

AMBIVALENCE AND UNCERTAINTY ACROSS TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to compare ambivalence, self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relational uncertainty between the different types of love by Sternberg's Triangular Model of Love. It was a comparative study. The sample comprised of adolescents ($N = 525$) further divided into 7 types of love with 75 participants from each love type, including liking, infatuation, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, and consummate love, which used a purposive sampling method. The Triangular Love Scale (Kowal et al., 2023) was administered to bifurcate the adolescents across the types of love. The Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence (Siefert & Haggerty, 2019) and the Relational Uncertainty Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017) were administered to adolescents on all seven types of love. The data were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by post hoc comparisons. The study explained that types of triangular love led to the variations in the level of ambivalence and multidimensional uncertainty.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, love consists of three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Different combinations of these components create different types of love, including liking, infatuation, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, consummate love, and non-love (Sternberg, 1997). Intimacy fosters emotional connection and understanding, commitment gives a sense of the future and continuity of the relationship, and passion is an expression of emotional and physical attraction between two people. Relational uncertainty occurs when these aspects are out of balance or underdeveloped, and people question their own emotions, their partner's motives and intentions, and the relationship's future (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Therefore, the psychological effects of intimacy, passion and commitment fluctuations can be theoretically explained as relational uncertainty, which is conceptually related to Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. Theoretically, the variety of combinations of the three love components could vary the certainty people feel in their romantic relationships (Knobloch, 2007).

Longer-term romantic relationships are typically formed in younger people, mostly in late adolescence (Connolly & Goldberg, 2009; Kansky & Allen, 2018; Schulenberg et al., 2004). Love is marked by a variety of mixed experiences as uncertainty is encircling the relationship. Thus, due to the heightened uncertainty, most prominent feature of triangular relationship is ambivalence, love and hate at the same time which turns the romantic relationship into bitter sweet. Thus, people in romantic relationship frequently experience "ambivalence," which is characterized by

conflicting emotions, both good and bad (Schneider & Schwarz, 2017). Ambivalence is a common and normal part of love relationships, even though people are not always aware of their mixed feelings or experience them continuously (Uchino et al., 2014).

Establishing and maintaining romantic relationships can result in both positive and negative feelings, as well as ambivalence. Conflicting feelings toward the partner result from these mixed experiences (Zayas & Shoda, 2015), which can be problematic because they frequently happen when people are already committed to the relationship (Miller et al., 2006). These ambivalent states are especially important for relationship quality and personal well-being (Holt-Lunstad & Uchino, 2019; Zoppolat et al., 2022). Ambivalence causes negative feelings, but it also encourages reflective information processing and the search for solutions to alleviate discomfort (van Harreveld et al., 2015). As a result, it may be a factor limiting the longevity of a romantic connection, as it encourages the redefining and revaluation of the partner and the bond built with them. Results of ambivalence are not always negative for the relationship (Moss & Wilson, 2015).

The degree of lack of confidence people have in their impressions of engagement in interpersonal relationships is known as relational uncertainty. In romantic relationship, self, partner, and relationship sources are the root causes of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002). Self-uncertainty refers to the questions people have regarding their own engagement in a triangular love relationship. Partner doubt refers to the questions that people have regarding their romantic partner's engagement in a relationship. Relationship uncertainty is more abstract than self or partner doubt since it addresses issues about the dyad as a whole. The three causes of relational uncertainty (self, partner and overall relationships) are linked but separate concepts (Knobloch, 2007). Another explanation is that the uncertainty reduction process is perceived as pleasant and develops intimacy, regardless of the remaining uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). These conflicting feelings can arise or be exacerbated by various diagnostic events or situations within the relationship (Joel et al., 2021). Although the experiences of ambivalence and uncertainty are prominently dependent upon the nature and type of love but pertaining these lines of inquiry the empirical literature is deficient and the present study is an initiative to examine the level of ambivalence and uncertainty across the triangular types of love.

