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The importance of love and affection in sexual relationships: An evaluation from psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives

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The authors declare that there is no possible conflict of interest in this study.

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This study was scanned in the iThenticate program. The final similarity rate is 5 %.

The importance of love and affection in sexual relationships: An evaluation from psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives**Abstract**

Sexuality is a complex phenomenon that encompasses biological, psychological, and social dimensions, transcending mere physical needs to foster emotional and spiritual connections. This study explores the significance of love and affection in sexual relationships from psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives. The research emphasizes that love and affection enhance sexual experiences, contributing to individual well-being and the sustainability of long-term relationships. Utilizing Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love and attachment theory, the paper highlights how emotional bonds improve relationship quality. Additionally, the study examines the role of neurotransmitters like dopamine and oxytocin in reinforcing attachment and trust. The commodification of sexuality in modern society is critiqued for diminishing emotional connections. The findings suggest that integrating love and affection into sexuality promotes deeper fulfillment, contrasting with relationships focused solely on physical pleasure, which often lead to emotional dissatisfaction. The paper underscores the necessity of emotional bonds for healthy and meaningful sexual relationships.

Keywords: Sexuality, Love and affection, Emotional connection, Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, Attachment Theory, Relationship sustainability, Emotional fulfillment, Media and popular culture, Human well-being

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Introduction**

Sexuality, as a multifaceted phenomenon, integrates biological, psychological, and social dimensions that transcend physical needs to create emotional and spiritual connections. This study examines the interplay of love and affection in sexual relationships, emphasizing their role in fostering individual well-being and enhancing the sustainability of long-term partnerships. By addressing the questions of how emotional bonds influence sexual experiences and relationship quality, the research highlights the necessity of integrating affection into intimate relationships. The significance of this topic lies in its ability to bridge the gap between physical and emotional aspects of human connections.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The research adopts Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love and attachment theory as foundational frameworks. Sternberg's model emphasizes the three components of intimacy, passion, and commitment, demonstrating how love can foster deeper emotional and physical connections in sexual relationships. Attachment theory further illustrates how secure emotional bonds, formed in early relationships, shape individuals' capacity for trust and connection in adulthood.

Concepts

1. Sexuality: A complex interaction of physical, emotional, and social factors that contribute to human connections.
2. Love and Affection: Emotional expressions that strengthen intimacy, enhance trust, and deepen the meaning of sexual relationships.
3. Biological Attachment: The role of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and oxytocin, in creating feelings of attachment and satisfaction.

Literature Review

Existing literature highlights the importance of emotional bonds in achieving fulfilling sexual relationships. Studies indicate that love and affection enhance trust and emotional safety, enabling partners to experience greater satisfaction. Moreover, research on neurotransmitters such as dopamine and oxytocin confirms their role in

fostering attachment and mutual trust. However, the commodification of sexuality in contemporary society is critiqued for undermining these emotional aspects, leading to shallow and less satisfying connections.

Method

The study employs a qualitative approach, including a comprehensive review of existing literature and thematic analysis of case studies related to sexual relationships. Data from psychological and sociological research are synthesized to explore the integration of emotional and physical dimensions in intimacy.

Findings

1. **Enhancement of Sexual Experiences:** Love and affection significantly enhance the quality of sexual relationships by fostering trust, emotional safety, and mutual respect.
2. **Role of Neurotransmitters:** The study confirms that dopamine and oxytocin play a crucial role in reinforcing emotional bonds, promoting feelings of happiness, trust, and connection.
3. **Critique of Commodification:** The modern commodification of sexuality is shown to diminish emotional fulfillment, prioritizing physical pleasure over meaningful connection.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The findings underscore the importance of love and affection in sexual relationships, highlighting their contribution to individual well-being and relationship sustainability. Emotional bonds are essential for fostering trust, intimacy, and long-term satisfaction, contrasting with relationships focused solely on physical pleasure, which often result in emotional dissatisfaction.

1. Encourage discussions on the integration of emotional and physical aspects in sexual relationships through educational and therapeutic settings.
2. Promote awareness of the negative impact of commodification on the emotional dimensions of intimacy.
3. Support further research on the biological mechanisms of attachment and their implications for sexual and emotional well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of human life. However, sexuality should not be perceived merely as a physiological need; it should also be recognized as a profound human experience that fosters emotional and spiritual connections. In this context, love and affection are fundamental elements that shape the meaning of sexual relationships and support the overall well-being of individuals, both physically and emotionally.

