

WHEN LOVE DRIVES YOU OFF THE TRAILS: NARRATIVES OF MORBID LOVE

Romantic love appears as the keystone of happiness and it is seen to involve plenty of various positive physical, psychological, and behavioral features (Aron et al., 2005; Gonzaga et al., 2001; Fisher, 2004; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Määttä, 2011a,b; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012a,d; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2011, 2012). These features are, among others, increased sense of well-being, energy, stronger self-esteem and self-regard, sexual appeal, and expectation of a promising symbiotic future. Many of these factors work two-way: on the one hand, they support positive togetherness while, on the other hand, they can become the chains of love. The latter refers to the appeal of the partner's companion and constant, even desperate, longing for it; caring for the partner and thinking of him/her compulsively; the experience of the partner's possession and his/her dependency; and the fear of losing love. Moreover, one's fragility and insecurity also cloud expectations toward love—anticipation and wishes may eventually turn into demands for guaranteed love.

More and more research data about the crises, touchstones, and minefields of love are available (Acavedo & Aron, 2009; Altbauer-Rudnik, 2006; de Boer, van Buel, & Ter Horst, 2011; Peele, 1975; 1988; Sussman, 2010; Thomson & White, 1993; Toohey, 1992). The desire for the sense of well-being connected to love can turn into an addiction (Forward & Craig, 1991; Peabody, 2005). Already before Stanton Peele (1975), Sigmund Freud had noted the similarity of passionate love with substance abuse as he stated (the citation adopted from Reynaud et al., 2010):

The Soma Elixir (a love potion) is perfectly in line with the most important intuition, that all our inebriating spirits and our stimulating alkaloids are merely a substitute for a single substance, yet to be discovered, the same that the intoxication of love procures (p. 261).

Love has been compared to addiction (Peabody, 2005; Reynaud et al., 2010) and from this perspective, love has been studied especially as neurochemical (Bianchi-Demicheli, Grafton, & Ortigue, 2006; Carter, 1998; Ortigue et al., 2007; Schultz, 2000), neurobiological (Esch & Stefano, 2005; Goodman, 2008), and hormonal functions (Marrazziti & Canale, 2004; Pessiglione et al., 2006). Pleasures, rewards, and addiction that result from falling in love have been compared to effects of drug abuse (e.g. Adinoff, 2004; Gardner, 2011; Volkow et al., 2006), problem gambling (Potenza, 2008; Tamminga & Nestler, 2006), eating disorders (Savukoski, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2011, 2012), religion (Taylor, 2002), and even to the smoking of cigars (Brody, 2007). Moreover, love has been regarded as pathological (Sophia et al., 2009) accompanied with studies that use concepts like lovesickness (erotic melancholy; amor nereous) (Duffin, 2005; Tallis, 2005; Toohey, 1992) and disorders

SKEWED AND CRUMBLED LOVE

of love (Altbauer-Rudnik, 2006; Brand, 2007; Feygin, 2006; Leckman & Mayes, 1999; Mullen, 1994).

How to measure the features of morbid love? Numerous measurements have been developed to study love; the most famous of which are Rubin Love Scale (Rubin, 1970), Love Attitude Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986), Passionate Love Scale (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986), and Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1986). All these are based on question or attitude scales that respondents can use to assess the level, change, and elements of their love. Yet, none of them measures morbid love. Only one scale has been developed to measure love addiction (Hunter, Nitschke, & Hogan, 1981). Some other parallels between love and problem behavior are studied, for example the connection between love style and eating disorders (Worobey, 2002), violence (Brenda et al., 2002), or other darker sides of love relationships (Pamela & Regan, 2000).

In case love turns into an addiction, how does it occur at the level of conscious behavior? This perspective is not yet studied comprehensively. How do people describe the bruising side of love, pathological forms of love, fixations and addictions? Little research data are available. The question is relevant also because the definition of an addiction is ambiguous. For example, Jim Orford (2001, p. 344) says that “addiction does exist” (see also, Davies, 2006). And neuro-pharmacological research on addictive adaptations in the brain provides only one perspective of addiction (Tamminga & Nestler, 2006). In order to gain better insight to love-related addiction behavior, more information about the psychological, social, and emotional essence of is needed (see Schaeff, 1989). It is even more difficult to describe the conformities of love because also the phenomenology of love lacks many answers (see Määttä, 2011a,b,c; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2011, 2012a; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2011).

