

COMMITMENT IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of commitment in romantic relationships, the motivation behind it and how people view the sustainability of a relationship. The study was carried out on youth of Karachi their ages ranging from 18-24 years. A pilot study in the form of a focus group comprising of 5 participants was conducted to gather some views on the factors involved in a committed relationship. The resulting discussion led to the construction of a questionnaire and a focus group criterion to conduct the study. After a pilot a focus group was conducted on a sample of 7 males and 7 females who were selected from various departments of the University of Karachi. 13 were single and one was married, which albeit not a factor that was controlled, did lead to some very relevant views being exchanged between the participants on commitment and why men's and women's behavior changed after they got into a committed relationship or even marriage. Aspects such as basis of a romantic relationship, factors that make a relationship successful, role of commitment, significance of the knowledge that the partner is committed to one, role of family, friends, and role of religion in the level of commitment are discussed. Content analysis was carried out on the data that was collected from the two focus groups. Understanding and trust were considered as the most important features of a romantic relationship and for it to be successful. Religion and parents were considered as factors that would affect the level of commitment in a relationship. Parallels are drawn between Robert Sternberg's triangular theory of love and the evolutionary perspective, how understanding and commitment are two of the most intrinsic factors that keep a couple together and how both these units pertain to the survival of the human race. The point that arises here is that commitment in romantic relationships where there is chance of procreation, maybe genetically coded in man and woman as fundamental to the propagation of the human race.

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Introduction

Relationships have always been important for humans at all stages of life. One cannot dream of a world devoid of existence of committed, loving and caring relations. But at times entering into a committed relation, it increases expectations which could result in reducing feelings of love. One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.¹

Jankowiak and Fischer² concluded after carrying out a study on romantic love that it constitutes “a human universal... or near universal”. Romantic love is also linked with, especially in its initial stages, with emotions such as euphoria, attention that is intensely focused on a specific individual, thinking obsessively about that person, being emotionally dependent on and intensely desiring emotional intimacy with the loved one and feeling a surge in energy.^{3,4}

Throughout the world, romantic love has played an important role, which suggests that it evolved as a precursor of the human mating system.⁵ Jankowski and Fischer found in a survey of 166 contemporary societies that 147 of them had been involved in romantic love; the researchers noted that the remaining 19 cases were actually oversights in ethnography, the anthropologists failed to ask the required questions, hence no negative evidence was reported.^{6,7}

Aaron et al⁸ found in their study on *Reward, Motivation and Emotion Systems Associated With Early Stage Intense Romantic Love* that early stage romantic love can induce euphoria, it is a cross cultural phenomenon, it is also stated to be an evolved form of mammalian drive to go after preferred mates. The study showed results which suggested that subcortical reward and motivation systems are used to focus on a particular person, and that individual emotional factors are processed by limbic cortical regions and there is ‘localization heterogeneity’ which works for reward functions in the brain of a human being. Love in turn leads to the drive to commit.^{9,10}

A host of studies that have recently been carried out have posited how emotions help in the regulation of interpersonal relationships.^{11,12,13} Human survival according to the

¹ Acevedo, B.P. & Aron, A. (2009) Does long-term relationship kill romantic love? 13, 59-65. *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved on November 23, 2010 from <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/gpr13159.pdf>. Doi:10.1037/a0014226.

² Jankowiak WR, Fischer EF (1992). *A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Romantic Love*. *Ethnology* 31:149-155.

³ Fischer, H.E. (1998) Lust, attraction and attachment in mammalian reproduction. *Human Nature* 9: 23-52.

⁴ Aron, A., Fisher, H., Mashek, D.J., Strong, G., Li, H. & Brown, L.L. (2005), *Reward, Motivation, and Emotion Systems associated with early-stage romantic love*.

⁵ Fischer, H.E. (1998) *Lust*, op.cit.

⁶ Jankowiak WR, Fischer EF (1992), op.cit.

