Exploring Love and Marital Satisfaction among Married Malay Males

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ABSTRACT

As a result of love being an important reason for individuals to enter marriage, this study aims to explore the relationships between components of love and marital satisfaction. A total of 64 married urban Malay males who volunteered to participate in a larger study exploring the psychological aspects of close relationships were chosen in this study. Questionnaires consisting of questions relating to personal background, love and marital satisfaction were distributed. Completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed to determine relationships among variables. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between love, specifically, the passion component of love and marital satisfaction. The total number of children and age of spouse were also significantly negatively related to marital satisfaction. The results in this study indicated the importance of love especially the passion component of love in promoting marital satisfaction among married Malay individuals. Thus, this suggests future research to focus on love aspects in studying gender, marital relationships and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Love, intimacy, passion, commitment, marital satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Love is viewed as one of the most important aspects in building a long term relationship, namely marriage. Love is not the only reason for marriage in contemporary western culture (Acevedo & Aron, 2009) but gradually has become an important reason for marriage in Asian culture including Malay marriages (Hoesni et. al., 2012). Besides love being an important factor for individuals to enter marriage, previous research also found that love is crucial in maintaining a healthy marital relationship and psychological well-being.
being among married couples (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995; Contreras & Hendrick, 1996; Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999; Merves-Okin et. al., 1991; O’Leary et. al., 2012).

There have been many studies which have explored the relationship between love and marital satisfaction. One such study was carried out by Contreras and Hendrick (1996). They investigated marital love and satisfaction among Mexican American and Anglo American married couples. They found that Mexican American couples were less idealistic concerning romantic love compared to the Anglo American couples. The findings show that although Mexican and American couples showed love differently, married couples from both groups reported similar marital satisfaction. Another study carried out by Merves-Okin et. al. (1991) found that the perception of love within the marital relationship influences the marital satisfaction of the respondents. The findings showed that the more positively participants view their spouses’ expression of love, the higher they reported of being satisfied within their marriage. These results imply that perception was more important than the actual behaviour of love responses they receive from their spouse. These findings also indicated that if participants perceived spouses as expressing more the intimacy component of love, they were more likely to report higher marital satisfaction. Thus, there is clear evidence on the relationships between how people perceive love and marital satisfaction. The more participants’ perceive that they are being loved, the more satisfied they were in their marriage. The more they perceive that their partner expresses love, the more satisfied they became in their marriage.

The importance of married couples perceiving that love still exists in their marriage was also mentioned by Bonds-Raacke et. al. (2001) and Ruvolo and Veroff (1997). They suggested that the gradual decrease in romantic love that married couples once experienced may be perceived by a married individual as an experience of “deterioration of love”. The experience of “deterioration of love” can eventually result in unhappy and unsatisfactory marriages. On the other hand, the well-being of a married individual who is not happy and dissatisfied can be badly affected.

For example, the research found that marital instability and distress can affect one’s physical health (Kiecott-Glaser et. al., 1993; Roberts et. al., 2005). Findings also indicated that marital distress promotes depression among adults (Assh & Byers, 1996; Coyne et. al., 1987; Horneffer & Fincham 1996; Ismail, 2004; Jackman-Cram et. al., 2006; Low & Stocker, 2005).

The perception of “deterioration of love” within marriage can also influence other people in the family including children. Findings suggest that unhappy marriages cannot create a conducive environment for the development of family members (Crouter et. al., 1999; Ismail, 2004; Webster-Stratton, 1990; Yela, 1999). Unhappy and depressed parents may not be able to play their parental roles as effectively (Webster-Stratton,
Murray et al. (2006) discovered that parents experiencing depression may not provide appropriate support for their children in even the simplest tasks such as helping their children with homework. A longitudinal study showed that children with parents experiencing marital distress and conflict prevented them from making positive adjustments in adulthood (Cui et al., 2006). Furthermore, the depressed mood and marital conflict between parents were also found to harm children’s adjustment (Low & Stocker, 2005). Krishnakumar et al. (2003) found that children with parents who practice negative interactions were also prone to poor social skills in dealing with daily life crises. Moreover, other studies found that marital distress and destructive marital conflict contribute to other problems that are related to the dysfunctional and psychopathological behaviour of the married couples and children (Coie et al., 1993; Olsofsky, 1995). Children of parents who experienced marital distress were more likely to suffer from internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression (Low & Stocker, 2005) and prone to juvenile delinquency (Patterson et al., 1982) and conduct disorders (Fincham et al., 1993; Webster-Stratton, 1990).

