

## PARENTAL INTERFERENCE AND ROMANTIC LOVE: THE ROMEO AND JULIET EFFECT<sup>1</sup>

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The two hypotheses tested were that (a) feelings of love become more highly correlated with trust and acceptance as relationships develop through time; and (b) parental interference in a love relationship intensifies the feelings of romantic love between members of the couple. The first hypothesis was derived from our conceptualization of love and distinctions between romantic and "conjugal" love. Affirmation of this hypothesis supported a methodology for operationalizing romantic love. The second hypothesis was derived from classical literature and small group dynamics, and was explained in terms of two theoretical principles, namely, the motivating effect of frustration and reactance. This hypothesis was also supported, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal change score correlations. Plausible alternatives to this hypothesis were examined and then eliminated through further analyses. Possible relationship dynamics associated with parental interference and trust were discussed. Finally, the findings were applied to cross-cultural variations in the occurrence of romantic love.

Romantic love can be thought of as a distinct form of interpersonal attraction that occurs between opposite-sex partners under specifiable social conditions. Though romantic love is considered to be an important and meaningful experience by many members of our culture, little research has been done with respect to the social conditions associated with variations in feelings of love. This may be due in part to the difficulties inherent in attaining adequate methodological control over the process being studied, and to not having developed any acceptable conceptualization of what is meant by love.

The present study explores the relation between one type of influence on a heterosexual relationship—parental interference—and love in the relationship. The primary hypothesis was derived from several separate but con-

vergent sources: the classical literature on romantic love, studies of group reactions to external opposition, and two generalized theoretical principles. All of these considerations, which will be more fully elaborated, lead to the same hypothesis: parental interference in a love relationship intensifies the feelings of romantic love between members of the couple.

A balanced presentation should acknowledge that there are competing theories which would predict that parental interference should reduce the positive aspects of the relationship, and thus reduce feelings of love. The application of reinforcement principles would suggest that romantic feelings that are not reinforced or are punished (by the parents' disapproval) would decrease in intensity. The frustration-aggression principle would suggest that the frustrations produced by parental interference would lead to aggression that could be displaced onto one's mate, who is a safer and more available object for such aggression, and that such conflict would result in a diminution of love. The range of applicability of such seemingly incompatible principles is, of course, a major focus of this study.

### *Parental Interference and Romantic Love*

*Classical sources.* Romantic love has been the subject of countless literary efforts.

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Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is such a classic description of the situation of interest that we may take it as a paradigm case. One will recall that the short but intense love affair took place against the background of total opposition from the two feuding families. The family conflicts did, in several parts of the play, force the lovers to decide whether their primary allegiance was to each other or to their families, and they created difficulties and separations that appear to have intensified the lovers' feelings for each other.

The association between parental opposition and love is found in cultures and times other than our own. In Roman mythology, for example, the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is built on the intensification of love by parental opposition: "they longed to marry, but their parents forbade it. Love, however, cannot be forbidden. The more the flame is covered up, the hotter it burns [Hamilton, 1942, p. 101]." A culture's literature and folk tales are not taken as necessarily valid reflections of phenomena within that culture, but rather as sources of testable propositions.

In reviewing the history of romantic love, DeRougement (1940) emphasized the persistent association of obstacles or grave difficulties with the intensity of the love. An affair consummated without major difficulty may hold less zest. Of course, parental interference is just one kind of obstacle to love's consummation.

*General principles.* The second basis for the hypothesis derives from studies of group responses to external opposition, beginning with Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang*. Sherif and Sherif (1964) stated that strong and consistent support exists for the observation that opposition to the group or restrictions of the group's activities and goals (e.g., by authority figures or other groups) increases group solidarity. While these dynamics were derived from larger groups, it seems reasonable that they would apply to dyadic heterosexual relationships. Love, as will be elaborated later, is a form of interpersonal attraction or cohesiveness.

