

# LOVE: A SELF-REPORT ANALYSIS WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Theodor Reik once wrote that to be happy a man needs two things: love and achievement (2). In part, Reik is saying the same thing St. Paul wrote 2000 years ago when he said, "If I have . . . not love, I am nothing" (3). Both the ancient evangelist and the modern psychoanalyst have affirmed that to live a complete, satisfying, and self-actualizing life a man must have love.

But to say "man must *have* love" is already a reification. Love is not a thing one must possess. Love is a relationship between two people. This relationship is manifested by the ways these two people behave toward each other, and the feelings they have for each other. The behavior and feelings in the love relationship vary from pair to pair and from one partner in a love pair to the other partner. For example, in a happy marriage a husband may show his love by providing money to support his wife and by performing chores around the house that require more strength than his wife possesses, while his wife may manifest her love by having his pipe and slippers ready for him when he arrives home after a hard day at the office. Probably the way this husband feels about his wife is different from the way this wife feels about her husband.

The present study is concerned with discovering lowest common denominators of various specific love relationships of college students, and what expressions all their love relationships have in common. An analysis of unexpressed feelings turned out to be unfeasible.

## METHOD

It seemed that the problem could be approached through self-reports of the behaviors, feelings and experiences in love relationships. Therefore, as a preliminary step, some 300 undergraduate students were assigned the task of writing a term paper on "The Meaning of Love." The students were instructed to describe the feelings or incidents connected with people they loved which distinguished this relationship from that with people they only liked.

From these papers 305 statements characteristic of love relationships were selected. These consisted of 141 statement pairs referring to love expressions received and expressions given, 282 in all, and 23 single statements. To these, 39 statement pairs from Jourard's Self-Disclosure Scale (1) were added. The resulting 383 statements were gathered into eight categories and incorporated into a "Love Scale."<sup>1</sup> The scale is for use in describing one specific love relationship. To do so each statement is to be marked in one of three ways: (a) never true of the

<sup>1</sup>Copies of the scale may be obtained from the author, Psychological Service Center, University of Tennessee, Knoxville 16, Tennessee.

relationship; (b) sometimes true of the relationship; (c) always true of the relationship.

The scale was tried out with 10 Ss. They complained that they were unable to respond to the statements in the sub-category "unexpressed feelings received." Furthermore, in the main study no item in the sub-category "unexpressed feelings given" was checked by at least 75% of the Ss, which was the criterion for including the results (see below). Therefore the entire category of "unexpressed feelings," consisting of 90 statements (45 pairs), was omitted. This report is then based on 293 statements gathered into seven categories as shown in the left-hand column of Table 1.

The scale was given to 100 students in a psychology class, 50 men and 50 women. They were asked to complete it on their own, at home or in their dormitory rooms. For five weeks they were asked to complete the scale for one love relationship per week, in the following order: mother (or substitute), father (or substitute), closest friend of the same sex, fiancée or closest friend of the opposite sex, and sibling to whom they felt the closest. They were told to complete the scale only if they felt they genuinely loved the person in question. The number of Ss who could complete the scale for each relationship is shown in Table 1.

Since the purpose of the study was to discover a lowest common denominator of love, only those items were considered which at least 75% of the Ss had marked "always true of the relationship."

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the percentages of items in each category marked by at least 75% of the Ss as being "always true of the love relation-

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF STATEMENTS IN EACH CATEGORY OF LOVE EXPRESSION CHECKED BY 75% OR MORE Ss AS BEING "ALWAYS TRUE" OF VARIOUS GENUINE LOVE RELATIONSHIPS. ALSO, NUMBER OF Ss ABLE TO COMPLETE THE SCALE FOR EACH OF THE FIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

Category of love expression and no. of statements in each	Parents		Sibling N = 55	Friends	
	Mother N = 95	Father N = 93		same-sex N = 96	other-sex N = 70
Material evidence (money, chores, etc.)					
received (16)	25	31	13		6
given (16)	19	13	13		
Non-material evidence (advice, encouragement, etc.)					
received (34)	62	41	24	35	50
given (34)	44	35	26	38	56
Shared activities (games, shows, etc.) (9)			33	56	44
Similarity of outlook and goals, philosophy, ethics (9)				33	22
Self-disclosure (Jourard Scale: telling about yourself)					
received (39)				23	28
given (39)				33	33
Verbal expression of feelings					
received (46)					11
given (46)			2		11
Physical expression (5)					40

ship". The table shows that certain kinds of expression are more characteristic of some love relationships than of others.