When people talk and think about love, their associations are often quite positive which has been proven an almost universal phenomenon (Fisher et al., 2010; Jankowiak & Fisher, 1992). How well people are aware of the problems of falling in love and loving when they talk about love? Can they name what are the touchstones and difficulties of love? The purpose of this research was to study and bring out descriptions and characterizations of the event of love and cherishing it. The especial interest was to find out how well the participants recognized the negative sides of love and how they wanted to describe them.

METHOD

The data collection and method were based on the narrative research approach (see also Purtilo-Nieminen & Määttä, 2011). Narrative research refers to studies in which the primary data source is some type of subject-provided narrative. The concept of narrative can denote an entire life story or it can refer to the practice of storytelling (Riessmann, 2008). A narrative can be understood as a short story about a particular event and specific characters, an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life, or a narrative of one's whole life in biographical studies (Chase, 2008; see also

Erkkilä, 2006). In this research, the concept of narrative is understood as a story involving a particular event and specific character (Chase, 2008).

In addition, narrative approach requires that informants are able to tell about their lives and experiences freely. Indeed, Erkkilä (2006) points out that narrative also refers to the way of knowing and the nature of knowledge. According to narrative scholars, the story is a fundamental form of human communication, and therefore it accounts for human experience (Atkinson, 1998; Clandinin, 2007).

The narrative interview can be seen as a loose framework for collecting narratives (Hyvärinen & Löyttyneemi, 2005). The traditional interview convention can be replaced by conversation, where interviewees can develop narratives together with the researcher (see Riessmann, 2008). Following these guidelines, the data in this research was collected through two methods and phases. The first set of data was collected among students at the University of Lapland. 35 students, aged between 20 and 45 years, were interviewed (22 women and 13 men). At the time of the study, 18 of them were either married or cohabited, 16 of them were singles, and one was divorced. Open interview was chosen as the interview method because it allowed the participants to freely describe what they think about love. The themes for interviews emerged from the participants' views, thoughts, and experiences of love. What happens when one falls in love, what does love give and demand, and what kinds of phases and contents does love involve or could involve, when love hurts and why? The interviews lasted between one to two hours and were recorded and transcribed word by word.

In the next phase, the interview data were expanded by essays. Students of educational psychology (N=46) who studied at the University of Lapland wrote an essay about "What makes love difficult? What hurts in love? Why is it difficult to cherish a romantic relationship?" The data were collected during the course of love psychology in 2012. The data comprised anonymously written essays that were between one to four sheets long. 36 of the respondents were women and 10 were men. 38 of them lived in cohabitation with their partners, two were married, and six were dating.

The reason for collecting two sets of informal data—essays and open interviews—was that people can reveal what they really think and feel and thus, the many forms and shades of love would be unveiled. Some of the participants described their experiences of falling in love, the process of finding a partner in a versatile ways. Some of them could have several happy or unhappy experiences of falling in love while some of the participants did not have much personal experience: they had found their partner from college or their first love relationship had just begun. What is common to these two sets of data is the rich narration.

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes the analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. The former means categorizing, for example by types. The latter refers to the composition of a new narrative based on various original narratives. Both of these analysis methods were used in this research. The aim was to create narratives that describe the essence of morbid love.

SKEWED AND CRUMBLED LOVE

In this research, an analysis of narratives and narrative analyses were made from the narratives that the participants told in the interviews. In this research, the analysis was made using narrative structuring that tries to put together a cohesive narrative of experiences and events during interviews. Furthermore, the analysis typified a category-content-focused approach, with parts of narratives being placed in different categories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

The narrative analysis generated new interpretations and findings for two research questions:

1. How do students describe the essence of morbid love at the level of behavior?
2. What are the typical traits or narratives of dark sides of love and loving?