The group solidarity findings are an empirical consistency. Two types of theoretical principles can be used to explain such consistencies. One of these is the principle that

frustration, in the form of interference with goal-directed activity, barriers, delays of reinforcement, and the like, can intensify the goal-directed behavior and increase the desirability of the goal object (Amsel, 1958, 1962; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Wright, 1934). Since interference is an obstacle to the continuance of a desired relationship, it should increase the desirability of that relation. Another related principle has been proposed by Brehm (1966). His theory of reactance states that threats to one's freedom of action arouse a desire to restore one's freedom and that the strength of this desire is directly proportional to the number and importance of the behavioral freedoms threatened. The desire to restore freedom results in behavioral resistance and attitude change in a direction opposing that advocated by the threat source. Since parental interference in a love relationship is a direct threat to the couple's freedom to act on feelings of love for each other, reactance theory predicts an intensification of feelings of love between the couple and behavioral resistance to the threat.

A feeling of love is an emotional state which carries with it a high probability for a number of behavioral tendencies. Parental opposition to the relationship often includes both interference with and threats directed toward these behavioral tendencies and thus should by either principle intensify the feelings of romantic love.

### *The Concept of Romantic Love*

The present research instruments are based in part on an unpublished conceptual analysis of love and friendship by Davis and on a seminar conducted jointly by the second and third authors. While our ideas were developed independently of Rubin (1970), there is considerable overlap. Rubin included the following dimensions in his scale of romantic love: affiliative and dependent needs, feelings of exclusiveness and absorption, and the predisposition to help. Our conceptualization includes the first two of these, as well as physical attraction and passion (supported by Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1967) and idealization. Scale validation upheld Rubin's distinction between romantic love and liking, a distinction which has gone

largely unrecognized in the field of interpersonal attraction. In our work, the concern was rather with the contrast between romantic love and conjugal love (cf. Goode, 1959). Conjugal love is love between mature adults and is thought to evolve out of mutually satisfying interactions and increasing confidence and personal security in the relationship. Components of any close friendship are also requisite for conjugal love, such as mutual trust, lack of criticalness, appreciation, respect, sharing, genuine knowledge of the other, loyalty, and a willingness to sacrifice for the other in time of need. Many of these components of conjugal love need not be present in romantic love. In fact, both the association of romantic love with uncertainty and challenge (DeRougement, 1940) and a lover's frequent requests for reassurance about his partner's love and fidelity suggest that basic mutual trust is in question during the romantic stage of relationships. Hence, the association of trust with love is basic to our distinction between conjugal and romantic love.

Our conceptualization differs from Rubin (1970) in that he uses the term "romantic" to indicate love between seriously involved unmarried opposite-sex partners, in contrast to our use of the term in the distinction between romantic and conjugal love. The position taken here is that both unmarried and married relationships may have elements of both romantic and conjugal love, with the expectation that serious relationships evolve over time from a predominantly romantic to a more conjugal type of love.

A central conceptual implication of our analysis is that feelings of trust, acceptance, and other components of conjugal love need not be strongly associated with feelings of passion and romantic love. Rather, one would expect that feelings of love and trust would become more highly associated as couples share experiences and feelings, come to know each other better, and attain greater confidence in the relationship. While such experiences that are required to form a basis for trust and acceptance need not perfectly coincide with the stage of the relationship, one would expect them to coincide enough so that love and trust would be more strongly

correlated for couples who have been together longer and for couples who are married.

### *Hypotheses*

There are two major hypotheses. Confirmation of the first would be supportive of the methodology used to test the second hypothesis. (a) Feelings of love become more strongly correlated with trust and acceptance through time. (b) Parental interference in a love relationship intensifies the feelings of romantic love between members of the couple.

The testing of the two hypotheses was done within the confines of a longitudinal study of the quality of marital and serious dating relationships. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal data have been brought to bear. The first hypothesis was tested by examining and comparing the correlations of love with trust (and other measures of the conjugal quality of the relationship) between unmarried and married couples and between unmarried couples at initial and later follow-up time periods. The procedure for testing the second hypothesis was as follows: A purified index of romantic love was derived by partialing out the contribution of trust (taken as the key indicator of conjugal love). Reported parental interference and feelings of love and romantic love were correlated during the initial time period. Next, longitudinal data were examined to see if increases in parental interference were associated with increases in feelings of romantic love. Finally, a series of additional analyses were performed to rule out some of the most obvious artifacts, such as selective couple attrition, background factors, and parental interference as a reaction to the couple's stage of commitment.

