Personal Relationships, **3** (1996), 97–115. Printed in the United States of America.

What is this thing called love? Defining the love that supports marriage and family

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Abstract

The aim of this article was to define, on the basis of theorizing and research, the love that supports marriage and the family, or the type of love that is related to high levels of satisfaction in relationships, to the psychological well-being of family members and to stable family relationships. Literature is reviewed that explores the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of both mature and immature love, and I conclude that all three aspects of love can be either mature or immature. With regard to the emotional component, I have noted that feelings of both passion and companionship can continue throughout life. Immature love is exemplified in such constructs as limerence, love addiction, and infatuation. Given that love is socially constructed, I note that it can be strongly affected by the beliefs about love that are present in the culture, and that these beliefs can be either functional or dysfunctional. Particularly dysfunctional beliefs include those emphasizing that love is blind, external, and beyond the control of the lovers. Behaviors characteristic of mature and immature love are also explored. It seems that mature love may be best conceptualized as creating an environment in which both the lovers and those who depend on them can grow and develop. This type of love supports marriage and family life.

A lot has been written about love, which, at least in Western societies, is seen as the most important of all human needs (Montagu, 1970) and central to our close personal relationships. There is not a lot of agreement, however, about exactly what love is. The aim of this article is to define, on the basis of theorizing and research, the particular type of love that supports marriage and the family. In other words, what kind of love is likely to be related to high levels of satisfaction in relationships, to the psychological well-being of family members, and to stable family relationships? In seeking to define the love that supports marriage and family, it is assumed that such love encourages all three of these components: satisfaction, healthy family relationships, and stability.

This issue is particularly important, given the current high divorce rates and the high costs of divorce to family members (Furstenberg, 1990; Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Kitson and Morgan (1990) describe divorce as "among the most stressful events that many individuals experience" (p. 915). For divorced adults, the consequences of divorce include higher rates of illness, higher mortality rates (Doherty, Su, & Needle, 1989; Menaghan, 1985), more economic problems, and downward mobility, particularly for women (Corcoran, Duncan, & Hill, 1988; Duncan & Hoffman, 1985; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986), and restricted social relationships (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984). For children, there is disruption of socialization (Dornbusch, 1989) and loss of contact with fathers (Furstenberg, 1990; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988).

Further, many children react to divorce with symptoms of distress such as anxiety,

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acting out, and diminished performance at school and in social settings (Hetherington, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), at least in the short term (that is, over 2 or 3 years). There is also increasing evidence of long-term effects of divorce on educational attainment (Krein & Beller, 1988) and on the timing and stability of the sexual involvement and marriages of the children of divorce (McLanahan, 1988; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988).

Guttman (1993) notes that the ideology of American family life has, at least in more recent times, tended to focus on personal fulfillment as the primary reason for maintaining family relationships and love as the sole basis for marriage. Although there are positive implications to emphasizing these two factors, there is also a downside. Likely consequences include a tendency to seek personal fulfillment without considering the implications of that behavior for others (including spouse and children), along with a tendency to focus on love as beyond one's control. Albrecht and Kunz (1980) report a study of a large sample of divorced individuals based on social-exchange principles. One of the most important costs in maintaining the relationship reported by these respondents was that love had been lost, and that they would be operating in the context of a loveless relationship. These individuals seem to be suggesting that their love for the partner (and perhaps also the love that the partner had for them) is dead and cannot be resurrected.

Love as Socially Constructed

In line with other researchers and theorists (Bierhoff, 1991; Dion & Dion, 1973, 1975; Hatfield, 1988; Skolnick, 1978), I will be taking the view that love is, at least in part, socially constructed. Hatfield (1988) argued that we all carry around assumptions, often semiconscious, about what the experience of love will be like, and these assumptions have a profound impact on the experience of love that we actually have. Bierhoff (1991) claimed that the ideas about love that are present in our culture affect how we interpret our experience. In other words, both our experience of love and our interpretation of that experience seem to be affected by the beliefs about love in the culture. In this article, the primary goal is to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of our social construction of love and then to present a social construction of love that would provide better support for marriages and families.

Cancian (1987) traces the history of the social construction of love in Western society in terms of the split between home and work, the socialization of gender roles, and the feminization of love. She argues that ideas about love in American culture changed over the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the present, with love becoming the domain of women in the home and work becoming the domain of men in the office and factory. With these changes came what Cancian calls the feminization of love, which involved putting emphasis on verbal self-disclosure and expressing tender feelings and ignoring masculine ways of expressing love such as providing protection and practical help, shared activities, spending time together, and sex. Cancian argues that the feminization of love encouraged women to be dependent and preoccupied with relationships and men to be independent and preoccupied with work (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Hess, 1979; Noller, 1993). This feminization of love also leads to rigid gender stereotypes and roles: women are seen as dependent, loving, and incapable of practical action, and men are seen as independent and competent, not needing the help of others and being unable to provide emotional support to their partners or children. Cancian also sees the feminization of love and polarized gender roles as producing conflicts over intimacy between wives who demand more closeness and husbands who withdraw. Findings on marital communication and needs for intimacy and independence support this claim (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

Cancian (1987) also points to different constructions of love within Western cul-

ture at the present time. She labels these as the companionship blueprint, the independence blueprint, and the interdependence blueprint. The crucial differences among these three types of love are the extent to which gender differences on love and roles are polarized and the extent to which love is seen as in contradiction to self-development. The interdependence model, which involves androgynous love, is seen by Cancian as the most desirable and fulfilling model of love, and the companionship and independence models are viewed as the least desirable and fulfilling. The problem with the companionship model is the emphasis on women sacrificing themselves for their families in the interests of harmony and togetherness and going along with traditional gender roles. The problem with the independence model is that love relationships are seen as secondary to the strong emphasis on self-sufficiency and the avoidance of obligations to others or long-term commitments. In other words, in the independence model, love does not interfere with the individual's personal goals, and individuals are likely to leave relationships when conflict arises between the relationship and their own personal goals. In this vein, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that independence was the most consistent theme mentioned by those in their sample of cohabiting couples who had lived together for many years without marrying. Many family scholars have argued against the tendency of modern couples to avoid commitment and to focus on individual needs (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Swidler, 1980). (The interdependence model will be discussed in more detail when mature love is considered in a later section.)