Naturally, the generalizability, validity, and reliability of the results can be criticized. The stories are summaries of the course of events and in that form the data describe every participant's way of assessing their own life, the chains of events and emotions that mold it. Therefore, it is not salient whether the happenings are described comprehensively or truthfully but their interpretation of what happened is. One of the research participants had noticed that writing had clarified her/his own action and thinking and thus promoted self-understanding. Another had contemplated the theme from a new perspective:

Certainly, love is not just joy and happiness but it includes pain and agony that is not my fault. (woman, married)

RESULTS: WHAT MAKES LOVE BRUISING?

The participants described their thoughts, opinions, and experiences in diverse ways from the perspectives of love-related problems and difficulties. In this research, the narrative analysis generated new interpretations of gathered data. After a thematic categorization, we created new narratives that crystallize the manifestations of bruising love. These new stories are new compilations, representative and interpretive narratives based on an analysis of participants' interviews. These constructed stories are what Polkinghorne (1995) calls "storied narratives." In this research, two storied narratives were composed. They seem to be typical narratives: a story of fear of intimacy and commitment and fear of abandonment.

Narratives of the Fear of Intimacy and the Vortex of Love

The person of this narrative is hooked on the event of falling in love: he/she wants to be enamored and fall in love over and over again. He/she is not able to or does not want to commit to the relationship which is, however, sexually satisfying. His/her behavior represents a typical vortex of love, love addiction, that makes one enchanted with enchantment, obsessed with obsession, and love falling in love.

WHEN LOVE DRIVES YOU OFF THE TRAILS

The phenomenon can also be called love dependence which is a fixation making the person repeat the same behavior again and again.

There was always someone new... it was that zest for life. (man aged 24, unmarried)

His/her life represents a chaos of life or sexuality where pleasure and experiences are groped for through new relationships. Each new conquest is used for bolstering up his/her ego. The love addict hurries from a relationship to another, always seeking new conquests. When love leads to this type of behaviors, the life style is exhausting as new pleasures and experiences are constantly looked for and nothing else than a new romance, relationship or sex partner matters.

The vortex of love manifests itself as five partly overlapping love images, addictions or syndromes that make the person reach for new experiences of falling in love:

1. Addicted to conquering—checking one's appeal

The most famous representative of this type is probably Don Juan who demonstrated his appeal over and over again to himself and others. Instead of falling in love himself, Don Juan actually needs others to fall in love with him. After conquering someone and becoming certain of his success, he does not need his victim any longer but carries on searching, charming and abandoning new partners. The phenomenon is also called sex addiction, Don Juanism, hypersexuality, erotomania, nymphomania and satyriasis and even an academic journal is devoted to this theme: *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*.

I did not want to bind myself, I am still too young and I guess there is more that life can offer to me. (man aged 28, unmarried)

For me, it became more important to expand my experiences than being together with him. That started to be like watching paint dry. (woman, age and marital status not known)

What is the most exciting in love is finding out whether you can charm the other—I have not yet even thought about the continuation after that. (woman aged 27, unmarried)

2. Addicted to an illusion—looking for permanent pleasure

He/she is addicted to the illusion and cherishes hope of finding love that provides the perfect pleasure. Deep down, he/she feels vulnerable, imperfect, worthless, lonely, and insecure. The solution is to find someone who makes him/her feel complete and safe. Having become disappointed time after time, he/she always tries to find new love believing that finding the one and only is just a matter of time. Yet, he/she is incapable of ever getting rid of the feelings of loneliness and insecurity.

I doubted and wondered whether he cares enough for me or not. (woman aged 31, married)

SKEWED AND CRUMBLED LOVE

Disappointments follow each other and although anyone better does not seem available, at least not on the open market, I believe I will find one.
(woman aged 22, unmarried)

3. Addicted to romances—fallen in love with infatuation

He/she looks for the first moments of infatuation and romance. Addiction to romances is manifested as a dependency on experiences without which life seems wasted. He/she looks for new extreme experiences of falling in love in order to compensate the uneventfulness of his/her life. However, everyday life becomes the emptier the more wonderful experiences he/she gets. People adjust and go numb as the same infatuating experiences do not produce as powerful pleasures as before. Indeed, it is worth asking how many times one people can fall in love deeply in order to fall love deeply.

