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An Analysis of Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

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Abstract

Love is a universal human phenomenon; yet love is not universally experienced and expressed the same way in all cultures. Love is a core psychological and physiological human need whether one realizes it or not. Love is a matter of human survival. Love is like a fine diamond with the possibility of various qualities of clarity, cut, carat and color. Sternberg's (1986) *Triangular Theory of Love* identifies three measurable components of love: (a) passion, (b) intimacy, and (c) decision/commitment. This theory of love describes seven kinds of love with seven properties associated with the components. Love changes over the course of relationships. The purpose of this paper will be to critically analyze Robert Sternberg's (1986) *Triangular Theory of Love*.

A Theory of Love

“What is love? ‘tis not hereafter’; ‘love is heaven, and heaven is love’; ‘Love is a sickness full of woes’; ‘Love is a growing or full constant light’; ‘love it is but lust’; ‘love is more cruel than lust’; ‘Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds’; ‘Love is like linen often chang’d, the sweeter.’” (Stallworthy, 1973, p. 19)

What is love? Philosophers, poets, dramatist, theologians, psychologist and others have strived to define and describe the concepts associated with the modern English word “love.”¹

The ancient Greeks used words such as *eros*, *phileo*, *storge* and *agape* to capture the essence of love. Is love solely a feeling or emotion? Is love just an interpersonal and intrapersonal relational attitude? Is love only a cognitive process that influences behavior? Or is love simply a psychophysiological response to stimuli which results in the motivation to love (Murstein, 1988)?

Love is a universal human phenomenon; yet love is not universally experienced and expressed the same way in all cultures (Beall & Sternberg, 1995). Love is a core psychological and physiological human need whether one realizes it or not. Love is a matter of human survival (Ornish, 1998). Love is like a fine diamond with the possibility of various qualities of clarity, cut, carat and color. Thus, love is a multidimensional, universal, human, psychophysiological, dynamic phenomenon that involves emotion, cognition, motivation and volition.

As the science of psychology developed over the century’s scientist faithfully tried to understand through theoretical constructs the complexity of love. No one theory can describe the whole of any phenomenon. Theories provide a framework for understanding the parts of a whole. Theories must be operational in the sense they represent reality and can be measured.

¹ Note on plagiarism: Sternberg employs a similar sentence in the introduction of the book *The Psychology of Love*, and his article *The Nature of Love*. I wrote the introductory sentence in note 1 before reading his texts. I was going to delete my thought and either quote or paraphrase Sternberg but decided to add this note because I genuinely had the thought and believe it is common knowledge with no need to cite a reference.

Over the past four decades, studies on love emerged as an important research topic in social psychology (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Sternberg, 1986/97/98; Sternberg & Grajek, 1984). Psychologists developed theoretical models of love and methods to measure the psychometric dimensions and dynamics of love in close relationships (Aron & Westbay, 1996; Buss, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Heaven, Da Silva, Carey, & Holen, 2003; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Lee, 1988; Mathers & Moore, 2001; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Sternberg, 1997/98). In two major annual reviews of psychological literature of close interpersonal relationships the two most noted theories of love were Lee's *Colors of Love* and Sternberg's *Triangular Theory of Love* (Berscheid, 1994; Clark & Reis, 1988).

The purpose of this paper will be to critically analyze Robert Sternberg's (1986) *Triangular Theory of Love*. This analysis will involve an overview of the theory, an explanation of how love is measured using the applied theory, an exploration of the research on the theory, and a critique of the theory.

An Overview of Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Sternberg (1986) states that his "tripartite theory deals both with the nature of love and with loves in various kinds of relationships" (p. 119.) He also contends that his theory is just one way to conceptualize the theory of love. Sternberg (1986) views love as genetically coded but mostly learned through social interaction. He would embrace a biologically evolutionary construct of love that has varied throughout history and in different cultures (Beall & Sternberg, 1995).

