

# Influence of the Psychological Characteristics of an Individual on the Choice of the Style of Romantic Relationships

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## Abstract

The following methods have been used in the study: “Styles of romantic relationships” questionnaire; H. Eysenck’s EPI test; H. Schmieschek’s test of accentuations; “Styles of romantic relationships” questionnaire by E.N. Strizhova, which consists of six subscales that correspond to six styles of romantic relationships with focus on friendship, self-sacrifice, fascination, obsession, rationality and game. Student’s parametric criterion was used for evaluating the significance of differences between two independent samples; Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used for evaluating the relation between the studied characteristics; the Rulon formula was used for evaluating the reliability of the test’s parallel forms; method of least squares (linear regression equation) was used for evaluating the tendency of age-related changes of the studied parameters; Wilcoxon’s non-parametric criterion was used for evaluating the certainty of the shifts of the studied characteristics upon the repeated testing; one-way analysis of variance was used for evaluating the certainty of the studied factors’ influence on the measured characteristic. The results of the study were analyzed with Excel and SPSS statistical software.

Participants in the study were students of Ural State University (Ekaterinburg), South Ural State University (Chelyabinsk) and South Ural State College (age – 16-22 years), as well as women and men of various social groups, 30-40 years old.

The study showed that significant psychological characteristics of an individual include temperament, accentuations of personality traits, ability to love and experience of intimate relationships. A social-moral program for developing the culture of romantic relationships at young age is relevant. We revealed positive influence of experimental-genetic method on the parameters of psychological characteristics of the ability to love, experience of intimate relationships and styles of romantic relationships.

**Keywords:** individual, psychological characteristics, romantic relationships

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the interest toward studying human interactions is growing. Difficulties with building psychological intimacy are noted by sociologists, culture researchers, psychologists and pedagogues. Romantic relationships integrate the key elements of the existence of each individual separately and all of them together: element of physical reproduction (sexuality), social interaction and education (socialization) and components of inner harmony, growth, self-development, self-embodiment, preservation of oneself and others on the truly humane level (spirituality). Children’s awareness of romantic relationships remains relatively “pure” up until 15-17 years of age – sex is not identified with love. However, slightly later (from the age of 18-20), sex and love begin to associate and almost correspond in human conscience. Therefore, it is important to “grasp” the conscience of the youth with the idea of love instead of the dominant of sex. It is highly difficult to do so in the conditions of the modern mass culture. Directed efforts from parents, mentors, teachers, and all people involved in the problems of the young generations, have to be applied. Despite the available data of the modern studies, pedagogics often cannot fulfill the goals of sex education. One of the reasons of such necessity is the lack of teachers’ proficiency in the questions of human sex roles and psychological-sexual relationships, which, on its own, can be presented as a psychological and pedagogical problem. The phenomenon of romantic relationships as a type of interpersonal

relationships is virtually unstudied in the national psychology. Romantic relationships are relationships of satisfying partners’ emotional and sexual needs, which can transform into other types of relationships [17]. In psychology, romantic relationships are defined as complex emotional, cognitive and behavioral formation related to experiencing a special value and significance of a certain object. Style of romantic relationships is an integrative formation that contains and reflects individual’s personality characteristics, namely, the leading personality traits; temporal characteristics of the relationships; nature, dynamics and transformation of the relationships *per se*; partners’ status characteristics, which change in time due to certain social transformations and person’s achievements [19].

Upon creating the paradigm models, specialists attempt to expand the comprehension of the nature of romantic relationships [8, 10-14, 16, 18, 20-22]. For example, the nature of romantic relationships of adult people is addressed in the analogy with attachment that exists between mother and child, or with psychological comprehension of the style of romantic attitude as obsession, where such relationships are called fatal. The meaning of the paradigm of “maniacal” romantic relationships points to the fact that such ideal of relationships (being a general romantic ideal) is actively promoted by literature, cinema and every possible subculture. There are ideas of love as self-produced attitude. Relationships of attraction and love have been

separated, and separate scales have been created for these relationships based on studying the types of love stories' development; twenty-four narrative plots of romantic relationships have been named. Couples with highly similar plots turn out to be happier in the relationship compared to couples with less similar plots. All these authors think that it is possible to talk about a relatively certain interpretation of romantic relationships as a robust personality characteristic.