First, I felt good because of our shared experiences of ecstasy but then they felt mundane—I do not want to content myself with that. (woman aged 23, unmarried)

4. Addicted to recognition—securing one's self-satisfaction

He/she feels caged when the romantic relationship starts to show signs of settling down. The other's proximity is frightening because it can hurt. Thus, the person protects from disappointments by avoiding commitment. He/she looks for new experiences of falling in love in order to feel free and secure. Falling in love becomes a way of proving one's independence, invulnerability, and autonomy. Falling in love turns into a bulwark.

I have tried to set some limits... in case the other decides to leave. (woman aged 21, unmarried)

I did not want to be in a leash—I would not have enjoyed that or even survived. (man, age and marital status unknown)

He/she has an endless desire to prove that he/she is worth loving. Even if he/she found a partner who tells how lovable he/she is, the person tries to find a new partner to assure his/her value. The person's own doubts and inability to trust in others result in constant need for recognition. He/she wants to prove that he/she has the chance of conquering someone. Actually, he/she does not look for intimacy but is afraid of it.

I could not believe what had happened... the absurd feeling of happiness... and then I started to fear or doubt whether this can go on. (woman aged 21, unmarried)

5. Addicted to mirroring—forever pubescent

Some people have the pubescent identity struggle their whole life or do not have it until adulthood. He/she falls in love due to immature self-knowledge. He/she uses others to find out what other people think about him/her. Partners are mirrors

through which he/she looks at his/her own image. His/her emotional life and relationships are under constant whirlpool and testing. Life is seen as a great adventure or continuous experimenting.

I started to suspect that I am just a habit for him—I wanted to be admired, I enjoyed when someone made a pass at me and the attention, I wanted to test my appeal. (woman aged 25, cohabiting)

Narratives of the Fear of Abandonment and Clinging to the Other

The narration about the fear of abandonment in love is unfortunate because the person believes that happiness, satisfaction, and balance in life cannot be achieved without the significant other. Thus, the person can sacrifice his/her life for helping, caring for, fixing, and changing the other whether the other was an alcoholic, violent, or had other behavioral problems. The fear of abandonment can lead to codependency (Loughead, 1991; Norwood, 1985; Wright and Wright, 1991) and the one who suffers from it starts to live for the other in the name of love. As reactions to the other's abnormal behavior, the person develops unhealthy coping methods, explaining that it is all about love. Consequently, he/she tolerates violence and ignores himself/herself.

I would be ashamed to tell to what I am ready to submit in order to receive love. (woman aged 26, married)

The person stays in a violent relationship and explains: "I love him." Yet, it is likely that this person does not consider himself/herself worth loving by anyone and thus feels powerless and hopeless and is definite that there just are not any other options.

As we had promised to love each other in public, you should not give up that promise very easily—quite often I felt guilty because I was not able to defend myself. Perhaps, it was also about the fear of losing her. (man aged 25, unmarried)

The codependent person is sick with worry for the other. He/she tries to help in a way that does not really help. He/she says "yes" but means "no". He/she tries to avoid hurting the other's feelings and simultaneously hurts himself/herself. He/she is incapable of trusting his/her feelings. The list could go on endlessly. The person is used to think, feel and act in a way that hurts himself/herself. On the other hand, he/she is clinging to the unhappy love because he/she denies, undervalues and ignores himself/herself, thinks that he/she does not deserve anything better.

Dorothy Tennov (1979) calls this type of hopeless love limerence. It refers to a convulsive clinging to the other caused by a powerful affinity and need for taking care of the other. The event of falling in love develops into a state of limerence

SKEWED AND CRUMBLED LOVE

and codependency little by little. At first, the romantic relationship is insecure and testing. Then, the attention is focused more and more strongly on the significant other who seems to fill the person's whole life. Constant, compulsive speculation occupies his/her mind totally.

I could not stop thinking about him and felt like demoniac. (woman, age and marital status unknown)

The fear of losing the beloved, being totally dependent on him/her but not able to control him/her and his/her feelings may also represent the fear of losing control over oneself: the fear of not being able to cope without the other and being terrified because of the thought of being alone or becoming abandoned. This kind of fearful love seems to have three typical features: 1) Addicted to strong emotions—living the strong pendulum motion of feelings where ecstasy and agony take turns; 2) Addicted to the heat of the moment—feeling impatient, and 3) Addicted to pleasing—the powerful inclination to adjust.