### METHOD

#### *Subjects and Procedure*

The present study is based on data from the Marital Relations Project, a longitudinal study designed to validate new instruments for assessing the quality of serious dating and marital relations, focusing particularly on interpersonal behaviors and feelings, as well as on the evaluation of the effectiveness of three types of marital intervention.

Couples were recruited from a variety of sources and covered the continuum from very happy with their relationship to unhappy, troubled, and probably seeking help from the project. All of the participants were volunteers interested in learning more about their relationships. A total of 140 couples completed

the initial questionnaires and comprise the initial (Time 1) sample. All of the 49 dating couples had a serious commitment to the relationship, and the median length of time that they had been going together on a serious basis was 8 months. Eighteen of these couples were living together at that time. For the 91 married couples, the median length of time married was 4 years, although the range was up to 25 years together.

The Time 2 questionnaire forms were, with one exception, the same as the Time 1 forms, and they were filled out from 6 to 10 months later. (During the interval between Time 1 and Time 2, the couples participated in various forms of marital counselings, which were not found to produce effects measurable on our scales.) Complete Time 2 information was obtained on 35 of the Time 1 unmarried couples and on 76 of the Time 1 married couples, for an overall response rate of 79%. Of the initial unmarried sample who returned Time 2 questionnaires, 20 couples were still dating, 9 had gotten married, and 6 had broken up. Of the initial married sample, 70 were still married, and 6 were separated or divorced.

### Scales

The two instruments of concern here are the feelings questionnaire, in which each member of the couple rates on a 6-point scale how he feels about his spouse (or steady) and how he thinks his spouse feels toward him on 36 key aspects of a relationship; and the interpersonal behavior questionnaire, in which each rates on a 5-point scale how frequently he and his spouse engage in 113 potentially bothersome and disruptive behaviors. The items were grouped into scales by combined methods of empirical cluster analysis and informal conceptual analysis of item content.

Of primary concern here are the love, interference of parents, trust, criticalness, and negative behavior scales. These scales combine, for each of the couples, several sets of four similar items—ratings from each respondent on himself and on his mate on several related items. The present scales, then, refer to the couple as a whole unless otherwise stated.

The following listing of scales gives the number of different types of items in each scale and the content or key concepts of each. The feelings questionnaire scales are: (a) *love*, four items—love, care about, need, and relationship more important than anything else. A sample item reads "I love my spouse," with response categories of 6 = completely (extremely or always, whichever is appropriate); 5 = very much; 4 = moderately; 3 = somewhat; 2 = slightly; 1 = not at all; and 0 = not applicable (none of the subjects used the not-applicable category); (b) *trust*, five items—concerning areas of trust, able to count on, considerateness; and (c) *criticalness*, five items—criticalness, disappointment, and seeing spouse as uninteresting, not developing, too dependent. *Parental interference* was measured by six interpersonal behavior questionnaire items: the communication (of a man to his wife, e.g.) that her parents interfere, are a bad influence, are hurting the rela-

tionship, take advantage of her, do not accept him, and try to make him look bad. The scale thus measures present ongoing concern and difficulty due to perceived interference from the couple's parents. Reports of parental interference were found to be positively skewed, and for this reason they were rescaled to form a normal distribution, which was used for all analyses. Rescaling was done on the couple's combined reports on each set of parents. The new scaling categories were: 0 or none = 0; slight = 1–5; mild = 6–12; moderate = 13–24; and severe = 25 and above. Of the unmarrieds, 45% had moderate to severe conflict concerning at least one of the couple's parents; and of the marrieds, 19% had this level of conflict. The Time 1 means (combining both the couple's parents) for these scales are shown in Table 1. A final scale was the negative interpersonal behaviors scale, comprised of 85 items from the interpersonal behavior questionnaire. This scale combines 10 of the 14 behavior scales (not including the parental interference scale) and is a measure of the behavioral quality of the relationship.