A model of romantic relationships, which is based on C.G. Jung's typology, is also being discussed. According to this model, each person searches for psychological completion in the relationship, and such functions can only be performed by an individual with certain psychological qualities [2]. Here, the specific focus is on the aspect of change of the style of individual's romantic relationships upon aging [1, 3]. The types of emotions have been studied, and it has been proven that emotions have dynamics that is defined by age and individual personality traits [4-7, 23], and that they include several stages. Stage of selectiveness and romanticism, which occurs in the youth, allows integrating the duality of physical and psychological attraction to a single object and possibility to combine different styles. Preference (rejection) of a certain style of romantic relationships can be explained by the theory of attachment styles, theory of social exchange and dialectics of relationships.

Modern researchers define six styles of romantic relationships; this paradigm was taken as the basis for our study. Each style of romantic relationships corresponds to a certain system of feelings and affirmations. Passionate romantic relationship, where the main focus [15] is on the physical intimacy, is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on fascination. Relationship that grows from attachment and friendship, where the similarity of partners is highly significant, is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship. Relationship that is accompanied by affective outbursts, jealousy and even feeling of hate toward the loved one (corresponds to our cultural stereotype of "romantic love relationships") is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on obsession. Altruistic romantic relationship with strong elements of sacrifice and self-abnegation is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice. Rational and calm relationship, where the partners state the conditions that have to be respected, is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on rationality. Romantic relationship that is similar to a game that is never taken seriously is the style of romantic relationships with the focus on game.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following methods have been used in the study: "Styles of romantic relationships" questionnaire; H. Eyesenck's EPI test; H. Schmieschek's test of accentuations; "Styles of romantic relationships" questionnaire by E.N. Strizhova, which consists of six subscales that correspond to six styles of romantic relationships with focus on friendship, self-sacrifice, fascination, obsession, rationality and game. Student's

parametric criterion was used for evaluating the significance of differences between two independent samples; Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for evaluating the relation between the studied characteristics; the Rulon formula was used for evaluating the reliability of the test's parallel forms; method of least squares (linear regression equation) was used for evaluating the tendency of age-related changes of the studied parameters; Wilcoxon's non-parametric criterion was used for evaluating the certainty of the shifts of the studied characteristics upon the repeated testing; one-way analysis of variance was used for evaluating the certainty of the studied factors' influence on the measured characteristic. The results of the study were analyzed with Excel and SPSS statistical software.

The study on the problem of the possibility to establish and develop the value of love and romantic relationships in the process of educational and mentoring work and constant latent psychological influence from a teacher was conducted during half a year. The following methods of influence were used: teacher's attitude toward the discussed problem, informal comments on life situation with the focus on axiological aspects of those situations; planned mentoring and cultural-educational events with consecutive axiological-psychological analysis.

Materials of the developing influence included: specific relevant life situations that occur in the context of educational and mentoring process, and their analysis; works of literature and art; educational and extracurricular activity organized under a teacher's management. The main concepts of psychological and pedagogical program "Developing the comprehension of the phenomenon of intimate (romantic) relationships during youth" are reflected in the course of lectures and seminar lessons.

First-year students of South Ural State College participated in the developmental experiment (men and women of 16-17 years old). Total number of participants was 72 people: experimental group comprised 36 people (18 men and 18 women), control group - 36 people (18 men and 18 women). The first stage of the experiment (stating stage) was conducted in October 2013. The second stage of the experiment (developmental stage) was conducted in March 2014. From October 2013 to March 2014, two experimental groups of the first-year college students attended the lessons of psychological-pedagogic program "Developing the comprehension of the phenomenon of intimate (romantic) relationships during youth". Two control groups of first-year college students did not have such lessons.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that the separate scales are "distinguished" rather well: certainty of the factor influence ( $F_{\text{exp}} = 30,72$ ) significantly exceeds the critical value ( $F_{\text{cr}} = 2,25$ ).

The results of the statistical analysis allow concluding the following: statistically significant differences between men and women were observed for the following scales: "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship": women's scores were significantly