His theory has three components: (a) intimacy, (b) passion, and (c) decision/commitment. Sternberg (1986) depicts the ideal consummate love relationship as an equilateral triangle where

“intimacy” is the top vertex, “passion” is the left vertex and “decision/commitment” is the right vertex (p. 119). The placements of the components on the triangle are arbitrary; thus, any vertex can be assigned a different theoretical component. The Triangular Love Theory has measurable mathematical and geometric qualities- the triangle in and of itself is used metaphorically (Sternberg, 1997/98).

How does Sternberg (1986/1997) describe and define the three components of his theory of love? In the context of his theory, Sternberg (1997) associates the intimacy component with “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness” (p. 315). The passion component refers to the “drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation” (Sternberg, 1997). The decision/commitment component refers to the “cognitive” processes (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119) and “in the short-term, to the decision that one loves a certain other, and in the long-term, to one’s commitment to maintain that love” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 315). Sternberg employs the classic psychological taxonomy of emotion, cognition and motivation. Additionally, Sternberg (1986) describes metaphorically each of the components using temperature- “warm” (p. 119) with intimacy, “hot” (p. 119) with passion, and “cold” (p. 119) with decision/commitment.

How are the components related or not related? The components are separate in “function” but influence each other through combinations which formulate seven types of love. Thus, the components can be analyzed individually and interactively. Sternberg (1998) identifies seven kinds of love- plus one other category called “non-love” which is the absence of all three components of love.

Baron and Byrne (2003) describe the seven kinds of love in their various combinations. These descriptions are general because no one kind of love can be associated with one person at any given time. Also, an individual who relates closely to many people will express and

experience various kinds of love over time; thus, these seven kinds of love are snapshots of theoretical love.

1. “Infatuation = Passion Alone (passionate, obsessive love at first sight without intimacy or commitment)” (p. 324).
2. “Romantic Love = Intimacy + Passion (lovers physically and emotionally attracted to each other but without commitment, as in a summer romance)” (p. 324).
3. “Liking = Intimacy Alone (true friendship without passion or long-term commitment)” (p. 324).
4. “Companionate Love = Intimacy + Commitment (long-term committed friendship such as a marriage in which the passion has faded)” (p. 324).
5. “Empty Love = Decision/Commitment Alone (decision to love another without intimacy or passion)” (p. 324).
6. “Fatuuous Love = Passion + Commitment (commitment based on passion but without time for intimacy to develop- shallow relationships such as a whirlwind courtship) (p. 324).
7. “Consummate Love = Intimacy + Passion + Decision/Commitment (a complete love consisting of all three components- an ideal difficult to obtain) (p. 324).

Sternberg (1998) states these kinds of love are “idealized cases based on the triangular theory and most loving relationships will fit between categories, because the components of love occur in varying degrees, rather than being simply present or absent” (p. 17). No two kinds of love are the same; love varies from individual to individual, from relationship to relationship, from moment to moment over the course of time in all relationships.

Not only does Sternberg (1986) identify seven (eight) kinds of love, he associates seven properties with the components of love. Even though “the three components of love differ with

respect to a number of their properties” (Sternberg, 1986, p. 120) these properties are consistent throughout his research. Table 1 identifies the components and the associated property levels.

Table 1

Properties of Triangle Vertices

Property	Component		
	Intimacy	Passion	Decision/Commitment
Stability	Moderately high	Low	Moderately high
Conscious controllability	Moderate	Low	High
Experiential salience	Variable	High	Low
Typical importance in short-term relationships	Moderate	High	Low
Typical importance in long-term relationships	High	Moderate	High
Commonality across loving relationships	High	Low	Moderate
Psychophysiological involvement	Moderate	High	Low
Susceptibility to conscious awareness	Moderately low	High	Moderately high