A previous scaling distinguished between love (love and cares for) and need (needs and thinks relationship more important than anything else). These items were combined into a single love scale because they were thought to be very similar concepts. The average correlation (for individuals) between the two previous scales (.66) was almost as high as their average reliabilities (.75), indicating that they are not measuring empirically separate domains. Similar correlations were found with both scales to other measures, including parental interference. The inclusion of the need items is consistent with Rubin's (1970) analysis of romantic love.

Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) may be found in Table 1, and they appear to be good to excellent in all cases. While three of the eight homogeneity ratios (Scott, 1960) were on the low side of optimal, this was due to low correlations between members of the couple, and scale homogeneities for individual persons were higher in all cases.

The love scale does not effectively distinguish between romantic love and conjugal love, and it may reasonably be considered to be measuring both. It was believed that a better test of the parental interference hypothesis would be attained with a love scale adjusted to reflect romantic but not conjugal love, since only romantic love was clearly relevant to the hypothesis. A purified index of romantic love was attained by partialing out that portion of the love variance which could be accounted for by trust, taken as the key conceptual determinant of conjugal love. Additional partialing of the other conjugal factors, criticalness and negative behaviors, made little additional change in the romantic love index (Time 1 data) and was not undertaken. Partialing was, of course, done separately for unmarried and married couples. This procedure derived from the conceptual analysis discussed earlier and found support in data reported in the following section.

## RESULTS

*Romantic and Conjugal Love*

From our conceptualization of romantic and conjugal love, it was hypothesized that love becomes more highly correlated with conjugal or friendship factors with the development of the relationship over time. Scales designed to measure the conjugal components of a relationship are the trust, criticalness, and negative behaviors scales (with the latter two both indicating a lack of acceptance of one's partner).

The first test of the hypothesis showed that love was more highly correlated to these friendship components for married than for unmarried couples. As may be seen in Table 1, correlations of love with trust, criticalness, and negative behaviors are .76,  $-.60$ , and  $-.50$ , respectively, for married couples, and .34,  $-.25$  and  $-.17$ , for unmarried couples. Differences between corresponding correlations of married and unmarried couples were all significant ( $p < .02$ ). Since the scale reliabilities are lower for unmarrieds than for marrieds, one could question whether the above differences are merely artifacts due to the unmarrieds showing less homogeneous responses across items. When the Spearman-Brown correction for reliability was used to calculate expected correlations based on equal reliabilities, the same pattern of results was obtained. The correlations expected for the unmarrieds based on the reliability values of the marrieds for love with trust, criticalness, and negative behaviors, respectively, were .36,  $-.27$ , and  $-.17$ .

The second test of the hypothesis indicated that love for unmarried couples was more highly correlated with these conjugal factors at Time 2 than at Time 1. The median length of a couple's serious involvement was 8 months for the Time 1 sample ( $N = 49$ ), 10 months for the Time 1 sample who were in the Time 2 together sample ( $N = 29$ ), and 18 months for this sample at Time 2. The correlations of love with trust, criticalness, and negative behaviors for the Time 2 together sample were .69,  $-.63$ , and  $-.53$ ; and the correlations for this sample at Time 1 were .45,  $-.18$ , and  $-.38$ , respectively. The Time 2 correlations are all higher than those

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS AND SCALE PROPERTIES OF LOVE, PARENTAL INTERFERENCE, TRUST, AND CRITICALNESS FOR UNMARRIED AND MARRIED COUPLES