1. Addicted to strong emotions—living the strong pendulum motion of feelings where ecstasy and agony take turns

The more fragile the relationship is the less the person feels of being loved. The sadder the experiences one has from previous relationships, the bigger the fear and compulsion will become.

I felt like dying without the other next to me. (woman aged 26, married)

The thought of requited love takes the person in a euphoric state with an inconceivable feeling of happiness. Yet, the feeling of not becoming loved by the other is always present and thus, ecstasy and agony take turns. It feels wonderful to meet someone who resonates but simultaneously it feels bad, too, as there is so much to lose:

You have to have the courage to defy dangers when you indulge in a passionate love relationship.

The one in love reacts easily to everything the beloved does: his/her every gesture or word is evaluated hoping for acceptance and fearing abandoning. In order to become certain of love, the person begins to study and constantly interpret the significant other's gestures and tones of voice.

As the codependency develops, the person starts to think that only this one person can satisfy his/her needs. The person is dependent on him/her and needs him/her almost helplessly.

2. Addicted to the heat of the moment—feeling impatient

The feeling of impatience follows. It means that the person is aware that time flies: it is a sort of fear of death when life seems worth living the most:

It feels like living and dying at the same time.

This impatience can lead for example to quick engagement as if love would run away if it is not captures:

You must strike while the iron is hot.

3. Addicted to pleasing—the powerful inclination to adjust

In addition, the one in love is extremely willing to adjust. He/she does not find his/her opinions that important. The same goes with the partner's hopes and requests. The person wants to fulfill them even at the expense of his/her own needs. At this point, the main point in life is to make the other feel happy and satisfied.

The tenderness and cruelty of love is described as “the seventh heaven” and “hell on earth.” Love is “agony and torment” or “so wonderful that it hurts.”

I felt that I cannot exist without that person. (woman aged 21, unmarried)

DISCUSSION

Naturally people want to re-experience everything pleasant. One starts to like and miss that feeling. One of the characterizations of abnormal, painful, and unhappy love is the compulsive need for experiencing the intoxicating event of falling in love over and over again. This need can become so powerful that it goes on even if it leads to negative physical and emotional consequences. Only few can admit that they are addicted or that their repeated experiences are not satisfying after all. They claim that they are enjoying although they feel lonely and unhappy. The core of the satisfaction in the vortex of love is not the pleasure found together with the partner but in the feeling of getting free of daily anxiety, depression or problems with self-esteem or self-regard. The good mood followed by falling in love provides a momentary relief for the deep feelings of insecurity.

Likewise, codependency includes not only fear and sorrow but also joy and enchantment, at least at the beginning of love. Clinging may be beyond rational control. Thus, emotional ups and downs in a romantic relationship reflect to other social relationships too, diminish resources to work and study, and distract one's piece of mind.

In this article, we highlighted two central elements of bruising love. They are, not by any means, the only ones but help understanding about the nature of morbid love. In this research, some issues were less reviewed, such as jealousy (Buunk & Bringle 1987; Rydell, McConnell, & Bringle, 2004; White, 1981), narcissism (Campbell, 1999; Määttä, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2011) and violence (Buss & Duntley, 2011; Chan, 2011; Flynn & Graham, 2010; Scharpe & Taylor, 1999; Wood, Maforah, & Jewkes, 1998). In addition, it remains unsolved how common the abovementioned behaviors are (cf., Gosling et al., 1998). Perhaps, it cannot be shown easily, nor is it even necessary. Most likely, many people do not experience the feelings of addiction

SKEWED AND CRUMBLLED LOVE

or codependency while some people have them frequently. Instead, it seems worth becoming aware of these dark sides of love and learning how to live with them—to learn to love.