⁷ Aron, A., Fisher, H., Mashek, D.J., Strong, G., Li, H. & Brown, L.L. (2005), op.cit.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frank, R.H. (1988). *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions*. New York: Norton.

¹⁰ Sternberg, R. J. (1986) A Triangular Theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93, 119-135.

¹¹ Baumeister, R.F., Stillwell, A.M. & Heatherton, T.F. (1995). Personal narratives about guilt: Role in action control and interpersonal relationships. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 17, 173-198.

evolutionary perspective is dependent on the establishment of collaborative unions, mating relationships that are long term, reproduction that is successful and the nurturance of offspring which are susceptible to fatalities if not looked after by their caregivers.^{14,15} Experiences that are related to emotion, behaviors that are expressive, cognition, and physiological processes aid people in meeting the requirements of romantic relationships via interactions that are spontaneous.¹⁶ Advocates of the attachment theory game theory and evolutionary theory have espoused that reproductive relations are maintained by emotions experienced by individuals.^{17,18,19,20} Hence jealousy will push individuals to maintain relationships that are monogamous.²¹

Sexual behavior in turn is motivated by desire which responds to physical attributes such as health or socio- economic status, which in turn will give any potential offspring the evolutionary advantage.²² Shaver Ultimately love serves as a device that propels two people to commit.²³

Acevedo and Aron²⁴ carried out a study titled *Does a Long-Term Relationship Kill Romantic Love?* The results indicated, after a meta analysis of 25 related studies had been executed, that romantic love (sans obsession) in long term and short term relationships was greatly linked with satisfaction in one's relations with one's partner. This gives impetus to the theory that if romantic love is the driving force behind commitment in a relationship and if it is possible then if one is truly in love- commitment ought to follow, but that is not the case at present where numerous couples are breaking up because one of them is not able to or does not want to commit.

¹² Frijda, N.H. & Mesquita, B. (1994). *The Social Roles and Functions of Emotions*. In S. Kitayama & H.R. Markus (Eds.) *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 51-87

¹³ Keltner, D. & Haidt, J. (1999). *Social functions of emotions at multiple levels of analysis*. *Cognition & Emotion*, 13, 505-521.

¹⁴ Buss, D.M. (1994). *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*. New York: Basic Books.

¹⁵ Shaver, P., Hazan, C., & Bradshaw, D. (1998). *Love as attachment: The integration of three behavioral systems*. In R.J. Sternberg & M.L. Barnes (Eds.), *The Psychology of Love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 68-99

¹⁶ Nesse, R.M. (1990). *Evolutionary Explanations of Emotions*. *Human Nature*, 3, 261-289.

¹⁷ Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and Loss: Attachment* (2nd ed., Vol.1). New York: Basic Books (ISBN 0465087469)...la:triangulus amoris.

¹⁸ Shaver, P. Schwartz, J. Kirson, D. & O' Connor, C. (1987). *Emotion knowledge: Further Exploration of a Prototype Approach*. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 52: 1061-1086.

¹⁹ Tivers, R.L. (1972). *Parental investment and sexual selection*. In B.G. Campbell (Ed.), *Sexual Selection and the Decent of Man*. (Chicago: Aldine.), 136-179

²⁰ Buss, D.M. & Schmitt, D.P. (1993). *Sexual Strategies Theory: An Evolutionary Perspective on Human Mating*. *Psychological Review*, 100, 204-232.

²¹ Buss, D.M., Larsen, R.J., Westen, D., & Semmelroth, J. (1992). *Sex Differences in Jealousy: Evolution, Physiology and Psychology*. *Psychological Science*, 3, 251-255.

