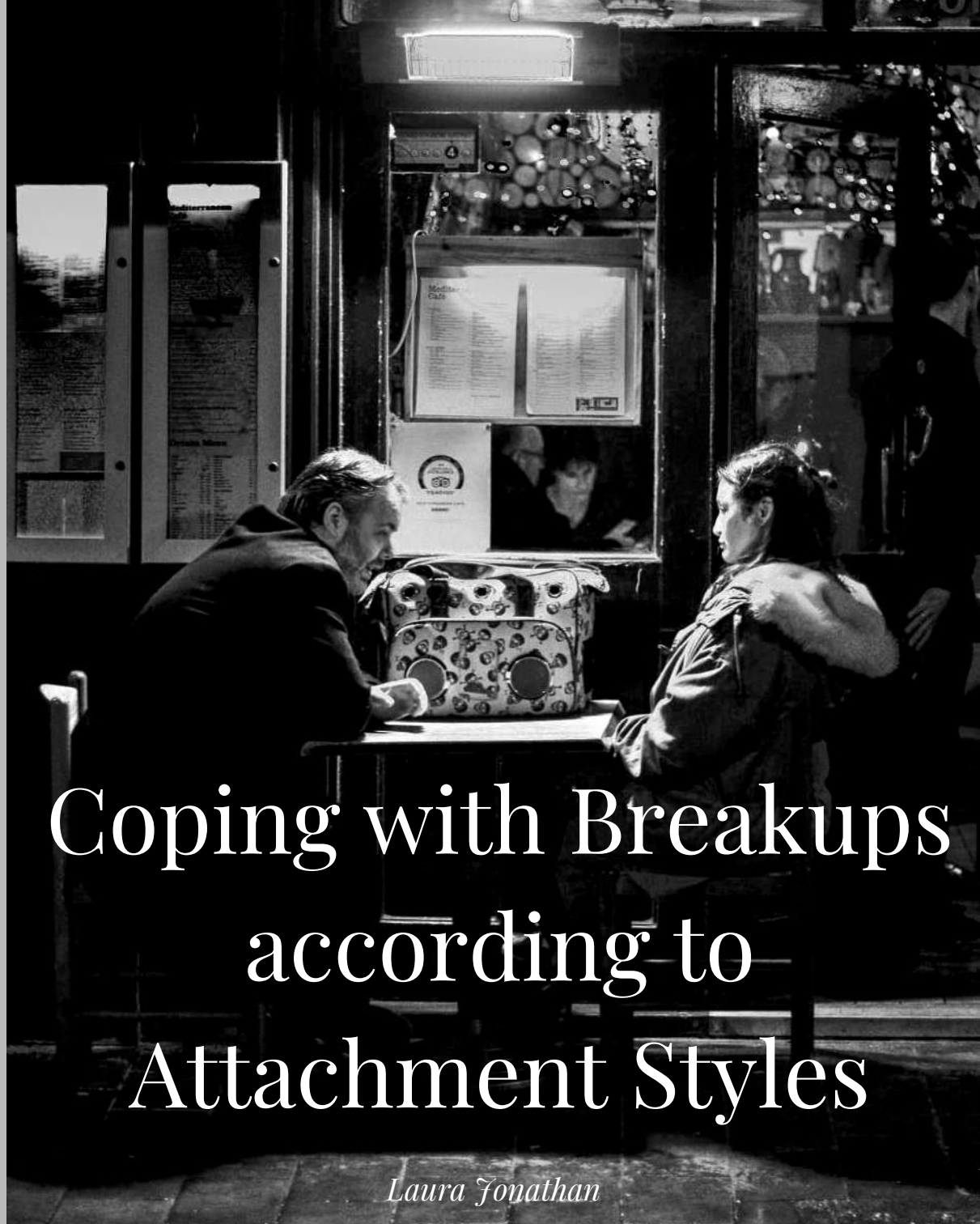
So...is all love lost for the Five Love Languages?

Well, not quite. In a recent study, Hughes and Camden (2020) attempted to address what they perceived as methodological flaws in previous research conducted on the topic. Using a large and diverse sample size, their analysis revealed that participants who perceived that their partners did well in their preferred love languages did indeed report greater love and relationship satisfaction. Perhaps, as mentioned by Polk and Egbert in their suggestions for future research (2013), measuring participants' perceptions of how well their partner displayed their preferred love language, as opposed to only measuring self-reports of preferred love languages from each partner, provided a more accurate picture of the issue. Support has also been found for the effectiveness of a "Five Love Languages Program", albeit provided by a singular study (Nichols et al., 2018). The program was found to improve partner empathy, despite notably failing to improve participants' perceptions of marriage quality or confidence in the strength and stability of their relationship.

Overall, given the three decades since the release of Chapman's bestseller and its widespread influence, astonishingly scarce research has been published on the topic. As a model, it falls short of the fundamental step of achieving psychometric validation. The theory's core tenet – that aligned love languages would lead to a better relationship – has had little empirical support at best. It is worrying to think that an average person would likely believe the legitimacy of the Five Love Languages, even or perhaps especially so if they had taken the time to conduct a quick Google or Wikipedia search to gather some evidence. More alarmingly, despite the prevalent implementation of the theory in psychotherapy, community services and government-backed programs, little to no research has been conducted to substantiate and justify the model's usage in these settings.

Notwithstanding, perhaps there is still some promise to Chapman's ever-popular model. Hughes and Camden's (2020) latest findings offer renewed hope for the model's scientific credibility. In psychotherapy and various other settings, anecdotes from professionals and clients attesting to the model's effectiveness in improving relationships warrant a serious investigation – one which the scientific community has seemingly overlooked.

It goes without saying that the essence of Chapman's preaching – that one should make the effort to better understand and love one's partner in the way he/she desires – can never be a bad thing. Nevertheless, the evidence thus far is clear. The "Five Love Languages" remains, for now, yet another pop-psych myth.



Coping with Breakups according to Attachment Styles

Laura Jonathan

Mending a broken heart after a breakup can be a painful and intense process. When a relationship fails, each person copes differently. What factors influence the way we cope with a breakup? Interestingly, research has found that our attachment styles can impact the way we handle a heartbreak. How we respond has very little to do with the other person but more to do with what is going on within us, our past associations and attachments formed as a child (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Understanding about attachment styles and their impact on relationships and breakups is important because it can help us work towards building a more secure attachment. It is also significant to recognise that how securely attached a child feels in their early years has a long lasting impact in how the child forms relationships and handles breakups as an adult (Wallin, 2007). Knowing our attachment style can help provide insight and understanding towards our strengths and vulnerabilities within relationships and pave the way towards having a more healthy coping style.

What are Attachment Styles?



In the first two years of life, a child forms an attachment with their parents and caregivers. According to Bowlby's early research on the matter, there are four main attachment styles that a person can develop: secure (50% of population), anxious (20% of population), avoidant (25% of population) and anxious-avoidant (5% of population) (Bowlby, 1969).

Secure Attachment - formed when a child's needs are met regularly and consistent affection is shown. The child is likely to be emotionally healthy and adaptive as an adult.

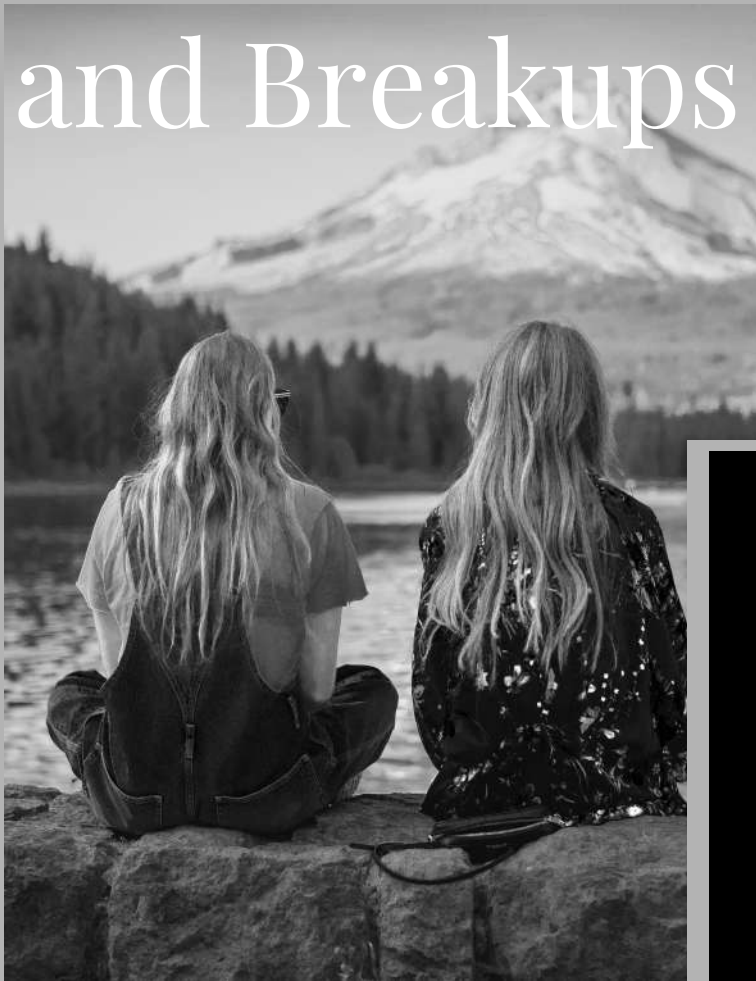
Anxious Attachment - formed when a child's needs are not met regularly and consistently (e.g., when a child is held only occasionally) and when the primary caregiver is emotionally unavailable and insensitive to the needs. Anxiously attached children are likely to grow into "little adults" who may be forced to grow up and take care of themselves.

Avoidant Attachment - formed when some of the child's needs are met at times with gentleness and warmth while other needs are neglected (e.g., when a child is fed but is not soothed when crying). The child is likely to grow to become confused and insecure, not knowing how others may respond to them.

Anxious-Avoidant attachment - most rare and formed when a child's needs are almost completely not met and when the child may be exposed to abusive or neglectful environments. The child is likely to be anxious and distrusting of others. Due to the rarity of this attachment style, only the first three most prominent styles will be discussed further.

Attachment Styles

and Breakups



Once an attachment style is established as a child, it is carried forth into adulthood and can impact how a person manages their emotions, forms interpersonal relationships and copes with conflict and intimacy (Waters et al., 2000). In particular, how each attachment style copes with breakups will be explored further.

Secure Attachment - Research shows that people with secure attachment styles handle breakups much more efficiently and maturely and are likely to turn to close friends and family for support. They are more open to acknowledging their painful emotions and grief and are better able to accept the reasons for the breakup which helps them respond in a less hostile way. They are also more likely to understand the reasons behind the breakup which will help inform what they need or want in future relationships. Although they will still grieve and experience pain, they are more able to self-soothe and regulate their emotions and understand that the breakup is not a reflection of their sense of self-worth. Because of their stable friendships, they will be able to garner healthy support as they cope with the loss.



Anxious Attachment - People with anxious attachment styles have a tendency to be overly attached or needy towards their partners. This may be because they are looking for reassurance and love, and because of their emphasis on needing their partner, they may deal with breakups the hardest. They are likely to experience a deep emotional pain and may take longer to cope with the breakup. They are likely to feel not good enough and might possibly engage in stalking or threatening behaviours. In order to deal with their loss, they may also quickly look for another relationship to feel the assurance and love or go back to an unhealthy relationship. Because of their dependence on others, they may either have a good social support or lack one because their friends are emotionally drained.