As Cancian (1987) has proposed, a number of constructions of love are present in a culture at any one time, and some of these constructions are likely to have positive effects on marriage and family life, whereas other views of love are likely to have negative effects on marriage and family. For example, various writers acknowledge that love can take unsatisfactory forms (Peele, 1988), or that love can be immature (Branden, 1988; Sternberg, 1988). In fact, Peele is quite critical of social psychological approaches to love for their failure to make moral and psychological distinctions and for their failure to focus enough on concepts such as maturity, responsibility, and appropriateness in studying love. Peele goes so far as to suggest that "it is this responsibility for selecting and nurturing a love relationship that actually defines our humanity and the special human ability to love" (Peele, 1988, p. 182).

Not all writers, however, are sympathetic to the view that some types of love are superior to others. Lee (1988), for example, in his discussion of love styles argues that all love styles are equally valid, and that choosing a love style is a matter of taste. He also argues strongly against the idea that some kinds of love are better than others; he is very critical of those who suggest that some styles of love are not really love at all (e.g., Davis & Todd, 1982). Such a perspective, however, ignores the fact that love is a relational phenomenon, and that how a person loves has a profound effect on the partner. In fact, Bierhoff, Fink, and Montag (1988; cited in Bierhoff, 1991) found that the love style of the partner affected an individual's relationship satisfaction, and that those whose partners were high on the game-playing love style of Ludus were likely to be particularly dissatisfied. Lee's perspective also fails to take into account the fact that romantic love is not inconsequential, but part of the powerful evolutionary process of family formation and reproduction (Buss, 1988a, 1988b). As Shaver (this volume) suggests, it is our "everyday name for aspects of a universal, biological attachment-behavioral system."

The present article is organized around the assumption that love is an attitude toward a particular person, and, consequently, that this love has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Assuming that love is an attitude enables the complexity of love and its manifestations to be explored. In addition, there is a great deal of support in the literature for defining love as an atti-

tude. For example, Rubin (1970) defined love as "an attitude toward a target person involving predispositions to think, feel and behave in certain ways towards that person" (p. 265).

In addressing this issue of the type of love that supports marriage and family life, the aim will be to show how these aspects fit together to create the experience of love. This experience of love will involve various feelings toward the loved one that are likely to range from highly sexualized passionate feelings to the warm enjoyment of companionship and to include other feelings such as admiration, respect, and caring. A second aspect of this experience of love will involve such cognitive components as a decision to commit oneself to the loved person, as well as more generalized attitudes to self and others and the expectations and beliefs about love that come from the culture. A third aspect of the experience of love will include the behaviors involved in expressing that love. Which behaviors are displayed will depend on a person's gender, personality, and beliefs about what love is and what are appropriate ways of expressing it. The way these three aspects of love are manifested in each individual will determine whether an experience of love involves a stable, healthy, growth-promoting relationship or an immature, overdependent, and growth-stifling relationship. For this reason, the rest of this article will be organized in terms of the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of mature and immature love. It is important to acknowledge, however, that this distinction among the three aspects of love is somewhat artificial, and that there is some overlap among them.

The Emotional Aspect of Love

The emotional aspect of love includes passion, admiration, affection, appreciation, care, and concern. Shaver (this volume) takes up the issue of whether love is an emotion, arguing very clearly that it is; this position is in line with earlier work such as that of Arnold (1960) and De Rivera (1977). In a recent study, Fitness and Fletcher (1993) compared individuals' perceptions of love, hate, anger, and jealousy and concluded that, at least as far as laypersons are concerned, all four emotions are distinct in terms of their prototypical characteristics and the cognitive appraisals that accompany them. They also found that both love and anger were common aspects of married life. It seems that, whether love is actually an emotion or not, it has an emotional aspect. As Shaver notes, this emotional aspect can take two forms: first, the surges of positive feeling about the loved one that are experienced from time to time; and second, the lower-level abiding sense of love that undergirds the relationship and results in a sense of loving and being loved (and which Shaver sees as part of the attachment system; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Branden (1988) supports the view of love as an emotion when he defines love as "an emotional response to that which we value highly" (p. 220); he includes in his list of the aspects of romantic love, deep emotional involvement, strong sexual attraction, and mutual admiration.

The emotional component of love was studied by early researchers such as Davitz (1969) and Dion and Dion (1973). In Davitz's study, subjects reported feelings of needing, caring, trusting,[1] optimism, cheerfulness, feelings of harmony and unity with the loved one, as well as an intense awareness of the loved one. In Dion and Dion's study, the emotional symptoms of arousal related to love included feelings of euphoria, depression, restlessness, and inability to concentrate. Some of these latter feelings would seem to be more related to the vulnerability associated with the early stages of developing love relationships than with love per se, and, if they persisted beyond the early stages of relationships, might be

1. Trust is probably more appropriately considered as a cognitive aspect of love, but is included here for completeness in terms of presenting empirical data. Because "feel" is often used in English to mean "think," there is a lot of confusion in the culture about what is cognitive and what is affective.

considered as immature manifestations of love.

Rubin's (1970) work on love produced three components of love that he labeled as needing, caring, and trusting. In a further series of studies, Steck, Levitan, McLane, and Kelley (1982) explored the relevance of these components to individuals' conceptions of love and other interpersonal attitudes of attraction, friendship, and liking. They showed that caring was more important than needing for love, but that needing was more important for attraction. In other words, individuals may be attracted to someone because the person fulfills a need, but love is not primarily about having needs fulfilled, but about caring for the other person.

