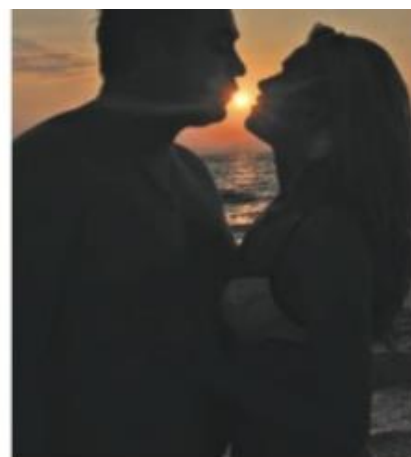


What Is Love?

A popular song from the early 1990s asks an interesting question: “What’s love got to do with it?” This chapter will examine the meaning of love and its connection to relationships. To determine the link between love and relationships, we first must get a handle on what love is.

When you think of all the songs ever written, consider how many of them have something to do with love. Love seems to be the songwriter’s predominant theme! In love songs we find some aspect of love we can relate to on an emotional level. But therein



So much of what people assume about love has to do with an emotional feeling.

lies the problem: So much of what people assume about love has to do with an emotional feeling.

Love is something for which all people long. It illuminates joyous comings and overshadows sad goings. It is the biggest drama of people's private lives, and it fuels the tabloids which report on the "love lives" of the rich and famous. So what is love, really? It is something different for every person.

The Bible speaks of love for God and for all humanity as our greatest goal (see, for example, Matthew 22:36-40). But how do



Storge love is the natural familial affection for people.

the statement, "I love you just because you are my child." Self-centered love says, "I love you when you do what I ask of you." Most of us grew up poised somewhere between these two realities. But does that adequately describe love?

What about the love between a husband and a wife? Sigmund Freud, according to some psychoanalytic writers, suggested love (libido or sex drive) is the cornerstone of our humanity—something which protects us enough to allow us to change and to grow (Gerasimos, 1991; Hutcheon, 1995). The Object Relations Theory, which is rooted in Freudian psychoanalytic principles, encourages spouses to grow in autonomy and interdependence, which allows them to develop a more authentic love (Scharff & Scharff, 2005).

Theologian, author, and church father Saint Augustine (354–430 ad) described love this way: "What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears

Storge love is the natural familial affection for people.

we attain this kind of love? Psychiatrist Erich Fromm recognized the complexity of love when he wrote *The Art of Loving*. He suggested that love, for most people, is about being loved rather than loving others. Love is something we must learn and practice, just as you learn and practice a musical instrument. He goes on to differentiate between **selfless love** and **self-centered love**. Selfless love is embodied in

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- **Agape**—unconditional, selfless love as personified in *commitment*;
- **Philia**—love which characterizes friendship, personified in *intimacy*;
- **Eros**—love which exemplifies romance and physical desire, personified as *passion*;
- **Storge**—love which displays a natural, familial *affection* for things and people.

While many social scientists have added to or renamed these dimensions of love, the concepts remain essentially the same as in ancient times. It is generally accepted that a combination of these four

eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”

The Dimensions of Love

Ancient Greek culture used four words to describe different kinds of love: *agape*, *philia*, *eros*, and *storge*. C. S. Lewis (1960) expounded on these four dimensions of love:

dimensions are necessary for lasting relationships. In Sidebar 5.1, the Balswicks use three of these dimensions of love to develop four relationship types.

Romantic Love

Mate selection in Western society is predominately dictated by romantic love. Recall that early in the history of America, spouse selection was based primarily on economic factors—the ability to support a family, acquisition of inherited land, and dowry, among other things. As economic factors improved, the notion of romantic love began to grow. During the early 20th

century, people began to question the meaning of romantic love. They wanted to know how to tell if they were experiencing *true* romantic love.

Eric Fromm (1956) attempted to explain his concept of love, suggesting that people tend to see love in the context of being loved, and that loving is a skill we need to learn. He suggested love is an art to be practiced, and that people working on their ability to love will demonstrate giving, caring, responsibility, and respect—many of the agape characteristics. While few people today marry someone they do not love, love is not the only deciding factor.

