

Love Constructs among College Students: A Religious Exploration

FIDES A. DEL CASTILLO
De La Salle University Manila, Philippines
fidesdelcastillo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The concept of love for most young people has become superficial. For the young, love is equated to being kind toward other people, considered a response to a feeling of attraction, or is manifested through sexual intercourse. This study examines the cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors that contribute to the love attitudes of college students particularly from De La Salle University Manila. Using a standardized love attitude scale applied to student survey, the results have shown that there are common constructs on the love attitudes of the students and that the young understanding love within the context of love of God and neighbor. Also, the study puts forward the need to design youth ministry programs, as well as instruction, that would provide opportunities for the young to manifest love through good works and charity.

KEYWORDS: Love, Youth, Religious Exploration of Love

INTRODUCTION

The youth have various notions about love. However, such notions fail to move them to consistently manifest genuine loving acts. Recent studies have revealed that the youth of today are constantly struggling with the feeling of “being loved and being un-loved.” Sadly, it is the notion of being un-loved that is the source of problems like substance abuse and suicide among the young.

This study examines the cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors that contribute to the love attitudes of college students particularly from De La Salle University Manila. Using a standardized love attitude scale, the results have shown that there are common constructs on the love attitudes of the students. Also, the study puts forward the discovery of an emerging spirituality among the youth and its implications to youth ministry.

The Basic Understanding about Love

The notion of love has different meanings. The idea of love is all pervading

that it cuts across culture, beliefs, and references. Underwood, Sprecher, and Fehr (2008) tell us that love is a “kind of attitude” wherein the heart is the core. In order to gain a better appreciation on the concept of love, this study looks at various notions from anthropology, psychology, and the Catholic religion.

From an anthropological perspective, love is described and divided into three partly overlapping stages of lust, attraction, and attachment (Fisher, 2004). The strong feeling of sexual desire that originates from lustful love makes a person experience an intense sensation and longing for physical intimacy and sexual act. Subsequently, love that is in the level of attraction makes clear to a person what he or she finds attractive among prospective partners. It is characterized by the person giving value to the object of desire. As opposed to lust and attraction, the stage of attachment is considered to be on the highest level since commitment, sharing, and selflessness are agreed upon and expected by those who are involved in the relationship.

From a psychological view, love is composed of sexual attraction, intimacy, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). Love that is anchored on sexual attraction and manifested through passion and intense emotions very often leads to heartaches, frustration, and sadness. By comparison, intimate love is manifested through trust and the sharing of confidence among friends and lovers. However, a relationship can be intimate but without permanence. Fromm (1956) tells us that “the feeling of love is superficial in comparison to one’s commitment to love via a series of loving actions over time” (p.87). Hence, an enduring loving relationship is assured with commitment and nourished by loving acts.

The assertion of Fromm on love being intimately linked with loving acts is in consonance with the view of Wojtyla (1960) on love as a task. A Christian who does good work toward others is practicing the teachings and living the ministry of Jesus. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum) explains that:

Jesus Christ sent as a man among men; speaks the words of God (cf. Jn 3:34) and accomplishes the saving work, which the Father gave him to do (Jn 5:36; 17:4)... He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by this death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth.

Out of his divine-human love, Jesus was sent by the will of His Father to save us all from sin. He “pitched his tent among us” (Jn 1: 14) and became one of us. He declared to his disciples “as the Father loves me, so I also love you” (Jn 15:9). He manifested his love for us through his whole life, especially in his passion, death and resurrection. The whole life of Jesus is full of perfect life of charity,

love, in which we, his disciples, can share through his Holy Spirit. Thus, the very foundation for our love of our neighbor is the immense love of the Triune God the Father, Incarnate Son and Holy Spirit for us all. It is the love definitively revealed by Jesus Christ who is true God and true man, and who shares this love with us through his Holy Spirit (Abott, 1966).

Various Perspectives of the Youth on Love

In these post-modern times where technology and media have permeated almost every aspect of our life, the concept of love has evolved and taken on different meanings. Mendoza (2001) shares the research findings of McCann Erickson Philippines on the power of media and technology on the Filipino youth. He asserts that the strongest influence on the thinking of young people now is the media. Consequently, television, print, internet, and the movies have contributed to and molded the notions, aspirations, and even biases of the young.

There are instances wherein distorted values like commercialism, self-centeredness, individualism, and violence are presented by mass media. Unfortunately, these negative values are seen and accepted by young people. As a result, the sense of love among students has gradually changed toward seeking one’s own benefit and self-interest. The concept of love for most young people has become superficial. Some equate love to being ‘*mabait*’ (kind or good-natured toward others) while others see love simply as a response to a feeling of attraction. It is also common nowadays for the youth to define love as sex. The youth seem to have a wide and varied understanding on the notion of love. It is interesting to note however that despite all their constructs of love, O’Donell (2012) tells us that the main issue of the youth is “to be loved.” It is not surprising then to discover that the problem of being “unloved” contributes to substance abuse and suicide among the youth.

