Love as a Form of Social Construct

Introduction

Introduction to the concept

"Love is a many-splendored thing,", "Love is stronger than death", "All you need is love" - lyrics from popular songs idealise it as mystical akin to magic. Social constructionists argue that romantic love serves a distinct social function, separate from familiar or platonic love. Biological explanations, such as increased heart rate or adrenaline rushes, complement this perspective. Love is fluid. At its basis, love takes attraction and affection and moulds it into a significant bond. But whether you want it to include sex, kids, love songs, a shared home, monogamy, those are what Dr. Jenkins calls optional add-ons. We need both biology and sociocultural philosophy.

Aim

The aim of the research is to understand how society constructs our ideas about romantic love and how societal norms and media influence how we feel and express love.

Objective

The objective of the research is to highlight areas where societal constructs about love may reinforce harmful stereotypes and provide interventions for a healthier and more realistic understanding of love.

Literature Review

From Plato's 'Eros' theory to courtship love and modern research on love, the understanding and expression of love have varied throughout history, influenced by societal norms and cultural expectations. Popular culture often portrays romantic love as intense, all encompassing, and sometimes even fatal, with myths such as 'love at first sight', the idea of being destined together, and the belief that love can conquer all differences. These can create unrealistic expectations about love and relationships causing disappointment and frustration when real life experiences do not align with these ideals. Women are often presented as needing a male figure to rescue them, while men as strong leaders and heroes, thus making women invest more in finding a romantic partner than in developing their own independence and self-worth.

Saying something is socially constructed does not mean it's fake. Laws, political parties, birthdays, national borders - all are social constructs representing something real. In Biel and Sternberg's paper, "The Social Construction of Love", they argue that romantic love is socially constructed, varying culturally based on time and space. Victorian Love focused on admiration without sexual desire while contemporary Canadian love is incomplete without intimacy and sexual desire. From a social perspective, romantic love is what its function does as seen in rhymes, films and songs.

Elizabeth Brake criticises what she terms "amateur normativity," the assumption that everyone desires and benefits from romantic relationships. Social constructionist theories acknowledge that romantic love is socially constructed, but we can't change everything. Despite efforts to promote alternative forms of love, the emotional and biological responses to romantic love remain ingrained.

Research gap

There is not enough research on how gender roles and expectations impact romantic relationships, especially considering India where the roles of men and women are traditionally assigned.

Need for this research

There's a need to explore how modern ideas of love clash with traditional values and rigid cultural norms and how societal constructs influence romantic relationships in India.

Methodology

Data collection method

A mixed methods approach combining qualitative interviews or focus groups with quantitative surveys would be the most suitable. Qualitative interviews or focus groups would provide rich data into individuals' lived experiences, cultural influences and personal interpretations of romantic love while quantitative surveys would help gather data on media consumption habits and attitudes towards love. Together, it would identify contradictions between traditional gender norms and modern ideas of love in the Indian context.

Sampling

Sample used would be Indian adults aged 18 to 50 years old randomly from various regions, socio-economic background, genders and relationships statuses.

Scales and measures

Different types of scales like The Gender Role Attitudes Scale, The Triangular Love Scale and The Media Influence Scale would be employed on the sample.

Statistical analysis techniques

Thematic analysis for qualitative data from interviews or focus groups, descriptive statistics, correlations for quantitative survey data and mixed methods analysis to combine both kinds of data would be conducted.

Ethical considerations

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Participants would be asked for informed consent, making sure they understand the purpose, procedures and risks of the study. Participants would be assured of their privacy and confidentiality.

Debriefing and Autonomy

They would be given freedom to withdraw from the study at any time and debriefed at the end.

Expected Outcomes

Overview of the expected outcomes

Participants may express tension between fulfilling societal expectations regarding gender roles and pursuing love based on personal desires. Some participants may find a balance between honouring cultural expectations while also seeking fulfilment in romantic relationships that align with modern views of love. However, some may demonstrate critical thinking by resisting exaggerated or unrealistic portrayals in media. The absence of certain romantic elements, like lesbian relationships or polyamory may reflect societal norms.

Contribution of the research

With the increase in content, Gen Z are surrounded by vast information about love, half of it without empirical evidence, especially in India where romance is shaped by media, songs and literature. Research into love is now more important than ever. Such exclusive

research would help us understand how gender roles are shifting and how society and culture shape our feelings about love.

Implications

Romantic gestures like love letters and candlelit dinners top the list for Indian daters, says the Modern Love Report 2023 by Bumble. However, 39% find Valentine's Day overrated. Honesty (49%) and friendship (43%) are valued more than quick text responses (26%). Women appreciate partners who give them space (27%) and consider friends' and family's opinions (40%). The end goals for Indian daters include living together (53%), marriage (49%), and having children (33%).

In modern times, we often learn about love by consuming media content that teaches us how love is supposed to be which can further impact our views on relationships and romance. Creators of media should consider developing alternative storylines that challenge gender stereotypes, promote diverse interpretations and empower us to think and feel about love the way we want it to be.

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