Compatibility

The idea of compatibility has become a cornerstone for many in determining relationship strength. Most of us think of **compatibility** as the capacity to live in harmony with someone—someone we

“compatible”? This is looking at love through the wrong lens.

Compatibility does not hinge on an inventory of personal traits. It is not based on commonalities. It is not something you have—it is something you make. It is a disposition, an attitude, and a willingness to work. Most of all, it is a *process* a couple experiences in their growth together. For this reason, and to minimize confusion, we prefer to call this process commitment, not compatibility.



enjoy being with, who will listen and support us, and with whom we share many things in common. However, these traits are not sufficient to keep a relationship together. We have counseled numerous couples who have been married 15 or even 20 years. They describe their early relationships as full of *commonalities*, but are now talking about divorce. Love must be defined as more than a series of compatibility traits. How many times have you heard a young couple say they are moving in together to see if they are

or girlfriend or maybe your child. At that moment of anger, you didn't *feel* love for that person, but did you actually stop loving that person? Probably not. Merely the *feeling* of love was gone, not the *essence* of your love.

Because we have found this principle to apply overwhelmingly in our counsel of couples, we no longer ask couples if they love one another. We ask them instead to explore their level of commitment to their relationship. A couple's level of commitment to their



Compatibility has become a cornerstone for decision making about relationships, but lasting relationships must be built on more than compatibility.

Making Love Last

It is not unusual for clients to come into our offices and say, "I love him [or her], but I am not *in love* with him [or her]." What does this really mean? It means the relationship has lost its

of promises of eternal passion. That is just being "in love," which any of us can convince ourselves we are.

Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had roots that grew towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossoms had fallen from our branches we found that we were one tree and not two (Madden, 2001).



Image from EnglishPodcasts / Melrose

Commitment is a better indicator of a lasting relationship than the profession of love.

passion. Many couples believe they cannot regain this passion. However, with a little relationship work, we believe it is possible for couples to attain the level of enthusiasm their relationships once held.

Try to recall a time when you were very angry at someone you loved—your mother, father, brother, sister, boyfriend or girlfriend or maybe your child. At that

relationship seems to be a much better indicator of whether the relationship will endure than the love they profess for each other.

Laurie Hall described the difference between involvement and commitment in a relationship as the difference between bacon and eggs—the chicken is involved, but the pig is committed (Hall, 2000). This difference is poignantly described by Dr. Iannis to his daughter Pelagia in the film *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*:

Love is a temporary madness. It erupts like an earthquake and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have become so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion. That is

SIDEBAR 5.1

RELATIONSHIP TYPES

Complete love has an equal proportion of *eros* or passion, *philia* or intimacy, and *agape* or commitment.

In Western culture, *eros* or passionate love tends to be predominant early in a relationship, with *philia* or intimacy entering in next, and *agape* or commitment following. In Christian relationships, it is important for an atmosphere of commitment to precede passion and intimacy, allowing both to grow to equal proportions prior to marriage.

Self-giving love is high in *agape* or commitment. This is seen more commonly in other cultures and in arranged marriages. Cultural constraints tend to fuse these relationships together. While intimacy and passion may develop in the relationship, they are not as necessary to keep a relationship together.

Friendship love is higher in *philia* or intimacy. Rarely does friendship alone lead to marriage; however, it is an essential component of a good relationship. Many husbands and wives describe their partners as their best friends, indicating the importance of emotional companionship. A marriage based strongly on friendship may face challenges to the development of passion, leading to dissatisfaction in the marriage.

Infatuation love is high in *eros* or passion. Many times people describe an immediate passion and sexual interest in another person. This can lead to a hasty marriage, which usually doesn't last, because the other necessary elements for maintenance of a relationship fail to grow and develop. Fortunately, most relationships that are predominately based on passion burn themselves out before a marriage takes place.

Source: Paraphrased from Balswick and Balswick 1999, 59–72.

Theories of Mate Selection

Our selection of a marriage partner is only partially conscious. Subconscious or unconscious factors also come into play. We are told beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Why do we consider certain people beautiful, but not others? Why are we drawn to certain individuals and not to others? The answers to these questions are complex.