²² Metts, S., Sprecher, S., & Regan, R.C. (1998). *Communication and Sexual Desire*. In P.A. Anderson & L.K. Geurrero (Eds.), *Handbook of Communication and Emotion: Research, Theory, Applications, and Contexts*. (San Diego, CA: Academic Press), 353-377

²³ Gonzaga, G.C. Keltner D, Londahl EA, and Smith, MD.(2008), *Love and the Commitment Problem in Romantic Relations and Friendship*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81:247. Retrieved on November 23, 2010 from: <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/dacherkeltner/docs/gonzaga.love.jpssp.2001.pdf>

²⁴ Acevedo, B.P. & Aron, A. (2009). *Does long-term relationship kill romantic love?* 13, pp. 59-65. *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved on November 23, 2010 from <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/gpr13159.pdf>. Doi:10.1037/a0014226.

Unless commitment is made there are only promises and hopes but no plans.²⁵ According to the thesaurus commitment is allegiance, loyalty, dedication, devotion or investment, it is the commitment of a person to a cause or situation or person with the expectation that something worthwhile will come out of it. It is also the act of attaching oneself either intellectually or emotionally to a 'course of action'. It also implies that one is relinquishing one's freedom to act in whichever way one deems fit.²⁶

Robert Sternberg in 1986 developed a *triangular theory of love* in which he postulated that love is composed of three intrinsic parts namely intimacy, passion and commitment. Sternberg stated that intimacy is when individuals are close, are attached to one another or bond with one another on a more intellectual or emotional plane. Passion, it was stated, encompassed physical attraction and the need to attain sexual intimacy. Passion, however, no matter how strong and intense it may be can easily dull or die out with time. Commitment is what holds two people together; it is the decision to love one another on a more temporary basis and in the long term to continue to hold the same feeling for each other. Relationships were based on a hierarchy which was postulated as follows:

Liking: This involves intimacy and is the first stage in the process of building a relationship. This is characterized in true friendships.

Infatuated love: what is mostly called as "love at first sight" this comprises of passion.

Empty love: This type of love has commitment and the component of decision yet there is not much else.

Romantic love: intimacy or understanding and passion are two of its intrinsic components.

Companionate love: Often in marriages where there is no passion except a profound affection and commitment is present. Intimacy is also present in this love. Often found in deep friendships and family members.

Fatuous love: It has passion and commitment as its characteristics, like in a whirlwind marriage or courtship.

Consummate love: This is the ultimate form of love, and is considered the ideal form of relationship towards which most people aspire to. Maintaining this love is even harder than achieving it and according to Sternberg, "without expression even the greatest of loves can die".²⁷

Hence what matters in a relationship, keeping in mind what available literature tells us and empirical findings reveal, is that romantic relationships can be formed on the bases of any one of the factors from the triangular theory of love postulated by Sternberg.²⁸ However, the factor that has the most profound impact on a relationship between two individuals remains commitment and which is an intrinsic part of the most profound form of love, that is companionate love, usually seen in long term relationships. As it has been

²⁵ Thinkexist. Retrieved on July 21, 2010 from <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/commitment/>

²⁶ The Free Dictionary. Retrieved on September 26, 2010 from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/commitment>

²⁷ Sternberg, R. J. (1988) *The Triangle of Love: Intimacy, Passion, Commitment*.

²⁸ Sternberg, R.J. (1986), *op.cit.*

stated earlier that commitment is a promise that two people make to love another and to maintain that love till it has been decided by both parties which could be a few months to a whole lifetime. Commitment requires strict adherence to the promises made and any deviation from it can and does result in deep and sometimes irreconcilable differences not to mention distress and broken relationships.

Love itself drives the individuals towards commitment in two ways, the first one being the experience of love which motivates the individual to approach a potential mate and most importantly prevents one from seeking 'competing alternatives' in the absence of the beloved. Secondly when a person expresses, as in physically, expresses his or her love through word, action, or gesture or anything else that is outward and communicates commitment to one's romantic partner, it in turn protects and makes the bonds more powerful (such as trustworthiness, dependence on each other, affection or kindness). And as interdependence and trust are enhanced or grow between partners, the individuals in a romantic relationship become more averse to cheating or breaking a commitment. They learn to sacrifice in the name of the relationship and start to exhibit behavior that is high or pro-relationship factors such as compromising one's own set of beliefs or ways to accommodate the other person's wishes.²⁹

