

Love as Caring Maturity: A Criticism of the Love Triangle Theory and Presenting a New Approach to Love in Couple's Relationships

Mehrnoosh Hedayati

Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies

Abstract

The need for love is one of the vital needs of the mankind and one of the most important motivations for the family formation and its continuity. However, as mentioned by the experts, along with other factors, a misunderstanding of the concept of “love” has put family at risk. The main goal of the present study is to provide an analytical overview of the concept of “love” in couple relationships, particularly by emphasizing on Sternberg’s theory of “love triangle” (1986) as a common approach among Iranian psychologists and counselors. The method of the present qualitative research is interpretive and critical, and the extracted data from the documents are thematically analyzed. The fundamental distinction between the “love as a caring maturity” approach and the earlier ones, which either describe love in the struggle with reason, or call one of the two as slaves to the other, is that “true love” is the product of rationality with all three cognitive, emotional, and voluntary capacities. Although, it is influenced by unconscious schemes, but it is multifaceted, selective, and under the authority of “adult ego state”. In this study, we will distinguish between “love” and “pseudo love” and propose the “Love Pyramid” approach with “Caring Maturity” vertex. In this approach, we will provide a more complete picture of the meaning of true love in couples’ relationship. This love is transformative in nature and nourishes itself at every stage of family life with the knowledge to remain firm and vibrant.

Keywords: love, love triangle theory, caring maturity, love pyramid

Introduction

In complex and industrialized modern world, many deterrents in society are barriers to accepting the responsibility of married life. Factors such as economic problems, interpersonal problems, responsibility, limitations on individual freedoms, changes in the entertainment and enjoyments, lack of differentiation from the primary family, and so on, increase young people’s fears of starting a family. Undoubtedly, a very powerful and intrinsic factor must convince people to prefer the pleasure of living together to its problems; this inner factor is nothing but

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“love”. Love is the basis for human distinction from the other creatures (Glasser, 1998). It is a basic and inner need which despite all the social changes, keeps the people’s desire for marriage as a permanent contract of living together alive.

Today research shows that the most common reason for marriage and divorce is the presence or absence of love (Sperechr & Hatfield, 2015). Presentation of a kind of love as “romantic love” through the media, has changed the premise of premarital love into a “romantic love complex” (Brardo & Owens, 2000) nowadays which plays an important role in the quality and continuity of marital relationships and family stability (Siren, 2011). But despite the growing popularity of ideas such as democracy, choosing a partner with love, but unfortunately, the stability and strength of the family is also threatened by the change of romantic feelings after marriage (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Undoubtedly, there are numerous individual, economical, and social reasons which contribute to the deterioration of family life, but evidences suggest that marital conflicts are usually exacerbated by a decrease in the expression of emotions and positive feelings and lack of intimacy and love (Sternberg, 2004; Gottman & Gottman 2006).

Fundamentally, the problem of instability or marital dissatisfaction between couples today unlike decades ago is not due to the repression or lack of romantic sentiments, especially at the time of choosing a partner, rather it seems more about the perception of couples about the love phenomenon. This perception leads to damaging expectations and breakdowns of communication rather than ensuring the stability and sense of belonging. For this reason, working on the love phenomenon and focusing on concepts such as awareness in “marriage love” might not be the only method of maintaining the family system. However, it can certainly be considered as an undeniable necessity for the formation and continuity of today’s family.

Among the different theories used for defining the love, its types and components, is “love triangle” theory by Robert J. Sternberg, that has high reputation between Iranian psychologists and researcher.

1. A SUMMARY OF STERNBERG’S “LOVE TRIANGLE” THEORY

Former typological theories of love have always been criticized and led to the formation of love triangle approach in a corrective process proposed by Sternberg (1968) with a less inductive perspective (1968). Sternberg grounds this theory historically and rationally (Beall & Sternberg, 1995) as well as psychometrically and empirically (Acker & Davis, 1992; Chojnacki & Walsh, 1990). He described the concept of love in three general components that could be the vertices of a triangle: passion, intimacy, and decision/ commitment (Sternberg, 1986). According to him, these three components in combination form 8 different types of love, and creating a classification system for the various kinds of love relationships (Sternberg, 1986, 1988). According to Sternberg, a relationship based on two or more of these elements is more durable than a love based only on one of these components. In his opinion, a “perfect love” which is a combination of all three components, is the strongest, most enduring and unfortunately the rarest type of love (Barnes & Sternberg, 1997).

Shortly after proposing the theory of “love triangle”, Sternberg (1999) put forward the theory of “love is a story” in response to the question of why people fall in love with particular person and in the criticism of his triangle theory. This theory suggests that the attraction of love depends on the identity or similarity of two individuals’ unconscious love stories. He believes that every human being has a personal narrative of the love story which is based both on the love story in the current relationship and that as a personal ideal perspective. In his point of view, the survival of the couples’ romantic relationship depends on the affinity and homogeneity of the two persons’ love story in both domains.