Theories of Developmental Process

Primary Elements. Theories of developmental process help to explain how we filter out ineligible or incompatible people. **Propinquity**, or physical proximity, is the first rule guiding whom we choose to date and later marry. **Assortative partnering**, which has its roots in evolutionary theory, relates to choosing a partner based on physical characteristics.

Assortative partnering is related to **homogamy**, which is the concept of choosing someone with some elements of similarity to your own. When homogamy is related to demographic characteristics or resources, we use the term **endogamy** to suggest the choice of a spouse within one's status group.

Types of Stratification. Several factors influence our choice of a mate. The first element of stratification or grouping is race and ethnicity. We tend to marry

within our own racial and ethnic group, which are examples of homogamy (Gardyn, 2002). According to the 2000 Census, the number of interracial couples in America increased from 1% in 1970 to over 5% in 2000, which is still a small percentage (Lee & Edmonston, 2005). There were nearly 4 million interracial marriages in 2006, almost double the number of interracial marriages in 2000 (U.S Census Bureau, 2007b). Most interracial couples consist of a white person and a nonwhite person, the most common being a white/Asian-American couple. The second most common pairing is white/Native American, and the third most common is a white/African-American couple. African-American men are more than twice as likely to intermarry as are African-American women, and Asian-American women are more likely than Asian-American men to intermarry (Lee & Edmonston, 2005).



Proximity, physical characteristics, resources and status are all involved in mate selection.

Social Class and Education. Social class and educational endogamy also affect our choice of a marriage partner. We tend to choose within our own class or close to it. This is partly explained by proximity. Our parents' social class determines where we live and what school we attend. Even in our work environment, we tend to be drawn to people with similar interests and educational status.

Religion. Religious homogamy, marrying within one's own religion, is more important in some groups than in others. The culture of many denominations tends to encourage marriage to someone with similar religious beliefs. The Apostle Paul advised Christians not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14 KJV). Another translation calls this being "mismatched with unbelievers" (NRSV). Paul's comment to the Corinthian church suggests believers and



Marrying someone of the same faith persuasion can strengthen a marriage.

Christian being pulled up. It is almost as if gravity exerts its influence in the spiritual realm too.

Paul gives instruction in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 not to be joined with those who

nonbelievers have nothing in common. A marriage with such disparity will only lead to problems. God is to be the center of a Christian marriage and if half of the marital union doesn't believe this, there will undoubtedly be tension. What about the believer in a relationship with a nonbeliever who is confident they can influence that person for Christ? You probably have known a Christian involved in a relationship with a non-Christian. More often than not, the Christian is pulled down, rather than the non-

are without faith:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”

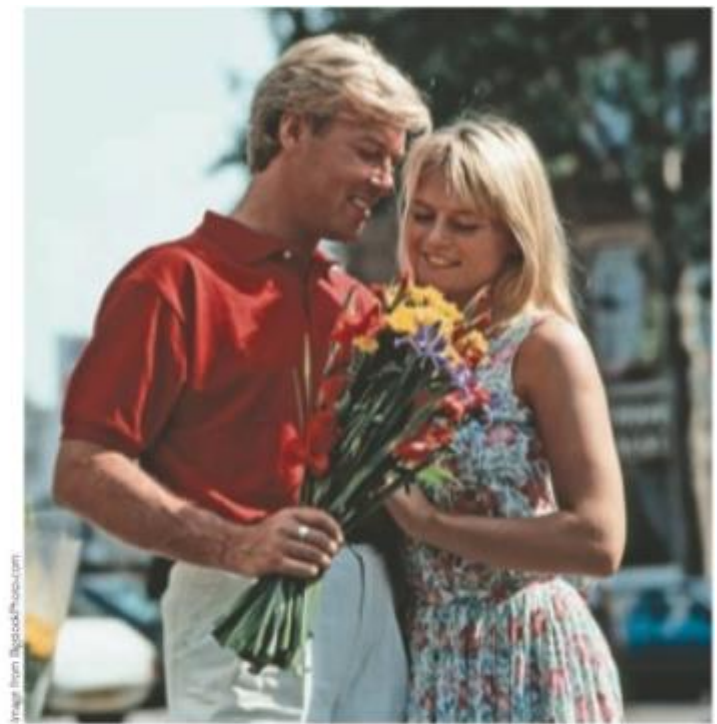
The righteousness of a Christian which Paul refers to is a gift from God which is

compromised when a believer marries a nonbeliever. Righteousness is incompatible with unrighteousness; light is incompatible with darkness, and marriage between a believer and nonbeliever creates a spiritual incompatibility.