| Item                     | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5     |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Unmarried couples        |        |        |        |       |       |
| 1. Love                  | (.88)  |        |        |       |       |
| 2. Parental interference | .35    | (.86)  |        |       |       |
| 3. Trust                 | .34    | $-.30$ | (.80)  |       |       |
| 4. Criticalness          | $-.25$ | .46    | $-.61$ | (.74) |       |
| 5. Negative behaviors    | $-.17$ | .44    | $-.72$ | .61   | (.92) |
| Married couples          |        |        |        |       |       |
| 1. Love                  | (.90)  |        |        |       |       |
| 2. Parental interference | $-.02$ | (.82)  |        |       |       |
| 3. Trust                 | .76    | $-.22$ | (.89)  |       |       |
| 4. Criticalness          | $-.60$ | .27    | $-.78$ | (.84) |       |
| 5. Negative behaviors    | $-.50$ | .46    | $-.79$ | .83   | (.95) |
| Scale homogeneity ratios |        |        |        |       |       |
| Unmarried                | .34    | .35    | .18    | .15   | .26   |
| Married                  | .39    | .29    | .30    | .22   | .37   |
| <i>M</i>                 |        |        |        |       |       |
| Unmarried                | 80.9   | 2.94   | 93.2   | 40.8  | 206.9 |
| Married                  | 81.7   | 1.98   | 90.7   | 41.3  | 223.4 |
| <i>SD</i>                |        |        |        |       |       |
| Unmarried                | 9.2    | 2.02   | 9.2    | 9.5   | 93.8  |
| Married                  | 9.8    | 1.57   | 12.8   | 12.3  | 119.5 |

Noe.—For unmarried,  $N = 49$ ,  $r \geq .28$ ,  $p < .05$ ; for married,  $N = 91$ ,  $r \geq .20$ ,  $p < .05$ . Scale reliabilities are in parentheses in diagonals.

at Time 1, with probabilities for the differences between the Time 2 — Time 1 correlations of  $p < .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .25$ , respectively. Similar Time 2 correlations were found both for the portion of the initial unmarried sample who had since gotten married and those who were still unmarried. Further, the Time 2 correlations (presented above) were similar to those for the Time 1 married sample (see Table 1).

These results are consistent with our distinction between romantic and conjugal love, and our hypothesis that love becomes more highly correlated with conjugal or friendship factors with the development of the relationship over time was supported.

*Parental Interference and Love*

It was hypothesized that parental interference in a love relationship intensifies the couple's feelings of romantic love. This hypothesis is examined both with respect to the love scale and to the derived index of romantic love.

*Cross-sectional data.* The initial Time 1

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS OF CHANGES IN PARENTAL INTERFERENCE WITH CHANGES IN LOVE AND ROMANTIC LOVE: TIME 2-TIME 1

| Sample            | N  | Love  | Romantic love |
|-------------------|----|-------|---------------|
| Initial unmarried |    |       |               |
| Still unmarried   | 20 | .37*  | .37*          |
| Gotten married    | 9  | .44   | .32           |
| Total             | 29 | .34** | .30*          |
| Initial married   | 70 | -.19  | -.02          |

\*  $p < .06$ , one-tailed test.

\*\*  $p < .05$ , one-tailed test.

correlations between parental interference and love are shown in Table 1 to be .35 ( $p < .01$ ) for the unmarried sample and  $-.02$  for the married sample. Time 1 correlations between parental interference and romantic love are .50 ( $p < .001$ ) for the unmarried sample and .24 ( $p < .01$ ) for the married sample. This positive and significant increase in the magnitude of the correlation can be understood as due to the partialing out of trust, which is itself negatively related to parental interference. In summary, parental interference and the romantic component of love were positively and significantly related at Time 1 for both the unmarried and married samples.

The smaller correlation for married couples than for unmarried couples may have been due to the married couples having significantly less variance in parental interference ( $F = 1.64$ ,  $df = 48/90$ ,  $p < .05$ ) due to the married couples having less overall interference ( $t = 2.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and a higher percentage reporting little or no interference. The smaller correlations may have also been due to the love responses for the married couples reflecting conjugal love to a greater degree than for the unmarrieds.

*Longitudinal data.* The causal interpretation of the above cross-sectional results—that the correlation between love and parental interference was due to the intensification of love by parental interference—is supported by the direct association between changes in parental interference and changes in love during the 6–10-month follow-up period. These data are reported in Table 2.

Correlations between changes in parental interference and changes in love and in romantic

love were moderately positive for both the initial unmarried sample who had gotten married ( $N = 9$ ) and those who were still unmarried and together ( $N = 20$ ). Changes in parental interference for the combined sample correlated .34 with changes in love and .30 with changes in romantic love ( $p < .05$  and  $p < .06$ , respectively, in the predicted direction). Among the married couples, no such pattern was obtained, suggesting that the positive association between parental interference and love is attenuated for couples who are in the more conjugal (and thus less romantic) stage of their love relationship.

