

## COUNSELLOR'S ASSESSMENT OF LOVE DEVELOPMENT IN MATE SELECTION AND MARRIAGE

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### Abstract

This article offers a typology for viewing love as the development of an interpersonal relationship in five stages. As a typology the author believes it has implications for both counselling and teaching purposes. In teaching, both clarity and precision can be gained by explicit conceptualization of love, while in counselling greater understanding and awareness may be generated through mutual discussion with couples who are in various stages in their love development. Such development may be viewed during mate selection or marriage in its many stages.

### Résumé

Cet article présente une typologie afin de considérer l'amour comme le développement d'une relation interpersonnelle en cinq étapes. En tant que typologie, l'auteur soutient qu'elle est pertinente tant pour fins de consultation que d'enseignement. Pour l'enseignement, on peut obtenir clareté et précision par une conceptualisation explicite de l'amour. Pour la consultation, le couple ayant atteint une certaine étape dans leur amour, peut par ses échanges, obtenir une compréhension et une prise de conscience plus vives. On peut considérer un tel développement lors du choix d'un conjoint ou à n'importe quelle étape du mariage.

### SELECTED LITERATURE ON LOVE

Romantic love, according to Greenfield (1965), serves a vital function since it provides the necessary rationale for the formation of new nuclear families in North American society. The importance of love, as a necessary condition to the couple's decision to marry, is strengthened and bolstered both by parental concern and the couple, itself, who feels it definitely must be in love before making such a final commitment. Since love is so important, particularly in the mate selection process, it would be worthwhile to note how certain writers have viewed love from different perspectives.

Although there is a considerable body of literature on love, only a relatively few authors will be cited as needed (Beigel, 1951; Dean, 1962; Duvall, 1962; Fromm, 1956; Goode, 1959; Greenfield, 1965; Mackey, 1969; May, 1967). What is most striking from reviewing this literature is the range of meanings and the various purposes that each author has in mind when writing about love. For example, Goode (1959) discusses love as a potentially disruptive force to stratification and lineage patterns in various social structures. At the same time, another writer sees love as a basis "to satisfy man's most urgent psychological needs" (Beigel, 1951, p. 333). And still, another defines love "as a delight in the presence of the other person and an affirming of

his value and development as much as one's own" (May, 1967, p. 206). Quotes such as these could be cited from each writer with an excellent probability that the end result would produce considerable confusion for the reader. What is needed is some clarity in conceptualization of love. Only a few writers have extended the concept of love to include it as a part or an aspect of relationship development. Rather than viewing love as an intrapersonal event, this writer extends this concept to include the other person as part of this complex process. Thus, the purpose of this article is to view love within a relationship context.

### LOVE AS RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

To begin, this writer conceptualizes love as residing within an interpersonal relationship. Love is reciprocated, it is shared, it is a mutual affair. When a person states he or she loves another without relationship content, this implies, to the writer, simply an attitude of preference for that significant other. For example, a brief contact with someone may lead us to imagine that we love her or him. However, as that preference leads to meaningful interaction and the significant other comes to feel toward this person in a similar way, the relationship comes to stand for more than the two persons so involved. That is, the relationship provides the necessary meaning that a love preference originally lacked. There is now sub-

stance where formerly there was only feeling toward this person. This subtle transformation to a relationship-based-love provides a dynamic which until then was lacking. The interpersonal relationship, then, gives the term "love" its deeper meaning as a growing and developing love. Thus, to say that one's love has grown over the years is to imply that the relationship has grown over the years.

By definition, then, love and relationship become synonymous terms. No relationship, no love! Where there is a superficial relationship, there is a superficial love. A deep love, a deep relationship, and so it goes! By using this definition of love, one is not restricted only to trying to understand just heterosexual relationships (Reiss, 1960). Apparently, Mackey (1969), another writer on love, was also concerned with a broad definition of love when he cited Dr. Johnson's definition as: "A growing interest in, appreciation of, and responsibility for another person" (p. 122). To suggest the utility of this broad definition, Mackey (1969) states: "Within this definition one can love his neighbor, and his neighbor's wife, without being accused of homosexuality or adultery," (p. 122).

To hold such a broad definition of love as the development of a relationship, frees both counsellor and teacher to consider the socio-psychology of relationships generally and the principles that govern them (Adams, 1972).