Note: From “A Triangular Theory of Love,” by R. Sternberg, 1986, *Psychological Review*, 93, 2, p. 120, Copyright 1986 by the American Psychological Association, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Based on the above properties of the triangle vertices, Sternberg, (1986) made the following observations- the emotional aspect of intimacy and the cognitive aspect of decision/commitment components “seem to be relatively stable in close relationships, whereas the motivational and other arousal of the passion component tends to be relatively unstable and to come and go on a somewhat unpredictable basis” (p. 120). The individual components have unique properties in close relationships; these properties interact differently within the triad of love to produce variations in the levels of experienced love within and between the individuals in

the relationship. The within and between relationship dynamics in Sternberg's theory increase the potential for measuring the individual components of the theory because of the self awareness through the expression and experience of love in the relationship which can be self-reported.

One of the unique attributes of being human is the ability to be consciously self-aware. Individuals have some degree of volitional control of the emotive and cognitive dimensions of intimacy and decision/commitment (Sternberg, 1998). However, the psychophysiological part of passion is not as easy to exercise self control over; thus, the rise and fall of the motivation of passion can literally happen unconsciously i.e. by simply looking at another person one can be aroused. When aroused one may become aware and can consciously decide how to act upon the arousal of passion. Self-awareness is an important dimension in measuring love. Measuring love requires self-reporting and if one is not aware of the dimensions of love it can not be measured. Anecdotally, love can effect blood pressure but love can not be measured like "taking your blood pressure or temperature."

Sternberg (1998) also notes that the components in his theory of love "differ in their commonality across loving relationships" (p. 120). His research indicates that "intimacy" is the most common component across various love relationships (Sternberg & Grajek, 1984). The passion piece is the most "divergent" of the components; while decision/commitment component is the most controllable of all three components. The type of love relationship makes the difference on how love is expressed and experienced. For example the passion of love that a parent has for their child is different than the passionate love between two opposite sex spouses or between two same sex life long friends. There are as many types of love relationships as there are types of people who have the capacity and capability to love.

According to Sternberg's theory of love, there are "many triangles" for any particular relationship. To understand the concept of "the love triangles" Sternberg (1998) utilizes geometry to explain this aspect of his theory. Love triangles differ in size and shape (Sternberg, 1998, p. 25). Sternberg (1998) notes that the shapes of the triangles depends on the "amount of love" (p. 25) and the "balance of love" (p. 26) within the relationship. The amount of love effects the area of the triangle; thus "the larger the triangle, the greater amount of experienced love" and vice versa (Sternberg, 1998, p. 25). If one component of love is overemphasized or the other components are deemphasized the ideal equilateral triangle of consummate love takes different shape "as a function of the kind of love" being expressed and experienced (Sternberg, 1998, p. 26).

Additionally, Sternberg (1998) identifies three "other triangles of love" (p. 29). These triangles are: (a) real versus ideal, (b) self-perceived versus other perceived, (c) feelings versus action. Individuals picture in their minds what an ideal love relationship looks like. Real love relationships are determined through expression and experience. Thus, the self-aware person compares ideal love to real love and the difference between the two can determine the balance and actual amount of love in the relationship. The outcome of this kind of love awareness analysis can determine if one's involvement in the relationship is more "ideal," "under-involvement," "over-involvement," or "mis-involvement" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 31).

As noted before, self-awareness is a unique human characteristic. This awareness determines the level of perceived love in a relationship. In a relationship between two people there is the "self-perceived" and "other-perceived" love. The "self-perceived" love is "the way you see things" and the "other-perceived" love is "the way your partner sees things" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 32). When two people compare their perceptions of love they can measure the size and

shape of their love triangles. The outcome of this analysis measures the amount of involvement in the close relationship. Measuring the involvement can demonstrate if a couple has “perfectly matched involvements,” “closely matched involvements,” “moderately mismatched involvements” or “severely mismatched involvements” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 33) .

Beyond the real and ideal triangles and the self-perceived and other perceived triangles of love, Sternberg (1998) describes a third triangle: the feelings versus action triangle. The failure in many relationships is the difference between feelings and actions. Relationship failure often happens when one does not express love; thus the feelings of love are not experienced. This lack of expressing love effects the real versus ideal and the self-perceived versus other-perceived love triangles (Sternberg, 1998).