Avoidant Attachment - People with an avoidant attachment style are likely to suppress and avoid their distressing thoughts and painful feelings. They may keep to themselves and avoid their friends and family after a breakup. They may avoid their ex-partner with extreme behaviours such as changing jobs or blocking them on social media. They may start to feel unworthy of love and believe that no one can truly love them. Some of them may push the blame and anger towards their partners, rationalising reasons of how the relationship would not have worked anyway and feeling like the relationship had led to a loss of their independence. The suppression of feelings and displaced blame helps them focus on their renewed autonomy since they now feel that they are free. Despite that, the suppressed feelings eventually catch up and they may turn to maladaptive behaviours to soothe the pain. This can subsequently lead to depression, anxiety or other mental health difficulties.



How to cope better?

Secure Attachment - Securely attached individuals are encouraged to continue to stay aware of their thoughts and feelings. It is important to continue expressing feelings and needs with their partners.

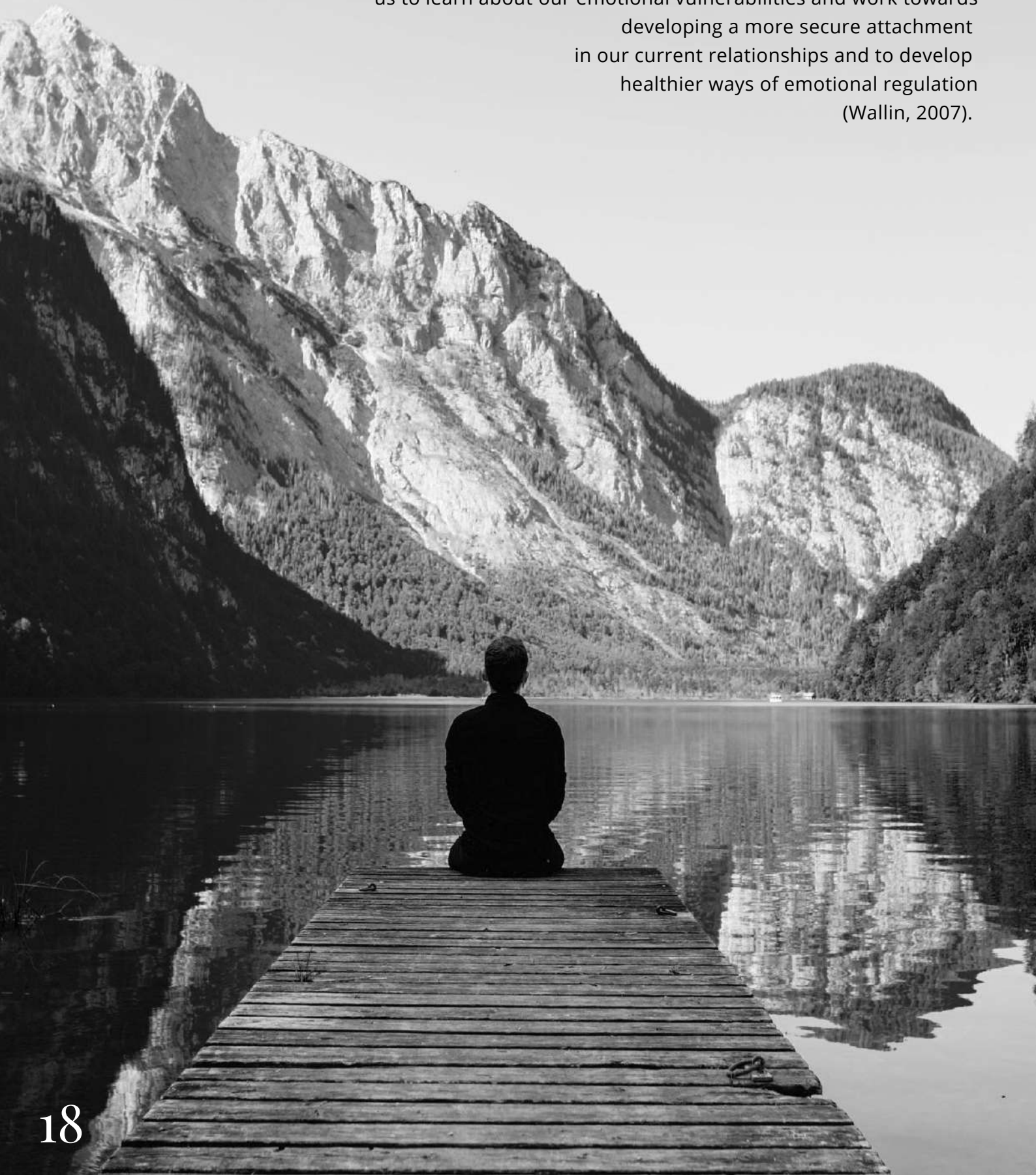
Anxious Attachment - Anxiously attached individuals are encouraged to learn to communicate their needs and feelings. Effective communication is the tool of a more secured attachment style. Practicing mindfulness and being in touch with feelings and understanding the deeper underlying issues and healing from them are important aspects of healthy coping.

Avoidant Attachment - Those with avoidant attachment would benefit from becoming aware of their tendency to suppress their thoughts and feelings. Learning to label their feelings and being mindful of their thoughts are also essential. There is a greater need to rely on social support and to focus on self-care.



Although attachment styles have already been formed and established as a child, they are not completely irreversible or rigidly fixed. Our life experiences, how we respond to difficult situations, the decisions we make, and the existence of social support and other protective factors can help us cope with a painful breakup.

Nevertheless, becoming aware of our attachment styles can help us to learn about our emotional vulnerabilities and work towards developing a more secure attachment in our current relationships and to develop healthier ways of emotional regulation (Wallin, 2007).



Love does not dominate;
it cultivates.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE



OPPOSITES ATTRACT OR BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER?: A PERSPECTIVE

Michael Thong

1.0 Introduction

There are simple reasons why people are attracted to their opposites; reasons such as novelty different experiences, or complementing each other's weaknesses. But this in fact is not the default position that many would align themselves with. When it comes to romantic compatibility or social friendships, many would think of similarities and common interests. It is natural for people who share similar interests to want to spend time with each other. So how then do the mechanics of social bonding and romantic relationships work when it comes to similarities or differences?

To fully appreciate the age-old debate on whether opposites attract or if birds of a feather flock together, we will need to first understand the reasoning behind the popularity of such assumptions. We need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of adhering to either perspective, as well as the contexts to which the assumptions are applied.

There are of course many different opinions and perspectives on how we can address this conundrum. The typical relationship advice weighs in on the emotional perspective of how differences or similarities would attract a potential mating partner. While science would likely approach it from a biological perspective on how our decision and levels of attraction are heavily influenced by our hormones and genes, however, little was done to discuss this diverse perspective from a social evolutionary standpoint.



2.0 Our Primal Self: An Evolutionary Origin

Fundamentally, we are born with a strong desire to live and survive (Pyszczynski, et al., 1997). To live and survive, we need to fulfil three critical functions – (1) to coexist with others, (2) to share resources, and (3) to procreate. Coexisting with others can be argued as one of the most important and complex to understand as it presents contrarian perspectives on the how people are attracted while also being in conflict with each other. Its effectiveness would directly lead to our ability to share and access resources, as well as increasing our chances and opportunities to procreate.

Coexisting or establishing healthy social interaction is by no means an easy feat to achieve. There are issues relating to rapport, competition, threat, ingroups/outgroups, trust, social-exchange, and compensative behavior involved within social interaction. To achieve a healthy coexisting arrangement, we must be similar enough so that we are able to form ingroups but different enough that we can complement each other's weaknesses instead of coming across as a competition or threat. Being similar may be perceived as threat due to competition to assert the same level of competence, level or authority should one of the party be pre-disposed to assert dominance over the other.

Our differences facilitate our motivation to help and share resources with each other. This implies that to coexist effectively we need to be similar yet different. However, would such an assumption work for all situations? Or do they vary between friendship, social acquaintances, and romantic relationships?



3.0 How About Friendship?

The motivation behind most social relationships or friendships is the idea of social exchange (Johar, 2005). Where there are conditions, value assignment and barter trade apply within the context of friendship. In this case, there is a significant focus on the conditions of the friendship. Such form of friendship often requires a trade between parties for something that either party has or does not have. Similar qualities can be perceived as threats and compromises the friendship; turning them into competition, and the never-ending cycle of outperforming each other in an unhealthy manner.

To resolve this, differences must exist, so the 'competition' driven relationship becomes a 'collaboration', which facilitates bonding and forming of alliances through helping and sharing. This way, they complement weaknesses of other members within the group; strengthening the overall group capability – which translates to better chances of survival, diversity of resources available, and remaining competitive as a group.

Such a phenomenon implies a friendship that was established with the consideration of differences, where both parties can bring something of 'equal value' to the friendship table. On the other hand, a friendship can also be formed when both parties are similar to each other. In this case, the object of trade is 'companionship', with similarity as a vehicle to facilitate the exchange between the various parties.

It is easier to develop rapport and trust with similarity as a 'lubricant'. Additionally, ingroups can be formed easily when common characteristics and interests are shared between individuals. The adverse effect of having ingroups is that boundaries are drawn with the outgroups. Often the behaviors directed against the outgroups are negative and biased. The outgroups are often individuals who are different from the ingroups.



4.0 Love and Relationships

With love and relationships, the same law of social exchange as well as building ingroups and outgroups based on similarities or differences applies. Depending on the motivation of the individuals for the relationship, the focus on differences or similarities varies. Differences attract as it has the potential to help each other broaden their horizons and life experiences. Differences can also facilitate the learning of empathy and adapting to new ways of doing things or forming new habits. Differences can also be an opportunity to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses to achieve better personal and relational fulfilment. Some may even be attracted to the excitement of having so many differences in the relationship as a driver for engagement as it facilitates communication and curiosity between individuals.

Similarities facilitate relationship-building through sharing of common interests, ease of developing the rapport, having constant engagement with shared levels of excitement, similar habits, and similar cultural background. Having similarities would facilitate better communication and minimize misunderstanding or conflict.

Ironically, the paradox exists that both similarities and differences in a relationship can be a double-edged sword. Differences contribute to a higher probability of conflict, and unpleasant interaction between the two parties; while having too many similarities may repel the individuals from each other due to too much commonality which may lead to boredom, complacency, or 'projected' self-hate (Gabbard, 1993). 'Projected' self-hate happens when an individual possesses certain traits that he/she loathes, and the loathing is projected onto any individuals that possess similar traits.

If this is the case, why then do the assumptions of 'birds of a feather flock together' or 'opposites attract' exist?



5.0 The Irrational Lie of the Brain

If both similarities and differences can be edifying and toxic within a friendship or romantic relationship, how then can we work towards a better application of this phenomenon?

Human cognition has an interesting mechanism – rationalizing – which is a bias used by humans to rationalize or justify decisions which are often irrational and biased. Sometimes rationalizing includes telling lies to our mind to justify our decision and understanding of a particular situation just so that it ‘makes sense’ to us. Trying to identify a reason or justification through compartmentalizing similarities and differences as a guide to a fulfilling relationship may be the only way to approach relationship and attraction.

The truth is that attraction or repulsion due to similarities or differences varies from person to person, context to context, and value system to value system. Fundamentally, it is most important to understand what the motive is for wanting a friendship or a relationship and to ensure that these motives are healthy and ethically plausible.