As far as nonverbal displays of love are concerned an analysis that was based on commitment, revealed that a partner's love's assessment is necessary for the maintenance of a relationship.³⁰ Especially in the initial stages of a relationship it enhances the relations between the partners knowing that the other person is also feeling the same way as oneself or has the feeling of love which aids in the acquiescence of the pursuance of relations that are intimate.³¹ As these relationships evolve, the perception that the partner feels love for one will most likely lead to the promotion of commitment in varied ways. This will include acts such as reassurance that a partner gives one in times of ambiguity and also in the promotion of intimacy.³²

No matter which part of the world one goes to the definition of commitment holds true and no matter which tribe, culture, society, religion or country one belongs to, the fact that one has made a promise to another remains as binding as if it were set in stone. Still one hears of people indulging in acts which are in direct contrast to the rules of commitment, and in most cases the consequences are painful and in some cases horrific. Why people knowingly or unknowingly commit such acts has been under the much debate with much ink being wasted on it. Whether there is a difference between the commitment styles of men or women, or whether it was because of the current scenario where people want more freedom of emotional and physical expression remains a point which raises a lot of argument not to mention belligerence. Sometimes men are blamed and sometimes evolution is held responsible for their actions.

²⁹ Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C.E., Foster, C.A., & Agnew, C.R. (1999). Commitment, Pro-relationship behavior, and Trust in close Relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 942-966.

³⁰ Frank, R.H. (1988). *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions*. New York: Norton.

³¹ Buss, D.M. (1994), *op.cit*.

³² Gonzaga, G.C. Keltner D, Londahl EA, and Smith, MD. (2008). Love and the Commitment Problem in romantic Relations and Friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81:247-262.

Religion and cultural values play a huge part in Pakistani society; Pakistan itself was made so that the Muslims would have the freedom to practice their religious beliefs in peace and harmony. The cultural values and norms are very collectivistic and not given to individualism in any form, and if there is any break from tradition it causes in some cases grievous harm to the parties involved with the legislature doing little if anything to protect the women in such cases.

There have been cases of karo kari or honor killing in Pakistan, which implies that family members of a female have the right to kill her if she brings shame to her family in any respect whether it is asking for the right to study, or getting married according to her wishes. Even though this is rampant only in villages in Sindh, this brutal practice has had devastating consequences for its victims where many have been killed in the name of honor.³³

The religion practiced in Pakistan by the majority of the population is Islam and the writs of the holy book of the Muslims, the Quran, permits Muslims to marry from “people of the book” who are the Jews and the Christians. It has been stated in the Quran, “Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allure you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allure you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to mankind: that they may celebrate His praise”.^{34,35}

Another issue that has risen due to Pakistan’s internal security situation, which was impacted by the influx of the afghan refugees and the Iranian revolution on Pakistani Shia community, is an increase in sectarian violence. 1997 and 1998 were the most strife ridden years in the history of Pakistan. There has been considerable loss of life among the sunni shia communities due to the intolerance of both parties during the years 1980-2004.³⁶ What this has done is to drive a wedge between the two communities hence any relationships that can lead to intermarriages are generally looked upon as being prone to complications and strife between a couple due to religious differences.

Since Pakistan follows the norms of a collectivistic culture, hence parents are considered a final authority on most matters, be they education, marriage or life decisions of any kind. Children whether male or female tend to live with their parents till they are married at least and even after marriage most traditional parents would prefer to have the children with them. This in turn leads to the joint family system which is still largely prevalent in Pakistani society. Any romantic relationships hence need to be formed keeping the cultural boundaries and religious norms in mind since marriage is still considered as the ultimate aim of getting into a romantic relationship.

³³ *Daily Times*. 2010. *Karo-kari incidents similar to targeted killings*. Retrieved on November 24, 2010 from http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C07%5C09%5Cstory_9-7-2010_p.12-15.