In addition, conduct disorder is described as “a pervasive adolescent disorder with clinically significant antisocial behaviours such as excessive non-compliance, aggression, stealing, lying, truancy, violence, destructiveness, cruelty, and sexually coercive behaviour” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Unfortunately, it remains as one of the most difficult syndromes to treat clinically (Keiley, 2002). Studies have discovered that many children who display conduct disorder have parents who experience marital distress. Distressed parents were prone to showing irritability, critical and punitive parenting skills towards their children and were harsh or inconsistent in disciplining and monitoring (Frick, 1994; Gottman & Katz, 1989; Webster-Stratton, 1990). “Deterioration of love” may also eventually lead to divorce. Studies carried out by Asmah (1979), Jones (1980, 1981, 1997) and Kling (1995) showed that divorce rates among Malays are increasing gradually albeit not significantly. The effects of divorce are harmful to the individuals within the broken marriage and also the children within the broken family. For instance, a longitudinal study carried out by Yu et al. (2010) found that there were associations between divorce and poor quality parent-adult child relationships.

In addition, previous research also indicated that there were also differences between love types and gender. Many studies on love have also explored the nature of love experienced among males and females (Hendrick et al., 1984; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Parra et al., 1998; Leon et al., 1994; Dion & Dion, 1993). The findings indicate that females have the tendency to have a more pragmatic kind of love (Pragma) compared to a playful type of love (Ludus) reported by males. Gender has also been found to influence how love is perceived. One of the studies investigating
From the above discussion, previous studies have shown that love, gender and culture can be viewed as important factors that can influence a person’s experience of love, an individual’s marital relationship and psychological wellbeing. The main objective of this study is to explore the relationships that exist between components of love and marital satisfaction specifically among married Malay males.

**METHOD**

**Sample**

A total of 64 married urban Malay males were chosen from a larger sample in a study exploring the psychological aspects of close relationships. The subjects were participants attending a self development seminar in Kuala Lumpur and volunteered to participate in the study.

**Research Instruments**

Questionnaires in this study consisted of questions relating to personal background, love and marital satisfaction.

**Personal information**

The demographic section consisted of questions relating to the personal background of participants. This included personal information such as gender, age, religion, education level, personal monthly income, total number of years of marriage and total number of children.
Love was measured using a triangular love scale developed by Sternberg (1988). The scale consisted of 45 items that represent three love dimensions such as passion, intimacy and commitment. Responses were measured using a 7-Likert scale, $1 = \text{strongly do not agree}$ and $7 = \text{strongly agree}$. Reliability for this scale is $\alpha = 0.96$ which reached over the minimum requirement of alpha Cronbach $\alpha = 0.70$ as suggested by Anastasi (1988).

Marital Satisfaction
Marital satisfaction was measured using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986) which was adapted by Rumaya (1997) and Bullare (2005) for the Malaysian context. This scale consisted of four items and used a 7-Likert scale, $1 = \text{strongly do not agree}$ and $7 = \text{strongly agree}$. Reliability for this scale is $\alpha = 0.93$ and passes the minimum requirement of alpha Cronbach as suggested by Anastasi (1988).

Analysis
The data in this study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21 for Windows (SPSS 21). Descriptive statistics were carried out to analyze the personal background of subjects using minimum, maximum, percentages, mean and standard deviation scores. The Pearson correlation was used to analyze relationships between variables and regression was used to determine the most influential factors contributing to marital satisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Results
The subjects ranged from 20 years old to 60 years old with a mean age of 37.61 years. The subjects were also married for a total mean years of of 12.52 with children whose ages ranged from. They also earned a monthly income between RM1,000 to RM10,000 with a mean income of of RM4340.61. The academic qualification background ranged from primary education to masters postgraduate degrees.

