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Lifespan Psychology

August 24 2020

Final Essay

A Life of Love

If I learned anything from the last two years, it is that romantic relationships are a very important part of life. This essay discusses Romantic relationships over three periods of time. The three periods include adolescence, early adulthood and middle adulthood. While discussing romantic relationships I will also discuss the evolutionary perspective of psychology.

What makes a romantic relationship? When I discuss romantic relationships I mean love. In order to properly discuss romantic relationships, I want to define love based on Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. “Love is made of three components: intimacy, which is affection. passion, which is sex and physical closeness, and commitment, which is the longterm determination to maintain that love”(Feldman, 334). While aspects of romantic love occur over our lifetimes, the start of romantic relationships typically occurs in adolescence.

The evolutionary perspective goes hand in hand with romantic relationships. “This evolutionary perspective suggests that romantic love arises from forces within the hominid brain that are independent of the socially constructed mind. From this perspective, romantic love must be present, in some form or another, within every culture”(Jankowiak 149). This means that romantic love is a cultural universal, and that romantic love is a part of being human. According to the text, “The evolutionary perspective is the result of genetic inheritance from our ancestors traits and behavior that are adaptive for promoting the survival of our species have been inherited through natural selection”(Feldman 23). According to the evolutionary perspective, romantic relationships are necessary for our survival, romantic relationships provide the means for reproduction and the ability to raise a child.

While romantic relationships are cultural universals, the concept of romantic love is present through many phases of our lives. The first is adolescence. Dating remains the dominant form of social interaction that leads to intimacy among adolescents. It works as a way to establish intimacy with another individual. True intimacy becomes more common during later adolescents. “Sexual behavior and thoughts are among the central concerns of adolescents occupying the minds of almost all adolescents a good deal of the time”(Feldman 297).

Romantic relationships in adolescence tend to be riskier. “Romantic relationships and sexual activities of youth have long been equated with risk. Early romantic involvements, especially those during the first part of adolescence, have been linked to various negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, substance use, and delinquent behaviours”(Bongardt 497). Romantic relationships at this time in life are normal. “The engagement in romantic relationships and emerging sexual activity are increasingly considered normative aspects of adolescent development and the transition to young adulthood”(Bongardt 497). While sexual activity is considered riskier in adolescence, a quality relationship with parents can help reduce the risk. “In sexuality research, a consistent finding pertaining to the role of parents in healthy adolescent sexual development concerns the protective function of a high-quality relationship with parents. Adolescents who have a good relationship with their parents—characterized by high levels of warmth, closeness, and support—generally initiate sexual behaviour at a later age and engage in safer sexual behaviour”(Bongardt 497). Therefore, the time of adolescence may be risky, but this is a time when people normally start engaging in romantic relationships, and the risks associated with romantic relationships, such as STDs and pregnancy may be minimized, by having a good supportive relationship with parents.

After Adolescence, comes early adulthood. In this time development of romantic relationships becomes more crucial, “Romantic unions such as marriages, cohabiting partnerships, and steady dating relationships seem to promote emotional and physical well‐being across development”(Masarik 356). At this time romantic relationships can affect well being and emotional health. “Approximately 90% of all individuals end up married; however, 50% or more of these marriages fail, and still others are marked by withdrawal, conflict, and enduring unhappiness”(Masarik 356).

During early adulthood romantic relationships become a more clear part of life and quality romantic relationships lead to a higher quality of life. Difficulties with romantic relationships during this time period lead to negative outcomes to the individuals of the relationship. During early adulthood the key to a happy marriage is that, “marriage requires emotional investment and that marriage leads to more life fulfillment”(Masarik 356). During this period in life romantic relationships promote mental health and well being, but failure in romantic relationships lead to decreased levels of happiness and poor mental health.

In middle adulthood relationships are an important source of emotional security, they also affect stress and sleep. “Romantic relationships are an especially potent source of social belongingness and emotional security in adulthood” and “Over the past several decades, research has confirmed that people who have higher‐quality relationships with their friends, family, and romantic partners tend to have better health outcomes”(Huelsnitz, 23). In middle adulthood high quality relationships contribute to healthy sleep.“ People who are involved in higher‐quality relationships report better sleep outcomes compared to those in poorer‐quality relationships”(Huelsnitz, 23). In this time of life it is important to maintain relationship effectiveness“people high in relationship effectiveness have a track record of relationships marked by mutual caring, trust; emotional closeness, responsiveness, sharing of experiences, and valuing of faithfulness, loyalty, and honesty”(Huelsnitz). People who are in a healthy romantic relationship are more likely to have resilience against stressful life events. Having healthy romantic relationships in middle adulthood contributes to overall health and well being, emotional security and social belonging.

In conclusion, romantic relationships are a major part of life. In the teenage years romantic relationships tend to be riskier, but the risk is limited by having quality support from parents and peers. In early adulthood, romantic relationships have a correlation with well being and quality of life, quality relationships have a higher quality of life, while poor relationships lead to a negative quality of life. In middle adulthood, romantic relationships contribute to health and wellbeing and emotional security and social belonging, Quality romantic relationships in middle adulthood also lead to increased resilience from major life stressors. Throughout life, high quality relationships lead to a higher quality of life.

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