*Material or tangible evidence* is more characteristic of love relationships with members of the family, especially the parents. The love relationship with the mother appears to be fairly mutual: 25% of the items under "received" and 19% of the items under "given" are checked. The relationship with the father is more one-way: 31% of the items under "received", but only 13% of the items under "given" are checked. The kinds of things students did that demonstrated love for parents consisted primarily of running errands, performing chores, and remembering and buying gifts on special occasions. The parents did most of these things for their children, and also provided for the children's material support, education and so on.

*Non-material evidence* was marked more frequently than any other category. It is the one area which applies to all kinds of love relationships. Love is expressed in this way most often in the relationship with mother, second most often with friends of the opposite sex, and least often with siblings. The activities that characterize the love relationships with mother and with friends of the opposite sex are very similar. However, mothers are somewhat more likely to give advice and constructive criticism, while friends of the opposite sex are more apt to provide encouragement, emotional support and to emphasize good qualities while minimizing bad qualities. Fathers seem to specialize in teaching ideals, values and practical skills. What the Ss did for their loved ones follows a similar pattern, except that the Ss appeared to be more considerate of their friends' wishes, needs and desires than they are of their parents' needs and wishes. Curiously, the only person the Ss prayed for consistently was the father.

*Shared Activities* characterize the love relationships among peers, especially same-sex friends. Same-sex friends and opposite-sex friends shared the same activities, except that same-sex friends also took trips together, visiting in each other's homes, or rooming together. The one item typical of the relationship with siblings, but not typical of other love relationships was "fought or teased each other."

*Similarity of outlook on life* is regularly characteristic only of relationships with friends. These love relationships are characterized by having the same interests, and respecting each other's ideals. "Differences that come up between you do not disrupt the relationship," characterized the relationship with same-sex friends.

*Self-disclosure* appears also to be chiefly characteristic of love behavior with friends, both of the same and the opposite sex. This section was adopted from Jourard's Self-Disclosure Scale (1). But our results differ from those of Jourard. He found his unmarried *Ss* most apt to disclose themselves to their mothers, and least apt to disclose themselves to friends. However, Jourard measured the total amount of self-disclosure by adding all disclosure, whether it was an occasional or regular activity with the loved person, whereas in the present study only items that at least 75% of the *Ss* marked as being always true of the love relationship were counted. Thus it is possible that *Ss* would discuss more regularly some things with their friends (our results), but that they would discuss less regularly a wider range of things with their mothers, so that the total amount of self-disclosure to the mother would be greater (Jourard's results). The things our *Ss* disclosed were attitudes, interests, and opinions, which is in agreement with the findings of Jourard.

*Verbal expression of feelings* seems to occur regularly only in relationships with friends of the opposite sex. These include expressions of love, enjoying being together, missing the other when he is gone, feeling the other very attractive, being concerned about the other's happiness, thinking of the other frequently, and being proud of the other's achievements.

*Physical expression of love* was regularly characteristic of the love relationship with friends of the opposite sex, and this included regularly only hugging and kissing.

If we view these results from the point of view of the love relationship with the different kinds of persons, we find: Love with parents is characterized by tangible and intangible expressions received and given. Giving gifts and money is confined almost completely, as a regular thing, to members of the family. Friendship is characterized by doing many different things with each other, and for each other, by discussing personal attitudes and opinions, and by having a somewhat similar outlook on life. Verbal expression of feelings and physical expression of love is only regularly characteristic of the love relationship with members of the opposite sex.

The characteristic common to all love relationships, including that with siblings, was non-material evidence of love such as receiving and giving advice, encouragement, constructive criticism, consideration, instruction.

However, it must be remembered that these results are only a kind of "lowest common denominator" of the love relationships of college students—the kinds of behavior that at least 75% of them felt were regularly true of their love relationships.

#### SUMMARY

A scale was constructed for characterizing love relationships. Three fourths of the items were taken from 300 term papers by college students on "The Meaning of Love," and the remainder from the Jourard Self-Disclosure Scale. The scale was administered to 100 college students. In order to arrive at lowest common denominators, the results were tabulated only for items which were marked by at least 75% of the *Ss* as "always true" of the particular relationship rated. The characteristic common to all the love relationships rated was non-material evidence of love. Love of parents was characterized also by material evidence. Love of siblings included this to a lesser extent, and was also marked by shared activities. Love of friends was marked by shared activities, similarity of outlook, and self-disclosure. Love of friends of the opposite sex was further characterized by verbal and physical expressions.

#### REFERENCES

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