Inferential Results
Results showed that there was a significant moderate relationship between love and marital satisfaction among subjects with $r = 0.622^{**}, p < 0.01$. This showed that the more subjects love their spouses, the more satisfied they are with their marriage. Specifically, the analysis showed the highest significant dimension of love that relates to marital satisfaction is passion with $r = 0.63^{**}, p < 0.01$. This is then followed by intimacy with $r = 0.594^{**}, p < 0.01$ and commitment with $r = 0.511^{**}, p < 0.01$. These results indicated that the higher levels of passion, intimacy or commitment subjects have towards their spouse, the more satisfied they are in their marriage.

TABLE 1
Correlation between Love, components of love and Marital Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marital Satisfaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>0.62^{**}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>0.59^{**}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>0.63^{**}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>0.51^{**}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01
Hence, the regression analysis was carried out to identify the most influential dimensions of love towards marital satisfaction. Results found that passion significantly predicted marital satisfaction scores, $b = .14, t(62) = 6.38, p < .05$. To illustrate this finding, results in Table 2a showed that the value for correlation was strong where $R=0.63, F(1, 62) = 40.73, p<0.05$. This result showed that 40% of the passion variance can be explained by variability in the subjects’ passion and marital satisfaction. In addition, the statistical value for $F$ is 40.73 and significant at 0.05 level. This shows that there was a significant relationship between passion as a predictor towards marital satisfaction, ($F(1, 62) = 40.73, p<0.05$).

Analyses for age of spouse and marital satisfaction (Table 3) also showed a significant negative relationship with $r= -0.25**, p<0.01$. This result shows that the older the spouse was, the less satisfaction subjects have towards their marriage. There was also a significant negative relationship between the total number of children and marital satisfaction with $r= -0.26**, p<0.01$. This result showed that there is a tendency of subjects to experience more marital satisfaction when they have less children.

Generally, results indicated that love plays an important role in how subjects in

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 2a</th>
<th>Model Summary&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Predictors: (Constant), passion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Dependent Variable: marital satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
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<th>TABLE 2B</th>
<th>ANOVA&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Sum of Squares</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>125.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Residual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>315.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dependent Variable: marital satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Predictors: (Constant), passion</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2C</th>
<th>Coefficients&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Unstandardized Coefficients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dependent Variable: marital satisfaction</td>
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this study report on how satisfied they are in a marriage. The results show that there is a positive relationship between love and marital satisfaction. To illustrate this set of results, the more subjects perceive love from the three components, namely passion, commitment and intimacy, the more satisfied they are in their marriage. However, it is shown that passion love component contributes most to marital satisfaction. This is then followed by intimacy and commitment love components. This result implies that the passion component of love suggested by Sternberg (1996) such as expression of romance, physical attraction and sexual consummation are most important in determining how satisfied subjects report concerning their marriage compared to intimacy and commitment. Nonetheless, the intimacy component of love which includes feelings of closeness, connectedness and bondedness in loving relationship and also commitment to maintain love suggested by Sternberg (1996) remain crucial for subjects in this study in perceiving marital satisfaction.

In addition, the findings also indicated that the total number of children and the age of the spouse has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction. These results show that the less children the subjects have, the more satisfied they are in a marriage and the older the spouse, the less subjects are satisfied with their marriages. This result supports the 40 year longitudinal study conducted by Vaillant and Vaillant (1993) where marital satisfaction moves in a U-shaped curve according to the age of the spouse and the stage of the family cycle. This shows that intervention efforts should be implemented after a certain period to increase the marital satisfaction. This finding indicates the importance of married couples, helping professions and related organizations taking action and increasing efforts to educate and increase the level of awareness of the need and importance of passion in a marriage.

Table 3
Correlation Between Spouse’s Age and Marital Satisfaction Among Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marital Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spouse’s Age</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p< 0.01, *p< 0.05

CONCLUSION

In summary, the results of this study indicated the importance of love specifically, passion, within long term relationships such as marriage. Passion was found to be one of the most important components of love contributing to marital satisfaction. Conversely, the age of the spouse and total number of children were also negatively related to marital satisfaction. This result indicates the need for marital programs to increase the passion component of love within marriage. Since love was found to be one of the most important reasons for marriage (Hoesni et. al., 2012), serious attention should be focussed on increasing, maintaining and improving marital relationships within the community.
Hence, future researchers need to include love as one of the important components in studying marital relationships and well being.

**REFERENCES**


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