Religious educators have an urgent task of re-appropriating the genuine concept of love among the youth. Groome (2009) tells us that “we must do both catechesis and religious education. For indeed it takes a village to raise a Christian and the church adds wisely, a village with a school or some intentional program of catechetical education. Additionally, people’s literacy in Catholic faith must be both informative and performative, entailing both instruction and practice, with the latter not simply the consequence but, in a cyclical way, a source of education in faith” (p. 60). Thus, parents and teachers, through the light of instruction, must carefully guide students at this significant crossroad of their life.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines the cognitive, affective and behavioral factors that contribute to the love attitudes of the De La Salle University college students. Using a standardized love attitude scale, the research will address the following questions:

1. How do love attitudes characterize the emerging love spirituality among the Filipino youth?
2. What are the pertinent propositions of the research findings to youth spirituality?
3. What are the relevant implications of the research findings to religion educators?

Research Design

The researcher employed qualitative and quantitative research methods for the study. The quantitative research included the following stages of preparations: (1) the administration of the validated and pre-tested love scale to 120 college students from De La Salle University Manila for standardization, (2) preparation of statistical results with the T-test, and (3) the administration of the standardized survey to a new set of 100 student respondents for statistical analysis of the results using the T-test.

The qualitative research included a critical description and analysis of the love attitudes of college student respondents, an examination of psychological principles that addressed the specific attitude construct in relation to social formation and engagement, and analysis of possible integrative service learning approaches that would address the peculiar attitude data identified in the attitude construct.

Respondents

Tertiary level students were the target respondents of the study. They belong to the senior level of De La Salle University Manila. The respondents have varied religious affiliations. There were 120 respondents for the first and second stage of the quantitative research.

The Instrument

The material used in this survey was the pre-tested and validated love attitude scale for college students developed by the researcher. Prior to the statistical testing, the items were subjected to item analysis in two settings. The love attitude scale has undergone construct validity and reliability tests. The scale has been pre-tested on the computation of the correlation coefficient and reliability coefficient by determining the coefficient alpha. For the validity test component, construct validity was pursued through factor analysis. In factor analysis new factor definitions were statistically identified from the respondents' answers.

The factor analysis and reliability tests reduced the survey items. Only those items that highly reflected the factor traits of respondent attitudes were statistically retained.

As a result of the reliability and validity tests, the 100-item scale was reduced to 40 items. Then, the scale with 40 items utilized the Likert scale. The positive statements offered the respondents the following choices and corresponding

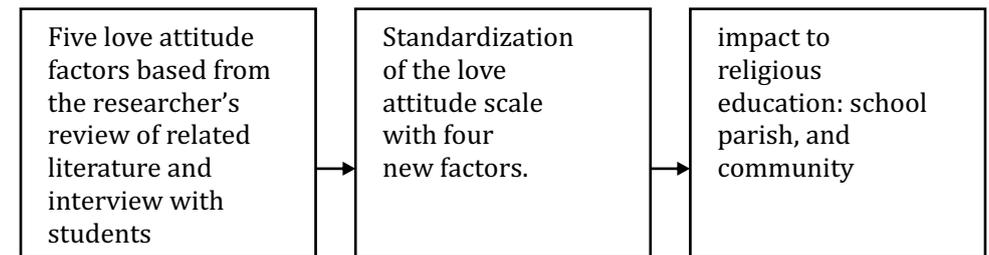
values: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Uncertain (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly disagree (1). As for the negative statements, the following choices and values were applied: Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), Uncertain (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly disagree (5).

During the pre-testing stage, the love attitude scale had five pre-defined factors upon which the survey results were examined. The scale had been pre-tested among 120 college student respondents from De La Salle University Manila. Through item total correlations, the love scale had a final reliability test score of $\alpha = .9296\%$ with 40 items retained.