For the unmarrieds, changes in parental interference were not more highly correlated to changes in romantic love than to changes in love, as might have been expected. This was due to the lack of a negative correlation between changes in parental interference and changes in trust for the unmarried couples ( $r = .04$ ), although there was a negative correlation for the marrieds ( $r = -.26$ ).

Thus far, the data support the hypothesis that parental interference intensifies feelings of romantic love, but this hypothesis would be on firmer ground if some of the obvious competing hypotheses could be dismissed. The first of these alternatives is that parental interference breaks up couples with low levels of love, so that by selective attrition the only couples left with high parental interference are those with high levels of love as well. A second alternative is that the correlation reflects not a relationship effect as hypothesized but rather a family background—individual difference correlation. The third alternative is that parental interference is a reaction to the couple's commitment to marry. Since commitment to marry should be associated with high love, this would account for the obtained parental interference—love correlations. Each of these alternatives is examined in turn.

*Selective couple attrition.* If parental interference operated to break up couples with low levels of love, one would expect the degree of such interference reported at Time 1 to be predictive of break-up rates before Time 2. But no indication of predictiveness was attained, with the correlations being essentially zero ( $r = -.02$ ) between Time 1 interference and break up. This lack of overall predictive-

ness does not mean that parental interference has no effect, since it may be due to such interference breaking up some couples and providing other couples with the emotional basis for staying together. The lack of overall predictiveness might also mask a selective attrition effect. It could be that, of the couples who broke up, those who had relatively high parental interference were also relatively low in love. Such a pattern among those who did break up would give rise to a spurious positive correlation between parental interference and love for those couples remaining together. However, in fact, the opposite pattern occurred. The correlations between parental interference and love for those couples who subsequently broke up was not different from that correlation for the entire sample ( $r = .61$  for the unmarried,  $r = .26$  for the married, and  $r = .45$  for the entire group of 13 break ups).<sup>5</sup> Thus, couples who broke up during the study had a pattern of parental interference-love correlations such that their attrition would tend to depress the predicted correlation. If we can assume that the couples who broke up before they had a chance to participate in the study had the same pattern, then selective attrition could be excluded as an explanation of cross-sectional correlation between parental interference and love.

*Background factors.* Another alternative is that persons who have interfering parents also have some characteristic background, such as parental overprotectiveness, which could then influence them toward the obtained present relationship characteristics. A check to see if there were any characteristic backgrounds of those unmarried persons who had present conflict with their parents showed no differences for measures of adolescent happiness, conflict in the family during adolescence, or parents' happiness with each other at that time. Further, there were no significant differences in the correlations between interference from one's own parents versus from one's partner's parents, to one's own report of love and other factors. This lends sup-

<sup>5</sup> This includes seven unmarried and six married couples. One of the unmarried couples who were together when they filled out their Time 2 questionnaires broke up immediately thereafter but is included in this analysis.

TABLE 3  
CORRELATIONS WITH COMMITMENT TO MARRY

| Item                  | Commitment to marry | Love | Romantic love |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------|---------------|
| Commitment to marry   |                     | .52  | .51           |
| Parental interference | .31                 | .35  | .50           |

Note.— $N = 49$ ,  $r \geq .28$ ,  $p < .05$ .

port to the interpretation that the correlation between parental interference and other aspects of the relationship was due to relationship dynamics associated with such interference. It was interference with the relationship, rather than trouble with one's own parents, which was the central factor.

