

Love (Components)

Zahra Sattaur, Lisa Lashley, Charles Golden

Nova Southeastern University, College of Psychology

Several theories have emerged over the years to explain love. These theories have emerged in order to understand the nature of one's experience of love in daily life. The two dominating theories on love are those proposed by John Alan Lee and Robert Sternberg. Lee's model suggested a model which includes six styles of love, three which are primary, and three that are considered secondary. The primary styles of love are Eros or passionate love, Ludus or game-playing love, and Storge which is friendship-based love. The secondary styles of love are Pragma or practical love, Mania which is possessive love, and Agape which is altruistic love. Lee sought to describe the styles of loving in a relationship as opposed to describing types of people in the relationship.

Sternberg's triangular theory of love suggests that love can be explained via three components forming the ends of a triangle. At the top of the triangle is intimacy, while passion makes up the bottom left corner of the triangle, and decision and commitment make up the bottom right corner of the triangle. The position of these elements within the triangle has no significant relevance, but it is useful to explain the overall model. This newer model of love has been proven in research to be more reliable and is more generally accepted, as it includes factors that are included in other models. Within this theory, the intimacy component refers to feeling close and connected in a relationship. These feelings make up warmth in a relationship. In a relationship, passion refers to motivations and other sources of arousal which turn into attraction, romance, and sexual intimacy. Decision and commitment includes components that are short-term and long-term, where decision is the choice for one to love another in the short-term and

commitment is the long-term maintenance of that love. Included in this are cognitive elements that are part of decision making regarding the choice to commit to a relationship. While love can be separated into components, Sternberg suggests that it is important to not forget about love as a whole when delving deeper into interpretation of each of the components.

The geometry of the “love triangle” is dependent on the amount of love and the balance of love within a relationship. Hence, more love will result in a larger area within the triangle. Therefore, the three components influence one another based on the presence of each one in a relationship. For example, more intimacy may result in more passion or commitment and vice versa. All three components are vital to a relationship and give rise to various combinations of love.

There are 8 possible types of love that arise from different combinations of the three components. These include nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, and consummate love. Nonlove does not include any of the three components of love. It is characterized by normal interactions that do not involve love. Liking is when there is only intimacy without the passion and commitment components. Infatuated love refers to passionate love without intimacy and commitment. This is also described as “love at first sight.” Empty love is when one makes the decision to love someone else and commit to that love without the intimacy and passion components. Romantic love results from intimacy and passion combined together. Companionate love refers to the intimacy and the decision/commitment components combined together. Fatuous love consists of passion and the decision/commitment component without intimacy. Commitment here is usually made based on passion, therefore, it may be short-term. Consummate love happens when of all three components of love are combined. This type of love is easier to attain than to maintain.

The components of love vary in many ways. The experiences of love discussed are said to change at different stages in a relationship as they each follow a different course once a relationship is initiated. Each of the three components have a different level of importance based on whether the relationship is short-term versus long-term. The components also vary in how common they are in different relationships and in the physiological response that they each produce. Overall, this theory of love has been shown to incorporate several different empirical findings regarding love and relationships. It can therefore be used to explain numerous phenomena regarding people's experiences of love in everyday life due to its generalizability.

Further Reading

Ahmetoglu, G., Swami, V., & Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2010). The relationship between

dimensions of love, personality, and relationship length. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(5), 1181-1190. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1007/s10508-009-9515-5>

Sternberg, R. J. (2006). A duplex theory of love. In R. J. Sternberg, & K. Weis (Eds.), *The new psychology of love; the new psychology of love* (pp. 184-199, Chapter viii, 338 Pages)

Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. Retrieved from

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/docview/621431982?accountid=6579>

Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119-135.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119>