Conceptual Framework

The primary aim of this research is to discover the various notions on love among the youth specifically among college students. The specific objectives of this study are (1) to discover the love attitudes of college students using a standardized attitude scale and (2) to identify the critical insights that would help address the emerging spirituality among the youth. The conceptual framework of the study is outlined below:

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study



Development and Pre-testing of Items in the Love Scale

Relationship, feeling and emotion, intimacy, service and commitment, and response to God's love were initially identified as the domains for the pre-test factors of the love scale. Love is first and foremost a relationship. Love allows man to develop meaningful interactions and significant experiences with family members, kin, significant others, friends, co-workers, and other individuals. The second domain of love is the sense of feeling. When someone is in love, that person experiences an emotion typically called a loving feeling or being in love. The third domain is intimacy. It can be described as a sense of personal closeness and belongingness between individuals. While it is true that those in an intimate relationship can be in love in due time, an intimate relationship is not a guarantee of the presence of genuine love. The fourth domain is service and commitment. Love is an obligation and devotion towards our neighbor. The last domain is love as man's response to God's love. This is a religious perspective by which man generously loves others out of his gratitude to a Supreme Being.

Table 1: Copy of Love Attitude Scale Pre-test (For administration to 120 college students)

1	Love can be shared to others
2	Love is the key to a happy relationship
3	People will love me if I am good to them
4	Love is a special connection between two lovers
5	I am loved because I belong to a family
6	Love means suffering for the sake of another person
7	Love brings people closer to each other
8	I love a person when I want him or her to be happy
9	Love is exclusive to my family
10	Valuing a person is a sign of love
11	Accepting a person's weaknesses is a sign of love
12	Being in a romantic relationship means that I am loved
13	To love another person is to forget one's self
14	My parents must approve of whoever I am romantically involved with
15	Loving means finding time to deepen the relationship with another person
16	Love can be shared to people whom I do not know
17	Attachment to a person is a sign of love
18	Love is keeping an intimate relationship with another person regardless of what I feel
19	An illicit relationship is a sign of love
20	Members of a community can show their love for one another
21	I am sad when I am not involved in a romantic relationship
22	Love is a mixture of emotions
23	I am happy when someone makes me feel special
24	I feel loved when people accept me for who I am
25	I feel uneasy when someone showers me with affection
26	I enjoy being the center of attention
27	One can be caring and insincere at the same time
28	I feel worthless when I am rejected
29	Love is being emotional
30	Unattractive people will not be loved
31	Being in love makes me feel happy
32	Romantic love is genuine love
33	I am loved when I give everything to my loved one
34	People love me when they care for me
35	Love is seeing my significant other happy

36	Loving a person means forgetting my feelings
37	Being attracted towards the opposite sex is a manifestation of love
38	I am frustrated if I do not get what I want from my partner
39	It is important that I give in to what my partner asks of me even if I do not like it
40	My world crumbles when I break a romantic relationship
41	Love attracts me toward another person
42	I believe people will love me if I am sincere
43	I believe that love is a special connection between two persons
44	Love requires romance
45	To be intimate is to show physical affection towards another person
46	Love is spending a lot of time with my partner
47	Losing one's virginity to somebody I am romantically involved with is a sign of love
48	Saying "I love you" is a manifestation of love
49	Accepting the decisions of my love one even I if I disagree with him or her is a sign of love
50	Choosing my romantic partner over my family is love
51	Being physically present to my loved one is very important
52	Honesty and loyalty is a sign of love
53	I support my loved one in good times and the bad
54	Love means correcting the mistakes of others
55	Spending a lot of time with my peers is a sign of love
56	Showering my loved one with material things is a manifestation of love
57	Lust is expected in an intimate relationship
58	Sex is expected in an intimate relationship
59	Loving others means caring for them
60	A successful relationship requires trust and open-ness
61	Love hinders me to show my true self
62	A broken romantic relationship simply means that I should pursue a new one
63	Love makes me forgive the mistakes of another
64	Love is shown in good deeds
65	Being fair is an act of love
66	Loving means giving without expecting anything in return
67	Love requires loyalty
68	Love means committing one's self to another
69	Being in love means not worrying about the consequences of one's action

70	Loving consists of respecting the beliefs of my partner
71	I love someone when my time and attention is only for him or her
72	Love means controlling another person
73	Attending a community service is an act of love
74	Sharing my things to others is an act of love
75	Love is a natural human act
76	Love requires being responsible for others
77	Love means committing to accept everyone despite our differences
78	Taking care of my old parents and elderly relatives is an act of love
79	Loving the poor means giving them old clothes and extra food
80	Giving left over food to a beggar is an act of love
81	Volunteering as teacher-catechist in a public school is an act of love towards neighbor
82	Love means being kind to everyone
83	God is the source of love
84	Love is respecting God's name
85	Helping the needy is a sign of our love for God
86	Loving my family is my way of showing love for God
87	Supporting my friends especially when they have problems is an act of love for God
88	Worshipping God in prayers is a manifestation of my love for God
89	I show that I love God when I read the Bible
90	To follow the commandments is to love God
91	I love God when I accept life's difficulties
92	The very foundation of love is the Triune God
93	To love others means to love them just like what Jesus did
94	To love is to be holy
95	Charity means loving the unlovable
96	God gives man the capacity to be charitable
97	God wants me to be a loving person
98	Our response to God's love is manifested in our good works
99	We express our love for God through words and deeds
100	Love is best shown in practice

Post-test New Attitude Definitions

Domains of Love Based on the Student Survey:

Unconditional, Communitarian, Spiritual, and Physical Manifestations

After the reliability and validity tests, sixty items were eliminated from the 100 love attitude statements. Four newly defined factors were extracted from the pre-test samples involving 120 respondents through factor analysis:

First Factor: Love is unconditional.