*Reasons for parental interference.* A third alternative is that the parental interference-love correlation was due to parents' concern with and opposition to those relationships with high commitments to marry, and thus by implication with high love. The commitment to marry scale consisted of one item for each partner which asked the degree of commitment to marriage. The response scale had four categories, and the correlation between partner's responses of .90 indicates high response reliability. The correlations of commitment to marry with parental interference, love, and romantic love are shown in Table 3. Commitment to marry correlated .52 to love and .51 to romantic love. If the primary direction of influence was that commitment to marry precipitated parental interference and thus produced the interference-love correlation, one would expect that commitment as the independent variable would correlate more highly with parental interference than would love or romantic love. This is not the case, however, with correlations from parental interference of .31 to commitment, .35 to love, and .50 to romantic love. A second test of this alternative showed that when commitment to marry was partialled out, the resulting correlations of parental interference to both measures of love were still moderately positive, with values of .23 ( $p < .06$ ) to love and .39 ( $p < .01$ ) to romantic love. These results do not support the contention that parental interference is primarily a reaction to couple commitment, although couple commitment may be an additional factor in

parental interference. Couple reports suggested that in the majority of cases parental interference was the result of external social factors (racial, religious, socioeconomic, moral), which were in several cases exacerbated by plans to marry.<sup>6</sup> All participating couples had serious commitments to their relationships, which would have made it possible for any of the parents to see a potential mismatch in their offspring's partner. The moderately high correlations between changes in parental interference and changes in love and romantic love were obtained both for couples who did and for those who did not get married during the interval (see Table 2), suggesting again that couple commitment was not the crucial factor. The most plausible interpretation of these considerations is that couple commitment may be an additional, but not the primary, factor in explaining the association between parental interference and romantic love.

*Correlates of parental interference.* A better picture can be obtained of the overall effects of parental interference from additional Time 1 correlates. As is seen in Table 1, parental interference was significantly correlated with reported lower levels of trust, more criticalness, and more negative interpersonal behaviors, for both unmarried and married couples. (Note also that these conjugal factors are highly intercorrelated for both groups.) A pattern similar to the cross-sectional results was found for the correlations between changes in parental interference and changes in trust, criticalness, and negative behaviors (for unmarries, .04 and .33,  $p < .05$ , and .26,  $p < .10$ ; and for marrieds, -.26,  $p < .05$ , .19,  $p < .06$ , and .40,  $p < .001$ ). To be consistent with the pattern, however, a negative correlation between changes in parental interference and changes in trust for unmarries would have been expected. The failure to obtain such a relation may have been due

either to factors idiosyncratic to this stage of the relationship (during which many couples were deciding on and solidifying their commitments) or to random statistical variation.

When the negative behaviors scale was broken down into conceptually and empirically distinct clusters, parental interference was found to be most strongly correlated to clusters indicating that couple members (a) compared their partners unfavorably to others ( $r = .56$  for unmarried, and  $r = .40$  for married) and (b) engaged in behaviors which showed contempt and hostility toward their partners ( $r = .48$  for unmarried, and  $r = .36$  for married). These findings, all statistically significant, are dealt with in the Discussion section.

### DISCUSSION

These results, when taken together, provide strong support for the causal hypothesis that parental opposition leads to romantic love. Cross-sectional correlations between parental interference and romantic love were significant for both unmarried and married couples, and they were of greater magnitude for the unmarried couples. Changes in parental interference were positively correlated with changes in love and romantic love for unmarried couples. There was no indication that parental interference selectively broke up couples with low but not high love. No distinctive pattern of backgrounds was found for persons experiencing opposition from their own parents, and interference from either set of parents was correlated with the same relationship traits in both members of the couple. Finally, parental interference as a reaction to couple commitment was not supported as a plausible alternative explanation, although it remains as a possible additional factor.

It should be remembered that the parental interference scale measured the couples' ongoing concern and communication about what they perceived as parental interference. Thus, our measurement of parental interference need not correspond exactly to the parents' actual interfering behaviors, and may be influenced by the couple's dependence and vulnerability or by possible couple antagonism toward their parents. The importance of

<sup>6</sup> Six unmarried couples .8 standard deviation above the mean on parental interference were interviewed by telephone and reported that such interference was due to a racial difference, a religious difference, his bad first impression due to shaggy dress and grooming, his being unemployed and not in school (a bum), wanting a son to finish school rather than settle down, thinking a daughter could do better, and the couple living together.



these influences remains to be explored. The possible nonrepresentativeness of the sample should be noted: many of the couples were seeking information about their relationships through the study. Since parental interference may lead to uncertainty in the relationship, the sample may have included a disproportionate number of couples with high interference (means are shown in Table 1). Any such ambiguities introduced by the nonrepresentativeness of the sample are not believed to be sufficient to undermine the validity of the reported findings.