II. METHOD

Participants

This research used a design approach of cross-sectional survey research. Standardised self-report questionnaires will be used to collect data. A sample of 525 students from various private and public Universities of Sargodha in the university level was taken. In this Sargodha population both the males and females are included. The age of the participants ranged from 18–25 years. The current study used convenient sampling technique. When it comes to love representation, the study shows that most of the participants were in the Infatuation. The Data will be analysed using one-way analysis of variance in SPSS.

Measures

Triangular Love Scale (Kowal et al., 2023) was administered to categorize adolescents into different types of love. Triangular love scale consisted of 15 items with three subscales named Intimacy, passion and commitment. The scale was rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The response category was *not at all* to *extremely*. The minimum score was 15 and maximum score was 75. The reliability of scale was .94. After the identification of adolescents with seven love types, two further scales were administered to examine the level of ambivalence and uncertainty. Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence (Siefert & Haggerty, 2019) consisted of 9 items. The scale was measure on a 4-point Likert Scale. The response category False, Not True to very true. The minimum score was 9 and maximum score was 36. The reliability of scale was .90. Relational Uncertainty Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017), consist of 18 items with three subscales named Self Uncertainty, Partner uncertainty and Relational uncertainty. The scale was measure on a 6-point Likert Scale. The response category was Strong disagree to strongly agree. The minimum score was 18 and maximum score was 108. The reliability of scale was .95.

Procedure

The adolescents were provided comprehensive instructions regarding the study. The participants first completed the Triangular Love Scale (Kowal et al., 2023). Based on their scores, the different types of love were identified including liking, infatuation, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, consummate love, and non-love. Only those participants who met the study requirements (identification with a specific type of triangular love) were asked to complete the remaining questionnaire. Participants were given sufficient time to complete each questionnaire and were encouraged to respond honestly. Overall response was encouraging. The ethical considerations followed in the study were inform consent from adolescents, anonymity of their identifies, confidentiality of information and right of withdrawal of information given to participants.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Mean, Standard Deviation and F-Values on Variables across Types of Love in Adolescent

	Liking	Companionate	Empty	Fatuous	Infatuation	Romantic	Consummate			
		Love	Love	Love	Love	Love	Love			
Variables	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	Post-Hoc
Ambivalence	23.48 (6.13)	22.84 (6.78)	23.64 (6.41)	25.58 (6.29)	26.03 (5.03)	24.97 (5.31)	24.08 (7.13)	2.67*	0.02	1>2<3<4<5>6>7
Self-Uncertainty	20.25 (6.44)	22.86 (6.33)	22.57 (5.79)	22.34 (6.37)	24.6 (5.25)	22.28 (5.44)	19.51 (6.09)	5.69***	0.06	1<2>3>4>5<6>7
Partner Uncertainty	21.48 (6.91)	23.43 (7.34)	22.82 (6.12)	22.9 (6.86)	24.56 (5.68)	22.21 (6.16)	19.49 (6.28)	3.76**	0.04	1<2>3>4<5>6>7
Relational Uncertainty	22.33 (6.01)	22.39 (6.57)	23.62 (6.01)	24.11 (6.29)	24.57 (6.08)	21.18 (5.46)	19.32 (6.29)	5.21***	0.06	1<2<3<4<5>6>7

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. $p < .001$.