Criticism of the love triangle theory

Although Sternberg made a great contribution in his recent works by criticizing the love triangle theory and introducing the theory of “love story” and helped to understanding why love attraction between the two individual exists, but his approach has several major drawbacks.

3.1 Proposing a variety of relationship models instead of a true love styles

Despite Sternberg’s claim of “love” typology, his classification is practically based on the typology of interpersonal relationships described in a continuum of relationship without feeling to the romantic one (including intimacy, passion and commitment). Why do we still insist on considering these relationships as “love” when there is no feeling of intimate bonding, no excitement for being together or no commitment and responsibility towards the chosen partner. In fact, this definition is nothing but a “love” distortion. Every components of love is linked to others, therefore, removing even one of its basic elements leads to the creation of a kind of relationship that is naturally lacking “love”. As Socrates believed, “dividing love into good and bad” is a kind of doxa (common belief), not “love” classification. “Love” can be nothing but the desire for wisdom and search for truth. And the true beauty of “love” is the interest in wisdom. In "love story", also, the similarity or

3.2 Proposing a variety of Attachment Styles instead of Love Styles

Regarding the love story, most of the stories cited by Sternberg as a romantic narrative can be considered as a factor to destroy a relationship not to create a romantic one. In fact, what Sternberg introduces as the romantic narrative of individuals and the complementary role of the two lovers in the same stories as the condition for its continuity, is a type of Attachment Styles and infantile unconscious communicative procedure between the individual and first beloved (mother) which has been firstly proposed by Freud and successfully reflected by various theories such as attachment styles of John Bolby (1969), schema attraction of Jefry Yang (1994) and object relation approach of Melany Klein (1986). Even Aron and Aron (1986) had expressed love as a way of expanding themselves. Also, Sternberg’s “Love Story” is quite consistent with the concept of "Life Script" in the Transactional Analysis theory by Eric Berne (1975/2015), who calls this narrative as a life script not “love story” and emphasizes the maturity (or powerful Adult Ego State) and edition improving of this script before making

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romantic choices. How can we call some stories like Governance, Collection, Horror, War and Sacrifice as romantic relationship just because the beloved plays our complementary role?

3.3. The love manifestation as an psychic determinism

Approaches that describe love as unconscious need to relation with early prototypes, ignore the love's voluntary nature. In fact, the "love story" not only removes the past problems of love but minimizes the power of awareness in adult human's decision making and its agency in "love". Although Sternberg (2014) believes that love is both the cause and effect of a lifestyle, but his more emphasis is placed on its causality. This deterministic and passive view of love contrasts with the definition of experts like Erich Fromm (2019) who see love as art and talent which should be fruitful in the best way. Researchers have found numerous evidences regarding the variability of attachment styles such that the adult attachment one enables couples to trust each other over time with growing relationship, increasing affective maturity and changing insecure attachment styles (Fraley et al, 2006). Romantic selection, although being influenced by biological, social, environmental, cultural and even personal factors, freedom of choice is one of the key features of love (Fehr, Sprecher and Underwood, 2009). Fromm believes that understanding the freedom concept in love, increases the importance of choosing the right beloved in return for experiencing the love only (Fromm, 2019).

1.4. Disregarding the evolving nature of love

Another criticism of Sternberg's theory by some scholars is associated with the lack of clarification of the evolutionary stages of "love" and the factors affecting it (Acker & Davis, 1992). Although he described the changes in each of the components within the contemporary Western culture, he did not characterize the evolutionary nature of love. Hence, it seems that the different components of love, especially intimacy and passion, are declining shortly after marriage, and the only factor maintaining a relationship is the commitment which has been increasing over time (Sternberg, 1988:125). This intensifies the reluctance of lovers to the marriage institution. However, the course of love, as described by Alain de Botton (2016), defines attractions and missions at each stage of love development in relation which makes the couple eager to experience it. Love is in essence a skill we need to learn rather than an enthusiasm we simply experience. Exiting the fantasy period of encountering with the beloved is an inescapable and even a pleasant way to reach a lasting love combined with understanding and touching the truth of life.

1.5. Failure to consider full psyche's capacity

Another drawback with both Sternberg's approaches to love is based on the neoclassical psyche view of rationality. According to the neoclassical theories, psyche consists of at least three essential, irreducible, capacities, including the cognition (knowing), affect (emoting) and conation (will) (LeDoux, 2002; Tallon, 1997). Scholars believe that all triangular theories of love including Sternberg's work are based on these neoclassical views as described by Socrates in Plato's The Republic. This description of the psyche is also neoclassical in relation to the psychology of the medieval period, among both Christian and Islamic scholars. However,

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Sternberg failed to explain well the cognitive aspect in his justification model of love. Despite, Cognitive psychologists who consider the cognitions either precede emotional experience, or are partially constitutive of emotional experience, Sternberg firstly introduced the component of decision/commitment as the cognitive element of love (1986:119), but he does not explicitly mention a relation between cognition and this component in his later work (e.g., 1997). Due to his tendency to define love as a story in the human's unconscious self, the impact of cognition and knowledge in his new definitions of love not only departed from the components of decision and commitment but also from passion and intimacy. Disregarding the cognitive basis can degrade love from a sensible phenomenon to the level of unmanageable schemas.