Passionate and companionate love

Berscheid and Walster (1978) have distinguished between passionate and companionate love, with passionate love being seen as involving a high level of emotional intensity and intense sexualized feelings. Companionate love, on the other hand, is characterized by respect, admiration, and trust. In other words, the main difference between passionate and companionate love seems to be the intensity of the emotional component. These intense feelings associated with passionate love are also likely to be less stable than the warm but less intense feelings generally associated with companionate love. Passionate love, however, is not of itself an immature form of love. As the motivational or arousal component of love (Sternberg, 1986), it is likely to be important at successive stages of relationships. Hatfield (1988) notes that most people hope to have relationships that combine the delights of passionate love with the security of companionate love. Thus, passionate and companionate love frequently coexist in relationships, and this combination of passionate and companionate love is likely to be related to the love that supports marriage and family.

On the other hand, some theorists argue that the emotional aspect of love is likely to change its character over the course of a relationship and become more companionate and less passionate. For example, Lee (1988) argued that Eros (or romantic love) was likely to change over time to a more relaxed companionship, and Sternberg (1988) argued that passion is likely to be replaced over time by a long-term and deeply felt commitment. Several researchers have found, however, that the characteristics of love do not change very much over time.

Traupmann and Hatfield (1981), for instance, found that reports of passionate and companionate love remained fairly high, irrespective of whether couples were dating, engaged, or in mature relationships, with only a slight decline in both, which could be attributed to time or length of the relationship. In addition, Forgas and Dobosz (1980) measured three factors: (1) desirability, (2) love, commitment, and permanence, and (3) sexuality. They found that both young marrieds and those married more than 25 years were high on all three factors. It is important to keep in mind that this study was cross-sectional in design, and the sample of those married for 25 years or more is likely to be composed mainly of highly stable couples with strong commitment to each other and to their relationship. Those with lower levels of commitment are likely to be divorced by this time.

There is some evidence for a decline in passion over time. Acker and Davis (1992) carried out a study based on Sternberg's triangular model of love (which sees love as involving three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment). They found that passion declined by length of relationship (from the shortest to the longest), especially for women, but that relationship stage (casually dating, exclusively dating, engaged/living together, married) did not affect the strength of the passion component. In other words, passion is not affected by marriage per se, but is likely to be lower for those who have been married for a long time. It is interesting to note that, in Acker and Davis's study, older respondents tended to *want* less passion in an ideal part-

ner than did younger respondents, and that passion contributed *less* to satisfaction than did commitment and intimacy, especially in longer relationships.

Perhaps one reason that the characteristics of love do not change very much over time is that companionate or friendship-based love is the strongest component of love relationships at all stages, including the early stage. Such a finding is supported by the work of Hendrick and Hendrick (1993) and Grote and Frieze (1994). Hendrick and Hendrick found that the most frequent theme in the relationship accounts of groups of college students asked to describe their romantic relationships was Storge, or friendship love, and that almost half of the students saw their romantic partner as their closest friend. Similarly, Grote and Frieze (1994) carried out a study that explored friendship-based love (which is similar to Storge) in both young dating relationships and the marriage relationships of middle-aged adults. They found that friendship-based love was strong in young dating relationships, as well as in the relationships of middle-aged married adults. This type of love was also moderately strongly correlated with erotic love and with relationship satisfaction. As Grote and Frieze argue,

> It makes sense that the climate for the maintenance and expression of erotic love would be favorable in a dating or marital relationship characterized by high levels of cohesion and enjoyment between the partners, and conversely, that feelings of affection and companionship would be renewed by positive sexual experiences with the partner. (1994, p. 298)

In other words, these researchers are arguing for a reciprocal relation between passionate and companionate love, with each providing a context in which the other can flourish and grow. This type of love is also likely to be highly stable and to support marriage and family life.

Because the feelings associated with the emotional aspect of love, such as admiration and affection, are likely to be hard to maintain when one is angry, hurt, or disappointed, the emotional aspect of love is likely to be unstable, as suggested by Kelley (1983), even in otherwise stable and healthy relationships. For this reason, feelings are unlikely to be a good criterion of love (Murstein, 1988). As Murstein asks, when spouses are angry or irritated with one another,

> Should we declare them to be out of love and reinstate them in love's kingdom only when they have kissed and made up? If so, we would have to acknowledge that at any given moment, considerable numbers of individuals are shifting position of being in and out of love. I believe, therefore, that feelings are too unstable a criterion to use as an index of love. (1988, p. 27).

When Kelley (1983) and Murstein (1988) claim that the emotional component of love is unstable, they are not suggesting that the emotion associated with love declines over time, but rather that any relationship is likely to go through times of conflict and disagreement when passion, and even intimacy, may well be low. During such times, what aspects of love are likely to provide an appropriate criterion or index of a couple's love for another? Those in mature love relationships are likely to recognize that factors other than emotion are better indices of love, including cognitive components such as commitment, and behavioral components such as willingness to care for one another. As Branden (1988) notes, love is more than an emotion; it also involves judgments or evaluations, as well as the tendency to behave in particular ways. We will deal with these components in later sections.

Negative views of love

Although negative views of love such as seeing it as a fantasy or a projection are common among psychoanalysts such as Stendahl (1927), a number of those writing on love from a more social psychological or clinical perspective agree that love is not always healthy or pleasurable (Murstein, 1988; Peele, 1985, 1988; Tennov, 1979). These writers use a number of different

terms that emphasize different aspects of immature or unhealthy love. As Peele (1988, p. 166) notes, "Love can take unsatisfactory forms, up to and including full-blown pathologies that stem from deficiencies in the individual lovers."