Table 1 shows significant mean differences on Ambivalence across Types of Love with $F(522) = 2.67$, $p < 0.05$. Participants in Infatuation Love exhibited the highest ambivalence ($M = 26.03$, $SD = 5.03$), followed by Fatuous Love ($M = 25.58$, $SD = 6.29$), Romantic Love ($M = 24.97$, $SD = 5.31$), Consummate Love ($M = 24.08$, $SD = 7.13$), Empty Love ($M = 23.64$, $SD = 6.41$), Liking ($M = 23.48$, $SD = 6.13$), and Companionate Love ($M = 22.84$, $SD = 6.78$). The η^2 value was 0.02 ($< .20$) which indicated no effect size. Findings shows significant mean differences on Self Uncertainty across Types of Love with $F(522) = 5.69$, $p < 0.001$. Participants in Infatuation Love reported the highest self-uncertainty ($M = 24.60$, $SD = 5.25$), followed by Companionate Love ($M = 22.86$, $SD = 6.33$), Empty Love ($M = 22.57$, $SD = 5.79$), Fatuous Love ($M = 22.34$, $SD = 6.37$), Romantic Love ($M = 22.28$, $SD = 5.44$), Liking ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 6.44$), and Consummate Love ($M = 19.51$, $SD = 6.09$). The η^2 value was 0.06 ($< .20$) which indicated no effect size.

Findings shows significant mean differences on Partner Uncertainty across Types of Love with $F(522) = 3.76$, $p < 0.01$. Participants in Infatuation Love exhibited the highest partner uncertainty ($M = 24.56$, $SD = 5.68$), followed by Companionate Love ($M = 23.43$, $SD = 7.34$), Fatuous Love ($M = 22.90$, $SD = 6.86$), Empty Love ($M = 22.82$, $SD = 6.12$), Romantic Love ($M = 22.21$, $SD = 6.16$), Liking ($M = 21.48$, $SD = 6.91$), and Consummate Love ($M = 19.49$, $SD = 6.28$). The η^2 value was 0.04 ($< .20$) which indicated no effect size. Findings shows significant mean differences on Relational Uncertainty across Types of Love with $F(522) = 5.21$, $p < 0.001$. Participants in Infatuation Love reported the highest relational uncertainty ($M = 24.57$, $SD = 6.08$), followed by Fatuous Love ($M = 24.11$, $SD = 6.29$), Empty Love ($M = 23.62$, $SD = 6.01$), Companionate Love (Group 2) ($M = 22.39$, $SD = 6.57$), Liking ($M = 22.33$, $SD = 6.01$), Romantic Love ($M = 21.18$, $SD = 5.46$), and Consummate Love ($M = 19.32$, $SD = 6.29$). The η^2 value was 0.06 ($< .20$) which indicated no effect size. Post-Hoc comparisons revealed significant pair-wise mean differences.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to compare ambivalence, self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relational uncertainty across the seven types of love proposed in Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg, 1986). The results showed a significant difference between the 7 types of love, which illustrates that the nature and configurations of romantic relationships have an impact on each person's emotions and doubts. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in ambivalence across the seven types of love. The people were most ambivalent if they were in infatuation Love, and were comparatively less ambivalent if they were in companionate love. The love in Infatuation is characterized by a highly intense passion, but not enough intimacy and commitment, and may give rise to the Love conflict, instability and anxiety in relation to love (Fisher et al., 2002). Companionate Love is, on the other hand, grounded in intimacy and commitment, thus an emotional comfort and lowering contradictory feelings. The results are consistent with Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg, 1986) more intimate and committed relationships are likely to be more stable and satisfying psychologically.

Similarly, strong differences were found among the love types with regard to self-uncertainty. Infatuation Love was more uncertain about their own feelings, relationship goals and own future expectations while the Consummate Love group was the least uncertain. Consummate Love brings intimacy, passion and commitment together, helping partners to build their confidence in themselves and in the relationship. The results provide some support for modern research on Relational Uncertainty Theory (Knobloch, 2015) which posits that a more stable relationship decreases uncertainty about the individual as well as about his or her role in the relationship. A significant difference was also found in relation to partner uncertainty. Infatuation Love participants had more uncertainty regarding their partner's feelings, intentions, and commitment, and Consummate Love participants had the least uncertainty regarding their partner's feelings, intentions, and commitment. When there is no commitment, one feels uncertain if the person you're interested in is committed to the other person or if they are lying to you, but when there is commitment, you feel assured and have trust in the other person.