When love relationships are measured and analyzed then strategies can be designed to encourage the expression of love so love can be felt through real experience. However, the absence of felt love does not mean that love is not present in the relationship and that the relationship will fail. For example, a senior adult married couple may not feel the same passion in their relationship that they expressed and experienced as young adults; yet this couple may have a consummate love relationship. The way each of the components in the triangular theory of love are expressed and experienced changes over the “course” of the love relationship (Sternberg, 1998).

How do the components of love differ in relationships over time? According to Sternberg (1986) “the importance of these components of love may differ over time within a relationship as well as across relationships at a given time” (p. 123). Sternberg (1998) embraces and employs other theories of intelligence, emotion, and motivation in close relationships when he explains how love develops, is expressed and experienced over time. He concludes “each of the three

components of love has a different course, and the changes in each over time almost inevitably result in changes in the nature of a loving relationship” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 36).

What are the courses of the components of love over time? As noted Sternberg (1998) draws from the rich research on emotion, motivation, and cognition. For intimacy Sternberg (1998) taps the separate theories of Ellen Berscheid and George Mandler and “according to these theories, emotion in close relationships is experienced only as the result of interruption of common and well-rehearsed interactions between partners-what might be referred to as scripts” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 36). These scripts are developed over time in relationships.

In a well developed healthy relationship over time some may feel very little emotion. Sternberg (1998) describes the positive and negative sides of decreased emotion with regard to intimacy over time. Intimacy does not have to decrease in close relationships even if it is not felt. Positive emotions can be experienced throughout a life time. However, in failing relationships the intimacy component often deteriorates to a point of no positively felt emotion; thus, individuals may not feel loved or be in love. The curve of the intimacy component over time is bell shaped.

How can you determine if intimacy exists if it is not felt? In a successful love relationship intimacy can be positively expressed and experienced even when not necessarily felt. It is through an “interruption” in the relationship that can determine if intimacy exists (Sternberg, 1998). When two people are separated do they miss one another? If they miss each other- do they long to be together? If they miss one another and long to be together then intimacy probably exists in their relationship, even if it was not felt before the separation.

Another attribute of successful relationships over time involves the idea of two people being so close they feel as if they are one person. That is why the death of a long time spouse

can be a very traumatic event. It is in the absence of the other that the longing for closeness and intimacy is manifested. Sometimes one may not know what they have until they do not have it any longer. The same is true for couples who divorce. Sometimes couples who divorce realize they love the other after they are no longer have each other.

What does passion look like over time? The level of passion in various kinds of relationships can rise and fall quickly over the course of time. Sternberg (1998) utilizes Richard Solomon's "opponent-process theory of acquired motivation" (p. 39) when explaining the passion component. He notes that there are two functions or processes of the opponent theory that effect passion over time: (a) "positive process is quick to develop and also quick to fade," (b) "the negative or opponent process, is slow to develop and also slow to fade" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 39). These "processes in conjunction is a motivational course" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 39) that depends heavily upon the psychophysiological.

Passion performs different functions in different relationships and is the most unstable of three components of love. For example in a marital relationship sexual intercourse plays a significant role in the passion of love. The curve of passion over time generally starts off with a sharp upward trend then as love is expressed and experienced over time it is hard to maintain an increasing level of passion; thus the curve may drop to below zero; however, passion may spike up and down quickly during a relationship over time. Passion is expressed and experienced differently in a parent-child relationship or friendship relationship; yet passionate love can be expressed in healthy ways in all loving relationships.

