

Long Proposal Template for the 2009 NCFR Annual Conference

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Title: How Love Emerges in Arranged Marriages: A Qualitative Cross-Cultural Study

Abstract: Thirty people in twenty-two arranged marriages were asked questions about how love emerged and grew over time in their marriages. Subjects were of five different religions and nine countries of origin, with length of marriage ranging from 3 to 540 months (mean: 19.4 years). On a 10-point scale, love grew in these marriages from a mean of 3.9 to 8.5, and a number of factors were identified that appeared to contribute to the growth of love, the most important of which was strong commitment. Other important factors included self-disclosure, shared trauma, and parenthood.

Full proposal:

Americans, and perhaps Westerners in general, are very demanding when it comes to love, and they are becoming increasingly so. In the past, many Americans were willing to marry without love; now most Americans see romantic love as a precondition for marriage (Kephart, 1967; Sprecher et al., 1994). In many cultures in the non-Western world, love is still not a requirement for marriage. In fact, most of the world's marriages are arranged by parents or matchmakers. In such marriages, if love emerges at all, it does so over time. As people say in India, "First comes marriage, then comes love."

At least six studies have directly compared love in love marriages to love in arranged marriages. Two, involving couples from India, suggest that love in love marriages decreases over time, that love in arranged marriages grows over time, and that love in arranged marriages may ultimately surpass love in love marriages (Gupta & Singh, 1982; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Studies involving Orthodox Jews and Japanese have shown no difference between love in love marriages and arranged marriages (Schwartz, 2007; Walsh & Taylor, 1982), and studies in China (with women only) and Turkey (both genders) suggest

that love may be stronger in love marriages than in arranged marriages in those cultures, perhaps because of coercion in some arranged marriages (Hortacsu & Oral, 1994; Xiaohe & Whyte, 1990). A variety of research involving American couples also sheds light on factors that strengthen love, among them self-disclosure, fear and trauma, and physical arousal (Aron et al., 1997; Dutton & Aron, 1974; Foster et al., 1998; White et al., 1981).

If one is interested in factors leading to the emergence of love in romantic relationships, the arranged marriage would seem to be a potentially fertile area of study. In love marriages, people are usually strongly in love at the time of their marriage, but in arranged marriage, the betrothed are not marrying for love. Yet love often emerges in such marriages. How does this occur?

We sought to answer this question by locating individuals in arranged marriages in which love increased over time. Couples were obtained through postings placed on various Internet chat groups, as well as through postings on the newsletter of Smartmarriages.com. They were invited to participate in the study only if their love had increased over the course of their marriage.

METHODS

Subjects. In all, we interviewed 30 individuals in 22 marriages; married spouses were interviewed separately. Subjects were pre-screened to assure that their level of love had increased over the course of their marriage. Fifteen subjects were male, and 15 were female. Sixteen were white, and 14 were Asian. They were of five different religious backgrounds: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and the Unification Church. Although most lived in the United States, they were from nine different countries of origin: the United States, Austria, India, Pakistan, Italy, Hungary, New Zealand, Japan, and Holland. The average age was 46.9, and the average length of marriage was 19.4 years (range 3 to 540 months). For couples supplying the relevant information (n=25), the average time they knew each other before marrying was 17.6 months; in some cases they had had little or no contact before marrying.

Procedure. Subjects were interviewed either by email or telephone. In about the half the cases, a follow-up interview was conducted, mainly to clarify answers or to seek missing information.

Basic demographic information was requested, and a series of questions were asked about participants' cultural, religious, and family backgrounds. They were then asked a series of questions about their marriage; in particular, they were asked to estimate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how in love they were when they first married and how in love they were at the time of the interview. They were also asked, through open-ended questions, to identify factors or events which they believed contributed to an increase in love in their marriage. All subjects were assured that their responses were confidential.

RESULTS

On average, on a scale of 1 to 10, subjects estimated their level of love of at the time they were married to be 3.9. At the time of the interview (on average, 19.4 years later), the level of love was estimated to be 8.5. The correlation between length of marriage and degree of increase in love was quite low ($r=.06$), contradicting the Gupta & Singh (1982) finding. This low correlation resulted in large part from data from three individuals who reported dramatic increases in love early in their relationships; in one case the level of love increased from 0 to 10 in just 3 months. Eliminating the three outlying points, the correlation increases substantially ($r=0.47$, $n=27$).