Peele (1988) focuses particularly on love addiction, defined as love characterized by an overwhelming dependency, which he sees as leading to relationships that are not necessarily pleasurable and that seem to last despite (or perhaps even because of) the pain involved. These relationships seem to be driven by a deep need or deficiency in one or both of the individuals in the relationship and are characterized by possessiveness and jealousy. Apart from the problems inherent in the relationships themselves, there are a number of other unpleasant consequences for the individuals concerned, including a negative impact on their involvements with other people and on their coping with outside activities such as work and leisure. Peele sees love addiction as polar opposite to genuine (or mature) love, where the partners have a commitment to mutual growth and fulfillment and where their relationship is integrated into the totality of their lives. Addictive love, although it may involve a reasonable amount of stability, is unlikely to provide a healthy environment either for the partners themselves or for the nurturance of healthy, happy children. In support of this proposition, Feeney (1991) found evidence for links between negative forms of love (mania, love addiction, limerence) and anxious-ambivalent attachment. Anxious-ambivalents tend to have relationships characterized by preoccupation, clinginess, and anxiety (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994).

Peele (1988) is critical of the lack of recognition among social psychologists of the negative aspects of romantic love relationships and of the tendency to focus on the strength of individuals' mutual attraction to one another and to ignore the larger context of the individuals' psychological functioning and their social environment. The more recent work on attachment style and its implications for love relationships (Collins & Read, 1990, 1994; Feeney & Noller, 1990, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990, 1994; Levy & Davis, 1988) would seem to fulfill the need for more of a focus on the negative aspects of love relationships. (Attachment style will be dealt with in more detail in the section on cognitive aspects of relationships.)

Tennov (1979) contrasts love with "limerence," which is a highly intense form of romantic love involving extreme longing for the loved one ("limerent object"), continual intrusive thinking about the loved one, acute longing for signs of reciprocation from the loved one (with the lover's mood being determined by the latest interaction with the loved one), fear of rejection, idealization of the loved one with a tendency to overlook any negative aspects, and an absorption with the relationship and an ignoring of the other aspects of one's life. For many of us, such a description may remind us of our adolescent "crushes." Although these feelings and experiences may be harmless enough at adolescence, they may be particularly troublesome when they are experienced by middle-aged individuals looking for some new excitement in their lives. Taking such feelings seriously may lead to the disruption of families involving a number of children, as well as heartache for former partners. In this regard, Sternberg (1988) discusses those who are not satisfied with love that is predominantly companionate and may seek outside affairs or start a new relationship. Over time this new relationship may also become companionate, and the limerent lover may need to be off again in the search for romance. This kind of "love" does not support marriage and family life.

Another immature type of love discussed in the literature is infatuation. According to Branden (1988), infatuation is different from love because infatuation is the result of focusing on one or two traits or aspects of the loved one and reacting as if those aspects were the total person. Sternberg (1988) sees infatuation as generally obsessive, based on fantasy and often

asymmetrical; he argues that the best cure for infatuation is to get to know the object of one's infatuation very well so that reality has a chance to compete with the idealization.

Immature styles of love such as those we have discussed in this section are not conducive to stable, healthy, and happy family relationships, but tend rather to be focused on the short-term needs of the lover (see Steck et al., 1982, who found that need was related to lay conceptions of attraction, but not love) and to ignore responsibilities and obligations to others. Although these immature styles of love have a clear emotional base, they are, nevertheless, fueled by ideas about love in the culture. In the next section we discuss some of the dysfunctional ideas about love in Western culture that impact on how we behave in our relationships and that work against healthy, happy family life.

The Cognitive Aspect

In this section we focus on a number of cognitive aspects of love, including commitment, prototypes of love, attachment styles, and culturally based beliefs about love.

Commitment

As Sternberg has suggested, one component of the cognitive aspect of love is commitment, which involves both short-term and long-term factors. Both Sternberg (1986) and Murstein (1988) focus on the short-term decision that one loves another person on the basis of one's current experience (feelings about, attitudes to, and behaviors toward that person; Murstein, 1988). The important point they both make is that love is not just about feelings that can wax and wane, but involves a conscious decision to love. Levinger (1988) argues that, although commitment as the cognitive stable aspect of love tends to be downplayed in current definitions of love, our sense of commitment to the relationship is likely to increase our sense of love and appreciation. In other words, not only does love increase the likelihood that we will be committed to the relationship, but being committed can increase our love. Recent findings by Hecht, Marston, and Larkey (1994) support this proposition. They found that, across two studies, individuals experiencing committed love were more likely than those experiencing other types of love to report their relationships as of high quality.

Sternberg (1986) emphasizes that commitment involves not only the short-term decision that one loves, but also a long-term decision to maintain that love. According to Kelley (1983), commitment determines the maintenance and stability of the relationship. To the extent that commitment is high, the couple is likely to stay together through both good and bad times, and both partners will be more likely to try to deal with any issues in their relationship. Kelley also argues that commitment will be enhanced by public vows and rituals (such as engagement and marriage), as well as by the support of friends and the level of investment in the relationship. (Rusbult (1980) also sees investments such as time, money, property, and children as related to commitment.

Kelley (1983) distinguishes between two types of causal conditions that promote stable relationships. The first type involves generally positive factors, and the second type involves constraints and external forces. Positive factors can include the pleasure experienced in interacting with the person and concern for his or her welfare. Constraints can include beliefs about appropriate behavior (e.g., Marriage is for life. You should only be married to someone with whom you are in love) or beliefs about consequences (e.g., Divorce has negative consequences for children); external forces can include pressure from other family members or societal and cultural constraints.

Where positive conditions promoting commitment to a stable relationship are low, and constraints and external pressures to stay in that relationship are high, partners may stay together even when they are hurting each other, and perhaps hurting

children as well. Commitment to a stable relationship can be a positive force if it encourages spouses to work on their relationship and to resolve the issues that are making them unhappy. Conversely, if such commitment means that couples stay together without working on their relationship, and that individuals tolerate inappropriate behaviors such as violence, then it can be a negative force. The commitment that is part of love and that supports marriage and family life needs to involve more than just a determination to stay together; it also needs to involve a determination to make the relationship as satisfying and worthwhile as possible.