Additionally, Sternberg (1998) associates passion with addictions. He states "when one starts to use the addictive substance, one feels a 'high' as a result and is then likely to use more of the substance" (p. 41). The addict "habituates" the use of the substance over time but requires

increased amounts of the substance to maintain the high. Without the addictive substance the person may be miserable and crave the substance. The high of sexual passion in relationships can be addictive and some may find in the course of passion over time they can not maintain the same level of active passion as they had early in the relationship especially when people are young. Thus, for many couples the passion component may “moderate and transform over time, although not necessarily into something less satisfying” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 41).

The most stable of the three components over time is “decision and commitment.” Sternberg (1998) notes “the course of the decision/commitment component of love in a close relationship depends in large part on the success of that relationship (and vice versa)” (p. 41). If intimacy and passion are not positively expressed and experienced in a relationship over time then the decision to stay committed to the relationship is in jeopardy and the result is “empty love” if one decides to stay in the relationship. In a successful relationship the curve of decision/commitment moves quickly upward and stabilizes over time. The unsuccessful relationship may go up quickly but has a sudden drop when the relationship fails.

Finally, as demonstrated above Sternberg’s “triangular theory of love” is very much like a diamond with various qualities of clarity, cut, carat and color. Like an individual finger print love is unique to an individual and to those in the close interpersonal relationship. The love of a parent to child is different for the parent and different for the child. The love expressed and experienced in a heterosexual marital relationship is different than the love between two same sex life long friends who have expressed and experienced love from childhood to senior adulthood. Robert Sternberg’s theory of love seems to be intuitive and constructively viable but does it measure how love is realistically expressed and experienced in human relationships?

Explanation on Measuring Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Robert Sternberg first presented his Triangular Love Scale in his 1988 book *The Triangle of Love*. Since 1988 he has refined his research and in 1997 conducted a study that construct-validated the scale (a more detailed analysis of this study is presented in the next section). In 1998 he simplified his research in his book *Cupid's Arrow: The Course of Love through Time*. This book took his theory out of academia and put it before the general population as a working and practical application of love. The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale as presented in *Cupid's Arrow* organizes his theory and breaks down the scale in three sections: (a) intimacy, (b) passion, and (c) commitment (note the last section is not labeled "decision/commitment.") (Sternberg, 1998, pp. 45-46).

Each of the sections in the love scale has 15 statements with blanks. In the blank the participant fills in the name of the person they are in relationship too. After filling in the name of the person in the blanks, the participant goes through the love scale statements twice using the rating scale of 1-to-9 with 1 = "not at all" and 9 = "extremely" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 45). The first time the participant rates the statement to "the extent to which the statement is characteristic" of the relationship (Sternberg, 1998, p. 45). The second time the participant rates the statement to "represent the extent to which the statement is important to" the relationship (Sternberg, 1998, p. 45).

For example the first item for intimacy section is "I am actively supportive of _____'s well-being." The participant puts the name of the person they are relating too in the blank then rates the statement first as a "characteristic" of the relationship and second on the "importance" of the characteristic to the relationship. In this context the participant may rate "characteristic" as a five and "importance" as a nine. The "characteristic" rating has to do with

how one actually feels in the relationship and the second rating of “importance” is more like the ideal way one should feel in the relationship (Sternberg, 1998, p. 45). This coincides with the real versus ideal triangle. Thus the difference in these ratings is critical for knowing the size and shape of the love triangles.

After the participant rates the statements twice, the scores are separately added up per section and each section is divided by 15 which provides an average rating for each component of the triangular love scale in two separate categories. Sternberg (1998) provides two tables describing “the normative information for the triangular love scale.” The first table is the “characteristicness” rating and answers the question “how characteristic is the description in each statement of your relationship?” (p. 47). The second table is the “importance” rating and answers the question “how important is the description in each statement to your relationship?” (p. 48). Each of the rating tables are divided into three sections and scores are divided as “high,” “average,” and “low” (p. 48). A high or low rating score represents “approximately” 15 percent of the top and bottom scores.

What did Sternberg find when using the scale? First, he found that the score “differences between sexes were not significant” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 48). Thus, the rating table in the book is inclusive of male and female ratings in a single score. He found through his research that participants thought the rating scales were “intuitive” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 49). Simply put the statements seemed to match the reality of the individuals and made theoretical sense based upon human expression and experience of love.