1.6. *Incompatibility of psyche's capacities*

In addition to accepting the three psychic capacities, most experts agree on the compatibility of the three aspects of cognition, emotion and will and believe that no one can be separated or eliminated in psychological functions. Although the three fundamental human psychic capacities are "quasi-discrete", the difference among them is more qualitative, and these three are always interacting with each other in the human phenomenology and it is unlikely that one could observe a component completely separate from other capacities in the human experiences (Diessner, Frost & Smith, 2004: 686). Of course, Sternberg emphasizes the continuous interaction of all three components in the love triangle pattern (Sternberg, 1988:136), but he was unable to take the advantage of all psyche's capacities in explaining the concept of love (Acer & Davis, 1992; Lemieux & Hale, 2000). With the approval of three different capacities of human being, Ibrahim Dinani (2013, 14-15) believes that love theorists have primarily focused on one of these capacities and acted in such a way that emotion, will and cognition are completely separate and even contrasting with each other. So, we can see in Sternberg's theories of love in adult people, the highest contribution is devoted to emotions (attachment needs) and conation (unconscious script).

1.7. *Ignoring the neurological structure involved in love*

Another criticism of the Sternberg's approach to love is ignoring the complex biological mechanisms of love. According to the neurologists' opinions, lasting love involves the cognitive, emotional and instinctive centers of the brain simultaneously. They have shown that during the experience of love, next to the various chemical secretions the frontal lobe section (as processor and logical section of brain) is also engaged in experiencing the romantic passionate feelings. The central executive section collects and evaluates all the information of the brain's primitive parts, assesses emotions and thoughts together and ultimately specifies our choices and motivations (fisher, Aron & Brown, 2005). Although Limbic system plays a crucial role in falling in love, however, the evolution of neocortical part being responsible for important and complex human tasks such as speech, writing, planning, reasoning, conceptualization and other cognitive processes, leads to an emergence improvement of romantic sentiments in modern human and we cannot consider the desire for another as an intrinsic thing without cognitive aspects (Steiner, 2009). Even the biological evidences of human, verify the evolutionary nature of "love" phenomenon, so that unlike passionate love

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which originates more from the nucleus accumbent of the limbic system, lasting love grows and develops over time and involves the anterior cingulate and insula cortexes. These biological evidences indicate that the cognitive part of the brain become more sensitive within the evolution process of love forming in mature people. In addition, even during the passionate romantic encounters, the cognitive function of the brain is fully active, but judgments may vary somewhat based on the value attitude to the beloved (Zeki, 2007). So, the arguments in love are based on "caring logic", rather "cold logic".

1.8. Disregarding the awareness and maturity elements in love

The most important criticism of Sternberg's approach and all triangular ones is the disregard for maturity in the formation of the adult 'love' structure. When we consider the adult "love" story as the recalled childhood "love" narration to the first beloved through relying on psychoanalytic approaches, it is as if we have completely ignored the cognitive changes between the childhood and adulthood periods. In the psychoanalytic approaches such as "attachment theory" or "object relation", "love" is fundamentally lacking mature and rational aspects and it is merely a human need for the re-search of lost childhood security. In such an intellectual context, we must either get rid of the trap of "love" so as not to get caught in the childhood unconscious traps, or accept the wise advices and prescriptions for rationalizing "love" or in other words, the precedence of reason over "love". In all these descriptions and prescriptions, what is certain is the "love" leisure from the intellectual and conscious aspects. For this reason, it has been insisted to consign the control of this rebellious thrill to the wisdom, unaware that even if we can separate the two, they will work poorly.

Therefore, one can claim that the triangular perspectives have discarded the important cognitive components such as puberty or consciousness and thought while explaining the enduring love in the couples' relationship in the family and only limited love to the sexual instincts, attachment emotions and a social or cultural (commitment) contract. In other words, these viewpoints have well explained the components of love for the first few months and even until the decision to start a relationship, but did not identify and explain an element for the "love" as a changing, evolving and stable phenomenon. As stated by Badiou (2014), what has been introduced so far to people as love has only been "experience of romantic encounter", not the description of a perfect and lasting love. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine love, especially the love which leads to the family formation and identify its components in order to differentiate them from fervent and short-lived pseudo loves.