Prototypes of love

Fehr (1988) used a prototype approach to test five models of the relation between love and commitment: the model which sees love and commitment as identical (Forgas & Dobosz, 1980; Money, 1980); the model which sees them as completely independent (Solomon, 1981); the model which sees them as largely overlapping constructs (Kelley, 1983); the model which sees commitment as a component of love (Sternberg, 1988); and the model which sees love as a component of commitment (Rusbult, 1980). Fehr found that laypersons (as opposed to psychologists) identified features relevant to both love and commitment (including caring, trust, sharing, sacrifice, respect, loyalty), features unique to commitment (such as perseverance, living up to one's word, faithfulness), and features unique to love (happiness, friendship, wanting to be with the other, warm feelings, understanding). These findings seem to support Kelley's (1983) model of love and commitment as being overlapping constructs. In another study in the same set (Fehr, 1988), participants saw love and commitment as overlapping, even though they also saw commitment as having some distinctive central features such as loyalty, responsibility, and faithfulness.

It seems clear from Fehr's findings that the two constructs are seen as overlapping, and that commitment is very central to love. It is not as clear, however, that love is central to commitment. In other words, although love does not seem possible without commitment, commitment may be possible without love. Sternberg (1986) seemed to acknowledge the possibility of commitment without love when he talked about love that involved commitment, but little passion or intimacy. He described such love as likely to be somewhat empty, and the relationship as cool and distant. He also allowed for the possibility of love without commitment, but such love was described as immature. Flings and affairs, for example, were seen as involving immature forms of love that were lacking in commitment.

Attachment styles

In terms of adult attachment theory, the cognitive systems known as working models are likely to have an important impact on an individual's approach to love. According to Bowlby (1969) individuals develop working models of self and other on the basis of the responsiveness of the primary caretaker and the quality of interaction with her or him. Working models can involve positive or negative views of self and positive or negative views of other. According to Bartholomew (1990), those with negative views of self are likely to be high on dependence (see themselves as unable to cope without the help of others), and those who have negative views of others are likely to be high on avoidance (be uncomfortable with closeness and intimacy). These kinds of beliefs have been shown to have an impact on individuals' love relationships, including their anxiety about being abandoned, the extent to which they are able to share themselves with others, the length of their relationships, how quickly they become involved in new relationships, the maturity of the love experienced and expressed, and their idealization of the loved one (Collins & Read, 1990, 1994; Feeney & Noller, 1990, 1991, 1992; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988).

Feeney (1991; Feeney & Noller, 1990) explored the relations between love styles (including the more unhealthy or immature forms of love like love addiction and limerence) and attachment styles. She found positive correlations among mania (a possessive, dependent style of love in Lee's formulation), love addiction, and limerence, as well as evidence for a link between anxious-ambivalent attachment and limerence. It seems that unhealthy forms of love such as limerence and love addiction are more likely to be experienced by those who are anxious and preoccupied about relationships and who tend to be clingy in their involvements with others.

Secure individuals, on the other hand, hold positive beliefs about themselves and others. They are comfortable with intimacy and are not overconcerned about being abandoned. They are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them. There is evidence that secure individuals have more satisfying relationships, that their relationships tend to last longer than those of insecure individuals, and that they are able to deal with conflict in more positive ways (Feeney & Noller, 1992; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Noller & Carter, 1994). Clearly, the working models that are central to adult attachment theory are likely to have a profound impact on an individual's experience of love. Those who are secure in attachment are likely to hold working models that increase their chances of having mature love relationships and establishing and maintaining healthy, happy family relationships.

Cultural beliefs about love

A further cognitive aspect of love likely to affect an individual's experience of love is the acceptance or rejection of cultural beliefs about love. Beliefs that love is blind, external, and uncontrollable (Dion & Dion, 1988; Schon, 1963) are likely to lead to different outcomes from those beliefs emphasizing that the main function of human romantic love is to provide a stable, healthy environment in which children can be nurtured and protected (Buss, 1988a, 1988b).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Fehr (1994) asked participants to rate a series of prototypes of love (including friendship, maternal, sisterly, romantic, infatuation) in terms of how well these prototypes represented their views of love. They rated friendship, maternal, sisterly, and parental love as being closest to their idea of love, and romantic love was ranked quite low on the basis of these ratings. Infatuation, puppy, and sexual love received the lowest ratings of all. These ratings seem to indicate that, when ordinary people think of love, they do not think of passionate sex and affairs, but of responsible, companionate love involving caring and concern for the loved person.

Another important cognitive aspect of love includes the expectations we have of what romantic love—or a love relationship—should do for us, or what Branden (1988) calls the "irrational and impossible demands made of love" (p. 223). As Branden notes, if love is expected to provide continual happiness and fulfillment with little or no effort on our part, despite our weaknesses and insecurities, then it is likely to fail, and our experience of it is likely to be less than satisfying. On the other hand, if we recognize that building a love relationship requires a lot of energy and effort on our part, then we will be able to deal more effectively with the inevitable disagreements and disappointments. Sternberg (1988) also comments on those who enter a relationship, expecting a "marriage made in Heaven," but not recognizing that time and effort are required to build and maintain such a relationship.

Branden (1988) argues that certain central aspects of American culture interact with our ideas about love to reinforce these unrealistic expectations about love. These aspects of American culture (passed on to the rest of the world through film and television) include an emphasis on the individual as more important than the group (or family), the commitment to total freedom for the individual, and the belief in happi-

ness as every individual's basic right. Dion and Dion (1991) have shown empirically that individualism is associated with less love for the partner, lower levels of care, need and trust, and placing more emphasis on a Ludus love style involving a game-playing noncommittal approach.