The age-old adages such as ‘birds of a feather flock together’ or ‘opposites attract’ are merely heuristics employed to provide a way to describe a phenomenon; they are by no means ‘predictive’. Each is a description rather than a prediction. There is truth in these assumptions of course, but they are at most correlational and not causal. They are observations of common overt behaviors of the many couples succeeding or failing; but little about the intrinsic motivation of being in the relationships are explored.

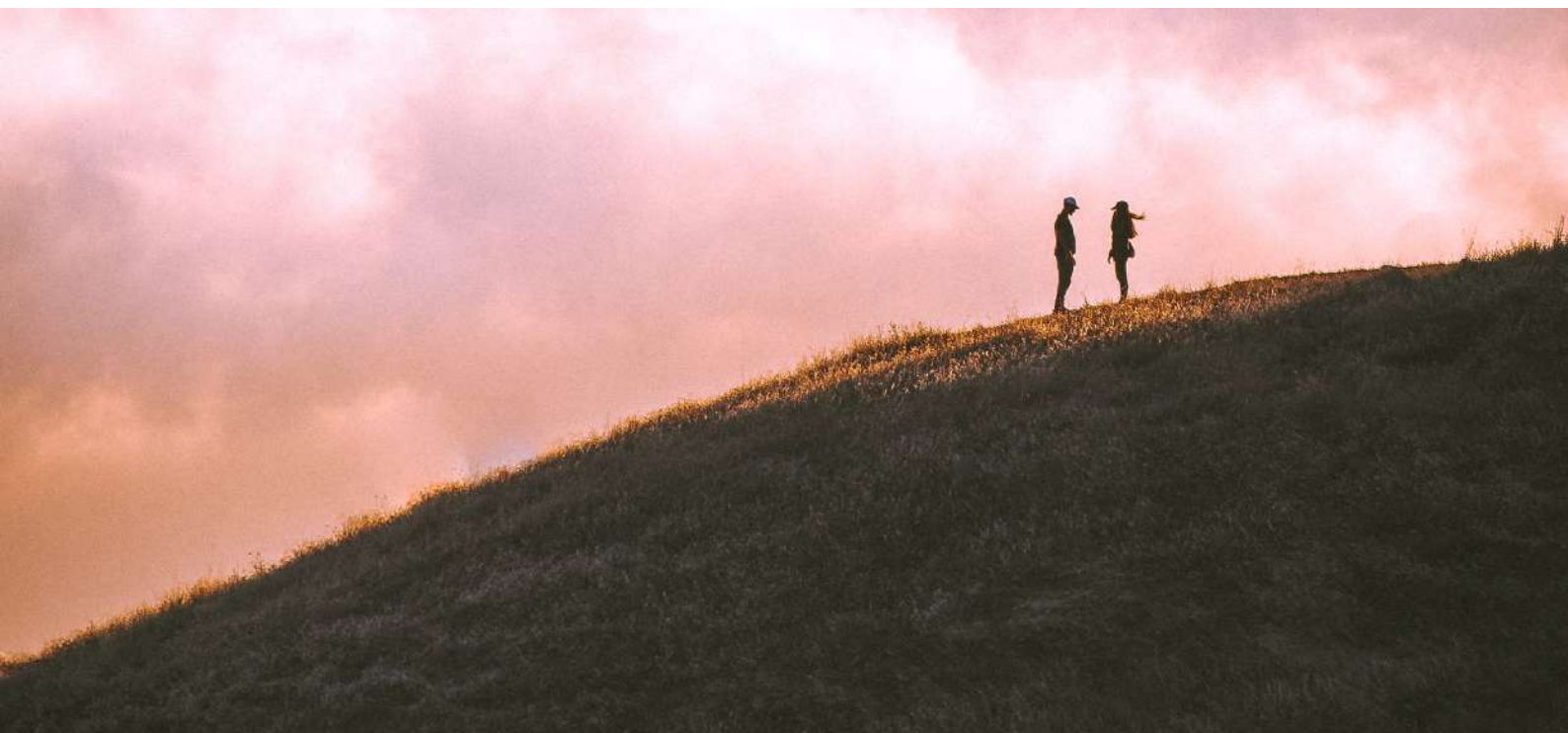
Using these heuristics to explain and imply whether a relationship would succeed or not is nothing more than a fallacy, riddled with confirmation biases. The objective? To have ‘peace of mind’ or a decision that can be attributed to reason and logic.



6.0 What Then?

Understanding the complexity, biases and diversity on how people build relationships and experience love, would allow us to have an open and objective mindset to approach relationships. It is important to not allow these heuristics to cloud judgements, or to form narrow biases that could eventually lead to conflict in the relationship, mismanaged expectations, or toxic prejudice, all of which are unhealthy to any relationship.

Instead, focus on asking yourselves: (1) what is driving you to desire a relationship? (2) what do you want from the relationship? and (3) what would make both of you happy in a relationship? These are far more constructive questions that would bring about appropriate healthy actions such as healthier communication with each other and realistic expectations within the relationship, regardless of similarities or differences.



Navigating Online Dating According to Psychologists

Charmaine Wah

Relationships that develop online do not follow the same trajectory as traditional courtship. Psychologists have explored how users can have an optimal, evidence-based dating experience – from setting up a profile to having online conversations that lead to the first date. Their research has helped us to better understand human attraction and decision-making behaviour under these novel circumstances.

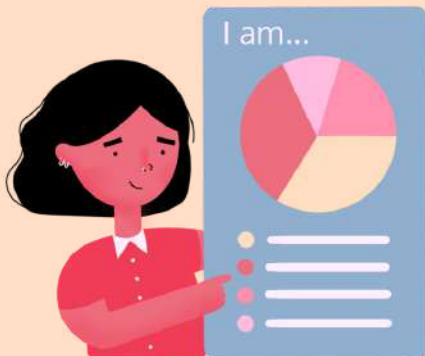
1. Smile in Your First Photo

In creating your profile, having a good first photo is important because you are trying to impress other users who have no prior information about you. For online dating, psychologists agree that having a smiling photo as your primary photo is your best bet (Khan & Chaudry, 2015). But, not just any smile.

Having an affiliative smile – characterised by a closed lip smile – signals appeasement and approachability, and thus facilitates the creation and maintenance of social bonds (Rychlowska et al., 2017). Having a genuine smile – with your eyes crinkled, paired with a slight head tilt – has also been found to positively impact your likeability, attractiveness and trustworthiness (Krumhuber et al., 2007).



2. "Show, Don't Tell" with Unintentional Cues



The next step is writing your profile. Despite being exposed to various potential matches, online daters tend to choose users based on similar attributes that have been shared on profiles intentionally, or in other words, upfront and directly. These include political views, religious beliefs and relationship goals (Hitsch et al., 2010; Khan & Chaudry, 2015). However, you can distinguish yourself from competing candidates by sending unintentional cues in your profile, which are subtle and implied (Khan & Chaudry, 2015).

For example, instead of stating "I'm funny" or "Looking for someone with a similar sense of humour", show your wit and humour by telling a joke in your profile. With no option to verify the honesty of users' profiles, unintentional cues serve as a way to substantiate the character of the other person (Ellison et al., 2005 as cited in Gibbs et al., 2011). In the example above, telling a joke acts as credible evidence for a sense of humour (Gibbs et al., 2011).

Disclaimer

To avoid falling prey to Internet love scams, the Singapore Police Force advises the following: "...members of the public are advised to be careful when befriending strangers online. They should also be wary when asked to send money to people whom they do not know or have not met in person before. If they are contacted by a stranger via the phone, demanding for payment to a bank account in relation to government fines or charges, remain calm and stop communicating with him immediately, because this is most probably a scam."

3. Opening Up More Predicts a First Date



After getting a match and moving past the initial introductory messages, opening up about yourself to your online conversation partner can make the both of you feel closer and grow in mutual liking (Collins & Miller, 1994; Hazard, 2014). Thus, there is a greater chance of getting a face-to-face meeting. Just as in offline dating (e.g. Clark et al., 1999), emotional disclosure contributes to feelings of intimacy, and facilitates the development of a romantic relationship, as explained in Reis and Shaver's (1988) model of interpersonal intimacy.

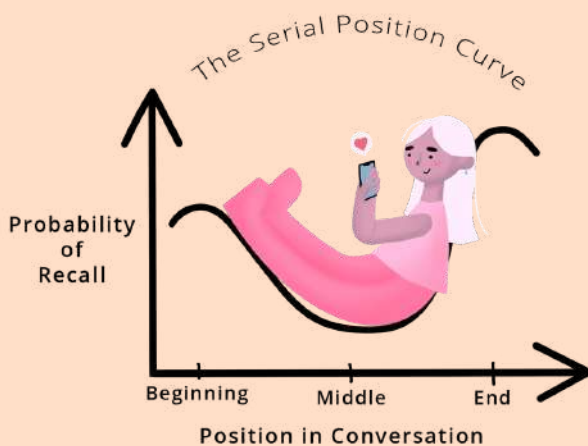
For example, you can share your thoughts, opinions and feelings, or information that you don't usually share with others such as embarrassing childhood anecdotes. At the same time, do take care not to share information that risks violating your privacy or compromising your comfort.

4. Be Attentive To Your Conversation Partner

Paying attention to the person you are messaging shows competence in communicating and makes them feel that they are important. In turn, this increases the ease of interacting and mutual liking (Cegala, 1981; Spitzberg & Dillard, 2012). Unlike physical dates, where attentiveness can be shown through physical cues, being attentive to online conversations could be through remembering facts about your conversation partner or details from past conversations. It could also mean showing respect, analysing their messages and taking time and thought to respond appropriately. Showing care and being involved in your interactions in this way also predicts getting a first offline date (Hazard, 2014).



5. End Conversations in a Positive Way



According to the serial position curve, we recall the things at the end of an experience better than those in the beginning or the middle (Murdock, 1962). This is referred to as the recency effect, where information that is stored most recently in short term memory is recalled more easily (Buchsbaum, 2016). Due to the recency effect, an ending has been found to have a powerful influence on how we judge the desirability of an experience, make decisions or social judgements (Diener et al., 2001; Price & Dahl, 2014; Berz et al., 1992).

Thus, Khan & Chaudry (2015) advise revealing positive things about yourself towards the end of a conversation such as an interesting hobby that you have not shared before, a funny comment or something fun you did that day.

Hmmm... Now what?

The research done may be helpful in understanding the psychology of attraction through online dating, but it does not tell us what is best for each individual person. Online daters should incorporate what feels right and what is still honest, as authenticity is crucial in a budding online relationship and even in developing long term relationships (Khan & Chaudry, 2015; Josephs et al., 2019).

Two yellow tulips are shown in the upper half of the page, one slightly to the left and one to the right, both facing forward. They have a soft, warm glow. The background is a blurred green and brown, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Mindful Couple Communication

Dr. Sunita Rai

A typical day at Mr and Mrs Tan's home:

"Stop nagging Lilian! You do this all the time. Nag and nag and complain and complain! No wonder you lost your job!"

"Oh yeah!! What about you?? Stuck in middle management for the last 5 years! Useless!"

Now let's reflect:

- How often do you have a conversation without being interrupted?
- Do you turn toward your partner by looking into his/her face when speaking or spoken to?
- When was the last time you held each other's hands and really felt their warmth and touch?
- Are you able to regulate your emotions in conflicts and have a respectful conversation?
- What bodily sensations do you experience when in a conversation with each other?

What is Mindful Couple Communication?

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully aware and present in every moment. Mindful couple communication refers to the process of being fully present in your interaction with your partner by paying attention, being aware of your and your partner's intentions, and having a sense of accommodation and acceptance of your partner.