In modern society, the perception of sexuality has evolved alongside cultural and social transformations. In traditional societies, sexuality was often associated with emotional connections within the framework of marriage or long-term commitment. In contrast, contemporary society tends to focus on individual satisfaction, and short-term sexual relationships have become more prevalent. Media and popular culture, in particular, have presented sexuality as a commodified object, relegating emotional connections like love and

affection to a secondary status (Levy, 2005). This shift can contribute to alienation and emotional dissatisfaction within interpersonal relationships.

The significance of love and affection in sexuality extends beyond emotional fulfillment; it is also critical for the long-term sustainability of relationships and the development of healthy attachment dynamics. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love posits that love consists of three fundamental components: passion, intimacy, and commitment, and the balanced presence of these components renders sexuality meaningful (Sternberg, 1986). Attachment theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of love and emotional connection in establishing trust and sustainability in relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

This paper aims to examine the importance of love and affection in sexual relationships from psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives. It will focus on the role of emotional bonds in sexuality and the impact of relationships lacking love and affection on individuals. The study asserts that sexuality, when enriched with love and affection, transcends the purely physical experience and holds a significant place in individuals' lives.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to conduct an extensive review of the literature concerning the relationship between sexuality, love, and affection from 1980 to 2023. The research sources were obtained from academic databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, SpringerLink, and JSTOR. These databases were chosen for their provision of high-quality, peer-reviewed studies relevant to the topic (Smith, 2008). The literature review was carried out by categorizing and systematically analyzing research from different disciplines such as psychology, biology, and sociology.

Selection Criteria

The primary criteria used for literature selection were as follows:

1. Studies examining the psychological and biological impacts of love and affection on sexuality. These studies investigate how sexual relationships strengthen interpersonal bonds and the overall effects on psychological health (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Fisher, 1998).
2. Sociological evaluations of the commodification of sexuality in modern societies. These studies analyze how cultural and economic factors shape sexuality and its social implications (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 2012).

3. Theoretical and empirical research focusing on the emotional dimensions of sexual relationships. These studies discuss how sexuality encompasses much more than its physical aspect and how it strengthens emotional connections (Sternberg, 1986; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The study employed content analysis as the main method to systematically assess the role of emotional bonds in sexual relationships. Content analysis allows for the detailed categorization and examination of data to identify specific themes (Krippendorff, 2013). To enhance the accuracy and reliability of the findings, each discovery was reviewed by two independent researchers and a validation process was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following key questions:

1. How does love and affection impact individuals' satisfaction levels in sexual relationships?
2. How do individuals' psychological and biological experiences shape in sexual relationships lacking love and affection?
3. How has the commodification of sexuality in modern society altered the meaning of sexual relationships in the context of love and affection?

This version uses a more formal and academic tone, suitable for scholarly work. If you need further adjustments or additional sections, feel free to ask.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE AND AFFECTION IN SEXUALITY

Examined Through Perspectives from Different Disciplines:

1. Psychological Perspective: The Impact of Love and Affection on Emotional Fulfillment and Security

Understanding the significance of love and affection in sexual relationships starts with the psychological perspective, which serves as a crucial foundational point. Psychology plays a key role in understanding individuals' emotional experiences, levels of satisfaction, and attachment dynamics within their relationships. In this context, Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love and Baumeister and Leary's "Need to Belong Theory" provide robust frameworks for explaining the connection between love, affection, and sexuality.

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Robert J. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love analyzes love through three core components:

1. **Passion:** Represents physical attraction and sexual desire, serving as the source of intense emotional and physical arousal.
2. **Intimacy:** Encompasses feelings of trust, closeness, and emotional connection, fostering deep understanding and support between partners.
3. **Commitment:** Involves conscious decisions and responsibilities aimed at sustaining a long-term relationship.

According to Sternberg, the balance among these three elements plays a crucial role in the depth and satisfaction of a relationship (Sternberg, 1986). In sexual relationships, the presence of love and affection facilitates an experience that goes beyond mere physical desire to include intimacy and commitment. For instance, in relationships based solely on passion, individuals often experience emotional dissatisfaction, and the relationship fails to transform into sustainable commitment. Conversely, relationships characterized by intimacy and commitment make sexuality a means for deeper bonding between partners.

Need to Belong Theory

Baumeister and Leary (1995) emphasized the need for individuals to form meaningful and enduring emotional bonds as a fundamental psychological requirement through their "Need to Belong Theory." This theory is vital for understanding the impact of love and emotional closeness on individuals' overall well-being. Studies have shown that when the need for belonging is unmet, individuals experience negative emotional states such as loneliness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.