"Love as caring maturity" approach

Jose Ortega y Gasset (2012) expressed that today and after centuries of talking and theorizing about love, we clearly feel that the previous theories of love are not sufficient and expressive for the people of this time as the inner personality of human beings have become more complex and their attention to the subject of love has become more precise and meticulous during the recent years. In fact, today, love changed from a completely abstract, romantic, mystical or luxurious subject to the reality of daily life and a necessity for permanent relationships. Also,

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everyone considers themselves entitled to experience true love in the life and to improve their life quality by love.

In the “love as a caring maturity” approach, we do not seek to make the sudden and passionate loves meaningless, but to show that true love is an evolutionary phenomenon and it is the result of various psychic capacities maturation. Love may appear abruptly and passionately under the influence of unconscious schemas, but this is only part of love life, not all of it. The “Love Pyramid” approach does not seek to provide a novel pattern for teaching the healthy or rational love-making, but it introduces the truth of “Love” and believes that everything except this is not love but “Pseudo Love”. In this Pyramid, four components are defined for the “true love”. The “caring maturity” component has five minor aspects, all of which are always interconnected and interacting.

"Caring maturity" in love structure

Maturity element

The semantic multiplicity of “maturity” has made it somewhat difficult to define, but we basically attribute the term mature to the individual who has attained mental maturity and decision making power along with contemplation (Armstrong, 2003). Psychologically, a mature individual is capable of accepting himself before accepting another, identifying and responding to different emotions, in addition to being able to postpone some of his pleasures and endure reasonable degrees of failure (Das, 2014). Unlike the popular belief, “love” is not anti-logic and anti-rational, not even free from logic and reason to be subjected to rationality after its emergence, but “true love” is the product of rationality. Gurdjieff believes that human beings rarely achieve conscious “love” as they are not ready for such love from the beginning (Orage, 2007). Eric Fromm (2019) provides an introduction to mature “love” emergence and uses metaphors such as going to class, practicing the skills of love and the art of learning love, which all mean investing in personality maturity before entering the “love” field. The mature spends all his efforts to be realistic and avoid unrealistic daydreaming or idealism and he is aware of dream's "child ego state", like as being loved without any effort and without restraint. However, true “love” requires humility, mutual responsibility, realism and wisdom along with mutual emotions and concerns. In Fromm’s opinion (2019), all of these traits are achieved with a wise faith and a person who is low in wisdom will not benefit much from “love”.

What is meant by “maturity” in this approach is not merely rational action in the face of emotional situations, but, rather, a kind of “Caring Maturity” which takes the advantage of all the human mind’s capacities. Mature love has a cognitive aspect along with emotional and voluntary ones, meaning that in people with insufficient cognitive development or maturity, love does not arise at all, but they perceive their intense emotional states as love (Erber & Erber, 2011). With the intellectual maturity of the parties, the relationship shifts from a merely emotional focus to a caring love one. The presence of cognitive and analytical elements alongside the emotional and voluntary components of love resemble the “musical fugue”. It is capable of establishing the sentiment and thinking as a complex interplay of processes, similar

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to a musical fugue, and as one can never reduce or separate the sound of a heard music to one of its tunes; the cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects of “love” cannot be also separated either or “love” cannot be reduced to one of them.

In the “love as a caring maturity” approach, it is believed that five kinds of consciousness are necessary for the emergence and enduring of mature “love”. These five kinds of consciousness, although sequentially formed in principle, they are not necessarily so and sometimes the awareness of subsequent stages adds to the previous ones. Hence, the growth of each type of awareness is accomplished in relation to other types. Accordingly, the concept of “mature” in the recent approach is inspired by four areas of awareness, including:

- **Self-awareness:** A person experiencing the true “love” is first attempting to know his own features. This endeavor does not mean the full recognition of himself at a specific time, but rather a dynamic and permanent preparation for contemplating on the content of thinking, feelings and behavioral roots and more importantly on the readiness to refine and improve the personal attitude and behavior. Although it is impossible to completely override or dominate the effects of unconsciousness and old value and emotional recordings, there is no doubt that the greater the awareness and, if necessary, getting rid of these childhood recordings and the greater attention to the here-now facts, the discretion sense in choosing the partner and planning future living conditions is also broadened and fit the present demands.

- **Awareness of conscious selection:** Contrary to psychoanalytic belief in loving, mature “love” is not only an unconscious phenomenon, but a conscious choice. Although this choice limited by biological, social, environmental, cultural and even personality factors, freedom of choice is a key feature of “love” (Fehr, Sprecher and Underwood, 2009:7). “Love” refers to the essence of being and the underlying and invisible surface of the ethics and moods of the lover. Romantic selection is more realistic than conscious choices that are made only by rational meditation as well as contemplation. Solomon considers the selection element to be precisely the differentiation factor of the erotica from other loves (Translated by Naraghi, 2016:105).