Why bother with Mindful Couple Communication

The benefits of mindful communication include lowering stress, strengthening empathy, greater relationship satisfaction, improving wellbeing, increasing happiness, greater sense of trust and love, and greater acceptance of the relationship and one another. There is also less focus on the small annoyances in life and a greater attention on the relationship as a whole and more willingness to fill up each other's love tank.

When we can deeply and mindfully connect with our partner, we have more energy, become more creative, and enjoy the fruits of life and the relationship. Staying connected in a relationship is in reality all about our *Intentions to Being Present* and *Committing to Connect*.

Here are 5 tips to get you started.

1. FOCUS ON WE-NESS

Effective communication is essential in our daily interactions with our colleagues, spouses, children and society in general. Yet, perhaps we do not pay as much attention to communication as we do to our career and/or academics. Couple communication, whether married or unmarried, sets the foundation for a healthy relationship. The difference as compared to any other form of communication is the greater focus on our intention on the "we-ness" rather than the "I". It is about flourishing as a couple rather than as an individual.

As a start, stay with the intention that:

- We are in this together and we will focus on what we both need and want, rather than what any one individual needs.
- This might also mean that sometimes we accommodate and compromise for the sake of 'we-ness'.
- It might even help to write down your couple intentions, goals and activities to keep you connected.

2. BE PRESENT

In mindful couple communication, we set clear intentions to focus on being present and this, in turn, helps us connect with ourselves and others. It always starts with first connecting with oneself. Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of secular mindfulness, shared a few ways to connect intimately and mindfully with oneself and then with one another. Mindfulness practices help to connect back to ourselves, and our beliefs, attitudes and values – this helps us to realise how all of these are relative and subjective, rather than absolute. We connect with our partner by focusing on the 'us', not just the 'I'.

- Start by reflecting on your values and beliefs amongst others. Ask yourself questions to deepen your understanding of yourself by questioning every value, belief and judgement.
- When interacting with your partner, ask questions to clarify and to understand rather than jumping to conclusions, especially in conflicts.
- Notice your bodily sensations when interacting and ask for time out if you feel overwhelmed. Be fully present with all of your senses.
- Remove any possible barriers from being present in the moment such as your devices or the television.

3. LISTEN DEEPLY

Mindfulness helps us to listen deeply, actively and empathetically to one another on the account of how it enables us to present in a given moment. This not only leads to reduced judgements, as previously mentioned, but also increases attention and greater acceptance – which subsequently helps in mutual connection and understanding. There is less focus on fixing or changing or advice giving. Instead, the focus is given to fully understanding your partner and this includes both their joys and struggles.

- Listen deeply with the intention to understand and connect rather than to be right.
- Whenever you feel that you are unable to listen, ask for a pause.
- Spend about 5-10 minutes focusing on your body and your breath to calm your mind before continuing the conversation. Do this together if it helps.
- When listening, have eye contact, put away all of your devices and focus on being curious about your partner and ask questions to clarify and deepen the conversation.
- Do not interrupt when your partner is speaking, even if you think you know what he/she is going to say. Be sensitive to one another's needs.
- Respect your partner by giving them the space to fully express themselves.
- Focus on connecting and understanding as it is not about who is right.

4. REGULATE YOUR EMOTIONS

Mindfulness is also very effective in emotional regulation. Wachs and Cordova (2007) found that mindful couples were indeed less judgmental, more responsive, and were better at identifying and communicating their emotions to one another. Mindfulness helps us to recognise our emotions and thoughts as they rise which gives us the ability to respond rather than react automatically.

- Pay attention to your bodily sensations when communicating. When you feel tightness or tension in your chest or stomach, or feel that your heart is racing or your mind is wondering, ask for a pause and walk away for the moment.
- Let your partner know that you need time to calm down. Do not walk away without first communicating this.
- Sit down instead of standing and close your eyes. Just focus on your breath at your nostrils, chest or belly for 5-10 minutes.
- Or if that does not work, stand up and practice mindful movement by stretching various parts of your body and bringing your attention to every movement.
- There are many mindful ways to regulate your emotions and you can use the mindfulness practice apps such as “Awareness Space” or “UCLA Mindful” to support you. Both are available free of charge.

5. PRACTISE GRATITUDE

Algoe, Gable and Maisel (2010) said that “gratitude ha[s] [an] uniquely predictive power in relationship promotion, perhaps acting as a booster shot for the relationship.” Gratitude helps us to maintain strong intimate bonds.

- Find moments to be grateful for your partner. This includes noticing pleasant moments when you are together, paying attention to your partner’s happiness and what brings a smile to their face, or observing what they find satisfying.
- Say “thank you”, “please” and generally show appreciative gestures as these makes your partner feel recognised, wanted and appreciated.
- Start with daily Loving Kindness Practice and include each other in your practice.
- Practice the 10 Mindful Finger Gratitude together where you use your fingers to count 10 things that you are grateful for in the relationship or about each other. You can be creative and use 5 fingers of each partner to complete the daily practice.

Love on the Brain: Does Love Really Make You Foolish?

Carrie Lee

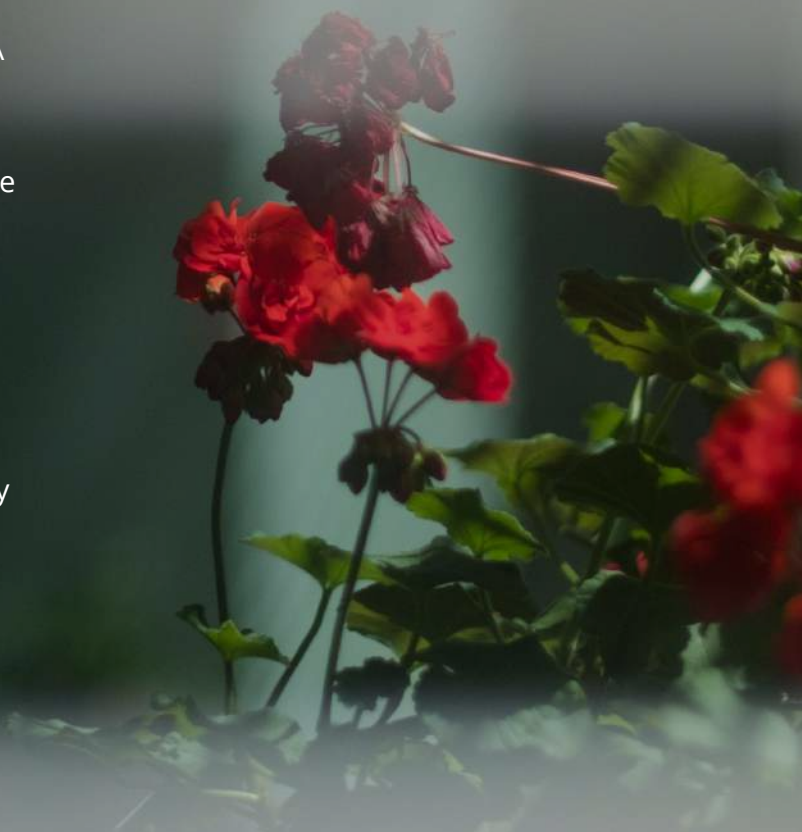
Let's face it – almost all of us have been there before. Falling in love; where all you can obsess about is that one person and you spend countless hours thinking about the “what ifs”. Soon, you're falling head over heels and you see the world through rose-tinted glasses. Love – a magical feeling. But at the same time, you find yourself at the end of silly decisions and clouded judgement. It really does start to make you wonder: does falling in love really make you foolish?

Setting the context

Before we dive into love and foolishness, it's important to talk about exactly how we're defining foolishness. Particularly, this article will reference cognitive control in relation to foolishness. Cognitive control refers to our general cognitive systems (i.e., memory, attention) and how we're able to process information (Haykin et al.). This ability contributes to other processes such as the way we think, behave and make decisions. So, as you read on, don't fret too much about depleting brain cells.

Yes. Love makes you foolish

Unfortunately, to be the bearer of bad news, love does indeed make us foolish. Studies have shown that being recently in love can have implications on our cognitive control. A study by van Steenbergen and his team (2013) revealed that passionate lovers often demonstrate reduced cognitive control in the earlier stages of their relationship. Furthermore, lower activation of the right prefrontal cortex has been found in brain imaging studies among passionate lovers (Bartels & Zeki, 2000). Unfortunately, the prefrontal cortex is the heart of judgement and decision making, and its reduced activity consequently means an increase in bad decisions (yikes). Overall, the evidence goes to show that falling in love does leave you feeling a little foolish.



Why does this happen?

Simply put, these cognitive changes occur to help with relationship formation. Particularly, researchers believe that reducing cognitive processes better allows us to fit another person's cognitive systems into our worldview whilst amplifying how perfect they are (van Steenbergen et al., 2013; Bartels & Zeki, 2000).

Moreover, when we fall in love, the structural changes in our brain further fuel these cognitive shifts. It's like we're biologically programmed to behave this way. This is largely due to the addictive nature of falling in love. When we fall in love, the reward center of our brain becomes highly active and we consequently become highly motivated to form a romantic relationship (Bartels & Zeki, 2000). Additionally, brain-imaging studies found increased activation in dopamine-rich areas of the brain when participants viewed images of their beloved (Aron et al., 2005). Taken together, love becomes this addictive feeling that leaves us hyper-focused on the thought of our newfound romance, leading us into this cardinal passionate state. You'd probably know it better as infatuation.

Where does it go?

With that in mind, you might now be wondering, do my cognitive resources really just go "poof"? Well, no! Because our brain becomes so highly motivated towards forming a new romantic relationship, it configures its functions to achieve just that. Generally, new lovers exhibit enhanced emotional-social processing (Wang et al., 2020). Compared to their single counterparts, studies find that passionate lovers are better able to process the emotions of others and deliver inhibited, emotionally appropriate responses accordingly (Wlodarski & Dunbar, 2014; Song et al., 2016). In turn, this heightened ability to respond emotionally to our partners help us to empathize and understand others, hence allowing for the formation of romantic relationships earlier on. Needless to say, the brain power you once used to remember your bubble tea order has now been channeled towards helping you develop the best response to swoon your crush off their feet.

In addition, a proportion of these cognitive resources also go into thinking about your beloved. Thanks to the addictive nature of love, new lovers tend to focus more on love-relevant thoughts (Wang et al., 2020). This includes focusing one's attention on their beloved, and obsessively thinking about the other and the next time you'd be able to see them – all of which draws on your pool of cognitive resources. Overall, being engulfed in passionate love causes our brain to delegate a chunk of our cognitive resources towards attaining its newly found goal of forming a relationship, hence leaving other cognitive processes at a disadvantage.