When couples seek counselling or when students enroll in a marriage course they very frequently wish to discuss love as if it were a thing separate from a relationship. In accordance with this idea, each person typically tends to view his or her love in highly personalized terms. For example, a male may admit how difficult he finds it to express his particular brand of love with his partner usually agreeing on that note. He may then conclude that if he can't really express his love, how then can he be in love? While couples may get bogged down with such typical love problems, they usually have no difficulty revealing certain aspects about their relationship. For instance, they can easily discuss factors important to their relationship, the various experiences they have shared, as well as how they feel about each other now as compared to when they first met. If they can discuss their relationship in this manner then they are well on the way toward viewing love as a joint effort as seen through the development of their unique relationship.

In summary, a way toward helping couples or students clarify the concept love seems to be aided through understanding the development of an interpersonal relationship. Unlike love, per se, which usually has such a special, if not vague meaning for the couple, relationships can be more easily discussed as both people are involved. At

the same time, it furnishes a basis from which their own definition of love can be related. This approach is easily accepted by most couples since the counsellor or teacher need not challenge, modify, or suggest a better definition of love for them.

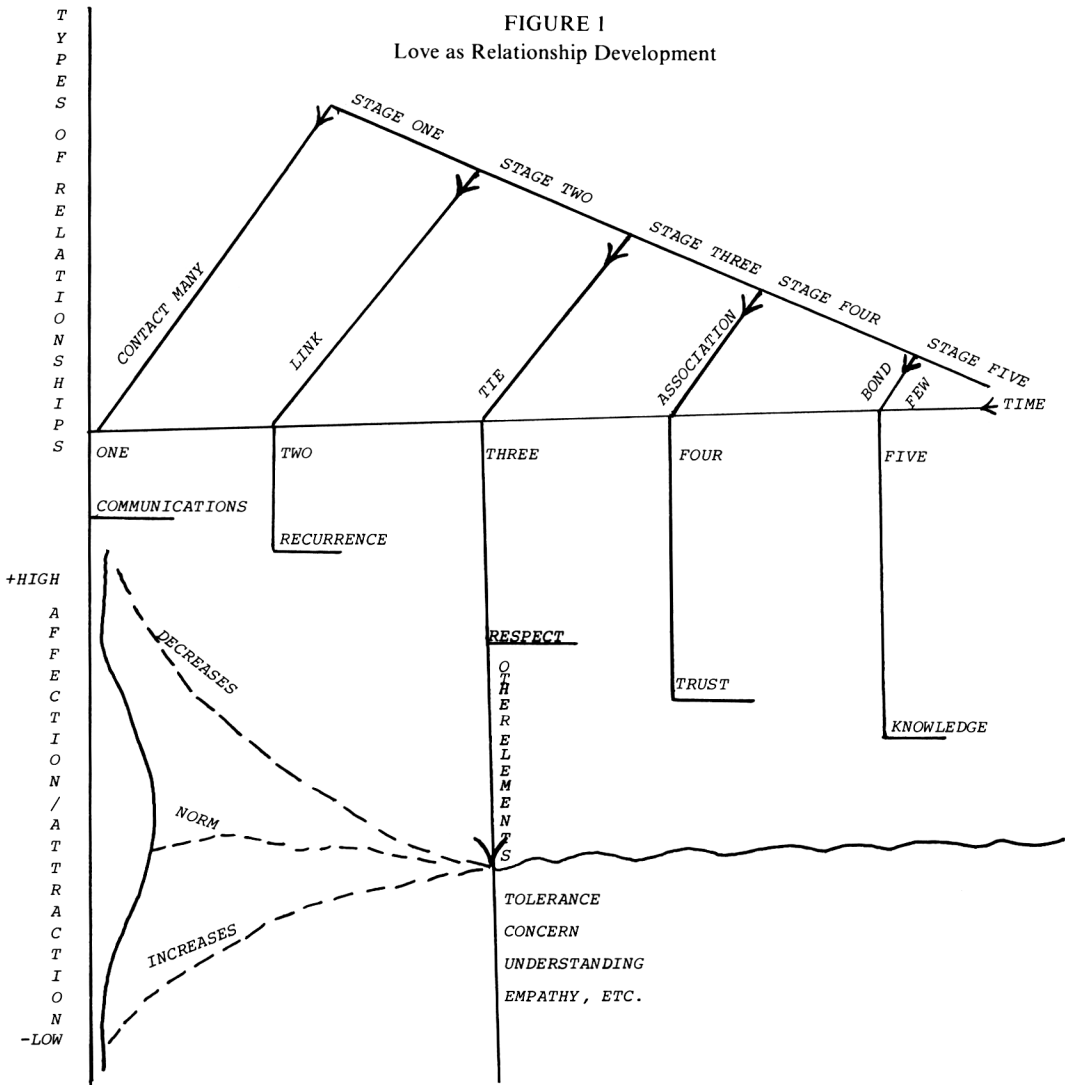
#### THEORIES OF LOVE AS RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