- **Other awareness:** This aspect of maturity is related to knowing the true attributes of beloved, without granting him perfect or false values. The adult seeks throughout the relationship, and not only at its beginning, to discover the revealed and hidden values of the beloved. However, he feels no need to assign all the desirable attributes to the beloved, rather investigates his proportionality to the beloved in order to share different worlds in the family institution via respecting the differences and understanding the “otherness”.

- **Awareness of the evolving characteristic of love:** Understanding the evolving nature of “love” helps lovers to anticipate these stages and prepare the relationship for them and not to see these changes as a failure of “love”, but as a necessity for growth.

- **Relationship-based awareness:** Ultimately, these five awareness lead to the relationship-based awareness, which is the caring maturity. In this type of awareness, one does not merely use his knowledge for the sake of pleasure, but what is desirable to him is the health of the relationship and experience of good feeling for each member of the relationship. As a result, he

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tends from egocentrism and individualistic freedoms to the family-centered pleasures and collective growth. With such a mature growth, human expands his “self” to accept the other in his own world, but does not ignore itself and attains the “relational self” perception.

Caring element

Eric Fromm (2019) cites care and concern as one of the most important elements of the mature love. In his opinion, true love is a serious desire to live and nurture what we cherish, and though conscious love is very rare. This love in its growing state has certainly a caring element (*Gurdjieff* by Orage, 2007). In other words, the interest in the beloved is not merely due to the benefit to the lover, but a desire for the beloved to reach his own perfection. Caring is a state of engrossment and being in a state of intrinsic desire, concern and a sense of responsibility towards someone or something (Noddings, 1984) and contains elements such as amenability and concern feeling, desire, tendency for ideas and interests, sensitivity to the welfare and comfort of another person, acceptance and responsiveness (Noddings, 1998). The alignment of the caring element with love is to the extent that Virginia Held (2006) prefers to call caring ethics as “the ethics of love” or “relational *ethics*”. Given that the most important caring element is the interconnection, mortality and unilateral self-sacrifice make no sense in the love as caring maturity and love is complete when the parties reach this romantic capacity. Contrary to the initial imagination expressing that caring approaches are of merely emotionally ones, Mathew Lipman (1995) promoted the caring element from a purely affective and emotional psyche’s capacity - which means compassion - to a “cognitive, emotional and intentional” one via proposing the “Caring Thinking”, and was able to well explain the cognitive basis of caring along with its emotional components. Even the engrossment element in the caring attitude that is well manifested in love, is not merely an emotional sense of beloved’s values and needs, but rather it’s a conscious intimacy (Sharp, 2014). In fact, caring thinking is the bridge connecting between thought and emotion (Fisher, Aron & Brown, 2005). The concept of caring in this approach, includes the meaning of “caring with” in addition to conveying the meaning of “caring for”. On the other hand, in this approach, in addition to paying special attention to each other, the couple in love intelligently care about their love and its implications. Lipman (2003:271) describes the caring thinking as having five components, including valuative thinking, affective thinking, normative thinking, active thinking and empathetic thinking. Such thinking is most manifest in true love. Such thinking is well illustrated in the true love. Based on expert's opinion about "care" concept, it was found that in "love as caring maturity" theory this element has four features as follows:

1. Responsibility for relation and members who exist in
2. Ethical attention to relation and growing members up
3. Empathic understanding to members who exist in
4. Interactional conceptualization from "self"

Caring Maturity: The major difference between the “love as caring maturity” approach and other approaches are that “Caring Maturity” is the main element in true love. Importance of Caring Maturity can’t be reduced to a recommendation or attachment to love. It is a real

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component which without it whatever is experienced is “pseudo love”. Of course, many love scholars have already argued that rationality and intellectual maturity are necessary for romantic love decisions, but there are some drawbacks to these views. Although, these views emphasize the importance of thinking and knowledge in choosing a love partner, but they generally regard reason and love as two separate and opposite elements which can’t be mixed, such as water and oil. Even they believe that love spoils the wisdom and if it steps into a life, it kills wisdom and leaves no room for reason (Ibrahim Dinani, 2013). They also believe that love is only good to be mentioned in myths and poems, and for getting married we only need logic and reason; a suggestion that modern human doesn’t readily accept.

Another objection to some of these views is the excessive and extreme role for reason to the extent that love should always come after reason. So, in these approaches one’s feelings and emotions are inferior to reason and logic, so much that the choices may fall entirely into the hands of logic which in that case the true love with its all mental and spectral capacities will not form (Fromm, 2019). In addition, the kind of maturity and consciousness which commonly referred to in “marriage love” approaches, in truth is a rational consciousness and not a caring one. That is why even those who have made rational choices without considering their feelings, are unhappy with their lives and are constantly searching for their love. Given the most important principle of “ethics of care” which is to create, maintain and strengthen a relationship (Gilligan, 1982), “Caring Maturity” is also a kind of awareness based on these three elements which can guarantee a love in long term relationships.