How one could manage to avoid the negative dimensions of love? Based on the results of this research, the key to stable love is self-respect and sufficient self-esteem (see *Figure 3*). We placed the fear of intimacy in one pan while fear of abandonment fills the other. The quality of self-esteem, especially connected to self-respect, varies. A person's quest for self-esteem and its destructive consequences (see also Greenberg, 2008) can make the love scales tip in the favor of either dimension.

When a person considers his/her own pleasure and contentment the most important, his/her behavior starts resemble fear of intimacy. The person has overly high self-esteem (or quest for it, see Greenberg, 2008) but low respect for other people and for himself/herself, as well. Others' feelings do not matter but the person needs constant confirmation that he/she is lovable. All new conquests function as proofs. Žvelc (2010) calls these relationships as object relationships because the other is perceived as an object for the satisfaction of the first person's needs; thus, the object person has the only value according to whether he/she can satisfy the first person.

When the situation is roughly the opposite, low self-esteem combined with overly high respect for others' needs and satisfaction, the person suffers from the fear of abandonment. Lack of self-respect is manifested in the person's way of ignoring his/her own needs and thinking that the only thing that matters is the other's contentment. Sophia et al.'s (2009) study supports this finding: individuals who are more attached and dependent on others and those naturally more prone to anxiety and concern over punishment are more likely to engage and maintain disturbing relationships, due to fear of loneliness and abandonment.

Thus, self-esteem seems to have the key role. People who are provided with healthy self-esteem are able to pay attention to their human dignity but are also interested in other people, especially their loved ones. Furthermore, it leads to respectful behavior toward others. The love scale is in balance when the person accepts and appreciates himself/herself but can also tolerate and appreciate intimacy without the fear of becoming left alone or hurt. Healthy self-esteem, finding one's resources and development toward greater self-expression in intimate relationships is necessary for finding fulfillment in life and balance in love (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012a,c) and yet, love is not just about one person: it is about respecting the other person and finding the mutual understanding (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012d; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2011). Thus, it is relevant to think how to define intimacy and closeness. Harvey and Pauwels (2009, p. 385) define closeness as "mutual satisfaction and behavior that contributes to one another's goals and hopes in life." Harvey and Pauwels' closeness describes quite well the equilibrium in the scale model presented in *Figure 3*.

WHEN LOVE DRIVES YOU OFF THE TRAILS



Figure 3. The scale of morbid love.

CONCLUSION

How to learn to love is a question that is impossible to answer comprehensively (Määttä, 2011b; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2011). Love and romantic relationships have their own laws for many reasons:

1. There are many forms of love and romantic relationships. Love like other complex emotions cannot be defined consistently: it is a combination of versatile emotions, knowledge, and action. These contents intertwine in human experiences. There for any evaluation or description of love is only a partial shade of love.
2. Love is a personal and holistic experience. It consists of those feelings, thoughts and acts that one considers manifestations of love. Different people have various interpretations of love. There are not any specific knowledge, emotional, or behavioral contents that are absolute and common to all love experiences. Although some traits or experiences are more common than others, there are as many definitions of love as there are thinkers, authors, researchers, and witnesses of love. Therefore, almost everything that can be said about love and relationships is true at least to someone in some circumstances.
3. Love is also a relative phenomenon. It is defined in each situation by the partners' contemporary unique characteristics. In addition, the idea of love may change along age. Most people hope that their relationships would develop

SKEWED AND CRUMBLED LOVE

positively. Therefore, it is not very surprising that people create—based on their experiences—theories, explanations, and beliefs for reasons that make a relationship fail or succeed. Explanations can also diminish or hinder a couple to analyze the complex dynamics of love. Giving to automatized arguments about the phenomenon of love has its dangers.

It is difficult to find regularities in a phenomenon that depends on individual experiences. Everyone must define love, and the emotion and the decision of existing love cannot be defined by any other people than the ones in love. Love is the most radical form of democracy between two people as it leans on the personal responsibility at its purest. It also includes the chance of being irresponsible because only lovers themselves can make the decision of ending their love: one of the partners votes against the other because feelings have changed.

A romantic relationship is fundamentally open, empty or unsigned state. It is a form that the spouses must create. How they organize their relationship, what love means and how to make it last are questions that the spouses have to answer together. Learning about others' experiences and courses of action can only help.