Age. Age is another important factor in spouse selection, especially in first marriages. Since many young people meet in college and marry soon afterward, the age difference at first marriage is around 2 years, with males being older (Darroch, Landry, & Oslak, 1999). When men remarry, or marry later in life, they tend to marry women considerably younger than themselves. In general, men are less likely than women to marry someone older or less attractive than themselves (Smith, 1991).

Evolutionary Theory

Darwin's theory of evolution is not accepted by many Christians. However,



Physical appearance plays a role in mate selection for both sexes.

Again, individual men and women have different values and criteria for pleasing physical appearances and attractions.

Buss and colleagues (2001) identified several characteristics which both sexes consider very important in a potential marriage partner, with physical attraction

Low [You are

some social psychologists use the **evolutionary theory of mate selection** to explain how men and women select mates *through unconscious attraction to qualities of fitness for bearing children and continuing the species.*

Physical Appearance. When asked about beauty, men and women tend to value different traits. Pop psychology claims men are visually stimulated, while women are romantically inclined. However, such gender stereotyping is not always the case.

being one of the most important. In a study of 728,000 Match.com members, physical attractiveness was rated as the most important characteristic, after intelligence and sense of humor (Gardyn, 2002).

Physical appearance also plays a role in what both sexes find attractive. In her article describing sex differences in mate preference, Denisiuk (2004) suggested women tend to identify attractive men as having a healthful appearance: symmetrical features, clear skin, and white sclera (the

white part of the eye), which is suggestive of good genes. Masculine features such as a strong jaw, narrow hips, and muscular build, which suggest high testosterone and fertility, are also attractive to women.

SIDEBAR 5.2

IS IT ALL IN YOUR NOSE?

A Swiss zoologist who tested women's responses to men's sweaty T-shirts has found that women are attracted to the scent of men who are most unlike them in an array of immune system genes called MHC (major histocompatibility complex), and that this may influence mate choice. The same type of study conducted with mice found that pregnant mice prefer the familiar odor of MHC-similar males. It is hypothesized that nesting with relatives may provide support and protection for the mother and her young. Interestingly, women who are on the Pill, which raises estrogen levels and simulates pregnancy, also preferred the odor of MHC-similar males. This brings up the possibility that odor perception in pregnancy plays a different function—that of choosing cooperative partners and would-be relatives.

So, what are the benefits of choosing MHC-dissimilar mates? It seems that MHC-dissimilar

Denisiuk went on to suggest men have their own criteria for judging the attractiveness of women. What men tend to find attractive in a woman are full lips, full breasts, and full hips, as well as smaller waists—all indicative of a woman's estrogen level and her ability to bear children. Sidebar 5.2 presents an interesting theory of mate selection as it relates to the sense of smell.

Parental Involvement. Some proponents of the evolutionary theory of mate selection suggest the differences in what men and women find attractive in a mate are based on their potential parental involvement. These theorists believe that since women tend to be the primary caretakers of their children, they tend to be more selective about the men they choose, in order to improve the survival of their offspring.

This evolutionary theory purports that men are generally less involved in childrearing, so they can afford to be less

mates have a higher fertility rate, produce hardier offspring with more effective immune systems, and have a reduced risk of genetic diseases. In other words, from an evolutionary standpoint, the more dissimilar the parents are genetically, the healthier the offspring, the lower the observance of genetic disorders, and the greater the likelihood for survival. Darwin's survival of the fittest!

While this does not provide definitive answers on mate selection, it does bring up an interesting question: is mate selection in our society altered by the number of young women who are on the Pill?