Although there are many ideas about love in the culture that can be seen as destructive to marriage and family life, I will concentrate on the ones that can be summed up in the statement that love is blind, external, and uncontrollable. According to Branden (1988), to argue that love is necessarily blind is to maintain that no real and deep ties, based on knowledge and understanding of one another, can exist between people. Yet many men and women would claim that they see the partner's shortcomings as well as strengths, and love him or her deeply, nevertheless. In addition, most lists of the behaviors associated with love include tolerance of the partner's shortcomings. For example, Swensen and Gilner (1964) argued that two factors are common to all types of love—emotional support of the loved one and toleration of his or her demands and negative aspects. In fact, several lists of the behaviors characteristic of love include similar patterns: acknowledging and accepting differences and weaknesses (Beck, 1988), putting up with shortcomings (Branden (1988), and being willing to tolerate the less pleasant aspects of the other (Swensen, 1972). Love that recognizes and accepts the negative aspects of the other—and loves despite them—provides more support for marriage and family than does love that is blind.

Dion and Dion (1973, 1975, 1988) argue that our culture defines romantic love as "an external event destined to happen to us." According to these authors, the prevalent stereotype in Western culture portrays romantic love as "an external force that is allegedly intense, mysterious and volatile—and that engulfs 'fated' individuals in an overwhelming idealized experience surpassing ordinary pleasures." In similar vein, Peele (1988) talks about immature approaches to love as involving the idea that love is accidental and volatile, and that it can disappear in a moment, just as quickly and unexpectedly as it came. This view of love as volatile emphasizes the feeling component that is, of course, the most unstable aspect of love, and ignores the stability-maintaining aspects such as commitment. Those caught up in this immature type of love fail to see that whether they continue to love their partner does not depend just on transient feelings, but on the effort they are prepared to put into the relationship and their commitment to it. Views of love that see love as a force external to the individuals in the relationship do not support marriage and family, since the stability of family life is dependent on the love remaining and individuals not "losing their love" or "falling out of love."

For this reason, building marriage and family life around "being in love" as the main basis for partner choice may be problematic, despite the fact that surveys show that most people give love or companionship as their primary reasons for getting married (Duncan, Schuman, & Duncan, 1973). The negative side of focusing on voluntary choice and emotional gratification as the basis of marriage is highlighted by Furstenberg (1990), who sees overemphasis on the personal benefits of marriage as an important contributor to the increase in divorce (see also Bellah et al., 1985; Lasch, 1977; Swidler, 1980). In fact, Furstenberg claims that "Gradually, the standard shifted from one which required couples to remain married even if they were not in love to one which virtually demanded divorce unless they remained in love" (1990, p. 380). When this new cultural standard is combined with beliefs that love is external and volatile, the ensuing belief system is likely to have a very negative impact on marriage and family life.

Tied in with the notion that love is blind and external is the belief that love is uncontrollable. As Dion and Dion (1988) note, this idea of love is illustrated by the phrases that we use to describe the experience of love. Terms such as "falling in love," "being swept off one's feet," and "being head over

heels in love" serve to underline and perpetuate this belief. According to this view, love is likely to strike from nowhere (like one of Cupid's arrows), just when we least expect it, and to sweep us off our feet and leave us head over heels in love with someone we have just met and hardly know. The belief is further fueled by the idea, also prevalent in the culture, that our individual happiness is all that matters and is best ensured by following our hearts rather than our heads. How many Hollywood movies have you seen that perpetuated that idea? The points made above about how viewing love as external affects family life apply here also.

Those who are already immature in their approach to love are likely to have that immaturity exacerbated by the beliefs about love that we have been discussing. If love really is blind, external, and uncontrollable, how can any individual be expected to approach a love relationship with maturity and responsibility? Such individuals will be victims of fate and unable to take control of their lives, with all kinds of negative consequences for those who love them. Berscheid (1980) sees this common belief that romantic love is uncontrollable as providing a useful justification for such behaviors as marital infidelity. The idea that the love for the partner in infidelity came from outside the individuals and was uncontrollable (or "bigger than both of us") is likely to lead to behavior that would otherwise be labeled as inappropriate being seen as justifiable. Yet, the finding that individuals are more likely to be attracted to someone when they are already aroused (e.g., through physical exertion) and inappropriately attribute that arousal to sexual attraction is interesting in this context (Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971). In fact, these researchers suggest that individuals may get themselves in the mood for romance (or an affair) and then become attracted to someone. Clearly, such beliefs, which are common in the culture, are likely to have a negative impact on marriage and family life, particularly when they coexist with beliefs about the importance of personal gratification and the lesser importance of responsibility and commitment.

What then are the cognitive aspects of mature love? Mature love is more likely to be experienced in a context where commitment and responsibility are seen as important, but where the partners are not just committed to staying together, but also to working on the relationship through dealing with conflicts and finding mutually acceptable solutions to the problems that will inevitably arise. Prototype analyses suggest that models of love that see commitment as a central aspect of love are fairly common. Having a secure attachment, which involves working models of relationships that include being comfortable with closeness and dependence and not being overly concerned about being abandoned, is also likely to contribute to mature love. Finally, certain cultural beliefs contribute to mature love, particularly those that focus on the importance of stable, healthy relationships, the need to acknowledge and accept differences and weaknesses, and the recognition that love involves an internal decision to love another person and is within the individual's control, and that love is controllable and must be nurtured.

The Behavioral Aspect

Ideas about the kinds of behaviors that are appropriate expressions of love vary, depending on the theoretical perspective and the gender of the individual. As already mentioned, Cancian (1987) argues very strongly that the feminization of love has meant that women's ideas about which behaviors are the prime indicators of love (behaviors such as verbal expressions of love and self-disclosure) have tended to predominate in the culture, whereas men's focus on giving help, sharing activities, and sex as indicators of love has been downplayed or ignored. According to Cancian, because of the emphasis on the more feminine aspects of love, we have tended to exaggerate differences between men and women in their ability to love and have encouraged "women to overspecialize in rela-

tionships while men overspecialize in work" (Cancian, 1987, p. 69).