Exploration of Research on Sternberg’s Theory of Love

Psychology has long struggled to be acknowledged as an empirical natural science. In order for psychological theory to be accepted as valid empirical science then reliable and

replicable research must be conducted. This is perhaps where Robert Sternberg has achieved his success. First, Robert Sternberg is the IBM Professor of Psychology and Education at Yale University. Just a cursory review of two credible web pages www.yale.edu/rjsternberg and www.yale.edu/pace/teammembers/personalpages/bob reveal that Robert Sternberg is a prolific researcher across a wide spectrum of psychological study spanning research in intelligence to love. Second, he has published more than 18 major articles, authored or edited over 18 major books to include editing the 1988 book *The Psychology of Love* and authoring the 1988 book *The Triangle of Love* and the two 1998 books *Cupid's Arrow: The Course of Love Through Time* and *Love is a Story*. Finally, Robert Sternberg has produced major theories in human intelligence, creativity, thinking styles, learning disabilities, and love.

With regards to the research on the theory of love he has produced five major articles (Beall & Sternberg, 1995; Sternberg, 1986/97; Sternberg & Grajek, 1984; Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001) three of which involved directed research with participants. What makes Sternberg's theory more credible is that his research on the core theory has developed over the past twenty years. He has construct-validated his theory. Others have tested his theory and include his theory as foundational material in their research (Hassebrauck & Buhl, 1996; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989).

In 1984 Sternberg joined by Susan Grajek conducted an extensive study on the nature of love. This seminal work in the theory of love grew out of Sternberg's research in "psychometrics of intelligence" (Sternberg & Grajek, 1984, p. 314). In Sternberg and Grajek (1984) they describe three structural models of love based on the early 20th century intelligence theories of Spearman (1927), Thomson (1939) and Thurstone (1938). In developing the Triangular Theory of Love, Sternberg and Grajek (1984) adopt a Thomsonian "bonds" model of

love. To test the emerging triangular theory of love they conducted a series of tests utilizing 85 townspeople from New Haven, CT. Sternberg and Grajek (1984) were able to compare the “structure” of various models and measure using other scales such as Rubin’s “Liking and Loving” scale. As a result of this study they developed the Triangular Love Scale.

In 1997 Sternberg conducted a study on the “construct validation of a love scale based upon a triangular theory of love” (p. 313). In Sternberg (1997) there are two studies which provides the “internal validation” which helps make the “determination of whether the internal structure of the data is consistent with the theory,” and the “external validation” which helps make the “determination of whether the scale based on the theory shows sensible patterns of correlations with external measures” (p. 313).

In the 1997 study there were 84 participants made up of adults 18 and over, equally divided between men and women that were mostly married heterosexual couples from the New Haven, CT area. The participants responded to a local newspaper advertisement and were paid \$10 for two hours of research work. The ages ranged from 19 to 62 with a mean age of 28 with a standard deviation of 8 years. Their individual relationships spanned just a few months to 22 years with the mean length of relationship of 4.54 years and a standard deviation of 4.60 years (Sternberg, 1997). He utilized pencil and paper questionnaires and conducted the research in small groups.

Sternberg (1997) ran a basic statistical analysis of the characteristicness and importance data collected and found a “high correlation” between the ratings of “feelings and actions” in the Triangular Love Scale with a “median $r = 0.98$.” Furthermore, Sternberg (1997) did a “five-way analysis of variance” upon the means from the Love Scale data. Based on this analysis he concluded “the main effects of the type of rating and gender were not statistically significant,

whereas the effects of relationships, manifestation, and component were” statistically significant (Sternberg, 1997, p. 320).