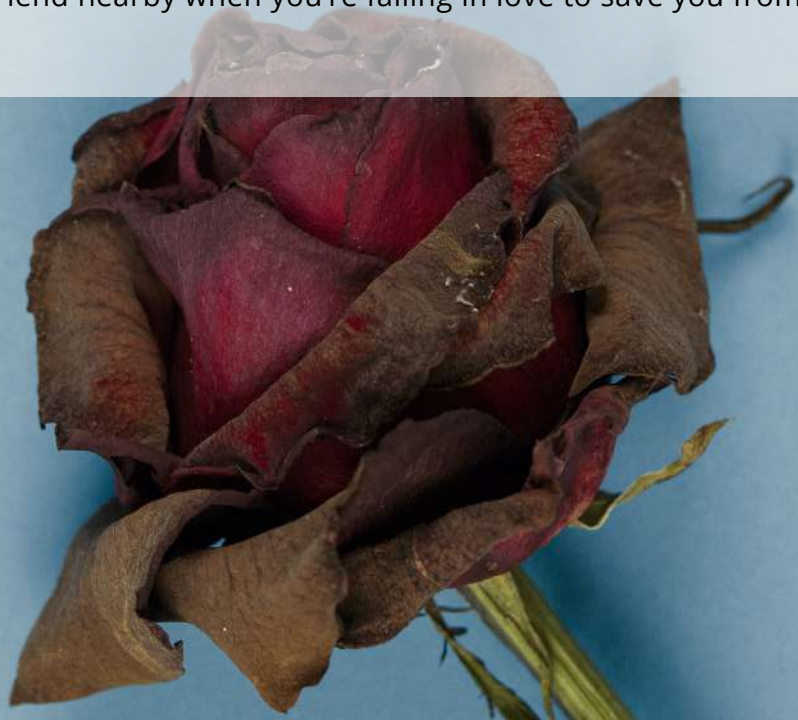
Is this forever?


If you're hoping that your cognitive resources restore themselves over time, I'm afraid you're about to have that bubble burst. Langeslag and van Steenbergen (2019) discovered that couples who had passed the passionate state still demonstrated reduced cognitive control. Particularly, this reduction was shown in post-error slowing. Compared to single individuals, committed lovers were found to have a tendency to be less cautious in their decision-making after making a mistake (Langeslag & van Steenbergen, 2019). This goes against prototypical research, which holds that individuals usually become more cautious and take longer to make decisions after committing errors.

This difference is attributed to the idea that being in love serves as a buffer to stressful events and pain (Langeslag & van Steenbergen, 2019; Kreuder et al., 2018). Compared to singles, lovers experience lower levels of negative affect (i.e., anger, sadness) and higher levels of positive affect (i.e., security, calmness, happiness) when faced with the same issues. Furthermore, love hormones (like the famous oxytocin) have been found to reduce feelings of unpleasantness while improving perceived social support from your partner (Kreuder et al., 2018). Overall, these mechanisms allow individuals to better cope emotionally, downplay their mistakes, and improve their overall well-being over time. When we put it that way, a small sacrifice in your good judgement doesn't seem too bad when you consider the improved coping strategies.

Conclusion

So, does love make you foolish? Yes! And while you may no longer be able to brush away this comment from your friends as a childish myth, there's no reason for you to feel bad about it. Our brains are biologically hard-wired to alter the way we think and behave when we first fall in love to help us form romantic relationships with others. In the long run, relationships help us power through difficult experiences in life and improve our overall wellbeing. With that in mind, I guess a trade-off between our cognitive control and emotional well-being doesn't seem that bad. Maybe just a practical takeaway: Consider keeping a single friend nearby when you're falling in love to save you from the really bad decisions.



A romantic scene on a beach at sunset. A woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a white dress with lace trim on the sleeves, is seen from behind. She is holding the hand of a man whose arm and hand are visible on the left. The background is a bright, hazy sunset over the ocean with rocky islands in the distance. The overall mood is warm and intimate.

“He stepped down, trying not to look long at her, as if she were the sun, yet he saw her, like the sun, even without looking.”

LEO TOLSTOY



Popular Ideas on Romantic Love and Relationships

What Contemporary Psychologists Say About Them

Jessy Yong

The opposite of love is indifference, not hate.

“What is the opposite of love?”

While it is now common to hear that the answer is indifference rather than hate, psychologists have begun to shed light on the complex relationship between these concepts.

Psychologists have first suggested that love and hate can coexist at the same time, which is why hate cannot be the opposite of love (Jin, Xiang, & Lei, 2017). One pertinent example would be romantic jealousy. Research has found that romantic feelings of love are actually associated with being jealous – so if you express more romantic love for a person, you will become more sensitive to any threats to the relationship. It is also possible that the more you love someone, the more you invest in them. You buy them flowers, bring them to movies, and plan parties for your anniversaries. However, if the other person does not reciprocate these efforts, you will begin to feel inequity in the relationship, which may turn your love into resentment. This is why individuals can become entangled in a love-hate relationship: you can experience more love yet, at the same time, have more hatred towards your romantic partner.

But what happens when someone “falls out of love”? Based on what we have learnt about love and hatred, it does not seem that hatred is a definite consequence of non-existent love. Instead, psychologists like Abbasi and Alghamdi (2017) have acknowledged the concept of indifference as the opposite of love, terming it as a form of “romantic disengagement”. They have pointed out that this indifference is notable in romantic relationships, as when compared to high conflict-laden couples who express high levels of negative emotions, disengaged couples usually express neutral emotions. But these neutral emotions can be signs of conflict avoidance, and a disaffection process that eventually leads to couples growing apart. So while indifference may not be a legal reason for couples to file for a divorce in Singapore, it can still be the silent killer in many romantic relationships.

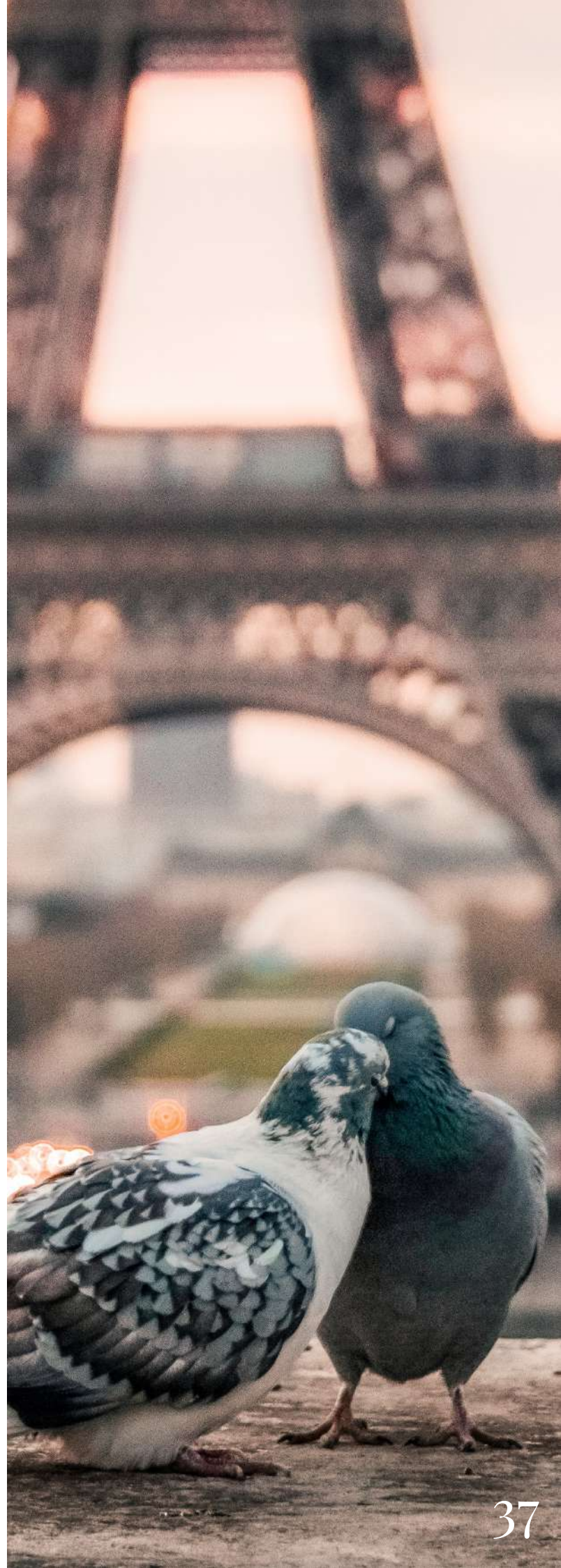
This is your honeymoon period.

Many of us have been warned about the honeymoon phase, which is characterised by “high levels of passionate love,... intense feelings of attraction and ecstasy, as well as an idealization of one's partner” (Lewandowski, 2013).

But psychologists have some good news for you: there are ways to combat this honeymoon phase.

For instance, Jacobs Bao and Lyubomirsky (2013) have suggested methods to combat hedonic adaptation, a concept which reflects the idea of “getting used” to something in our lives. This concept applies to many matters; it can be happy celebrations, traumatic events, and romantic relationships as well. Their main idea is that if a couple is able to prolong the adaptation process, it can help sustain their relationship.

They first propose that rather than sticking to the same routine, couples should engage in novel and exciting activities together. This is because the variety of activities ensures that the partners will not quickly get used to the relationship (it is difficult to anticipate what comes next). Second, they propose that couples need to show appreciation for one another. This allows each partner to be cognizant of how having a partner benefits them, which helps to delay the adaptation process. However, these solutions come with a caveat: if the partner continuously experiences positive events, it is possible that they will expect more of it in the future. Hence, there is a need to temper one's expectations in a relationship. So if you are able to maintain a relationship that is exciting and appreciative, but also one that is based on reasonable aspirations, you have a good chance of combatting the honeymoon phase.



Is a date on the rollercoaster the best way to find love?



The classic 1974 psychology study might be behind this idea that has been circulating on the internet. Dutton and Aron had shown how young men who crossed a suspension bridge (which increased their heart rate and respiration due to fear) were more likely to ask the research assistant out on a date compared with young men who crossed a sturdy bridge. This phenomenon is termed as the misattribution of arousal, reflecting the idea that one can mistakenly interpret their unrelated physiological symptoms as attraction for another person. This effect has since been replicated by other researchers under different conditions, such as inducing physiological effects from exercising and rollercoaster rides (White, Fishbein, & Rutsein, 1981; Meston & Frohlich, 2003).

Today, researchers have found that this misattribution of arousal can even apply to situations such as listening to specific music. Specifically, high-arousal and complex piano solo music has managed to lead women (but not men) to perceive faces of the opposite sex to be more attractive (Marin, Schober, Gingras, & Leder, 2017). These specific results suggest that music could have signaled to women certain schemas of romance, such as being serenaded by their partner. This therefore hints at the idea that the romantic courtship process is not just simply biological, but are also strongly associated to its social origins.

Old married couples look alike.

In 1987, Dr Zajonc and his graduate students published a paper supporting the idea that romantic partners eventually come to look like each other.

Their paper suggested how spouses develop similar facial features when they mimic each other's emotions and facial expressions for the long term. Paul Ekman, another well-known psychologist, furthered this concept by explaining how imitating facial expressions can contribute to similar wrinkle patterns and facial musculature, leading to an increased resemblance in couples.

But Zajonc's discovery did not age well. Just last year, researchers at Stanford University have found results that stated otherwise. Using a total of 517 couples and their facial images during the beginning and later points of their marriage, they analysed whether there was increased facial similarity over time (Tea-makorn & Kosinski, 2020). It turns out, spouses do not actually develop facial similarities over time. Instead, their faces were already similar at the beginning of their marriage. While it may be disappointing to hear that your grandparent's decades of marriage was not what made them look like each other, it is still pretty endearing to know that they probably became each other's life partners because they looked like each other from the very beginning.



Cultivating Positive Relationships: Familial Communication Strategies

Xavier Lim



Carl Whitaker wisely summarised the role of familial relationships – “There are no individuals in the world – only fragments of families.” This message symbolises the idea that our lifespan is shaped by the experiences shared with our families; few, if any, relationships are more salient and of paramount importance to one’s holistic well-being than the relationships with family members. Even though families are marked by biology and institutionalised by traditions such as marriage, communication appears at the forefront of factors that make or break families.