³⁴ Al-Qur’an, 2:221

³⁵ *Niche of truth*. Quran 2:21. Retrieved on November 24, 2010 from http://www.nicheoftruth.org/pages/the_quran_and_non-muslims.htm.

³⁶ Firdous, K. *Militancy in Pakistan*. Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. Retrieved on November 24, 2010 from http://www.issi.org.pk/ss_Detail.php?dataId=504

Method

Pilot Study 1

In the first trial an unprepared interview was carried out to see the response of people to the subject of commitment in romantic relationships. A group of 5 girls, age ranging from 18-24 were interviewed and their input was taken on 'the importance of commitment in a relationship'. The resulting discussion led to the construction of a questionnaire and a focus group criterion to conduct the study.

Pilot Study 2

In the second phase a focus group was carried out on a group of 8 who were interviewed. This focus group comprised of 4 females and 4 males from within the various departments of the University of Karachi. The time taken was approximately an hour. The participants were first asked questions which comprised of the demographic information which was age, qualification, marital status of parents, family, monthly income, their relationship status, and if they have been in a relationship and for how long? After they had answered these questions they were queried regarding the following aspects of the study:

1. What, according to you – is your idea of a romantic relationship?
2. In your opinion what is it that makes a relationship successful?
3. How important is commitment in your relationship?
4. How important is it for you to know that you partner is committed to you?
5. Would the level of commitment be affected by views held by your family, friends or religion?

It was found that asking questions orally pertaining to demographics, made the participants uncomfortable, hence these were put down in written form assuring confidentiality of the participants personal information.

Participants

After getting the consent forms of participation signed by the participants, the participants were equally divided into two groups. Two focus groups were conducted in which the participants were equally divided into eight, for each group. Each of these two groups had four males and four females aged 18-24 years. All belonged to various departments of the University of Karachi and were chosen using purposive sampling. The participants were informed before the start of the interview that they would be asked questions pertaining to romantic relationships and commitment and they were assured of complete confidentiality. The participants' names were changed to numbers and the gender denoted by the letter M for male and F for female which were noted against the numbers assigned to each participant hence M1 would imply male participant with code 1. Participants are also called interviewees in this study. There were two focus groups. Each was headed by two researchers. The interviewees identities have been codified from 1-14 with the males being coded as M and females being coded as F. Group 1 comprised of interviewees from numbers 1-8 with 4 males and 4 females, hence males in group 1 were M1, M3, M5 and M7 and females were F2, F4, F6 and F8. Group 2 comprised of

interviewees or participants where males were M11, M13 and M14 whereas females were F9, F10 and F12. Both groups data has been cumulatively reported in the study. So that it becomes one big group with participants from F1-M14.

Data Collection

A structured interview was rendered and data was collected from this, the interviews lasted approximately two hours. The research was divided into two groups, each headed by two researchers; one would be carrying out the bulk of the interview and the other transcribing. The interviews were bilingual that is in English and Urdu both, depending on the comfort and the comprehension level of the interviewees. The interview was carried out based on extensive literature review on commitment. A standardized demographics form was made which took the following information from the participants:

- Date of birth
- Gender
- Qualification
- Family monthly income
- Parents' marital status
- Interviewee's relationship status
- How many relationships has the interviewee been in and for how long?
- An optional blank was left for interviewees to write on if they had any comments, which were given to them after the interview.

The structured interview comprised of the following questions:

1. What, according to you – is your idea of a romantic relationship?
2. In your opinion what is it that makes a relationship successful?
3. How important is commitment in your relationship?
4. How important is it for you to know that your partner is committed to you?
5. Would the level of commitment be affected by views held by your family, friends or religion?

Data Analysis

Transcription of the interviews was verbatim from the structured interview questions. The initial categories or demographics and the structured interview was analyzed by the supervisor. Factors such as basis of a romantic relationship, what makes a relationship successful, role of commitment, significance of the knowledge that the partner is committed, role of family, peer pressure, and role of religion in the level of commitment were explored. A single author was conducting the study under the guidance of a supervisor.