To conceptualize love as the development of a relationship is not new since Reiss (1960), Bolton (1961), and Borland (1975) have moved in this direction with their theories. Reiss (1960), with his Wheel Theory, views the development of the heterosexual love relationship as having certain sociologic antecedents as explanatory variables of that love. In this way he removes the personalized and mysterious notions people usually hold about love. Borland (1975), while maintaining Reiss' (1960) basic theory, adds other ideas such as depth and strength of relationship. Her elaboration on this theory suggests that there are other important key concepts necessary, such as trust and respect, in her conceptualization of love development. Bolton's (1961) analysis, while based on mate selection, is another attempt to view relationship development as love development. For example, he states that relationships may stem from processes involving such things as identity clarification, personality meshing or from relationship factors, themselves. Bolton (1961) also adds the notion of "escalators" as factors which can explain how relationships grow. The reader is referred to all of these theories as excellent background to this article.

In contrast to Bolton (1961), Borland (1975) and Reiss (1960), others have viewed mate selection (love relationships) in terms of value consensus (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962), need complementarity (Winch, 1967) or even ego deficiency (Martinson, 1955). None of these latter approaches would appear very helpful to either the counsellor or teacher because of the relatively immutable factors dealt with. Moreover, a relationship is treated, for the most part, as basically static with less emphasis being placed on relationship development. In contrast to these various theories and concepts, this writer has developed a love typology which identifies five stages with significant *growth elements* in love development. Hopefully, this may aid both counsellor and teacher in their work with couples whether married or selecting a mate.

#### LOVE TYPOLOGY

The following love (relationships) typology has been developed as a way of viewing and discussing love within the context of the development of an interpersonal relationship. There is in this model, (see Figure 1), a time base with five stages



indicating progress in a couple's relationship development. Each stage of development has a particular factor signifying an important growth element. These elements were selected for this typology from counselling experience as well as from the relevant literature (see Borland, 1975). Along with the time base, and the five stages, there is a vertical line extending below the typology indicating the level of affection or attraction that occurs when a couple first meets, and how that affection has altered as the relationship has progressed. First, the five stages will be discussed while the affectional aspect will be considered at the end of the article.

*Stage One: Contact (strangers)*

This writer assumes that in urban society the most commonly experienced types of

relationships are secondary rather than primary. For example, contact with bus drivers, bankers, grocery clerks, to name a few, represents secondary relationships which most urbanites frequently experience. Within this kind of environment, most eligible couples probably first meet as strangers and would, therefore, have to rely on a third party for such contact. In other cases they may meet at a dance, a party or simply be picked up, such as in a bar. Thus, the starting point for two people would most likely begin as a simple *contact-type relationship*.

The essential factor needed for the relationship to minimally function would be adequate communications. If their communications were meaningful, they would probably wish to see each other again. This communication factor would be similar to Reiss' (1960) idea of rapport in his stage

one of his Wheel Theory. Good communications or rapport would include things like shared values, similar socio-economic class, and perhaps same educational level.

#### *Stage Two: Link* (acquaintances)

If communications have been successful and the couple begin dating, they automatically move from a contact-type relationship to a *link-type relationship*. A link-type relationship, while stronger than a contact-type only needs occasional meetings or recurrence to maintain it at that level. During Stage Two, both male and female stereotypes are slowly replaced by the unique personalities of the two people. Whether the couple continues to progress toward the third stage depends upon not only how often they see each other but on what transpires during their time together.

