



Assistance with University Projects? Research Reports? Writing Skills?

We have got you covered!

www.assignmentstudio.net

WhatsApp: +61-424-295050

Toll Free: 1-800-794-425

Email: contact@assignmentstudio.net

Follow us on Social Media

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/AssignmentStudio>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/AssignmentStudi>

LinkedIn:

<https://au.linkedin.com/company/assignment-studio>

Pinterest:

<http://pinterest.com/assignmentstudi>

“My heart burns up”: A qualitative exploration of layperson’s understandings and experiences of romantic love

Abstract

The aim of this study is to answer the research question ‘What is an adult layperson’s understanding of romantic love?’ To answer the question, semi-structured interviews of two young heterosexual adults, one male and one female, were conducted. Thematic analysis method was used to organize data, identify themes and interpret the results. The main findings of the research indicate that an adult layperson considers physical aspects (e.g. sex and physical intimacy) as vital elements of romantic love. Further, there is an acceptance that romantic love is transient. It is concluded that transience of romantic love can be partly associated with its physical undertones and its unrealistic nature. Consequently, it is opined that it is not realistic to seek long-term romantic love. Long-term relationships cannot be sustained based on romantic love alone. These conclusions indicate that one should look beyond romantic love for the development and sustenance of long-term heterosexual relationships. .

“My heart burns up”: A qualitative exploration of layperson’s understandings and experiences of romantic love

There is no universal definition of romantic love. The notion may be different for different people depending upon the culture and the time. Even for people within a particular culture, romantic love may mean different things. However, the phenomenon is universal. Romantic love is considered to have a biological basis and is a learned behaviour influenced by stories and imitations (Schäfer, 2008). A man is more vulnerable to falling in love if he overestimates the woman’s sexual interest. Similarly, women with stronger sex drive are more vulnerable to love (Galperin & Haselton, 2010). Romantic love is a psychological state that helps in mate selection. It can be viewed as the second phase of love, between physical attraction and long-term attachment. While physical attraction may precede romantic love, reciprocity, similarities with the partner and long-term compatibility are also important (Gibson, 2015). Personality traits such as humour also have a significant influence on falling in love (Braxton-Davis, 2010).

Further, past experiences impact a person’s existing construct about romantic love. Physical intimacy and passion are essential. The feeling of being loved increases self-esteem and romantic love is considered to be a higher level of love. The intimacy results in the sharing of intimate feelings with the partner. The feeling overpowers rationality and fantasy takes over. Love itself has multifarious manifestations, such as love for one’s children, friends and humanity in general. Romantic love is a type of love that has its highs and lows and is relatively short-lived. It is transient because it has to be propped up by emotional energy and actions. While it lasts, it makes the person feel great. Its end results in a feeling of misery (Schäfer, 2008). However, romantic love increases anxiety (Bajoghli et al., 2011) and wanes gradually. Slowly, there is a realisation that the essential elements, such as physical intimacy, are fading away. Though the process is long, there is a definite moment when the awareness about the end is accepted. The moment is profound and has an intensity that is akin to a shock (Sailor, 2013).

As evident from perusal of the literature, romantic love is a type and a phase of love in relationships. It is partly driven by physical attraction, commonalities, perceived compatibility, past experiences and stories. It is irrational, temporary and leads to positive feelings while it lasts. This report aims to answer the research question ‘What is an adult layperson’s

understanding of romantic love?’ The objective is to enhance our understanding of how people perceive and experience romantic love.

Method

Participant

For answering the research question, two heterosexual persons were interviewed to understand their notions and experiences of romantic love. The persons were selected based on existing contacts in the researcher’s social circle. One participant was an unmarried female around 30 years who had her last romantic relationship 10 years ago. The other was a married male around 28 years old, with a small child. His romantic relationship was the one with his wife around 7 years ago.

Method of data collection

Data for the research was collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants were informed about the aim of the study and the interview date and time. They were provided the questions in Appendix A before the interview. An interviewer agreement form was signed. They were told that they could discontinue the interview any time they felt distressed or uncomfortable, or for any other reason.