Results

In the present study the findings are presented from factors such as basis of a romantic relationship, what makes a relationship successful, role of commitment, significance of the knowledge that the partner is committed, role of family, peer pressure, and role of

religion in the level of commitment were explored. All fourteen are taken as one group and then the most mentioned response is reported in the following aspects of study with the highest rated one being mentioned in the beginning and lowest rated one at the end.

Basis of a Romantic Relationship

This thematic unit refers to the factors that were responsible in forming the basis of a romantic relationship. From the fourteen who took part in the interview, five people namely F3, M4, F7, F9 and F10 said understanding formed the basis of the romantic relationship, whereas four (F3, M4, M11 and F12) stated that trust was something that was intrinsic in a relationship. F2 stated that respect for each other and respecting each other's values (10) was what formed the root of the relationship. M1 however stated that the feeling of wanted physically and mentally was important whereas F2 and F5 stated that they felt it was important to think before leaping into a relationship.

Success of a Romantic Relationship

The highest response was for understanding, where eight out of fourteen participants unanimously agreed that it was one of the most important factors in a romantic relationship. Seven participants mentioned space, which is the space that is given to each person by the partner—the space to be one's own person rather than be constantly shadowed and leaned on, one of the participants in this group, F10, stated that 'having one's own life' was also important for a successful relationship. The next most mentioned factor important for the success of a relationship was trust in each other with six participants mentioning this aspect in the success of a relationship. Compromise was another factor which was mentioned by three of the participants. Three more mentioned the spirit of sacrifice as being significant factor that should be present for the success of a relationship. Another two mentioned boundaries or limits which they felt were important for the success of a relationship, limits or boundaries where people knew that going beyond a certain boundary or limit would cause hurt to the other person.

Role of Commitment

This thematic unit referred to the role that commitment played in romantic relationship. Commitment stands for loyalty and devotion and giving assurance to the other person about one's intentions in a romantic relationship. Twelve out of fourteen participants stated that commitment in a relationship was very important. F12 stated that acceptance was important for commitment and M4 who was married and an outlier stated that for him commitment was not important, which provoked the others to defend their stance with reasons why commitment was important for a relationship. However M4 did state that he felt this way because everyone was having a romantic relationship and the word or the concept of commitment was abused more than anything nowadays. Here one could sense reaction formation for the concept of commitment may be he did believe in it but was showing the opposing emotion to this thematic unit, since he was married it was his adherence to his commitment that he was now married.

Knowing That One's Partner Is Committed to him/her

This thematic unit deals with the question as to how important it is to know that one's partner in a romantic relationship is committed to one. All fourteen participants felt that it was very important for them to know that their partner was committed to them. However the discussion veered into another dimension of relationships, which was that the female participants F1, F3, F5 and F7 felt that they wanted to be told that they were loved as much as they were in the beginning of the relationship. The male participants felt that it was not that important to talk about it often, and the fact that they were with their partner was symbolic of their commitment to their partner. This unit did spark a debate in which female participants F1, F3, F5 and F7 vociferously stated that they felt women needed to be told that they were still wanted by their partners and that it felt good. They also stated that actions and words go hand in hand it albeit in moderation as in once a day they felt was adequate for them.

Role of Family, Friends and Religion in Commitment

This thematic unit deals with how family friends and religion affect the level of commitment in relationships that are romantic. Religion seemed to be the most touted factor that affected relationships and that could be because of strict adherence to laws pertaining to religion and since this is a collective culture parents values are passed down and strictly adhered to most of the time by the children. Most of the parents are particularly keen on children marrying within their religion in Pakistan. That could be because state and religion are so intrinsically entwined and Islam is such a part of one's life here that most life decisions are made keeping the tenets of Islam in mind. Participants F1, M2, F3, M4, M6 and F7 reported that religion would have an impact on their level of commitment. That is if their level of commitment would suffer on the basis of difference in religious values or beliefs. The second most reported factor was parents, Pakistani society is based on a collective cultural value system, hence parents are respected and their decisions do have an impact on the decisions of their children. Participants F5 and M11 stated that they felt, appropriate management of the situation would avoid conflict within the three factors that of religion, parents and friends with their level of commitment with their partner.