Swensen (1972), on the basis of extensive research, constructed a list of behaviors associated with the expression of love for an opposite-sex partner. These included both verbal and physical expressions of affection, self-disclosure, providing emotional and moral support, giving gifts and care, feeling happier when the loved one is around, and being willing to tolerate the less pleasant aspects of the other. This list is an indication of the wide range of behaviors that can be seen as expressions of love, and it supports the work of Rubin (1970, 1973). Similarly, Hecht et al. (1994), in designing their Love Ways Questionnaire, included the same type of behaviors (Doing things for my partner; Giving my partner support), but also included such behaviors as making a commitment, planning the future together, and the way we look at one another. Branden (1988) lists the characteristics of successful couples and includes in this list a number of ways of expressing love behaviorally. These include physical affection, expressing admiration and appreciation, sexual expression, accepting demands, putting up with shortcomings, and making time to be alone together. Overall, there is much agreement about the behaviors that indicate love. Immature love, on the other hand, would be indicated by behaviors that would generally be labeled as selfish and that focus on individual gratification to the detriment of the partner or the family.

Working from an evolutionary perspective, Buss (1988a) carried out a study designed to show which behaviors are seen as prototypical acts of love and provided evidence that the most prototypical love acts were agreeing to marry and remaining faithful even when separated. Other highly rated behaviors included calling when the partner was feeling down, cancelling plans to be with others, giving up going out with others, listening devotedly to problems, and resisting sexual opportunities with others. Clearly, the focus of these behaviors is commitment, faithfulness, exclusivity, and caring concern. The fact that many of these love acts overlap with acts involving commitment fits with Fehr's (1988) data reported earlier that showed individuals' prototypes of love contain a number of aspects of commitment.

In this same study, two kinds of acts not predicted by evolutionary theory were also nominated: acts of sacrifice (changing career plans for the relationship, cancelling important engagements to be with the partner) and acts involving parents (introducing loved one to parents, making a special effort to get on with parents). The importance attached to these acts suggests that love also involves making an effort on the loved one's behalf (caring), as well as including the loved one in one's closest circle of family and friends.

Adult attachment theorists also see the bonds between lovers in a similar way as do evolutionary theorists, with the main functions of attachment being to increase the likelihood of parental health, stability, and investment in offspring (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). In addition, Bierhoff (1991) comments on the biological meaningfulness of the three components of the attachment system: attachment, caregiving, and sex (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Kelley (1983), in a paper that predates the evolutionary perspective of Buss (1988a, 1988b), also acknowledges the links between our biology and our need for close heterosexual relationships when he observes:

> Ultimately our social-psychological analysis of close heterosexual relationships must take account of the biological requirements. It seems likely that the various components of love—caring, needing, trusting, tolerance—can profitably be viewed from an evolutionary perspective, as relationship-binding dispositions that make possible and sustain the activities by which the continuance of each partner's genes is ensured. We cannot expect an evolutionary perspective to figure explicitly in the ordinary person's conceptions of love. However, it is reflected in their needs for intimacy (including sexual relations with members of the other gender) and in their susceptibility for developing caring and supportive attitudes towards the sexual partner and the shared offspring. (p. 277)

Integrative Conceptions of Mature Love

In considering the various components of love, it is important to note that several theorists combine these different aspects of love and see particular combinations of the different components as involving mature love.

Sternberg's concept of consummate love

Sternberg (1986, 1988) in proposing his triangular theory of love focused on consummate love, which involved his three components of love (passion, intimacy, and commitment) in equal proportions. In other words, consummate love involves "a state of intense longing for union with the other" (Hatfield & Walster, 1981, p. 9) (the passion component), high regard, intimate communication and mutual understanding, concern about the welfare of the loved one (the intimacy component), and a commitment to maintain the love through good and bad times (the decision/commitment component). Where the love is deficient in any of these components, it is seen as less than consummate and, in some cases, as immature. Fatuous love, for example, is love that is high on passion and commitment, but low on intimacy, and lacks the "stabilizing element of intimate involvement" (Sternberg, 1988, p. 128). This type of love is described as "the kind of love we sometimes associate with Hollywood or with whirlwind courtships" (1988, p. 128).

As part of his triangular theory of love, Sternberg (1986) also developed the concept of "an action triangle" that included various ways of translating the three components of love into actions. Actions that indicate intimacy include communicating inner feelings, offering emotional and material support, and expressing empathy for the other; actions that indicate passion include touching, kissing, hugging, and making love. Finally, commitment is expressed through staying in a relationship through the hard times and being faithful.

The strengths of Sternberg's ideas include his recognition of the importance of the different aspects of love, including the importance of commitment. On the other hand, measurement of these components has been problematic, with Acker and Davis (1992) reporting problems in separating out the different components. In fact, the three components of love seem to be highly correlated and not really separate components at all. In addition, Sternberg's theory does not really take the cultural aspects of love into account. Love is conceptualized as an interpersonal phenomenon; the fact that these interpersonal relationships occur in a particular cultural context, and that there are differences between cultures, is not really acknowledged. Nevertheless, Sternberg's triangular theory was an important milestone in terms of increased understanding of the concept of love.

Cancian's concept of androgynous love

Cancian (1987), as noted earlier, distinguished among three models of love present in Western culture: the independence model, the companionship or traditional model, and the interdependence model. Cancian rejects the independence model because of the focus on self-development (even to the detriment of relationships) and the implication that self-development occurs only or mainly outside of committed relationships and the support and feedback that such relationships can provide. Cancian also rejects the companionship model, which, although it tends to lead to stability in family relationships, leads to a situation where "both sexes are constricted by overspecialized roles that undermine health, limit self-development and create chronic conflicts over intimacy" (Cancian, 1987, p. 150).