Unfortunately, the picture of love that has been presented to individuals and society over recent years is simply a fleeting excitement and emotion. That picture lacks the elements of knowledge and thought (Fromm, 2019), while “thinking” which differentiates humans from other creatures certainly plays a pivotal role in the health of “love” as a human phenomenon. Therefore, the meaning of “true love” which is different than animal instincts for reproduction, is derived from mature thinking and cognition that must be nurtured before the emergence of the emotions of love in the individual.

The “Caring Maturity” in the “Love Pyramid” can manifest itself only in a mature human being described by Berne (1975/2015). In this theory, the mature people at any given time utilizes collected information and experiences from his here & now surrounding, uses his "child ego state" records (needs, emotions, and personal desires) and his "parent ego state" records (value system, ethical system, and norms) for analyzing the situations and making final decision. This part of the ego state of a human manages emotions and expresses them properly by first getting information from inside and outside sources and then processing them.

A mature human while receiving information from other personalities, doesn’t subject himself to the stories made up by the child and his attachment patterns. Also, he neither avoids the infused external values nor seeks refuge in pure reason. He relies on instantaneous information and reliable sources to live entirety of his being. Defining the mature part of the character indicates that this part doesn’t act merely based on logical information. It is a rationality which is aware of the needs, the rights of human, and his orientation. This rationality also values the

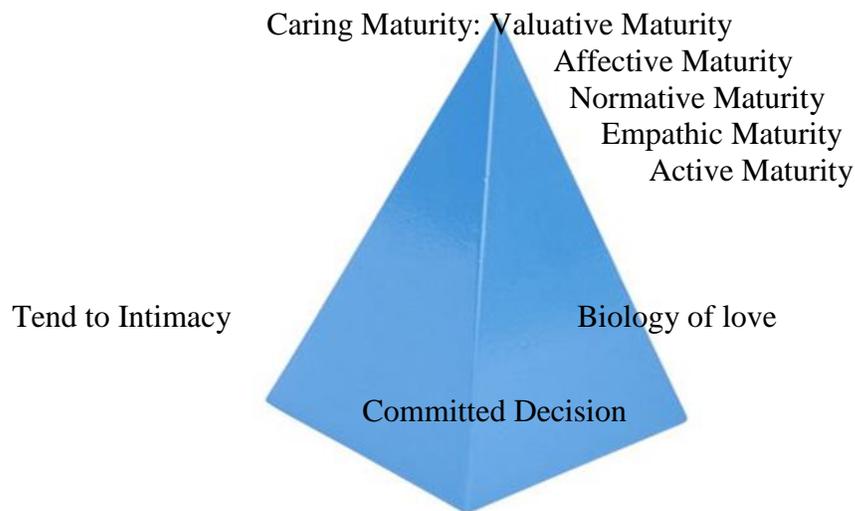
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ideas, norms, and emotions. In fact, when we speak about an interactive, passionate and delicate phenomenon such as love, the personality of “mature man” cannot simply consist of just logic and rationality. It needs an emotional element too. This element which is element of care is sensitive to life’s choices and essential in awakening of humanism along with self-interest in the human being. Below, we will describe the components of caring thinking in the concept of love.



Valuative Maturity or Awareness based on Appreciat: Some approaches have defined love as the process of discovering or giving value to the beloved (Ortega y Gasset, 2012; 32). This definition has different aspects. On the one hand, Velleman claims that love is a response to the dignity of persons, and as such it is the dignity of the object of our love that justifies that love (Helm, 2015); And the other hand, this awareness is based on understanding of the hierarchies of one’s own and the other’s values, and tend to their similarities and differences. At this stage, the “mature adult” understands the impossibility of aggregating all values into one person. He never makes a mistake by applying universal and absolute values to another person and bursting this bubble after marriage. For the “mature adult” love is a kind of a “truth” which is formed by understanding the values of the both sides. This “truth” is the understanding of the “otherness” with respect to differences (Badiou, 2014). On the other hand, people with valuative thinking are fully aware of the importance of personal values in the semantic orientation of life. Therefore, they are attracted to those with same perspective. In fact, throughout the relationship, even as romantic focusing decreases (e.g., dopamine declines), (s)he is always able to understand the values of self, his lover, and their romantic relationship.

Affective Maturity or Awareness of Emotions: Many scholars believe love is a kind of “evaluative-cum-motivational response to an object”. So, in love, we “cherish” the person for having “a particular complex of instantiated qualities” that is “open-ended” so that we can continue to love the person even as she changes over time (Helm, 2015). This feeling is a unique one to human being, and the greatest motivator of mankind (Arber & Arber, 2011). The

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distinctiveness of a romantic relation to other kinds of relations is influenced by inattentive schemas and desires of the “child ego state”, which has a strong desire for intimacy and closeness to lost beloved during infancy (Mother) (Berne, 2015; Balby, 1982). This component is based on the love story or life script which was devised in the context of life in infancy, and re-created in adulthood (Harris, 2004). But in the model of “love as caring maturity”, this component does not operate in a state of unconsciousness or act under irrational decisions of just our “child ego state”. Rather, affective maturity helps the person in love to think utterly about his interests and flair of affection and express it easily and freely. By taking advantage of this healthy emotional exchange, the lover makes the relationship warm and enchanting.