Praxis-oriented communication research in the past decade has continuously emphasized the role of effective communication on the health, happiness, and harmony of family members (e.g. Soong et al., 2015). In contrast, the lack thereof has been associated with neglect, indifferent familial relationships, and even abuse, all of which exert negative implications on well-being (Lin & Giles, 2013). This article describes communication strategies that promote positive familial communication and family cohesiveness in the context of sharing both good and bad news.

Communicating with Family Members

Recently, positive psychology has emerged as a cardinal perspective in the study of happiness and well-being. Spearheaded by Martin Seligman, positive psychology – the study of subjective experiences, behaviours, and traits that improve quality of life – was motivated by the need to diverge from addressing pathologies to building people’s innate strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). One of the domains which positive psychology seeks to enrich is the happiness of families. Particularly, insights from positive psychology suggest that one’s presence for and responses to family members during both instances when things go wrong and things go right are equally important in building familial rapport.

Sharing Bad News – Cathartic Function of Social Sharing.

Amidst bad times, there are many different emotion regulation strategies that one can adopt. Amongst these strategies, one seems to prevail – sharing our emotions with others (Reis et al., 2010).



In Singapore and most Asian societies where households adopt a collectivistic mindset, social sharing can enhance one's sense of identity and association with their families. Moreover, households that adopt an individualistic mindset may also gain from the positive psychological benefits of social sharing among emotionally close family members. For instance, according to inhibition theory (Pennebaker, 1985), physiological resources are mandatory in the inhibition of thoughts, action tendencies, and emotions; chronic inhibition of negative emotions can pose physical health risks (Rimé et al., 1998). Additionally, social sharing can aid individuals in gaining different perspectives on their negative experiences, allowing them to view these events more objectively.



One of the major supportive aspects of social sharing is empathic listening. Empathic listening, or active listening, refers to the act of listening attentively and non-judgementally. Carl Rogers (1959), the psychologist who developed person-centred psychotherapy, emphasized various components of empathic listening: (a) accurate reflection of the experiences and inputs of the speaker; (b) unconditional positive regard – defined as a genuine acceptance of the speaker regardless of their experiences; (c) active presence to the speaker, via being consistently involved in the conversation; and (d) non-judgemental mindset, where the listener should understand the subjective experiences of the speaker whilst withholding any personal biases.

As empathic listening conveys immediacy and helps the speaker feel validated, it may assist in accentuating the cathartic benefits of social sharing (Floyd, 2014). While listening to a family member express their concerns and negative experiences, it is important to differentiate

between the acts of listening empathically or dismissively. While the listener may yearn to address the problem head-on, most of the time it is sufficient to just be present for the person expressing their concerns, understand their experiences, and support them moving forward. Altogether, engaging in social sharing with our family members can not only ameliorate the emotional burden associated with negative experiences but also allows us to gain insight into these experiences.

Sharing Good News – Active Constructive Responding.

Although the research into social sharing in the context of negative experiences is comprehensive, strategies for positive experiences are scarce. Good things happen to us too – when they do, most of us want to share these positives events with someone else. While sharing bad experiences exerts a cathartic function and diminishes the intensity of negative affect associated with the event, sharing good experiences amplifies the intensity of positive affect associated with the event (Gable et al., 2006).

One of the most prominent communication strategies that concerns positive event disclosures involves a specific responding style – the active constructive responding style. Gable et al. (2006) differentiated four styles of responding to positive events, of which only the active constructive responding style is associated with well-being and relationship satisfaction for both people involved in the conversation (Lambert et al., 2013). Table 1 describes the aforementioned responding styles.



Table 1
Responding styles to Positive Event Disclosure

Style	Description
Active Constructive "Joy Multiplier"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining eye contact, mirroring speaker's excitement, asking questions to learn more about the positive event
Passive Constructive "Conversation Killer"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failing to pay attention, distracted by other stimuli/tasks, appearing uninterested, giving understated support
Active Destructive "Joy Thief"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introducing negativity by identifying negative aspects of a positive event
Passive Destructive "Conversation Hijacker"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing the conversation to something else

In essence, the active constructive responding style allows family members to be authentically engaged in each other's life. By eliciting visual imagery of the positive event and allowing the speaker to, in part, "re-live" it, the speaker may feel validated, cared for, and understood.

Communicating with the Elderly in Intergenerational Families

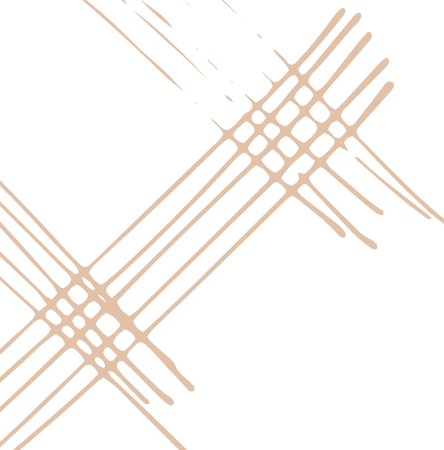
In 2021, the elderly population (age 65 and above) constitutes approximately 12.4% of Singapore's population – a number projected to increase to 33.3% in 2050. Due to changes in physical health and the cognitive decline associated with typical ageing, the ability of the elderly to communicate and their resultant psychosocial well-being can be compromised (Yorkston et al., 2010). To understand effective communication strategies for the elderly, it is important to be aware of the various challenges that the elderly may face.



Visual Challenges. Elders may live with presbyopia – the age-related gradual loss of ability to focus on nearby objects. Presbyopia may impair the elderly's ability to navigate through physical space and see visual materials presented on written documents. To accommodate for presbyopia, families may adopt the following strategies: (a) increase brightness and consistency of lighting across the household; (b) present written information clutter-free, with a large font size (at least 16 points) and adequate spacing between each line; and (c) avoid technical jargon to reduce complexity.

Auditory Challenges. Besides visual challenges, the elderly may also experience presbycusis – the gradual loss of hearing associated with typical ageing. Presbycusis may compromise one's ability to comprehend verbal speech in noise-polluted environments. To accommodate for presbycusis, families may adopt the following strategies: (a) introduce built-in pauses and succinct sentences to facilitate comprehension; (b) turn off electronic devices (e.g. computers, handphones) that may emit unnecessary background noise; (c) face the elder when speaking; and (d) encourage those with hearing aids to wear them.





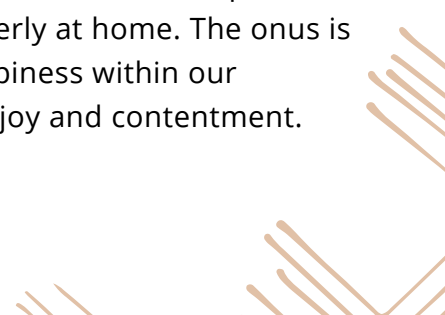
Avoiding “Elderspeak”. Elderspeak is a style of speech that entails a slower rate of speech, exaggerated intonation, elevated pitch and volume, repetition, and child-like vocabulary and grammar. Even though elderspeak is perceived by most caregivers as technical and stylistic changes that demonstrate warmth and facilitate comprehension, it tends to be perceived negatively by the elderly as condescending and a contributing factor to social withdrawal (Ryan et al., 1986).



Encouraging Reminiscence. One medium of conversation that can benefit the well-being of the elderly as evidenced by various clinical research into the dementia population is reminiscence (Young et al., 2016). Conversational topics that facilitate reminiscence can allow the elderly to “relive” various life experiences shared through those topics, thereby enriching their self-identity and purpose. These topics entail practices of free association and story-sharing via viewing of reminiscing music or images, which tap on the imagination and self-expression of the elderly. As opportunities for the elderly to explore the world and engage in new adventurous travels can become scarce, it is important for caregivers to supplement these reminiscence and transcendental experiences to encourage interactions with the elderly and forge meaningful relationships with them.

Caregivers, who are often family members of the same household, are instrumental to the lives of the elderly; often, caregiving can be a demanding role where one is expected to continuously prioritize the elderly's needs and well-being. However, it can also be a fulfilling journey for both the caregiver and elder as they continue to forge a meaningful bond.

Conclusion. Familial relationships guide us throughout our lives; from the day we were born, when we are groomed into adolescents and adults, and to the day we foster the next generation – we have always been guided by family, or those whom we consider family. Applied psychological research has guided our understanding of communication strategies that are useful to improve happiness and the relationships shared with family members and the elderly at home. The onus is hence on us to purposefully adopt some of these strategies to foster happiness within our households. After all, a happy home is but an earlier heaven – a haven of joy and contentment.



Self-Love In Romantic Relationships


Anutra Guru

You're casually scrolling through your social media feeds to see what the world is up to. Peppered in between pictures and links to news articles are quotes and messages about self-love and relationships. Some quotes might feel like they hit right home; making you momentarily pause and ponder over them; while others might come across a tad too corny for your taste, eliciting an eye roll in response.

Love it or hate it, the topic of self-love has become prominent in our discourse today. The importance of self-love is being highlighted by therapists, motivational speakers, and laypersons alike. Self-love can be defined as a state of appreciation for ourselves that grows from "actions that support our physical, psychological and spiritual growth" (Borenstein, 2020). This would mean holding our personal well-being and happiness in high value and taking care of our wants and needs. However, the definition of self-love is not limited to this and it can also mean different things for different individuals. As a rather abstract concept on its own, it is challenging to have a specific definition of self-love. Further adding on to its complexity is the fact that it is tied to related concepts such as self-esteem, self-worth, and self-care (Mutiwasekwa, 2019).

This makes it all the more fascinating when looking at self-love in the context of a romantic relationship. When you throw a romantic relationship into the mix, an intimate relationship with another individual with separate wants and needs from yourself, how much should you still prioritize self-love? Is it even all that important anymore?

While many seem to emphasize the need for sufficient self-love before entering romantic relationships, there is less talk about the maintenance of self-love when one is in a romantic relationship.



The biggest misconception surrounding self-love in a romantic relationship is that it is selfish to focus on loving oneself when in a relationship. Some believe that loving yourself in a relationship means giving more attention to yourself and, as a result, neglecting the needs of your partner and your relationship. In romantic movies, we are often sold the idea of a “selfless” love whereby one devotes themselves solely to attending to the needs of their partner. However, in reality, it is important to practice self-love while being in a relationship as it can be beneficial not only to yourself, but to your partner as well. Carving out time for yourself, making sure you are taking care of your needs, pursuing your own hobbies, and filling up your metaphorical cup can have several benefits. When you have greater self-love and prioritize yourself through things such as self-care and self-compassion, it builds your self-esteem, keeps you happy, and brings many benefits to your relationship.

Self-Love: Navigating Challenges as a Couple

When facing challenges together as a couple, having a good level of self-love means that you can be more resilient through the hardships that you face (Becerra, n.d.) and are able to remain self-assured and confident, and soothe yourself in times of adversity (Gilbert, 2009; Neff 2003). Sometimes, your partner might be dealing with their own set of struggles and might not be able to fulfill all your needs or wants in a relationship. In these times, you might need to give more to both yourself and your partner, assuming it is not a permanent situation (e.g., toxic relationships). Having greater self-love can help to build a higher self-esteem. Higher self-esteem means that you would not take it personally when your partner is unable to adequately attend to you. Rather, you would be confident enough to fulfil your own needs (and your partner too!). When you love and have greater confidence in yourself, there is greater assurance that you can navigate the world on your own two feet. This is also important so that it does not become a situation where there is increased co-dependency, which can set the relationship up for failure due to one or both partners being unable to constantly meet very high demands (Eldemire, 2019).