The concept of androgynous love as presented in Cancian's interdependence model involves both husband and wife being equally responsible for the relationship and working on it by communicating openly and negotiating on equal terms over problem areas. In addition, this love is not the feminized version of the traditional model of love; rather, it includes both the emotional expression and support emphasized

by women and the material assistance and shared activities emphasized by men. Both partners are openly dependent on and committed to the other, but are also committed to self-development. Self-development is seen not as working against the relationship, as in the independence model, but as strengthening commitment; each member of the couple supports the growth and development of the other. Love is seen as growing in this environment of mutual support and development.

An important strength of Cancian's concept of mature (or androgynous) love, as exemplified in the interdependence model, is her acknowledgment that love involves both the feminine and the masculine aspects of love. By conceptualizing love in this way, Cancian deals directly with the myth that men are less able to love than are women. Her model also recognizes that self-development and love are not necessarily in opposition to each other, but that, in a relationship characterized by mature love, each partner supports the health and development of the other. In addition, her ideas about love and intimacy fit with research on communication in marriage and problems of intimacy in heterosexual relationships. More research is clearly needed to test some of these ideas directly.

Beck's concept of mature love

Beck (1988) provides a comprehensive list of the characteristics of mature love—the love that supports marriage and family. His list includes both emotional and behavioral aspects of love. The emotional aspects include feelings of warmth and the consciousness of a strong deep bond; caring and being concerned about the partner's welfare; empathy or being able to tune into the partner's feelings; sensitivity or being aware of the partner's concerns; and understanding or being able to see things through the partner's eyes. The behavioral aspects of love included in the list are expressions of affection; acknowledging and accepting differences and weaknesses; companionship and closeness; friendliness or taking a genuine interest in one's partner as a person; intimacy or sharing the everyday details of both partners' lives; pleasing your partner and supporting your partner.

The strengths of Beck's approach lies in his clinical insights into what are the important aspects of love that strengthen relationships. On the other hand, more research is needed to show which of these feelings and behaviors can be considered the crucial aspects of love and which are less important. There is little attempt to integrate these feelings and behaviors into an understanding of love and how it operates in relationships. In addition, Beck places scant emphasis on the cognitive aspects of love. Conversely, all good cognitive behavior therapists know that the feelings and behaviors included in his list are likely to be supported by a system of beliefs and expectations that either encourage or discourage involvement. For those who believe that love is not external but involves an internal decision, that love is not blind but involves acknowledging the weaknesses of the partner and accepting them, and that love is not uncontrollable but needs to be nurtured, the feelings and behaviors emphasized by Beck (1988) will be a logical outcome of those beliefs. These individuals will also know that "a love relationship like every other value in life requires consciousness, courage, knowledge and wisdom to be sustained" (Branden, 1988, p. 223).

Conclusion

The primary goal of this article is to define the love that supports marriage and family. In examining this issue, I have reviewed literature exploring the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of love. We have seen that all three aspects of love can be either mature or immature. Given the evidence that love is socially constructed, however, and that love relationships occur in a social and cultural context, the cognitive aspect of love may be the most important determinant of the love experienced by those in love relationships. It seems that the emotional and behavioral aspects of love

are both strongly affected by the ideas about love that are prevalent in the culture and that have been accepted by the individuals concerned.

In seeking to define love, and particularly the love that supports marriage and the family, it appears that the most useful approach to love involves seeing love as an attitude that creates a particular type of environment in which both the lovers and those dependent on them can grow and develop. This idea is particularly emphasized by Cancian (1987) and by Grote and Frieze (1994). For Cancian, this environment of love is one of interdependence (or mutual dependence), equality, and open communication, where each partner supports the other in efforts at growth and self-development and where that self-development is even more successful than the self-development of the individualist because it occurs in this environment of care and trust.

Grote and Frieze (1994) describe an environment in which both friendship-based love (or companionate love or caring) and passion reinforce each other. For these researchers, passion and sexual activity increase the desire to be with and care for the partner, and the caring environment created by the companionship increase the opportunities for the expression of love through sexual pleasure.

Loving environments, however, occur within a cultural context, and the exact nature of the environment created by mature love and the behaviors that occur in that environment will depend on cultural factors. Where the cultural milieu encourages a responsible approach to love involving committed partners working for each other's good and creating a nurturing and healthy environment for all family members, there will be a higher probability of marital and family relationships that are stable and satisfying and of positive outcomes for all family members.

Of course, we need to know much more about this environment characterized by mature love and the implications that it has for both the couple and for the children of the union. What factors increase the likelihood that mature rather than immature love will be more common in a culture? How are both helpful and unhelpful beliefs about love transmitted in a culture, and how are dysfunctional beliefs maintained? How can functional beliefs about love be encouraged? These are questions for future research on understanding love and loving relationships.

In summary, we have looked at the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of love. We have seen that feelings of both passion and companionship can be sustained throughout life, although there may be some changes in the nature of those feelings. In addition, an important component of love is both the short-term and long-term commitment to the loved one and the relationship. The beliefs we hold about love will affect our willingness to make those commitments and to work at our love relationships. I have explored the beliefs about love present in Western society and noted the negative implications for family life of beliefs about love that suggest that love is blind, external, and uncontrollable. I suggest that, although immature love is a reality in our world, mature love is possible and is sustained by beliefs that love involves acknowledging and accepting differences and weaknesses; that love involves an internal decision to love another person and a long-term commitment to maintain that love; and finally that love is controllable and needs to be nurtured and nourished by the lovers. This kind of love is the love that sustains marriage and family as it creates an environment in which individual family members can grow and develop in an atmosphere of mutual caring and support.

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