Procedure

For conducting the interview, an interview schedule was prepared, and the participants were selected and interviewed on the particular date. The participants were informed that their answers would be voice recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the recordings would be deleted after transcription. They were clearly informed that the interview was voluntary and utmost confidentiality of the responses and identity of the participants would be maintained. The research was conducted only after the approval from the ACAP Human Research Ethics Committee. The transcripts of the two interviews are attached as Appendix B.

Analytic strategy

The responses to the semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that helps identify, analyse and report themes in a data. It helps in detailed organization and description of the data. It starts with identification of codes or interesting features of the data. The codes are subsequently organised or grouped into themes. A theme refers to an important aspect of the data with respect

to the research question and may be identified within the obvious meanings of the data. The themes are analysed for interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Repetition of thoughts or patterns in the data is one method to identify the themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Thematic networks or illustrations help summarize the dominant themes in the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis is particularly suited for analysis because romantic love is an emotion and is, therefore, not observable. It can be interpreted in terms of how people talk about it. In this research, semi-structured interviews with probing questions helped elicit analysable responses from the participants. Subsequent analysis of data helped identify patterns and themes in the responses that were amenable to further analysis (Schäfer, 2008).

Reflexive Statement

The researcher in this project is a young Australian college student. The persons interviewed are also from Australia and had their most profound romantic experiences at a similar age. Consequently, there is a possibility that there may be similarities between the researcher's notions about romantic love and the interviewees' understanding about the same. The researcher believes that romantic love starts with physical attraction and, if reciprocated, moves to the next stage of romantic love. The feelings are great and the misery of heartbreak is terrible. The researcher also believes that romantic love is only the initial phase of love and does not last forever. This is because we stop pretending after a while and come to know about each other's real personality. We also lose the physical attraction. However, there are romantic days (e.g. an anniversary) or periods in a long-term relationship, though they are much less frequent as time passes by. The researcher also believes that theory cannot possibly create a universal definition of romantic love that is applicable to all persons from all cultures at all times. Romantic love has idiosyncrasies for different people. The researcher is, consciously or unconsciously, looking for a confirmation of her notions about romantic love and the limitations of theory in confining it to an all-encompassing definition.

Results

As evident from the interviews, a layperson's understanding of romantic love has some essential elements. A layperson associates romantic love with physical aspects, such as passion, sex, kissing, holding hands and being together. Communication and expression of love are also essential. Therefore, it is important to spend time and make efforts to be together and to do nice things. It involves great feelings. There is a desire to love the other person all the time. It is a type of love, and apparently the best one. There is an expectation or a desire for it to last forever.

However, there is a realization that purely romantic relationships are transient. Romantic love has its moments in a long-term relationship as well, but it is not consistent. In fact, it is not that important after a while. It also fades away because of unrealistic expectations by the partners and the loss of interest in the activities required to sustain romantic love.

The need for romantic love arises due to the human need to be loved and to love. Romantic love provides an assurance that one is loved. It helps escape reality and enter the fantasy world, which appears deceptively real. An easy going and realistic partnership can help sustain the romance for longer. There is an expectation that it will last forever. However, romantic love can be a false feeling as well. Failures lead to shock and may even increase the lust for romantic love. One is particularly vulnerable to romantic love at a younger age when there is lack of clarity about what one wants. The notions about romantic love are influenced by movies, and commonalities with the partner accentuate the effect. Past relationships influence notions about romantic love, especially due to the expectations of the erstwhile partner. Romantic love is considered a phase and a type of love, not necessarily the right kind of love. The codes or the interesting features identified in the responses indicate that romantic love has some drivers (e.g. physical and emotional needs). It is essentially unrealistic, it requires effort to sustain romantic love and it is transient. In the context of the research question, the underlying themes and sub-themes are presented in the table A below.

Table A

What is an adult layperson's understanding of romantic love?

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Sub-themes</u>
Physical aspects	Sex
	Physical intimacy
	Passion
Emotional aspects	Sweet feelings
	A desire to love
	Passion
	Belief that it is the best type of love
Communication	Talking about each other's lives.

