Exploring the important component of love in marriage relationship

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ABSTRACT: Love has always been a hot topic for discussions. Every day in the social life we could see how couples expressing love. Robert Sternberg (as cited in Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009) formulated that love has three components. Intimacy involves the desire to give affection and attention. Passion, in which element of physical attractiveness drives the emergence of strong emotions in love. Commitment includes decisions to love and desires to live together with other people. This study aims to explore the components of love that encourages married couples in maintaining their marriage relationship. Participants were 26 Indonesian (13 male, 13 female) who have been married for more than ten years. It is a form of qualitative research, which used interview method to obtain data. Results showed that commitment becomes the main component (69%). Religious teachings about marriage and the presence of children made the subjects committed to maintain their marriage relationship. Intimacy becomes the second component (31%). It is carried out with openness, honesty, trust, communication, and understanding. The result of this research may be influenced by the eastern culture, in which participants possessed from their home country. This is contrary to research in western countries that showed romantic love is more common (Matsumoto, 2004). Romantic love is a kind of love where commitment is precisely to be less important than the other components.
Key words: love, Sternberg, marriage

Introduction

Love has always been a hot topic for discussions. Every day in the social life we could see how couples expressing love. Popular songs mostly talk about love. The topic of love does not recognize boundaries of time and place. We would find it at anytime and anywhere. Even love can be an inspiration for media to reveal hot news for the society. In Indonesia, almost every day television's program exposes rumor about the celebrity love life.

Not only in daily life, discussions about love has become a popular topic in scientific research, and also become one of the studies in social psychology. There is no one accurate definition of love and several theorists describe love in different ways. Gibran (2000) said that love is the most significant and universal themes in human life; a natural essence in human beings without boundary of place and time. Hatfield (in Baron & Byrne, 2003) describes love as the affection we feel towards people who are very closely related to our lives. This love is called companionate love. Love is a force without limit, which does not distinguish between culture, religion, race, ethnicity, and ideology. Hatfield also expressed about the passionate love, a love that is based on intense emotional reactions and often unrealistic for others. Lee (in Dicke, 1997) suggests theory outlines six love styles. Based on this theory, love is categorized into six; eros is passionate love; ludus is game-playing love; storge is friendship love; pragma is practical love; mania is obsessive love; and agape is selfless love. Fromm (in Friedman & Schustack, 2006) states that love is an art, not just a state of natural or artificial phenomenon that has no meaning. It requires knowledge, effort and experience. Maslow (in Friedman & Schustack, 2006) points out that love is included in one's hierarchy of needs. It is the need for a sense of ownership that includes a deep psychological connection with others.

Robert Sternberg (as cited in Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009) formulated that love has three components. Sternberg gives a comprehensive theory about love in various relationships with formulating the concept of love through a love triangle model (Baron & Byrne, 2003; Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009). This concept is known and depicted as triangular model of love (see Figure 1) that includes three basic components namely:

1. Intimacy; it involves the desire to give affection and attention; it also includes feeling near, associated, bound in a relationship, admiration to partner. Openness and intimate communication are important parts of a relationship.
2. Passion; it contains impulse that causes strong emotions in a loving relationship. This component is based on the romance, physical attraction, and sexuality. Mendatu (2009) stated that passion focused on the intense feelings that arise from physical and sexual attraction.
3. Commitment; it is a cognitive factor of love; it involves the short-term decision to love someone and long-term decision to maintain a relationship.

The three components above must be balanced and equally strong in order to achieve a satisfactory and ever-lasting love relationship, which is called ideal love (Baron, & Byrne, 2003). Furthermore, Sternberg describes the three components of love into seven different types of love, depending on the presence of each of these components (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009). These kinds of love are as follows:

1. Liking is intimacy alone, without passion or commitment.
2. Infatuation is passion alone, without intimacy or commitment.
3. Empty love is commitment alone, without intimacy or passion.
4. Romantic love is a combination of intimacy and passion, but without commitment.
5. Companionate love is a combination of intimacy and commitment, but without passion.
6. Fatuous love is a combination of passion and commitment, but without intimacy.
7. Consummate love is when all three aspects are present.