As has been pointed out earlier, the predicted effect of parental interference intensifying romantic love is consistent with the operation of two rather well-supported psychological principles—goal frustration and reactance. But the application of these principles to the complex circumstances of romantic love is perhaps novel enough to justify a distinctive name—the Romeo and Juliet effect.

Of as much interest as the consistency of the Romeo and Juliet effect with existing principles are the seemingly paradoxical effects of parental interference. While such interference increased the feelings of romantic love among couples, it also was associated with decreased trust, increased criticalness, and increased frequency of negative, bothersome behaviors.

Conceptually, the importance of trust can be related to the degree to which one relies on another for important functions or gratifications and to the degree that options or possibilities exist for violation of that trust. Parental interference clearly constitutes a threat to the relationship, and as such has the capacity to undermine the stability and mutual satisfactions of the relationship. The lower levels of trust of these couples, then, can be seen to be due to parental interference making the couples more dependent upon each other for love and emotional support, and yet at the same time less certain that the relationship can survive the stress.

Though uncritical acceptance is frequently thought to be a component of romantic love, this need not be the case. A high romantic attachment and idealization need not imply acceptance of one's partner as he really is. The obtained pattern of intercorrelations (see

Table 1) indicated that uncriticalness is a factor of friendship or conjugal love, rather than of romantic love. Similarly, Rubin's (1970) data showed that his item indicating that the subject finds it easy to ignore his partner's faults, initially thought to be a component of romantic love, actually had lower correlations to his love scale than to his liking scale.

The higher criticalness and greater frequency of negative behaviors of those couples experiencing parental interference is thought to be due to their intense emotional involvement (love and need) which is based on external opposition rather than on solid friendship factors. Persons who are more intensely involved are likely to place higher expectations and demands on the relationship, and to react negatively when such expectations are not met. Recall that the most frequent negative behaviors involved comparing their mates unfavorably to others and expressing hostility and contempt. These persons are intensely in love and may be disappointed and critical when their partners are not "knights in shining armor" or "fairy tale princesses" or not, they sometimes fear, even as desirable as some of their other friends. Also suggested is oscillation between needs for reassurance and testing due to their intense involvement, and contempt and despair at being trapped by their love.

Finally, this pattern may reflect a displacement of aggression felt toward the parents due to their interference with the relationship. It thus appears that parental interference does have a detrimental effect on certain aspects of the relationship, as would be predicted by the punishment or frustration-aggression principles.

Our conceptual distinction between the romantic and conjugal aspects of relationships has received support. The association between parental interference and lowered conjugal relationship factors suggests that, if such interference continues without resolution, it is likely to undermine the overall quality of the relationship. This may account in part for the failure to find a positive relation for married couples between parental interference and overall love. Rubin (1969) obtained patterns of love similar to our own. Differ-

ences in couples' religions (a potential source of parental opposition) were associated with higher love for short-term couples (less than 18 months together), but this trend was reversed for long-term couples.

If the finding that parental interference may lead to romantic love can be generalized to cultures other than our own, it can provide an explanation for certain cross-cultural differences in the occurrence of love. Rosenblatt (1967) found romantic love to be more prevalent in societies with nonneolocal residence (i.e., residence with one or both of the newlyweds' kin groups). Since newlyweds in nonneolocal societies are more likely to be confronted with divisive kinship pressures, it was suggested that one of the functions of romantic love was to protect couples from such pressures. Those nonneolocal cultures that did not emphasize romantic love were found to have other means of integrating the couples' kin, such as child betrothal and endogamy, so that the couples would not be confronted with divisive kin pressures. While the functional hypothesis aims to explain the maintenance of the social practice of love, the occurrence of that practice may be due to the intensification of love by kin interference. Patterns of residence conducive to parental interference may promote instances of romantic love, so that love becomes a visible social practice and is incorporated into these cultures. Finally, parental interference in established relationships may be associated with social factors other than residence, and one could predict that these factors would also be associated with romantic love.

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