	Expressing love through words
Resources	Time spent together
	Effort at being nice
	Money for expressing the love
Nature	Unrealistic
	Transient
	On & off
	Not necessary on a continuous basis in a long-term relationship.
	Can be false
	Just a type of love, not the only one.
Need	Assurance of being loved
	Fantasy, escapism
	Human nature
Supportive factors / influences	Commonalities
	Genuineness
	Movies
	Age

Two of the main themes, namely physical attraction and the nature of romantic love, are discussed below. Firstly, the participants accorded high importance to physical love as an essential element, and even a prerequisite for romantic love. This is evident from the following statements. “..that’s when 2 people have a passionate sexual relationship”, “Kissing and all that good stuff”, “Romantic love to me is that passion to want to be with each other in that sexual way” and “Romantic love is passion, extreme love, willing to go over and beyond, sweet, time consuming, sex”. Further, the participants believed that romantic love was unrealistic, a type of love, a phase, and it did not last long. This is indicated by the following statements. “I had it once but that only lasted 1 month”, “He just stopped being romantic. I think he lost

interest trying or had another girlfriend”, “Romantic love is not always consistent”, “not always realistic” and “It has its seasons or times it shows up. Romantic love out of all other types of love is something to me that is an on and off type of love”.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of this research are consistent with the literature discussed in the introduction. As Gibson (2015) asserts, romantic love is a phase of love. Physical attraction is often a vital ingredient in the mix, but commonalities are also important. However, long-term sustenance requires long-term compatibility and romantic love alone is not sufficient (Gibson, 2015). Braxton-Davis (2010) also emphasizes on the importance of personality traits in long-term love. Sexual undertones of romantic love are also confirmed in the study by Galperin & Haselton (2010). Schäfer (2008) also acknowledges the biological basis of romantic love and the influence of stories and past experiences in its development. Further, romantic love is irrational, transient, but leads to elation. Sailor (2013) further highlights the fleeting nature of romantic love, though he asserts that the influence wears off gradually.

The main findings of the thematic analysis are that a layperson views romantic love as strongly linked to physical aspects (e.g. sex, passion, physical intimacy) and believes that it is short-lived. Further, transience of romantic love is accepted. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that romantic love is strongly linked to physical attraction. Further, it requires time and effort to be maintained. These two factors indicate that romantic love is quintessentially unrealistic and is, therefore, more vulnerable to transience. To conclude, there is an acceptance that romantic love is dependent on physical aspects and it is short-lived. Due to the transience of romantic love, the desire for a long-term romantic relation may eventually lead to disappointment. It is important to understand that romantic love is exciting, but it is not what matters in the long-run. In essence, one cannot depend on romantic love to sustain a long term relationship. This is because romantic love is transient and unrealistic. These conclusions can help people, especially young adults, to avoid sole focus on romance as a measure of the strength of heterosexual relationships.

The main strength of the study is that data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. This helped the researcher delve in more detail about a layperson’s understanding of romantic love through probing questions. The thematic analysis process helped interpret the feelings of the participants by proper organization. However, one main limitation of the study

is that both the participants were around the same age (around 30 years) and had only one romantic experience. Hence their perspectives are essentially those of young adults with limited experience of romantic love. This makes it difficult to generalize the findings.

References

- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 1*(3), 385-405.
- Bajoghli, H., Joshaghani, N., Mohammadi, M. R., Holsboer-Trachsler, E., & Brand, S. (2011). In female adolescents, romantic love is related to hypomanic-like stages and increased physical activity, but not to sleep or depressive symptoms. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Clinical Practice, 15*, 164-170.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Braxton-Davis, P. (2010). The social psychology of love and attraction, *McNair Scholars Journal, 14*(1), 6-12.
- Galperin, A., & Haselton, M. (2010). Predictors of How Often and When People Fall in Love. *Evolutionary Psychology, 8*(1), 5-28.
- Gibson, L. S. (2015). The science of romantic love: Distinct evolutionary, neural, and hormonal characteristics. *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities, 7*(1), 1-9.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods, 15*(1), 85-109.
- Sailor, J. L. (2013). A Phenomenological Study of Falling Out of Romantic Love. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(37), 1-22.
- Schäfer, G. (2008). Romantic love in heterosexual relationships: Women's experiences. *Journal of Social Sciences, 16*(3), 187-197.