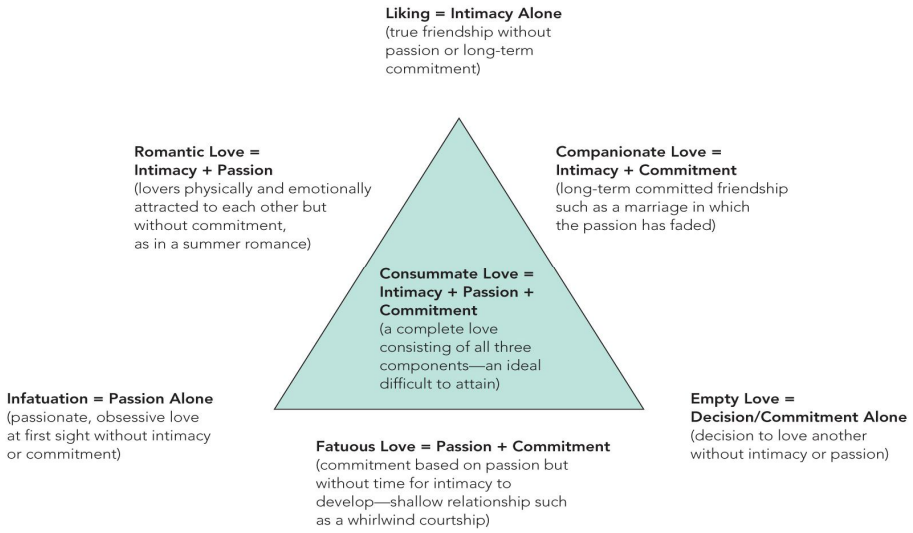

Figure 1. Stenberg's triangular model of love

Sternberg (1988) stated that intimacy and commitment was relatively stable in a close relationship, while passion tends to be relatively unstable and could have unpredictable fluctuation. In a short-term romantic relationship, passion tends to have an important role. In contrast, intimacy and commitment play a greater role than passion in a long-term romantic relationship. Acker and Davis (as cited in Dicke, 1997) found that commitment increases as the stage of the relationship advances. This may seem to be common sense, but Acker and Davis claimed that the responses to items in the commitment section of the STLS, the survey that they used, could yield high scores in most relationship stages. Passion tends to be high in the beginning of a relationship, and then it plateaus and declines, especially in women, as the relationship growth. Scores on intimacy were inconsistent depending on the length of relationship, but there was an indication of an increase as the relationship became more serious.

This study aims to explore the components of love that encourages married couples in maintaining their marriage relationship. Sternberg's triangular model of love became the basis of this research. This theory was chosen because it gives a comprehensive explanation about love in various relationships (Baron & Byrne, 2003; Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009, Saragih, 2009).

Methods

Participants

Participants were 26 Indonesian (13 male, 13 female) who have been married for more than ten years. Purposive sampling technique is used in this study. It is a kind of non-probability sampling with the purpose is to obtain a sample of people who meet some predetermined criterion (Cozby, 2005). The criterion used in this research is that the participants are married couple with the age of marriage is at least ten years.

Data Collecting

This research is a form of qualitative research, which used interview method to gather data. Qualitative research emphasizes collecting in-depth information on a relatively few individuals or within a very limited setting (Cozby, 2005). The main question posed to participants is what makes them maintain their marriage so far. However, other questions are raised in order to obtain deeper information. These questions are about the criteria for an ideal partner, married goals, the first impression of the partner, and things that make the participants attracted to their partner.

Procedures

The research was conducted using individual interviews by visiting the respondents in an agreed place. The researchers then asking questions in accordance to the points that have been prepared in the interview guide. At first, researchers made contact with the potential participants to obtain information about their marriage age. After finding suitable participants, researchers asked their willingness to be the respondent and determined the schedule of interview. At the initial meeting of the interviews, the researchers established rapport with the participants by introducing themselves and vice versa. Then, the researchers began to ask questions related to the purpose of research. The interview was conducted informally, mostly in participants' house. It was lasted approximately one hour for each participant.

Data Analyses

The conclusions of qualitative research are based on interpretations drawn by the investigator (Cozby, 2005). In this research, the interpretation is based on the interview transcripts. Coding then is done to focus on the potential meanings of the data. Qualitative coding entails three basic procedures: noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena, and analyzing those phenomena in order to find comonalities, differences, patterns, and structures (Esterberg, 2002). After the coding process, basic themes are then developed. The themes are then compared with the concept of Stenberg's triangular model of love to get the conclusion of the research.

Results

Results showed that 69% of the interview's coding indicates the participants regard the commitment as the major component in their marriage. It is found that the commitment to

marriage, the desire to live together, family, the presence of children, and religious teachings about marriage made the participants committed to maintain their marriage relationship. Intimacy becomes the second component (31%). Participants showed intimacy in several expressions such as openness, honesty, trust, communication, and understanding. Results also showed the absence of participants who explained passion as a component that encourages them to maintain their marriage. The result of the coding can be seen more in table 1.