Similarly, relational uncertainty was found to be significantly different among the seven love types. Participants in Infatuation Love had the highest level of relational uncertainty, while Consummate Love was related to the lowest level of relational uncertainty. The result indicates that balanced relationships with high intimacy, passion and commitment lead to more relationship certainty and decrease doubts regarding relationship continuity. The present study is significant in the context of Pakistan where cultural values, family expectations and societal norms have a significant impact on romantic relationships. These factors in the context can influence people's emotional experiences and can lead to more ambivalence and relational uncertainty in romantic relationships. While romantic relationships have been gaining a growing attention in psychological studies, there are still limited empirical research that looks into the role of ambivalence, relational uncertainty and Sternberg's triangular theory of love in Pakistan. The present study attempts to partly fill this gap, by exploring these constructs in combination, to yield culturally relevant evidence of the emotional dynamics of young adult romantic relationships in Pakistan.

Overall, the results are consistent with Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg, 1986). Schrodtt (2017) found that greater relationship confidence and the belief that conflicts can be resolved effectively are linked with reduced levels of self, partner, and relational uncertainty, contributing to healthier and more stable romantic relationships. The findings also corroborate Relational Uncertainty Theory which states that the uncertainty is more prevalent in less clear, committed, and understood relationships. Thus, the current study emphasizes that there are different kinds of love and the pattern of Consummate Love is the healthiest one as it involves less ambivalence and uncertainty and that of Infatuation Love is the least stable relationship pattern. This is one of the first studies to examine the relationships between romantic partners, and could support psychologists and other professionals who work with couples in helping spot relationship patterns linked to emotional conflict and uncertainty. In general, the present study shows that Consummate Love is the healthiest of all the relationship patterns and Infatuation Love is the most ambivalent and uncertain pattern, highlighting the importance of intimacy and commitment in sustaining a stable, satisfying romantic relationship.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the present study and the results should be interpreted in the light of these. Firstly, because the use of a cross-sectional research design precludes the determination of causal relationships between ambivalence, relational uncertainty and various forms of love. Long-term studies could shed more light on the evolution and changes of these relationship dynamics. Second, the study used self-report measures, which could have been subject to response bias including social desirability, and subjective interpretations of relationship experiences. Depending on their perceptions, participants might have expressed their emotions as intimacy, passion, commitment, uncertainty or ambivalence. Thirdly, the nature of the sample might limit the ability to generalize the results. The findings are of a particular cultural context and may not be generalizable to other cultures and relationship types. Further research should use a wider range of samples to increase outside validity of results.

In addition, this current study was limited to the ambivalence, relational uncertainty and love components of the Triangular Theory of Love whereas other factors that relate to relationships, such as attachment style, communication patterns, relationship satisfaction and conflict management strategies were not explored. These variables should be taken into account in future research to gain a more holistic understanding of the experiences of romantic relationships. Lastly, while the study looked at the various types of love, future research could look at each love type individually to gain a deeper understanding of how ambivalence and uncertainty play a role in each type of relationship pattern in the context of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study was based on two theories including Triangular Theory of Love and Relational Uncertainty Theory. The study investigated ambivalence, self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relational uncertainty for each of the seven love types suggested in the Triangular Theory of Love. The findings showed that there were significant differences between the seven love types, suggesting that the kind of romantic relationship has an impact on the emotional experience and perception of an individual. Infatuation Love marked by the empty passions in the absence of commitment and intimacy was associated with the most ambivalent and uncertain emotions, while Consummate Love, enriched with the combination of intimacy, passion and commitment was associated with the least ambivalent and uncertain emotions, indicating greater emotional security and stability in the relationship. The study serves as mirror for evaluating the involvement in a certain kind of love. As the consequences of romantic relationship are dependent upon the type of love one is involved in. Consequences can be positive, prototypically in the form of consummate love and negative in the case of infatuation love.

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