Sternberg (1997) measured the internal and external validation of his theory. He determined that with the data collected there was “internal-consistency” because of the high level of correlation. The data collected and analyzed for characteristicness and importance and feeling and actions also demonstrated high levels of correlation “0.66 for intimacy, 0.77 for passion, and 0.92 for commitment” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 324). He concluded from this data set that “the respective levels of these values suggest that the extent to which a given behavior characterizes a relationship is least reflective of its perceived importance in that relationship for intimacy and most reflective for commitment” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 324).

External validation of the Triangular Theory of love involved two parts “inter-correlations” between the two scales being compared and “correlations of each of these scales with overall satisfaction in the participants’ romantic relationships” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 324). The correlations were high between the two scales. Even though there was a strong correlation between the two scales Sternberg (1997) concluded there was no “straight-forward convergent-discriminant relations as a function of components of each of the scales” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 327). From this conclusion it was determined that the love scales of Sternberg and Rubin even though correlated do not measure the same descriptive components in the theories.

Sternberg (1997) concluded from the study that “the data are generally supportive of the triangular theory of love” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 328). However, he noted in the discussion of data four limitations of the study. First, “the study makes use exclusively of questionnaire data” which in and of itself is dependent upon the accuracy and authenticity of the participants (Sternberg, 1997, p. 328). Second, “the questionnaire was designed with the triangular theory of

love in mind” which is not a “theory-free method” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 328). Third, the study sample was small. Fourth, the data did not fully support the theory.

The study even with the limitations seemed to validate the theory. There must be replication of the study to validate the theory over time and with different samples of the population. Not only was the sample relatively small it was very homogenous- the participants were from a mostly white affluent northeastern United States community. This was not truly a random sample. This could have lead to the high correlation of data. Also, Sternberg (1997) noted that the questionnaire method even though a valid research tool needs to “be supplemented by behavioural data” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 328). This type of data is collected through observation and interviews.

Critique of the Triangular Theory of Love

After surveying the literature and analyzing the studies of various theories of love, Sternberg’s (1986) *Triangular Theory of Love* is scientifically validate and reliable in the sense it is predictable over time, measurable throughout time and replicable in other studies. However, the studies that have been conducted on his theory have been very homogeneous groups of either affluent white individuals/couples in the north eastern part of the United States or middle case somewhat affluent university students (Hassebrauck & Buhl, 1996; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989). Thus, the theory has not be applied to or measured against a diverse population of people. One would think that this would limit the theories application. The theory seems most applicable to western cultures where love is expressed and experienced in similar ways regardless of socio-economic status.

As noted above, Sternberg is a prolific researcher in several psychological domains e.g. cognition, emotion and motivation. However, in his theory of love he does not discuss the

individual capacities to love or individual capabilities to love. Humans have various emotional and intellectual capacities or capabilities to love. Mental health issues and diseases can hinder the expression and experience of love. Individuals who have been abused often have problems loving others and even themselves. Sternberg's theory seems to only include people who are relatively healthy. This is not to say those with emotional and intellectual challenges can not or do not love. Sternberg's theory does take into consideration imbalances and mismatches but seems to focus on people with relatively healthy cognitive and emotive processing abilities.

Sternberg operationalized his theory and put it before the general public. His research was developmental in that he along with his associates patiently over time developed the theory from conceptualization to actualization. The book *Cupid's Arrow* (1998) is very scholarly but oriented to the lay person. The book presents love as a life long developmental journey with the ups and downs of life. The practical application of his theory simply makes sense and seems to bear out in day to day living and loving.

No theory is perfect. Robert Sternberg seems to demonstrate a mastery over the domain of science he researches. It is interesting after reviewing his vast studies in intellect that he chooses to study love which seems to be an emotionally based phenomena for many people. And that may be why many relationships fail because they believe love is only a feeling. Sternberg's work in intelligence and motivation reinforces his theory in love. Love is a multidimensional, universal, human, psychophysiological, dynamic phenomenon that involves emotion, cognition, motivation and volition. Love is like a fine diamond with the possibility of various qualities of clarity, cut, carat and color.

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