Table 1. Result of the interview's coding

No.	Stenberg's triangular model of love	Coding of interview transcript	Percentage of the participants
1.	**Commitment**: cognitive factor of love; it involves the short-term decision to love someone and long-term decision to maintain a relationship.	- Marriage commitment - Religious teaching about marriage - The presence of children - The desire to live together until death - Family that have been built over years	69 %
2.	**Intimacy**: the desire to give affection and attention; feeling near, associated, bound in a relationship, admiration to partner, openness, intimate communication.	- The match with partner - Being happy with partner - Mutual trust - Openness - Honesty - Responsibility - A good communication - Love - Mutual understanding - Protection of the partner	31 %
3.	**Passion**: the impulse that causes strong emotions in a loving relationship; romance, physical attraction, and sexuality.	-	0 %

Discussion

Different from prior research, commitment is found as the main component of the marriage relationship in this research. This could be influenced by the values of eastern culture where the participants live in. People in collectivist cultures usually establish intimate and long-term relationships, in contrast to people in individualist cultures usually establish non-intimate and short-term relationships (Triandis & Suh, 2002). Moreover, passionate love is highly emphasized in individualistic cultures, whereas in the collectivistic cultures where strong kinship networks and extended-family ties exist, passionate are often viewed as negative because they may disrupt the tradition of family (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Besides, in western culture, romantic love is more common. Romantic love is a kind of love where commitment is precisely to be less important than the other components. The findings of Simmons, Vom Kolke, and Shimizu (in Matsumoto, 2004) pointed out that romantic love was valued more in the United States and Germany than in Japan. These researchers explained this cultural divergence by suggesting that romantic love is more highly valued in less traditional cultures with lack of extended family ties, and less valued in cultures where kinship networks influence and reinforce the relationship between marriage partners.

The research findings showed that religion has become one of the drivers of commitment to marriage. This could be due to the participants who came from Indonesia, where religion teachings have a strong influence in their life. In other words, religion plays an important role in determining the perspective, principles, and behaviors in daily life (Suryani, 2004). Christians holds that marriage is only once in a lifetime. It is characterized by the vow of marriage, which is the expression of a long life commitment (Suryani, 2004). Formm (as cited in Harper, 2010) said that marriage is a sacramental institution in which two individuals make a covenantal agreement before their God and religious community to love and serve each other "till death does them part". According to the teachings of Buddhism, marriage is a bond between a man as husband and a woman as wife which is based on love in order to form a family (household) that is blessed by *Sang Hyang Adi Buddha* (Hadikusuma, 1990).

The presence of the children also made the participant committed to their marriage. This is in line with the results of the research conducted by the Suryani (2004) concerning the relationship between man and woman in marriage. The results showed that one of the reasons why respondents maintain their marriages is the promised to God to be responsible towards their children. Thus, the responsibility of caring for the children is the responsibility of parents to God (Krisetya, 2010). In addition, children are also considered as a grace in a family. The presence of children can unite parents who may have the desire to divorce (AnneAhira.com, n.d).

Another finding in the study is that intimacy becomes the second component in marriage relationship. This is supported by Baron and Byrne (2003) who said that for men and women, marital satisfaction related to some behavior which reveals companionate love as sharing activities, exchange ideas, laugh, and work together. They explained that companionate love is a combination of intimacy and commitment. Furthermore, it is believed as the key ingredient in a happy marriage.

It is interesting to find that participants did not reveal passion as an element that makes their marriage survive in this study. It is believed by Indonesian people, especially in Javanese culture that passion regarded as a disruptive behavior which inevitably causing marital disharmony; however the control over passions marks a customary ideal of manhood and a refined character (Forshee, 2006). Makassarese associate passion with illness and treatment so is considered essential (Jankowiak, n.d). This is supported by Forshee (2006) who said that couples in Indonesia do not touch or sit close together and almost never show affection when out in public. This is quite contrary to studies conducted with respondents in a western cultural background. Matsumoto (2004) found that people surveyed in the United States prefer physically attractive partners in romantic relationship.

Results also showed the absence of subjects who explained physical attractiveness as a component that encourages them to maintain their marriage. However, most of the subjects said that physical attractiveness is one of the causes of attraction in the first meeting with their partner. This is confirmed by the findings of Sangrador and Yela (as cited in Baron & Byrne, 2003), which showed that physical attractiveness, which is part of the passion, is an important part in the early stages of a relationship. However, passionate love tends to decline during the duration of marriage (Baron and Byrne, 2003).

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