Moreover, when facing hardships together, if one were to be lacking in self-love, one might be overly engaging in self-criticism, which is characterized by maladaptive emotion-regulation strategies such as being harsh and judgmental about ourselves (Gilbert 2009; Neff, 2003). This might cause one to feel extra isolated and bring about a greater sense of damage to their self-worth, which would take its toll on their partner as well. In times of hardship, this will add undue stress to the whole situation and make it more challenging to handle. Hence, practicing self-love is important as it prevents us from adding excessive negative emotions to the relationship during times of hardship.

A person with long, wavy hair is seen from the back, holding a large bouquet of white roses. They are standing in front of a window with a grid pattern, and bright sunlight is streaming in, creating a warm, hazy atmosphere. The person is wearing a floral-patterned top. The text of the article is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Self-Love: Looking out for Yourself

Having a good level of self-love would help in knowing one's self-worth and allow one to recognize the boundaries that they wish to draw in a relationship. When one knows their self-worth and holds themselves in high regard, it is easier to assert oneself if there are certain things or values that absolutely cannot be compromised on. It would then be easier to be able to walk away from situations where one is not being treated well, such as in toxic relationships.

The quote "we accept the love we think we deserve" from the movie, *Perks of Being A Wallflower*, accurately summarizes this point. If one has a good level of self-love for themselves and as a result knows their own self-worth, then one would expect that same kind of love from their partner. This can help one choose healthy relationships where they are treated well and respected. Furthermore, with greater self-love, there is greater appreciation and understanding of one's needs. This would allow one to be able to communicate their needs to their partners more readily and clearly, thereby improving communication in a relationship.

Moreover, if one is lacking in self-love, it might lead to a greater tendency to seek validation from one's partner. Yet, partners are also individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and moods. We may not always get the validation that we are looking for and might even feel snubbed or neglected by our partners. In this case, how our partners view us eventually become our own view of ourselves. Without proper self-love, the need for external validation from one's partner would lead to a spiraling effect of lower and lower levels of self-love.

Tips for maintaining self-love in a romantic relationship:

#1: Maintain a degree of personal space and independence

It is important to have a degree of independence from your partner and continue doing the things that satisfy your needs. Remember to make time to continue doing the things that you love, such as pursuing your interests, hobbies, or nurturing other important relationships in your life outside of your partner. This will bring you joy and boost your self-esteem as you are reminded of your identity and value as an individual. While it is easy to get caught up in the fast pace of life, it is important to schedule regular time just for yourself so as to remember who you are as a person and tend to your own needs.

#2: Practise self-compassion

When we're overly critical about ourselves and keep going over mistakes that happen in our daily lives, it can weigh heavily on us emotionally and decrease self-esteem and self-love (Chopra, 2020). Practising self-compassion by forgiving ourselves and engaging in self-affirmations would help in boosting our confidence and increase self-love, leaving us happy and ready to take on new challenges in our lives and relationships.

#3: Acknowledge your emotions

Recognizing and acknowledging your feelings is an important component of self-love, especially in relationships. When you check-in with yourself and give yourself the time and space to think about your emotions, not only do you place value on yourself, but you also recognize negative emotions and thought patterns that are bringing you down (Killoren, 2020). By building greater self-awareness and reframing negative thought patterns in a more positive manner, it can make you feel happier, improve your level of self-love and your relationship as well.

#4: Remember you are in control of your own happiness

At the end of the day, remembering that you are in control of your own happiness is extremely important. While partners can make one happy, happiness is ultimately in the individual's hands and it is no one else's responsibility to ensure that.

It is important to remember that self-love is a constant process and it might always fluctuate with the different challenges and situations that life presents. Self-love is not an end goal but rather something that should be actively worked on regardless of the circumstance. As it appears, self-love in relationships is still extremely important and brings about benefits both to the individual as well as the relationship.

So, the next time you come across a quote on self-love, I hope that you will not scroll past it too quickly.

Familial Love in Different Cultures

Nicole Chong

Love is an intangible construct, of which many people have different ideas on what it means to them. To some, love is a grand romantic gesture, splurging out on through the gifting of a hundred red roses. For others, love is remembering how someone takes their coffee, or what's weighing on their heart these days. Love is also expressed in many different ways by different people. To some people, to love is to protect. This can come in the form of protecting loved ones from danger or from heartache. For others, to love is to provide. Due to the fact that love cannot be seen, it is usually only possible measured in words or actions.

Arguably, culture plays a role in influencing how we view and express love. What may be beneficial and esteemed in certain cultures may not apply to another culture (Bornstein, 2012). Therefore, certain actions that may convey love in a Western family may not be as valued in a Chinese family, and vice-versa. How do families of different cultures express their love for each other? Looking at the different love languages (i.e., quality time, acts of service, physical touch, and words of affirmation and gifts), we can observe how different cultures rely more on certain types of love languages more than others.

Western Families

Western families tend to gravitate more towards “physical and emotional expressiveness” (Clayton, 2014). Western parents focus on making sure their children feel unconditionally loved and accepted and are also more likely to tell their children how much they love them. They are also more likely to have a pet name for their child (“honey” or “sweetie”).

With these overt displays of affection, it may appear that Western parents love their children more than Chinese parents. However, while Chinese parents may be more muted in their affections, they simply just love in quieter and subtler ways. This by no means diminishes the amount of love they have for their children.

Chinese Families

Chinese parents' methods of love perhaps only come up when you observe them a little longer, and in more private spheres. The concepts of jiao shun guan (教训管) is prevalent in most Chinese cultures (Chao, 1994), and it means to train and govern their children. While the word "govern" may not sit nicely in terms of warmth or endearment, Chao (1994) reminds us to consider the parent's intentions behind this. It reflects a parent's desire to instill good values in children to help equip them to build better lives for themselves in the future. While guan (管) brings about moments of tough discipline and sparse compliments, its end goal is to make sure that children are given the best head-start in life. Clayton (2014) describes this as a desire to support their children through "involvement and investment". Chinese parents are fiercely committed to the upbringing of their children and are willing to make many sacrifices to ensure that their children are ready to take on adulthood. To Chinese parents, to love is to prepare.

Singaporean Families

Singapore is an interesting case where the type of love language or way love is shown differs in each family. Personally, in my own family, love is shown through acts of service, and in particular, food. For example, my mother still makes it a point to cook for the whole family after a whole day of work. If my father and I dared try to offer to wash the dishes after, she would quite literally wrestle the dirty plates off us, determined to see her act of love through till the end. Another instance of this was when my cousin once remarked that she liked spring rolls. From that day on, whenever spring rolls appear on the dining table, my grandmother would grab the plate and forcefully shove it in front of my cousin's face, worried that others would get to it before she did: "There, your favourite!" Said cousin would then be expected to consume at least four pieces to appease our eager grandmother.

At the same time, provision is another way in which Singaporean elders show their love for their family. Most of us would have a memory of a grandparent furtively pressing a dollar bill into our palms. The converse holds true as well. Money or financial support is another way in which children show their love to their parents. While adult Asian children may not bestow many words of affirmation upon their parents, most children who are financially capable would give their parents a monthly allowance, a way of easing their parent's financial burden, and to express gratitude for their many years of provision.

As we consider the different ways that families from different cultures express their love, it reminds me of my own experience with my grandmother. Since losing her ability to speak after her stroke, my grandmother can no longer nag at me to eat more, or try to secretly slip me dollar bills. However, each time I'm about to conclude my visit with her, she would reach out and stroke my hair – Reminding me that though words may fail, love is always determined enough to find another way to make its presence felt.



Attached to My Substance

An Evidence-based
Psychodynamic View on
Substance Dependence and
Implications for Clinical Practice

Dr. Shawn Ee

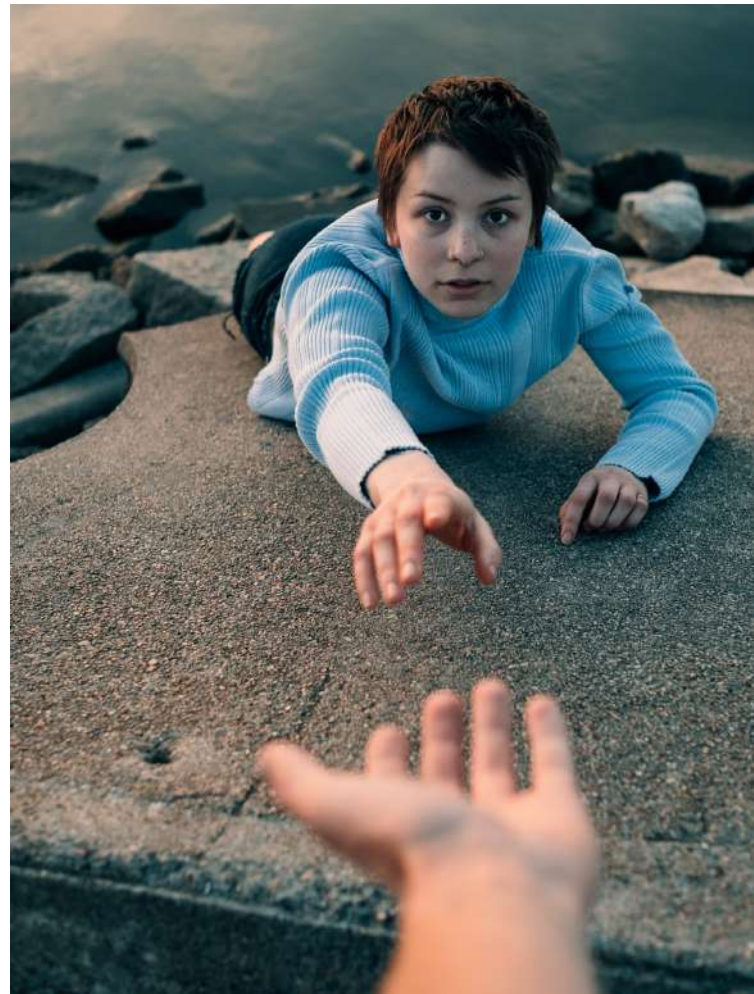
If we can love and feel attached to our primary caregivers, can we seek out others the same way if it was an initially damaging experience?

There is a burgeoning body of research addressing the clinical implications of attachment theory for psychotherapy. In childhood, the primary attachment strategy is proximity-seeking for support and protection (Bowlby, 1969/1982). However, in adulthood, the person may not necessarily require proximity-seeking but rather the activation of mental representations of attachment figures or relationship partners who serve the same function. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) termed these symbolic sources of protection "symbolic proximity" to supportive others. Mental representations of the self include incorporated or introjected (to use a psychoanalytic term) traits of security-providing attachment figures, so that self-soothing and soothing by actual others become alternative means of regulating distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004).

Transference Phenomena and Attachment to Therapist

“Enactive representations”, as described by Lyons-Ruth (1999), are the presymbolic internalisations of early experience that provide the foundations of our internal working models (IWM), and are the jointly created scenarios that reflect the initially unconscious, overlapping vulnerabilities and needs of patient and therapist (Wallin, 2007). In essence, enactments in psychotherapy can be seen as the here-and-now behavioural manifestation of implicit relational knowings whose first roots lie in, but are not limited to, what patients and therapists “enacted” with their attachment figure(s) as infants (Wallin, 2007). For example, when our earliest overtures for comfort were regularly welcomed, we learnt the advantages of turning to others to soothe our distress. Conversely, when such early overtures evoked rejection, we learnt the necessity to conceal our distress from others whenever possible.