Discussion

The fact that trust and understanding cropped up the most in the study on commitment makes one realize how underrated and misunderstood these two simple yet the most intrinsic of human needs are in a relationship. It is a fact that men and women relate differently to different aspects of a relationship, a communication gap definitely exists that remains unprecedented and causes myriad of misunderstandings. Robert Sternberg's triangular model of love lays proof to the fact that the ultimate kind of love or relationship between two people is the consummate love and this research consistently points to the fact that it is the basic need of majority of people to feel trust, understanding or intimacy and affection for their loved one.³⁷ Men and women strive for a relationship that is as close to consummate love as is possible and if it is not there then there will be frustration, anger, sadness or depression all dependent on the individual's coping skills

³⁷ Sternberg, R.J. (1986), *op.cit.*

with stressors in his or her life. A relationship that causes heartbreak and stress can lead to an eventual break up in which two people who loved each other at one point in time drift apart due to lack of fulfillment of each other's requirements.

The second thematic unit which focused on the factors that result in the success of a relationship were the most reported one being understanding, again one of the factors of a deeper kind of love. This is validated in Sternberg's model of love where in the hierarchy of love the most profound kinds of love have intimacy or understanding as one their characteristics. These are companionate love, consummate love and romantic love and even liking which is considered to be a precursor to any relationship be it romantic or otherwise. From the evolutionary perspective this is again validated since it is important to two people a man and woman in the traditional family structure to come together and who share some level of understanding to make the relationship work.

Since it is important for the beginning of any relationship to have intimacy or understanding, it is equally important for the retention of said relationship to continue to have some level of understanding otherwise the relationship will break down which will result in the couple parting ways. This would not have helped from the evolutionary perspective since it was important for the offspring to have two people aiding its survival. Advocates of the attachment theory game theory and evolutionary theory have espoused that reproductive relations are maintained by emotions experienced by individuals.³⁸

The third thematic unit that was discussed was how important commitment was in a romantic relationship. In this the majority of interviewees said that it was very important again validating Sternberg's model of love.³⁹ The more serious or profound a relationship the more important commitment is for the people involved in such circumstances. Commitment even from the perspective of evolution is important for the survival of the species, the concept of commitment to one's mate or beloved came about so that a couple could stay together and raise their children in the most effective manner possible. The survival of the offspring was/is the most important part that is played by mankind.

From the evolutionary perspective it is also incumbent upon the female to be more choosy about the male she mates with and to be more commitment oriented since she has more invested in the offspring.⁴⁰ The family itself came into being so as to fulfill the basic requirements of the offspring. According to the evolutionary perspective human beings are genetically designed to be able to fend for their survival and to procreate which is equally necessary in order for them to survive. In order to survive in the most effective manner possible the couple or parent has to be committed to each other and to the child for them to provide a thriving, normal and healthy physical and emotional environment. Hence the need for intimacy in a relationship which gives emotional stability and commitment which ensues hopefully out of that which in turn gives the relationship the impetus to last and provide an ideal environment for the offspring to grow in.

³⁸ Hatfield, E. & Rapson, R. (1993). *Love and Attachment Processes*. In M. Lewis & J.M. Haviland (Eds.), *Handbook of emotion* (New York: Guilford Press), 595-604

³⁹ Sternberg, R.J. (1986), *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Smith, E.E., Hoeksma, S.N., Fredrickson, B.L. & Loftus, G.R. (2003). *Personality*. Atkinson and Hilgard's *Introduction to Psychology*. 14th edition. 481-482. USA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

It has always been more important for the female to be told that she is loved and cared for, if one looks at primitive man and keeping Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious in mind it becomes incumbent on the species to carry out the actions or thoughts that were carried out by their ancestors. Since the evolutionary paradigm is part of that collective unconscious then it becomes second nature for man to unconsciously aspire to and want the same things that his ancestors aspired to or wanted in order to aid in their survival.