Love allows a person to accept somebody for what he or she really is. It is the response towards other people's love. An unconditional love seeks for the happiness and fulfillment of others. Factor one has the highest principal component analysis with a score of 6.143. There are 12 items identified under factor one. Most of the items relate to the human nature of loving other people and making them happy. The love under this factor means to be honest, loyal, caring and supportive at all times.

Second Factor: Love is communitarian.

It is in the community of persons that we are able to dispense the love that we have. This factor has a principal component analysis of 5.573 and has 11 items. For the young people, love means being one with the community. Love needs to be shared to friends, neighbors and community. Attending to the needs of other people and participating in charitable works are acts of love.

Third Factor: Love is spiritual.

Love is man's response to God's love. This is a religious perspective by which man shares love to his fellowmen out of his gratitude to a Supreme Being. The principal component analysis of this factor is 5.339 and it has 8 items. It is noteworthy that the young people today still have their idea of God as the source of love despite widespread secularism and commercialism. The youth consider the Triune God as the foundation of love. Worship and community prayer are means by which the young shows their love for God.

Fourth Factor: Love is a personal commitment.

The principal component analysis for this factor is 3.846 and it has 8 items. Love is a commitment not only to others but also to one's self. It takes commitment to accept the strengths and weaknesses of other people. It also takes commitment to make other people happy.

Figure 2. Post-Test New Factor Grouping

Factors	Principal Component Analysis	Scale item numbers per factor
Unconditional	6.143	35, 39, 43, 52, 53, 60, 65, 66, 67, 70, 75, 78
Communitarian	5.573	20, 23, 24, 55, 64, 73, 74, 85, 87, 90, 97
Spiritual	5.339	83, 84, 86, 88, 94, 95, 99, 100
Personal Commitment	3.846	8, 11, 12, 34, 48, 63, 77, 81

Discussion on Love Constructs and Its Implications to Religious Education

The new factors derived from the love attitude scale shows that there is a shift in the understanding of love among young people particularly the college students of De La Salle University Manila. In contrast to prior notions on the young being passive and superficial, the study has revealed that they have a deeper understanding on love.

The respondents of the love attitude scale believe that love allows them to have a better understanding of one's self, helps them relate well with others, and nurture a relationship with God. For the young, love is a personal response. Love also entails a commitment to accept and understand the behavior of other people. Moreover, the young believe that love is communitarian. Love necessitates the gift of self through service to the community. Additionally, love is something that is spiritual. The young believe that love originates from a Supreme Being. It is a gift from God that we partake and must share with the rest of humanity.

As opposed to the notion that the young are indifferent to religion and lukewarm in the practice of their faith, the love attitude scale has revealed that the young have a firm and steadfast faith in God.

They have a youthful spirituality that allows them to be open to and cognizant of a love that is unconditional, spiritual, and deeply personal.

In the realm of youth ministry, the results of the love attitude scale show that the young are eager to respond to and manifest their love through good works and charity. Hence, outreach activities and opportunities for service must be present so that the young can make real their notions of love. Lastly, worship and prayer meetings are indispensable to nurturing their youthful spirituality.

References:

- Abott, W. (1966). *The documents of Vatican II*. American Press.
- Fisher, H. (2004). *Why we love: the nature and chemistry of romantic love*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. London: Harper Collins.
- Groome, T. (2009). Adolescent catechesis: where are we now and going? *Sourcebook on adolescent catechesis volume 2*. Retrieved from <http://www.adolescentcatechesis.org/resources/niac-published-documents/>
- Mendoza, R. (2001). *Highlights of the McCann Erickson 2000 youth study*. Manila: Center for Youth Studies.
- O'Donell, J. (2012). *Troubled youth- common problems and ways to help*. Retrieved from <http://tweenparenting.about.com/od/healthfitness/tp/Troubled-Youth.htm>
- Sternberg, R. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93, 119-135.
- Underwood, L., Sprecher, S., & Fehr, B. (2008). *The science of compassionate love: theory, research and applications*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wojtyla, K. (1981). *Love and responsibility*. New York: William Collins Sons & Co.