Normative Maturity or Awareness of Normes: Awareness of norms is one the most major aspects of “marriage love” over other forms of love. Normative thinking is a reflection on the gap between what one likes or values, and what should be better to love and cherish for the benefit of the relationship and all members of a community like as family. This is the exact ethical thinking which promotes public interests over individual interest (Lipman, 2003; Tan et al. 2011). One of the causes of love breakdowns in long term relationships, particularly after marriage, is the absence of normative thinking in a romantic relationship as a result of unrealistic expectations of both sides about love (Fehr, 1988). Normative thinking helps one to understand the difference between reality and ideal imagination (Gregory, 2008). In long term romantic relationships, normative maturity helps couples to dissociate and depart from the ideal imaginations and accept the different stages of love in their life course. This aspect of maturity helps family members to avoid of being selfish and extend their "pure self" to "big self" which consider others. It also helps both to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each other as humans and let them feel and experience a love based on reality.

Active Maturity or Awareness of possibilities: Ortega y Gasset (2012) believes that the true meaning of love is the activation of emotions and even thoughts of the lover towards the beloved. Active thinking is one of the key elements of caring thinking. The caring mature person knows well that there are many things that he can do, in any situation, for what one likes or cares about to change unpleasant situations. Such a person has a plan in mind not only to create but also to maintain, consolidate and enhance those valuable things (Gregory, 2008). Thinking based on practical possibilities creates a sense of responsibility in the lover and considers accepting responsibility as the key elements of a romantic relationship (Fromm, 2019). This feeling in immature love diminishes as rapidly as it was initially developed so that the couple looks for a way out of their shared responsibility. However, mature lovers consider planning and acting to enrich their relationship as an enjoyment and pleasure. Voluntary acceptance of responsibility not only leads to a sense of accomplishment of another person’s growth and perfection but also leads to a sense of commitment to one’s ideals in relation to the other. This commitment to the ideals of a romantic relation is a distinctive feature of a love based on caring maturity to the extent that some think of caring thinking as a kind of “Committed thinking” (Sprod, 2001).

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Emphatic Maturity or Awareness based on empathy: Bergman (2004) believes empathy, acceptance, and take care to another person's feeling leads to engrossment. Since part of a lover's consciousness and attention is always focused on understanding of the other's thinking and feeling, therefore there will be a motivational shift, so long as the other's needs and motivations become part of the individual's own needs and motivations. Such consciousness validates and softens the judgments in a challenging and fraught misunderstanding's couple relationship. Fromm (2019) regards mutual respect as an essential element of mature love which in its absence, it may turn the sense of responsibility into a sense of control and possession. Respect is a mature and affective element of empathy that by recognizing the unique individuality of the other person, it gives the ability to "other understanding". This understanding and awareness provide the opportunity for growth and development in a loving relationship. Therefore, when there is respect, there is no exploitation.

The relationship between Caring Maturity and Intimacy: Caring thinking is a kind of "intentional" thinking. The phenomenological meaning of the word "caring" means that someone who values or cares for something is usually consciously and deliberately focused on it (Sharp, 2014). So the basic assumption about love as caring maturity is that even if the first romantic experience is inspired by unconscious decisions and the desire for intimacy and attachment to the beloved follows the patterns of early childhood, but for permanent intimacy, the mature person has intelligent criteria that influence early patterns. True and lasting love is a conscious and intentional process. It needs deep emotional thinking about causes and its consequences by the adult conscious person. Steiner (2009) with the help of three-capacity classification of the brain explains that the neocortical brain (thinking part) on one hand is always under influence of the limbic brain (emotion) and reptilian (will); and in other hand, this part of brain always controls the motivations and activities of the other two parts. The amount of this control is so much that as one becomes more educated, the effect of the reptilian and limbic parts on the neocortical brain decreases and the control of the subconscious feelings and instinctive emotions over the human mind becomes less possible. The evolution of neocortical sector in modern human has improved both the advent of romantic emotions and its continuity. So, the desire and interest to the other can no longer be regarded as an instinctive feeling with no cognitive elements.

The relationship of Caring Maturity with the biology of love: The biology of love is influenced by caring maturity in two ways. First, it is triggered by consciousness and second it is fueled and sustained by consciousness. Biologically, although in a love relationship, the reward and temptation parts of brain are first involved, but prefrontal cortex plays a major role in gathering information for this process. By putting different information together, prefrontal cortex maps the strategy of continuing communication and then monitors the process of love. In the previous approaches this process was reduced to sexual excitement only. But in the love pyramid approach, while respecting sexuality, neurochemical changes and brain structures are also addressed in the love experiences. Fortunately, the biological function of love in humans, unlike that in romantic literatures, is not beyond mature controlling. The structure of human brain has evolved such that is capable of consciously controlling the neurotic impulses of love.