Source: Wedekind and Furi 1987, 1471–1479.

choosy about a mate (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Psychodynamic Theory

According to the **psychodynamic theory of mate selection**, our parents have a great deal to do with our choice of a mate.

Psychodynamic theory has grown out of the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung (pronounced Yung), and others. It suggests



The parent image theory of mate selection suggests we choose a someone similar to our opposite sex parent.

our deepest relational needs are based on our internalized family drama. As adults, we search for the types of experience which comes closest to the patterns of interaction we experienced in our early childhood. This is an attempt to get what we feel we needed or missed as we were growing up (Scharff & Scharff, 2005).

Parent Image Theory. Various types of

Freud's theories and is the hallmark of Object Relations Theory. It suggests we form a fantasy image of our ideal mate in our minds through our childhood interactions, and then search for someone who will come close to fulfilling this fantasy image.

Exchange Theory

The **exchange theory of mate selection** is based on the premise: the exchange of social and material resources is a fundamental form of human interaction. All relationships have give and take, but the balance of the exchange is not always equal. Exchange theory explains how we feel about a relationship with another person based on the balance between what we are putting into the relationship and what we are getting out of it, the kind of relationship we believe we deserve, and our chances of having a better relationship with someone else

psychodynamic theories offer explanations for our choices. How many times have you heard someone say, “I married my father” or “She is just like my mother”? Based on Freud’s work, the **parent image theory of mate selection** suggests we marry someone resembling our opposite sex parent (e.g., a son would marry someone who reminded him of his mother; a daughter would marry someone like her father).

Ideal Mate Theory. The **ideal mate theory of mate selection** grew out of

them. Sometimes, however, one partner chooses to maximize his or her own interests, and exploits the other partner. Clearly, this is not conducive to a loving relationship.

Equity Theory

The **equity theory of mate selection** is similar to exchange theory in that people should *benefit from* a relationship in proportion to what they *give to* a relationship. Fairness is the hallmark here, although how to judge what is equitable or fair for the individuals involved can be difficult.

When applied to mate selection, exchange theory suggests we select mates who are more or less our equals. This selection process is based on several things, such as similar backgrounds, financial status, physical appearance, social status, and personality traits, to name a few. Exchange theory suggests relationships continue because the partners are getting as much or more from the relationship as it is costing

Stage Theories

Stage theories of mate selection describe how we move through distinct stages as we develop. Instead of experiencing gradual changes, stage theories suggest we make sudden shifts to different plateaus of perception and behavior. These shifts often correlate with the epiphanies or “ahas” of personal experience.

SVR Theory. Murstein’s (1987; Parsons, 1998) **Stimulus-Value-Role (SVR) theory of mate selection** suggests we choose our friends and partners through a three-stage model. We then filter out people at each stage who do not fit our preferences.

1. In the initial **stimulus stage**, we evaluate people based on physical appearance. We are usually attracted to people of similar age, appearance, and ethnicity.



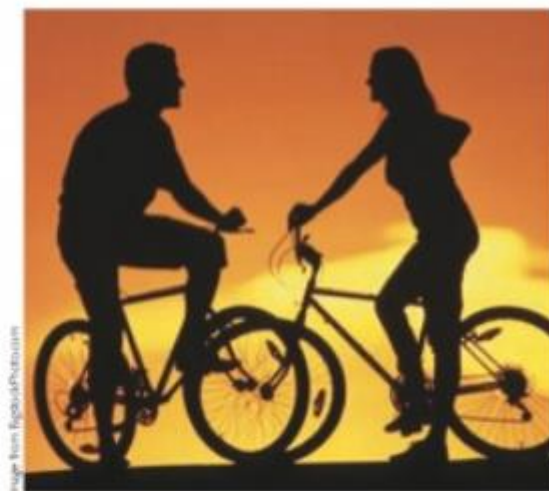


We tend to choose a mate who is similar to us in interests, background, social status and personality.

2. In the intermediate **value stage**, we evaluate the other person's values, such as attitudes toward religion, sex, career, and family. If their values are similar enough to our own values, we can choose to continue the relationship.
3. In the **role stage**, we share our activities to build a working relationship. It is preferable for our likes and desires to be complementary (you do this, while I do that) and for our attitudes toward roles to be similar.