Appendix A

Interview questions

Research Assignment, 2014: Interview Questions on Everyday Understandings and Experiences of Romantic Love

1. What is romantic love? Describe romantic love in as much detail as you can.
2. How is romantic love different from other kinds of love?
3. I'd like you now to think of a particularly powerful experience of romantic love that you have had. Please tell me as much about this experience as you can.

Probes:

Who was involved? How old were you? What were the specific circumstances? How did you feel? How did you know you were in love? What happened?

4. What do you think has affected your ideas on romantic love?

Probes:

Gender; culture/race/ethnicity; family experiences; past experiences; age; ability/disability; faith/spirituality; sexuality; the media; any other factors.

5. What place (or purpose) does romantic love have in your life today? What does it do for you? How is the current place of romantic love in your life different from the place (or purposes) it has had at other times in your life?
6. Romantic love is at the centre of the plots of many books, films, songs and television series. Why do you think it has become so important to our culture at this time?
7. I'd like now to give you the opportunity to tell me anything about romantic love that I might have missed. Is there anything else important that you think it might be useful or helpful for me to know?

Appendix B

Interview responses

Research Assignment, 2014: Interview Questions on Everyday Understandings and Experiences of Romantic Love

Sarah Boden's Interview

1. What is romantic love? Describe romantic love in as much detail as you can.

- Mmm well to me that's when 2 people have a passionate sexual relationship.
- Like you know, not just sex but holding hands and spending time with each other,
- Kissing and all that good stuff. I don't know if I am answering the question but yea that's how I see it.
- Like people can be in a relationship but they might have no sexual passion whatsoever.

2. How is romantic love different from other kinds of love?

- Romantic love to me is that passion to want to be with each other in that sexual way.
- Obviously there's love for your family and friends, even husband and wife can love each other but not be in love with each other. You know what I mean?

3. I'd like you now to think of a particularly powerful experience of romantic love that you have had. Please tell me as much about this experience as you can.

- See that's the thing, I've never really had that. Well ok, I shouldn't say that. I had it once but that only lasted 1 month. So I am not sure if I should consider that romantic love.
- Haha He took me out everywhere, we spent like every minute with each other. It to me was full of passion. That's why I was pretty shocked when it was over.
- He just stopped being romantic. I think he lost interest trying or had another girlfriend haha.
- Story of my life, but yea it was more than just going out having dinner.

Probes:

Who was involved? How old were you? What were the specific circumstances? How did you feel? How did you know you were in love? What happened?

- It was me and a guy at uni of course. What do you mean who was involved hahah.
- I was like 20 I think. We met in a lecture. Study group to be specific.
- Instead of studying we talked about each other's lives and waste all these times talking.

-Clearly maybe that's why I didn't do so well in economics hahah too busy being in a so called romantic relationship.

-I felt great at the time. Like I hope this lasts forever.

-I knew I was in love when I wanted the whole world to about him. I wanted to show him off. I even told him that I wanted my family to meet him. I think I was too forward with my love mmmm.

4. What do you think has affected your ideas on romantic love?

- Movies. Definitely movies. I know I am a grown women but there's so much we take unconsciously from what we watch. It creates these ideas on romantic love.

-I am starting to question that it is now hahah. I am not so sure anymore. Ugh I am confused.

-Anyways, keep asking.

Probes:

Gender; culture/race/ethnicity; family experiences; past experiences; age; ability/disability; faith/spirituality; sexuality; the media; any other factors.

-Maybe 20 years old is still too young to know what romantic love really is.

-Because I am still not sure about who I am and what I want at this age, so who knew what I was thinking when I was 20 years old.

-We were both from similar bringing. So yea.

5. What place (or purpose) does romantic love have in your life today? What does it do for you? How is the current place of romantic love in your life different from the place (or purposes) it has had at other times in your life?

- Well I am still searching for that so called romantic love.

-But I would imagine it would be the best type of love.

-I would love that. I have high expectation I guess. Maybe that's why I'm still single hahah.

-I want it to last forever.

-So not sure how to answer that question to be honest.

6. Romantic love is at the centre of the plots of many books, films, songs and television series. Why do you think it has become so important to our culture at this time?

- I think people love to love. They love the idea of being loved and in love.

- It's just human nature. Like come on, wouldn't you love that?