Two out of our 30 subjects could offer no insights about why their love increased. The remaining 28 subjects identified a variety of events, factors, and turning points that they believed were contributory. The most frequently mentioned factor was commitment ($n=9$). Subjects also mentioned factors such as self-disclosure ($n=5$), shared experiences (some traumatic) ($n=5$), parenthood ($n=4$), and physical intimacy ($n=3$) (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

This study is by no means a comprehensive look at arranged marriage, or even, for that matter, a cursory look at arranged marriage. Rather, it is a very selective look at

particular arranged marriages in which love emerged and increased over time. The point of the study was to learn about factors contributing to the growth of love, rather than to gaining insights about arranged marriage per se. The strength of the study lies in the diversity of subjects; they were from nine different countries, yet all shared the experience of learning to love their spouses over time.

The study is ongoing, with additional couples being recruited from still other cultures. Ultimately, the goal is to reconcile information obtained from this investigation with Western studies on how love emerges in Western romantic relationships. Insights about how this process works in arranged marriages should help in the creation of or the improvement of counseling or other methods for creating love or repairing lost love.

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TABLE 1. Factors Contributing to Growth of Love [Partial]

Factor	Subject's Response
Child-Related	<p>S5: "His support for his children was my main reason to love him all the more." S3: "...it {love} happened, slowly I had some love feeling for him after I came here. And then I had my first baby and after that I was kind of attached with him...so it [love] started after I started to have children." S2: "After having child, I think it [love] arrived at the highest point."</p>
Commitment	<p>S12: "It [love] starts from an absolute commitment and that begins to break down barriers in my heart and head, so feelings of joy and contentment and peace can bubble up." S19: "I also feel that he [my husband] has changed quite a bit and is now making more effort to consider how his behavior might affect me, and to do things that will be more likely to help me feel good rather than the opposite." S13: "We prayed together, tried to serve each other, worked on our personal growth (overcoming anger, etc.). We shared common values and a commitment to stay the course." S7: "It's very important for the couple to look into the same direction than to look into each other's eyes." S6: "First we knew marriage is for life" S4: "But what I have seen in the past is that it started off as a rocky relationship and staying committed in a relationship changes it into a more stable relationship..." S3: "My parents were together for more than 50 years. And so I learned from my family that this is a very serious relationship and I was very very serious about this and I wanted to make it successful...I found so many things which I did not like about my husband. And I am sure he also found so many things. But then I thought, okay, if I would have married a different person, that this person would also have some other problem. The important thing is I was very very serious about this relationship..." S1: "We made things work. She made things work with me. I made things work with her." S15: "Our love is still growing, and will always grow. We have moments of feeling deep love, and other moments where we do not feel deep love. But we have an underlying commitment which makes our marriage permanent."</p>
Outside Help	<p>S19: "Also, for 5 years I have been working the 12 Steps for Emotions Anonymous, and this year completed a one-week therapeutic workshop at The Meadows in Wickenburg, AZ. I feel the work I did on myself is the most important component of my increased happiness in the marriage."</p>
Physical Intimacy	<p>S22: "One significant turning point was during our first lovemaking, which was accompanied by prayer and ceremony. It did not go perfectly smoothly, and I recall being grateful to her for her easy-going and accepting nature." S2: "There was sexual attraction too. That was natural." S10: "I fell in love with him after our nuptial night. He chose my favorite spot for our honeymoon."</p>
Self-Disclosure	<p>S23: "Good communication is the key to continuously falling in love with each other." S20: "We have made effort to communicate regularly." S6: "During honeymoon we discussed our likes and dislikes, expressed our appreciation for each other, and declared we were lucky to find such a good spouse; that was the beginning of love" S4: "You can't love anyone until you know them. But that was the process of getting to know the person and then trying, getting to understand them and to feel that affection...You share your responsibilities and your strengths are of whatever nature and you move with that..." S24: "I would say that falling in love is a continuous process that started at the matching and still continues to this day. Good communication is the key to continuously falling in love with each other."</p>
Shared Experience	<p>S21: "About a year into our engagement, there was a big turning point for me. I distinctly remember a date when we were walking on 6th Avenue in NYC. John was admiring some of the sculptures and modern art in a few shops. Normally I would never have given it any attention. Instead, I asked him why he liked it. He helped me to see the art form a whole new point of view. This was a magical moment that opened my heart to him." S9: "We didn't speak for about 5 days because I was away on work and we missed each other." S6: "When on the 19th day of our marriage, during honeymoon, my husband injured his knee and bled, I cried while dressing up the wound {is how I define love}." S4: "My husband would call me from work each day in the morning and say, 'how are you doing?' because he left early and I would be sleeping.... small things like that obviously affects the other person... When my kids were learning to drive he would just get very uptight about driving and he would say, 'okay, if you want them to drive, you'll have to teach them to drive!' So I say okay and then, he'd always be in the back seat he'd never sit in the front seat....This is how we decided what we'll do." S3: "I had a feeling of love for him when he had a heart attack and when he was sick and in the hospital." S11: "I realized the love for her when we had a first fight."</p>