Relationship Theory. Levinger's (1976, 1999) relationship stage theory of mate selection suggests our relationships move through a series of stages as we mature. His model is based on an ABCDE acronym:

- Acceptance/attraction. When we meet someone, our initial attraction frequently is based on beauty and similarity.
- Build-up. As we reveal more and more of ourselves, we become increasingly interdependent. We may become annoyed at one another, but the pleasant parts of the relationship keep it going.
- Continuation/consolidation. This is the stage at which commitments such as marriage are made. The couple may enter into a long-term, stable relationship.
- Deterioration. Many relationships decay due to poor effort, lack of rewards, and unavailability of



Sharing activities is one way to build a working relationship.

primary task of coming to terms with the powerful force of the family of origin. The family of origin has a tremendous effect on who, when, and whether or not the young adult will marry, as well as impacting transition through future stages of the family life cycle. Successful completion of this stage involves separating from parents yet remaining connected, without cutting off or reactively trying to substitute the parental relationship with another. As was mentioned in chapter 3, an increasing problem in our technological society is the

alternatives.

- **Ending.** The relationship ends when the partners agree to separate or when one leaves.

Family Life Cycle. Unlike traditional sociological theory which looks at the family life cycle as commencing with marriage, Carter and McGoldrick (1999, 2005) begin the family life cycle with young adults. This is a cornerstone stage with the

historical and community contexts in which these families are formed. Carter and McGoldrick's family life cycle stages have been applied to the study of gay and lesbian relationships, but not without problems. The family life cycle developed by Carter and McGoldrick is child-centered and occurs in a context which receives validation and community support. The gay and lesbian life cycle is typically not child-centered and receives little validation or support in the larger context (Slater & Mencher, 1991). Other differences reside in the process of "coming out," the stages of couple development, and the stages a family goes through when they discover their child is gay or lesbian (Laird, 2005).

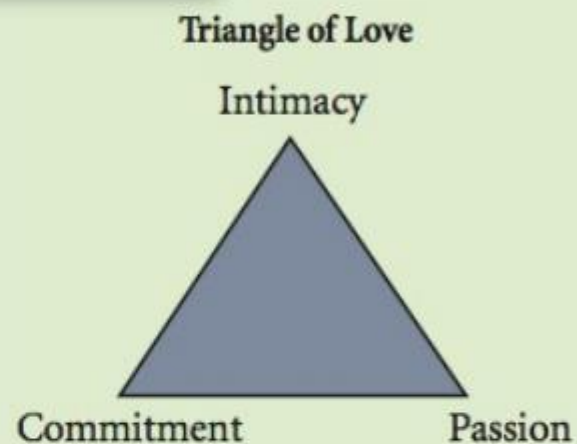
While all of these theories of mate selection help to explain some aspects of why we are drawn to certain people, we are still left with questions. What accounts for the intensity of love? Why do many couples have complementary traits? The deeper we look at

problem in our technological society, is the prolonged dependency young adults experience in preparation for the work world. This creates difficulties for both parents and young people as they attempt to renegotiate the hierarchical relationships (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, 2005).

Same-Sex Relationships. Stage models can contribute to our knowledge of gay and lesbian family culture; however, it is important to keep in mind there are enormous differences in the social,

explain. As we usually find in dealing with the weighty issues of life, the more we know, the more we realize we do *not* know.

Figure 5.1



Source: Sternberg 1986.

The Role of Romantic Love

If we conducted a survey to learn why people married their spouses, we would find as the predominant answer, "Because we were in love." We have already discussed

complementary traits? The deeper we look at the phenomenon of romantic attraction, the less these theories of mate selection seem to



The continuation/consolidation stage is where commitments such as marriage are made.

we were in love. We have already discussed that no matter how we try to define love, a definition remains elusive. There is no general consensus of what constitutes love.

Triangular Theory of Love. Robert Sternberg's **triangular theory of love** (1986; 2000) may further our understanding of the role of passionate love. This triangle of love, as shown in Figure 5.1, is characterized by three different elements: intimacy, passion, and commitment (1986). Although we have examined these elements earlier, to summarize,