In the context of sexual relationships, the need for belonging requires not just physical proximity but also emotional attachment. In loving relationships, sexuality enhances individuals' sense of trust and belonging. In contrast, relationships focused solely on physical pleasure and lacking emotional connection may lead to emotional dissatisfaction, loneliness, and alienation. Baumeister and Leary's findings clearly show that love is an indispensable component for emotional fulfillment in sexual relationships.

Psychological Fulfillment and Attachment Dynamics

From a psychological perspective, the presence of love and affection is among the most important elements that make sexual experiences fulfilling and meaningful. Bowlby's

attachment theory highlights the impact of attachment styles developed early in life on adult romantic relationships and sexuality (Bowlby, 1969). Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to form deeper and more satisfying relationships with their partners. Hazan and Shaver (1987) demonstrated that attachment styles directly influence the perception of love, intimacy, and sexuality in romantic relationships.

Research indicates that individuals with a secure attachment style experience higher emotional satisfaction in sexual relationships, while those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles often engage in more superficial and unsatisfying experiences (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). In loving relationships, sexuality strengthens the bond between partners, while insecure attachment styles are often associated with emotional disconnection and loneliness.

Therapeutic Effects of Love and Affection in Sexuality

Psychologically, incorporating love and affection into sexual relationships not only enhances individual satisfaction but also allows individuals to feel valued and reinforces their sense of security. For instance, Gottman and Silver (1999) emphasized that love and sexual satisfaction in healthy romantic relationships positively impact couples' overall happiness and their ability to cope with stress.

In conclusion, the psychological perspective underscores that love and affection in sexual relationships contribute not only to emotional fulfillment but also lay the foundation for individuals to feel valued, secure, and capable of forming meaningful connections. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Baumeister and Leary's Need to Belong Theory offer significant guidance for understanding these dynamics.

2. Biological Perspective: The Role of Hormones in Supporting Love and Attachment

Sexuality and emotional attachment are deeply interconnected not only through psychological and social factors but also through biological processes. Neurochemical mechanisms in the brain play a critical role in the formation of sexual behaviors and bonding between partners. Neurotransmitters such as dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin are fundamental biological factors that regulate feelings of love, affection, and attachment. These chemicals not only contribute to sexual pleasure and satisfaction but also promote the development of long-term emotional bonds.

Dopamine: The Reward System and Attractiveness in Romantic Love

Dopamine is one of the key neurotransmitters involved in the brain's reward and motivation system. When dopamine is released, individuals experience pleasure and reward, which motivates them to seek out and repeat these experiences. Dopamine is often referred to as the "happiness hormone" because of its direct connection to pleasure and reward.

The Role of Dopamine in Romantic Love

During the initial stages of romantic love, there is a significant increase in dopamine levels. Fisher (2004) noted that this rise in dopamine during the early stages of love creates a strong sense of attraction, desire, and motivation toward the partner. This dopamine increase leads individuals to focus on their partners, often thinking of them compulsively. The excitement, desire, and sense of dependency experienced during the first stages of a relationship stem from dopamine activity.

Dopamine and Sexual Activity

Dopamine is also released during sexual activity, enhancing the pleasure derived from the experience. The effects of dopamine not only facilitate mutual attraction and enjoyment in sexual relations but also trigger the desire for repetition. During sexual intercourse and intimate contact, dopamine stimulates the brain's reward centers, creating a "rewarded" feeling that strengthens the bond between partners and supports feelings of attachment throughout the romantic relationship.

Long-Term Effects of Dopamine

Dopamine's impact on long-term relationships is significant. Continuous dopamine stimulation can contribute to deepening bonds and sustaining passion in romantic relationships. However, dopamine's effects can change over time; its levels are highest during the early phases of love and naturally decline in long-term relationships. Activities and interactions that stimulate dopamine levels, such as shared new experiences and exciting activities, are important for enhancing relationship quality and continuity.

Dopamine's Role in Attachment and Security

Dopamine plays a crucial role not just in pleasure and reward but also in fostering attachment and trust. High levels of dopamine contribute to the development of trust and the continuity of relationships. Initially, elevated dopamine levels trigger excitement and passionate emotions,

but as dopamine levels decrease over time, a more stable and trust-based attachment can form. This can enable relationships to grow on a solid foundation and be maintained over time.

Dopamine is the primary source of intense emotions, attraction, and motivation during the early stages of romantic love. The increase in dopamine during sexual activity enhances pleasure and the desire for repetition, while also supporting long-term relationship bonding and trust. These multifaceted effects of dopamine play a critical role in the development and sustainability of romantic relationships.