Bolton's concept of "involvement escalator" would seem to be an important explanatory variable as to why the couple may continue to develop and progress in their relationship. One such escalator might be called involvement as a by-product of the frequency of their contacts. That is, numerous built-in expectations begin to arise simply from the interchange that the couple make within the relationship.

During this second stage and the succeeding ones the relationship could dissolve as two people reveal their unique characteristics, temperaments and specific qualities.

#### *Stage Three: Tie* (friends)

Ideally, should the couple continue to interact they soon find out certain things about each other that they can respect. Once a couple can generalize from a particular thing that they respect, e.g., talent, to the whole person, they have now progressed to a third stage, or tie-type relationship. Rubin (1973) sees respect as one aspect of liking. The other aspect is affection which is seen more personally than respect. This writer sees affection as an underlying feeling in any relationship and respect as reserved for a special relationship. Respect, then becomes another important element in the building of that relationship. However, to maintain a tie-type relationship the couple must continuously *communicate* effectively, interact as *frequently* as reasonably possible, and maintain an optimal level of *respect* for one another. This couple, ideally, could maintain a tie for life or have what is commonly referred to as a lifetime friendship.

How long it takes to move along the time continuum from Stage One (strangers) to Stage Three (friends) seems to be related to frequency of contact and discovery of "respect" as a component of the developing relationship. As the relationship

continues other elements may be added along with respect such as: tolerance, understanding, concern, empathy, etc. Each relationship will vary according to both the number of elements and the priority assigned to them.

#### *Stage Four: Association* (confidant)

To move into still a more depthful relationship, one would have to select out of his or her pool of tie-type relationships a person with whom a special confidence could be shared. Here, the element of *trust* is most strongly tested. Once this particular trust is established the relationship takes on a uniqueness that it previously lacked.

The couple, in moving to Stage Four, has what will be referred to as an association-type relationship. Whereas in Stage Three there was a recognizable tie, in this stage the couple moves closer and its association has significant meaning. For example, the risk of revealing his or her inner love *feelings* toward the other would depict this stage. To reveal such feelings and to be accepted forms a special trust. According to Reiss' (1960) typology this stage would be the same as his stage two, "self-revelation."

#### *Stage Five: Bond* (intimates)

For a couple to reach the stage of bond-type relationship, considerable *knowledge* of each person would be necessary. This knowledge would be gained from time invested, activities shared, and futuristic plans developed. Probably very few couples reach this stage before marriage or living together. Fromm (1956) would depict this as "productive love" by including *caring* and *responsibility* as two essential elements along with respect and knowledge. His view is well taken when one considers that a person can only be most responsible and deeply caring when he knows the other person more completely. This would be the most intimate and the strongest type of relationship that could be experienced by any couple as suggested by Borland (1975). Few, if any illusions about each other would be present at this stage of development.

Stage Five is not an unmixed blessing because disillusionment is a necessary side of gaining greater knowledge of another person. Paradoxically, while the relationship has reached its farthest level of development, it also runs the risk of dissolving as it removes the last vestiges of all romantic illusions.

Referring again to Figure 1, the vertical line representing "affection"/"attraction" suggests that a couple in *Stage One* may have felt initially either very positive or very negative toward the other person. However, the bell-shaped curve implies that probably most people hold neither intensely positive nor intensely negative feelings toward

another person on their first meeting. Yet, couples who were strongly attracted to each other may feel that they are "falling out of love" by the time they have progressed to Stage Three. Here, then, is when a couple may be confused and wishes to know from the counsellor if its members are really in love. Such a revelation of where they seem to be relative to others in their relationship (Stage Three) usually provides reassurance and some direction in furthering the development of their relationship. Ironically, those who initially had felt very negatively toward each other may now believe that they are "falling in love" by the time they reach Stage Three. These people are probably rarely seen in counselling.

In summation, this typology represents for both counsellor and teacher, several inter-related factors comprising the growth and development of love as an interpersonal relationship. The typology does not suggest where a couple should be in the relationship but where it apparently is. The typology offers the counsellor a way to view love without challenging a couple's personal view of love. Finally, the typology suggests that there are not different loves but only different relationships and different levels of development. Using such a conceptual tool may benefit young couples relationships in counselling or class by helping them decide where they are, what they hope for, and how they might further develop in their love relationship.

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