7. I'd like now to give you the opportunity to tell me anything about romantic love that I might have missed. Is there anything else important that you think it might be useful or helpful for me to know?

- Mmm not sure, I'm busy reminiscing on the one I had 10 years ago hahah.

-It would be nice to have that but last much longer.

Jim Croy's Interview

1. What is romantic love? Describe romantic love in as much detail as you can.

- Good question, ok let's see. Romantic love is passion, extreme love, willing to go over and beyond, sweet, time consuming, sex, not always realistic. Is that enough?

2. How is romantic love different from other kinds of love?

- Romantic love is not always consistent. Love can last forever. I love my wife very much and can't imagine not loving her.

- But I or we have our moments where we can switch to romantic love, but that doesn't last and I am ok with that.

-It has its seasons or times it shows up. Romantic love out of all other types of love is something to me that is an on and off type of love.

-The romantic in front of the love makes it more of an action that needs to be done.

3. I'd like you now to think of a particularly powerful experience of romantic love that you have had. Please tell me as much about this experience as you can.

Probes:

Who was involved? How old were you? What were the specific circumstances? How did you feel? How did you know you were in love? What happened?

- That would be me and my wife 7 years ago when we started dating, or first met.

- We were both 21 at the time. Every time I looked at her I got butterflies, all I wanted to do was hold her and kiss her and do other stuff haha.

-We put in so much effort in how we looked for each other and I actually tried, hard to believe but I would research places to take her, food to cook for her, even the words I used to express how I felt was romantic.

-Like I would be like "my god u look beautiful today." I said to her a lot.

-I knew I was in love 2 months into our relationship because she was just so easy going and made me feel like I could be 100 percent real with her. She didn't need me to always be romantic, she wanted more realness.

-She wasn't after a short term thing, she understood what it takes to be in a long term relationship, so did I.

That's why I say romantic love is not reality all the time.

4. What do you think has affected your ideas on romantic love?

Probes:

Gender; culture/race/ethnicity; family experiences; past experiences; age; ability/disability; faith/spirituality; sexuality; the media; any other factors.

- For me as a guy I'm not easily influenced by movies and books and stuff. I am not really into all that anyways.

- Its more the past relationships I've had and what they say. I've heard a lot in my past relationship on what I should be doing or not doing. So I think what has affected my ideas have come from women.

- Funny to say but women are very picky and have no problem telling you what they want. Half the time it's impossible to meet such expectations.

- Example, I had one girl tell me she would love if I bought her flowers every day. I'm sorry but that's not possible. I rather save that money than be buying some flower every day. For what reason does someone need flowers every day.

- It's like romantic love is more of an assurance that one is loved. People shouldn't have to always be romantic to feel loved.

5. What place (or purpose) does romantic love have in your life today? What does it do for you? How is the current place of romantic love in your life different from the place (or purposes) it has had at other times in your life?

- It's not very important for me. I don't need my wife to always show me her love by being romantic all the time. It costs money to do that every day. Once in a while is fine.

- We have date nights which is enough for me. That's when we have dinner and go see a movie. During that time we talk about everything and laugh and share stories that doesn't have to do

with our daughter all the time. Although I do love talking about my little girl. She's just awesome.

- Anyways, yea it's important but it's not needed every day.
- I envy those men that can be romantic every day. I wonder how they don't get tired.
- I show my love for my wife by just being a good person and acting on what I say and being there for her. She doesn't need flowers to know that.

6. Romantic love is at the centre of the plots of many books, films, songs and television series. Why do you think it has become so important to our culture at this time?

- People want to escape their reality, and fantasise. People like to fantasise. That's why it shows up everywhere.
- But sad thing is, when we don't get that fantasy, we become angry, jealous, sad, depressed, desperate. Which then makes people fantasise even more to escape. It's a vicious cycle I tell u.

7. I'd like now to give you the opportunity to tell me anything about romantic love that I might have missed. Is there anything else important that you think it might be useful or helpful for me to know?

- Romantic love is sometimes false love. It's not real love all the time. It's one way one can express their love but it's not the only way or even the right way.
- The people I know that are always in romantic love relationships are the people that can't keep their relationship or be in a long term one. Not sure fully why but that's what I've observed.