Oxytocin: The “Bonding Hormone”

Oxytocin, known as the “bonding hormone,” is a neurotransmitter that strengthens social bonds, promotes trust, and enhances feelings of attachment. It is particularly associated with experiences that foster social connections, such as sexual activity, childbirth, and breastfeeding (Carter, 1998). During sexual activity, oxytocin release enhances feelings of love, trust, and intimacy, reinforcing these bonds.

Oxytocin is produced in the hypothalamus and released into the bloodstream through neurons in the brain. The oxytocin released travels to various brain areas, promoting emotional bonding and trust. This leads to increased closeness between partners, positively impacting relationship quality. Oxytocin’s function contributes to higher trust and reduced negative emotions like jealousy and insecurity (Feldman, 2012).

Effects of Oxytocin on Emotional and Physical Health

Oxytocin not only enhances emotional bonds but also positively affects individuals’ physical and mental health. It reduces stress by inhibiting the release of stress hormones like cortisol (Carter, 1998). This effect boosts the immune system and improves overall health. Individuals with higher levels of oxytocin have shown lower anxiety and higher levels of happiness (Feldman, 2012).

Studies highlight the positive impact of oxytocin on relationship quality. Feldman (2012) found that individuals with higher oxytocin levels experienced higher satisfaction and longer-lasting relationships. By fostering compassion and intimacy, oxytocin supports relationship continuity and emotional depth.

Oxytocin and Sexual Activity

Oxytocin levels rise during sexual activity, facilitating the formation of both emotional and physical bonds between partners. This hormone not only contributes to physical pleasure

during sexual activity but also enhances feelings of emotional closeness and trust. Post-sex, the release of oxytocin promotes feelings of trust and commitment between partners (Carter, 1998).

The Importance of Oxytocin as a “Bonding Hormone”

Oxytocin plays a critical role in the attachment process in sexual and romantic relationships. High levels of oxytocin contribute to relationship sustainability and trust between partners. Its release is particularly important during first sexual experiences and moments of emotional intimacy. Through oxytocin, partners feel closer to each other, supporting stronger and healthier relationships.

In conclusion, oxytocin is an important hormone for strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds in sexuality and relationships. It improves the quality of love-filled relationships while reinforcing trust and attachment between partners. Its properties justify the designation of oxytocin as the “bonding hormone.”

Transformation of Cultural Norms and Values

The commodification of sexuality has led to significant shifts in value systems, not only on an individual level but also at a societal level. In traditional societies, sexuality was often constrained by moral and religious norms, whereas in modern societies, the concept of individual freedom has become more prominent (Foucault, 1978). This shift has facilitated the spread of perspectives that view sexuality solely as a physical experience.

The transformation of social norms has particularly impacted younger generations. Individuals who learn about sexuality in terms reduced to individual pleasure may struggle with establishing emotional connections. For instance, Twenge et al. (2017) have demonstrated that in modern societies, the rate at which young people enter romantic relationships has declined, while superficial sexual encounters have increased.

The commodification of sexuality in modern society has profoundly influenced how individuals view sexuality and relationships. The lack of love and emotional connection has reduced sexuality to physical pleasure alone, diminishing the meaning and depth of relationships. The role of popular culture and media in this process has further reinforced a tendency toward superficial relationships, creating a barrier to long-term, fulfilling partnerships. From a sociological perspective, promoting an understanding of sexuality integrated with love and commitment is essential for fostering healthier individuals and societies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that love and affection in sexual relationships contribute not only as emotional components but also play a significant role in the physical and mental health of individuals. Sexual relationships supported by love and commitment can create trust and long-lasting bonds between individuals, while those based only on physical pleasure are often associated with emotional disconnection, dissatisfaction, and psychological issues.

Research indicates that hormones such as oxytocin and endorphins can lower stress levels and strengthen the immune system in individuals involved in loving relationships. Furthermore, the positive impacts of such relationships on heart health, emotional stability, and overall quality of life are emphasized. On the other hand, relationships based solely on physical pleasure may lead to a superficial connection and feelings of dissatisfaction and loneliness.

In this context, addressing sexuality from a love and affection perspective is critical not only for individual happiness and satisfaction but also for the sustainability of relationships. The reinforcement of relationship dynamics through loving bonds allows individuals to feel valued, forming the foundation for healthy and fulfilling partnerships.

Future research could contribute to a broader understanding of the importance of emotional connection in sexuality by examining the impact of love and commitment on the quality of life in greater detail. Such studies would support the establishment of stronger and healthier bonds both in individual relationships and in society.

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