In the same vein, Bowlby’s contribution of attachment theory to the understanding of the therapeutic relationship holds that the behavioural/motivational system controlling attachment behaviour is likely to become active when a person is distressed, ill, or afraid (Bowlby, 1979). This activation of the attachment system results in the person attaining or retaining physical or emotional proximity “to another differentiated and preferred individual, conceived as stronger or wiser” (Bowlby, 1979). The nature of psychotherapy necessarily means that clients engaged in therapeutic relationships are likely to feel distressed, ill or afraid while discussing problems with their therapists.



“***These clients are likely to consider the therapist as “stronger or wiser” than themselves, and the attachment behaviour is then directed toward the therapist via the process of transference....***”

These clients are likely to consider the therapist as “stronger or wiser” than themselves, and the attachment behaviour is then directed toward the therapist via the process of transference (Andersen & Glassman, 1996; Liotti, 2000) that clients bring along into sessions, as a familiar interpersonal expectation of how others would relate to them. Bowlby (1979) proposed that clinicians could assess clients’ past and current behaviour, both within and outside the boundaries of therapy, to determine the ways in which their attachment history currently manifests itself, so that this knowledge of attachment relationships could facilitate the establishment of effective therapeutic relationships (Grotstein, 1990).

Substance Use Dependence and Attachment Relationship to the Substance

Attachment theory differentiates between distinct patterns of attachment styles, which imply different types of emotion-regulation and coping towards distress, and substantial research supports the relationship between an insecure attachment style and substance use as both an emotional regulation and a coping strategy (e.g., Belsky, 2002; Magai, 1999).

As described above, individuals use mental representations of the self with the incorporated traits of security-providing attachment figures for self-soothing or soothing by actual others for regulating distress. However, for individuals who have experienced damaging experiences with their attachment figures, that ability to regulate their distress and emotions in a functional way may not be present. The vulnerability of the individual is the consequence of developmental failures and early

environmental deprivation leading to ineffective attachment styles (Flores, 2001). It was proposed in a doctoral research study that substance dependence is a futile attempt by the substance-dependent individual at self-repair (Ee, 2017). It was found that individuals who engaged in a dependent relationship with the substance not only began to seek the substance as a reparative attempt at their attachment deficits, but also developed a substance-dependent problem over time (Ee, 2017). However, this process was argued to serve as an exacerbation of their substance-dependent condition because of the inability of the substance to fulfil the individual’s attachment needs (Ee, 2017).

***...its nature akin to
that of an
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frightening
caregiver.***

The pattern of substance use and dependence consists, in fact, not only in the dependence consists, in fact, not only in the acts of use but equally importantly in being deprived of its effects. This pattern of “separation and reunion” with the particular substance is reminiscent of the parent-child relationship. For individuals growing up with a secure

attachment, separation and reunion is a smooth and regular part of the exploration process (Bowlby, 2006). However, separation and reunion is a challenging process for individuals growing up with insecure or disorganised attachment styles and/or relationships with attachment figures.

Although not a perfect replication of the exact function and representation of an attachment figure, given that the substance is limited in its functions as a physical object, this unsatisfying relationship illustrates that no matter how the substance may serve as an object to provide help with emotional regulation and self-soothing, it ultimately sabotages the individual’s efforts to cope, albeit maladaptively. Consider its nature akin to that of an inconsistent, inattentive and frightening caregiver.



The analogous pattern is interestingly similar – that of an expectation of security and predictability in the child, and his/her subsequent disappointment when the parent is found to be the exact opposite.

Implications for Clinical Practice

The key point about attachment strategies and defences is that they are interpersonal strategies for dealing with suboptimal environments (Holmes, 2010). According to Ee (2017), the research findings showed that substance use allowed clients to incorporate a function of distraction into their coping repertoire to deal with the chaotic relationships and emotional dysregulation within their relational dilemma. This was shown to be consistent with the finding that the quality of the therapeutic relationship can be highly influenced by the Attachment to Substance presence of an insecure attachment to substance of choice, particularly for individuals high on anxious attachment (Ee, 2017). Not only does being dependent on a substance pose a threat to the establishment and use of the therapeutic attachment relationship, anxious clients' desire for merger and consensus may cause them to agree readily with their therapists about the goals and tasks of therapy, while ambivalently deviating toward their substance to meet their insecure needs.

Although a mediation effect for avoidant attachment could not be found, the study supported the view that attachment is consistent throughout the lifespan and the clinical implication is that therapists may then be able to ascertain how best to deal with attachment processes by first identifying what pattern of insecure attachment was present.

According to Holmes (2010), the aim is not so much to preserve the integrity of the individual when faced with conflicting inner drives, but to maintain attachments in the face of relational forces threatening to disrupt them. In other words, therapy will have to be modified such that it takes into consideration the quality of attachment inherent in the therapeutic engagement since clients would inevitably be faced with interpreting their therapists' words, reactions, and emotional responses, based on their IWMs of others. Questions are raised about what is the crucial ingredient that mechanises a good-enough therapeutic relationship for substance dependent clients, since many clients in Ee's (2017) second study reportedly lowered their substance use after commencing therapy with their therapists. Hence, some treatment recommendations are suggested as a result of the conclusions made.



- 1 Firstly, recommended as a good start to any therapeutic relationship, particularly therapy involved in working with our concept of the relational dilemma, five overall characteristics that were seen as universally helpful may assist with creating adequate conditions for a secure and reliable working alliance. Therapists are advised to evaluate their current practice and consider adopting the safe therapist characteristics of being non-judgemental, supportive and kind, demonstrating trustworthiness that helps confront client Attachment to Substance fears, the notion of therapist predictability, and the importance of maintaining attunement to clients' needs (Mallinckrodt, 2010; Mallinckrodt, et al., 2009; Mallinckrodt, et al., 1995).
- 2 Secondly, by adopting a non-directive approach, therapists will inherently have to focus on what surfaces in the context of the therapy discussion and manage what comes up for the client. Encouraging clients to be more in touch with their feelings can assist with building self-acceptance,

and guiding clients to articulate these struggles in a more coherent way. This approach is not dependent on any one therapeutic orientation but based on attachment theory, hence can be incorporated into different therapeutic orientations. See Kietaibl's (2012) review of attachment and its relationship with the working alliance for a detailed look into applications of attachment theory in other model-specific therapies (e.g., implications on Psychoanalytic practice, applications within Interpersonal Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and working within postmodern frameworks like Narrative Therapy). Given that this process-intensive style of therapy may be uncomfortable for therapists who are unfamiliar with more unstructured styles of therapy, it has been highlighted that attachment theory can be integrated such that a focus on client schemas can be related to the IWMs clients present with (McBride & Atkinson, 2009). For instance, either internal or external stimuli can activate IWMs proposed by attachment theory and inform CBT practitioners by providing insight into client schemas.

- 3 Thirdly, a recognition of the value of emotional exploration and expression is viewed to take precedence over a prime focus on challenging client opinions or dysfunctional cognitions, as a general recommendation. As shown in the current findings, depending on their attachment patterns, clients may inadvertently exhibit features of their attachment strategies or IWMs to manage their attachment distress. It is recommended that therapists learn to manage interpersonal distance with clients based on Daly and Mallinckrodt's (2009) concept of therapeutic distance, defined as the emotional closeness or distance between client and therapist based on client attachment patterns.

Mallinckrodt (2010) viewed that Attachment to Substance attachment aspects of the psychotherapy relationship are nearly always in a state of dynamic change, and a skilled therapist does not simply enact a single attachment, or caregiving pattern, but instead flexibly alters the pattern to help a client move away from a previously insecure attachment pattern of attachment. By adopting this approach, therapists can strategically move from an initial indulging of an insecure client's unique needs to gradually challenging the client's habitual patterns of relational behaviour based on their insecure attachment.

- 4 Lastly, in order to work through client transference in the therapy process, it was found that it was crucial for therapists to identify and be sensitive to possible interpersonal enactments, otherwise known as recognising the presence of overly positive or negative transference. Depending on the quality of the transference, it was argued that "at the core of the love or hostility expressed in the transference were feelings about a primary person in the life of the client, such as a mother, a father, a sibling, or any other central person" (King & O'Brien, 2011, p. 13). By attending to these feelings and the client's target attachment figure, the therapist can access the clients' attachment IWM of self and others. In this way, the therapeutic task may then be to first identify these attachment IWM patterns during the course of therapy,

and look out for evidence of client misperceptions to the therapist that appear more compatible with their history of relating with significant others. Therapists may reformulate and utilise attachment insights into more useful ways of coping with distress and emotional dysregulation. Although this process may be trickier for clients high on avoidant attachment, this may provide a more suitable avenue for therapists to raise and discuss their clients' reactions in a sensitive and informed way, at the appropriate time.

However, given that Ee (2017) did not include an examination into therapist countertransference, it must be noted that this is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion on managing transference processes, as that is beyond the scope of this article. In fact, as highlighted by King and O'Brien (2011), using the term "transference" to refer to the negative emotional experience of the client in therapy is not only imprecise, but may also be a dangerous Attachment to Substance if it absolves us from the responsibility of finding out what is actually going on in the session.





Therefore, therapists are advised to develop and maintain awareness of their own attachment patterns. By recognising their own attachment styles and triggers, therapists may be more present in their sessions and avoid reactions that may in turn trigger their clients (Kietaibl, 2012). If clients feel safe in therapy, they may be less prone to anxiety regarding therapy and premature termination of therapy (Mallinckrodt, et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, often the therapeutic milieu will come under the threat of rupture and either client or therapist may play a role in its formation. Clients may return to their substance use as a default coping position, and begin employing their attachment strategies in fear of interpersonal consequences and disappointment. Holmes (2010) pointed out that a crucial element in addition to reliability, consistency and feeling understood, is the repeated experience in therapy of emotional rupture and repair. As with the Ainsworth Strange Situation, the ability of the caregiver to withstand protest and help the child re-establish the secure base following a brief separation is a mark of secure attachment (Holmes, 2010). Similarly, therapy is characterised by a series of separations and reunions, misunderstandings, and acting out, so this alliance rupture and repair is argued to be an important therapeutic skill, and provides the client with a corrective emotional experience. Hence, therapists are advised to follow through alliance ruptures with kind and gentle repair, even if the rupture itself was inflicted by the therapist and appears daunting. This process can be internalised by clients as they begin to challenge their own expectations of relational rupture, and thus build the capacity for alliance repair, seen as being crucial to self-esteem and effective interpersonal functioning (Holmes, 2010).



The recommendations above are argued to be applicable for working with clients with substance dependence in both individual or group psychotherapy. Since these are interpersonal processes and patterns of relating that are essentially being targeted in therapy, the goal would be to enhance relational connection and assist clients with resolving their Attachment to Substance relational dilemma. In other words, therapists will find themselves influencing the relationship with the substance from secure to insecure, and interpersonal relationships from insecure to more secure. So far, to our knowledge, no earlier research had been able to demonstrate Ee's findings (2017) empirically; they contribute to the existing research in the areas of attachment and substance dependence. Given the right ingredients in forming strong bonds in psychotherapy, it is possible to ultimately persuade the individual to detach from the object of their [substance] dependence, and gradually learn to adopt a more secure dependence on security-giving attachment figures.



The unpublished doctoral dissertation is accessible via the Murdoch University website
<https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/41358/>

Ee, Shawn (2017). The impact of attachment to substance in substance dependent individuals' Psychotherapy relationships: An exploratory mixed-methods study. Professional Doctorate thesis, Murdoch University.



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