In the fourth thematic unit which was whether it is important for one to know that one's partner is committed to one, according to Rusbult, Drigotas & Verette when a person expresses, as in physically, expresses his or her love through word, action, or gesture or anything else that is outward and communicates commitment to one's romantic partner, it in turn protects and makes the bonds more powerful (such as trustworthiness, dependence on each other, affection or kindness).⁴¹ And as interdependence and trust are enhanced or grow between partners, the individuals in a romantic relationship become more averse to cheating or breaking a commitment. They learn to sacrifice in the name of the relationship and start to exhibit behavior that is high or pro-relationship factors such as compromising one's own set of beliefs or ways to accommodate the other person's wishes.

As far as nonverbal displays of love are concerned an analysis that was based on commitment, revealed that a partner's love's assessment is necessary for the maintenance of a relationship.⁴² Especially in the initial stages of a relationship it enhances the relations between the partners knowing that the other person is also feeling the same way as one self or has the feeling of love which aids in the acquiescence of the pursuance of relations that are intimate.⁴³ As these relationships evolve, the perception that the partner feels love for one will most likely lead to the promotion of commitment in varied ways. This will include acts such as reassurance that a partner gives one in times of ambiguity and also in the promotion of intimacy.⁴⁴ This corroborates the fact that in order for a relationship to reach the highest level in the hierarchy of love it is important to show, verbally and non-verbally, displays of affection and commitment.

Pakistani society with its collectivistic culture and rigid adherence to traditions, has ensured that no man or woman or child is under the misconception that he/she is an island and that people make decisions keeping in mind the impact such a decision will have on the rest of the group who is closely aligned to the individual in question. Six out of fourteen participants stated that religion was important and that it would affect their level of commitment in a relationship. Three stated that religion, family and friends should be managed effectively in order to avoid any hassles later on. As M13 states that one should be able to convince one's parents, five of the fourteen interviewed stated that parents were important more so than religion. Interestingly parents are the ones who teach about religious values from childhood, so both parental values and religious values are

⁴¹ Rusbult, C.E. Drigotas, S.E. & Verette, J. (1994). *The Investment Model: An interdependence analysis of commitment processes and relationship maintenance phenomena*. In D. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.). *Communication and Relational Maintenance*. (New York: Academic Press), 115-139

⁴² Frank, R.H. (1988). *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions*. New York: Norton.

⁴³ Buss, D.M. (1994), *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ Gonzaga, G.C. Keltner D, Londahl EA, and Smith, MD., *op.cit.*

intertwined and do have the capacity to adversely impact the level of commitment in a romantic relationship. The impact is felt not only by the parents but also by the children who are the result of the union of a couple from diverse religious backgrounds or even different cultures.

Other Considerations

The study was carried out keeping in mind that there would be only a couple of participants i.e. a male and female, however, one male married participant became a part of the study. This shifted the paradigm where the discussion took an interesting turn. The participants got involved in a discussion as to why women needed to be told that the men they were in a relationship would have a need to verbally and non-verbally show their commitment or affection. The Perception of women was that men changed after marriage, the argument was opposed by males and to which the men replied that it was because they had more responsibility. However the women stated that they also had responsibility but then their work was always undermined since it did not reap financial dividends. This debate is not new and realization has to set in across the board that whether one is working outside the home or in the home (as in homemaking) the responsibility is equally distributed in the management of the family structure and that both husband and wife share the onus of bringing up mentally and physically healthy offspring. The homemakers should also be given due respect and their work should not be undermined. And just because a woman is married to a man does not mean she is his chattel to be used as a child minder, cleaning maid or a source of sexual gratification only. If there is no respect for one another's feelings, a relationship cannot survive and this is where understanding comes into play understanding one another's needs and fulfilling each other's requirements as M14 so aptly stated when he was asked what led to success in a romantic relationship.