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According to Fisher (2014) even romantic love (with its elements of passion and intimacy and all external manifestations of emotion) is not merely a feeling but a thought. The separation of a phenomenon such as love from one of its elements which is sexual desire is evident even in the brain structure so that each of these sexual tendencies activates different parts of the brain. Sexual desire is largely a product of sensory experiences, particularly visual sense. Whereas love is a more abstract reflection of emotions and it is a product of thinking about the beloved (Blumont, Casiopou, and Casiopou, 2014). Even Sternberg emphasized higher levels of needs in moderating and controlling this instinctive component of love. Despite of his emphasis on sexuality as a central factor of passion in the love triangle, he stresses that the variety of needs (such as self-actualization and self-esteem for dominating or succumbing to instincts) can greatly influence this component (Sternberg, 1986; 119).

The relationship of Caring Maturity with Commitment Decision: The Commitment Decision in this model is a decision based on caring maturity. This component gets information from various internal sources (understanding value, interest, and respecting the norms) to external sources (cultural, social, family, and in general, all ethical and moral values). In the love triangle approach, the involvement of cognitive function in this component of love (including decision making about the relationship and commitment to it) is the most. But in the pyramid of love approach, the committed decision, is the first and the most important element. The committed decision is a commitment to the goals and objectives which are reached by the meaning of life and is effective in choosing the loving partner and lifestyle. Second element of the committed decision is based on the belief in unity of lover and a comprehensive and realistic “mature” assessment. In fact, the committed decision, affected by the “mature” evaluator and data processor, is not merely submissive to the stereotypical part of the personality of “parent” but adheres to the values that have always been important to the individual. This component can be seen in choosing dissenting decisions, taking communal interest instead of personal benefit, emphasizing on communication values, accepting responsibility for oneself and others, the desire to grow and progress along with the beloved, respecting one’s and the lover’s personal and cultural values, and etc.

The interaction of all three components with Caring Maturity: The function of the “adult” component has thus far been well characterized as the observer and argumentative informer for the other three components. Yet the “adult” component of love has another function in this model. It does not unilaterally oversee the other components or manage them. The link between all the components of a true love is interactive and reciprocal, meaning that the adult component is constantly informed by the other three parts. Although there is an interaction between all the components, but some elements of love are probably more closely related to components of Caring Maturity. For example, understanding the sexual needs and individual communication patters alongside normative maturity can make a marriage desirable and strong. Therefore, while this kind of love monitors the sexual instinct, it owes an important part of the attraction and its continuity to this instinct. The strongest relationship is between intimacy and empathy. As the emotional literacy and the power of understanding of the lover increases, the

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intimacy will increase too. And regarding the decision to commit, the most interaction is between the components of value maturity and practical maturity.

Conclusion

In recent years, many scholars have studied and come up with plans and programs for marriage and family institutions in Iran. But unfortunately, some non-native approaches neither made the Iranian family better off, nor has improved the family and marriage institutes. There is a serious threat. Promoting the criterion of love for marriage and the endurance of family to current generation, along with presenting the defective patterns of romantic relationships, lead us to a new approach towards love proportionate with the wisdom age and the Iranian native culture. The love pyramid model and the caring maturity (with its five sub-component of awareness of life values, emotions, norms, empathic understanding and practical possibilities) at its top is nothing but the gaining of consciousness, evaluating information, and reinforcing rational thoughts while maintaining, reinforcing, and improving of a romantic relationship. This approach can explain this motivating human force (often described as emotional, sexual, unintentional, and even illogical) in its true form which has epistemic, emotional, and voluntary basis. In fact, “love as caring maturity” is an internal polylogue conversation between the various mental components. In this definition, “love” is a win-win relationship between passion and sexual desire with intrinsic liking for intimacy and understanding of the consequences of entering a lasting love affair. What is important in the pyramid of love is that if it lacks any of four components, it is no longer can be called “love” but rather is an experience of the first and immaturely encounter of love which has not yet entered its evolutionary course. But this experience may be the immature excitement based on the mistaken belief of “passionate love” that has been betraying true, genuine, and healthy love for many years.

Undoubtedly, the kind of love that some scholars and particularly poets and writers refer to as pure love, is a love which lacks consciousness, is not nurtured over time, and eventually disappears quickly. By any means, it seems today’s human after tasting this elixir of life does not like to abandon this perception for the sake of marriage and preservation of family. Therefore, if we accept this criterion for current generation for beginning a relationship and maintaining it for a long time, we must also cultivate individual abilities and family contexts for the nourishment of an adult love with awareness and care. And of course, cultivating a caring maturity attitude should start at home and be taught at educational institutions too.

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