higher than men's ( $p \leq 0,001$ ); "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on fascination": men's scores were significantly higher than women's ( $p \leq 0,001$ ); "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on game": men's scores were significantly higher than women's ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). With aging, there was a common trend for men and women for significant increase of the scores on the "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship" scale, and significant decrease on the scales of "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice", "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on fascination", "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on obsession" and "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on game". Differences between men and women concerned only the scale of "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on rationality": women's score increased significantly with age, while men did not present a linear trend. Women of older generation, unlike men, had decreased score for preference of the romantic relationships style with the focus on fascination. To some extent, this contradicts the opinion that women over thirty years of age are more sexual compared to men. Men significantly exceed women by the number of significant correlations between the "Style of romantic relationships" questionnaire and the characteristics of Eysenck's and Schmieschek's tests. The "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on obsession" had the highest number of correlations with the characteristics of Eysenck's and Schmieschek's tests, while the "Style of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship" had the lowest number of correlations. Melancholic men lean toward styles of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship, self-sacrifice and obsession, and are less prone toward the style of romantic relationships with the focus on fascination. In turn, women present a more heterogeneous picture: phlegmatic women lean toward the style of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship, and choleric women lean toward the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice. Moreover, the styles of romantic relationships with the focus on fascination and obsession are the least preferred among phlegmatic women.

We conducted the comparative analysis of the characteristics of the ability to love and experience of intimate relationships with the characteristics of preference (rejection) of the romantic-relationships styles. Psychologists and anthropologists have systematized individual differences in the approach to intimate relationships – from strong dependence to active avoidance. During the past decades, theory of attachment became one of the main paradigms that includes the studies of interpersonal relationships. Researchers claim that attachment is initially a need, and then a skill that does not develop in everybody [19]. At the current stage of the study, we conducted the comparative analysis of the vividness of the characteristics of the level of preference – rejection of the romantic relationships' styles upon the "Styles of romantic relationships" questionnaire and the psychological characteristics evaluated by the methods of "Ability to love" by M.I. Rozenova and "Experience of intimate relationships" by K. Brennan and R. Fraley in the

adaptation presented by T.V. Kazantseva [9]. Participants in the study were 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>-year students of South Ural State University (19-21 years old). In general, by the age of 21, the development of the main psychological components of the ability to love was concluded (M.I. Rozenova). Total number of participants was 48 people, 24 men and 24 women.

We used Pearson's  $\chi^2$  criterion for more accurate evaluation of the comparative analysis of the ability to love and vividness of the level of preference (rejection) of various styles of romantic relationships in the whole sample. The sample in general did not present significant correlations between separate characteristics of the "Ability to love" scale and the level of preference (rejection) of the styles of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship, fascination, rationality and game. This is explained by the fact that the presented methods "concern" different psychological qualities and are aimed at studying different psychological phenomena. In other words, the "Ability to love" methods and "Styles of romantic relationships" survey do not repeat each other. Significant positive correlations were observed for the characteristics of the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice and the general "Ability to love" scale ( $r = 0,476$ ;  $r_{cr} = 0,4$  with  $p < 0,95$ ), as well as the characteristics of the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice and the scores on "Care (duty)" scale of the "Ability to love" method ( $r = 0,465$ ;  $r_{cr} = 0,4$  with  $p < 0,95$ ). Hence, it is possible to state that people that prefer the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice would more likely present higher scores on the ability to love. Moreover, young people that prefer the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice urge to demonstrate care.

Comparative analysis between the scores on the scales of anxiety and avoidance of intimacy in the "Experience of intimate relationships" method and the level of preference (rejection) in the "Styles of romantic relationships" questionnaire was conducted with Pearson's  $\chi^2$  criterion. We revealed a positive correlation at the level of a trend between the scores on the anxiety scale and the characteristics of the style of romantic relationships with the focus on obsession ( $r = 0,526$ ;  $r_{cr} = 0,52$  with  $p < 0,99$ ). Anxious individuals are prone to the style of romantic relationships with the focus on obsession. A negative correlation is observed between the scores on the scale of avoidance of intimacy and the characteristics of the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice ( $r = -0,439$ ;  $r_{cr} = 0,4$  with  $p < 0,95$ ). People with high scores on the avoidance of intimacy are least prone to the style of romantic relationships with the focus on self-sacrifice.

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that the secure attachment style does not define the presence of high level of the ability to love and the choice of a certain style of romantic relationships. It is possible that the key role is played by the internal personality resources and the social situation.

Although we accept the defining role of the family influence in this issue, we think that the external, wider

development environment (the surrounding world) can also have a serious effect on the development or blockage of subjective representations and relationships of love, and romantic relationships, in particular. Educational environment acts as such influential environment. A teacher is the main conductor and source of influence of the educational institution on a young individual's personality.

At the end of the present stage, it was possible to state the following: the situation of the developmental experiment had a positive influence on such psychological phenomenon as ability to love - in the male sample, the number of people with high level of the ability to love increased. The situation of the developmental experiment positively influenced the styles of romantic relationships: in women the characteristic of obsession in romantic relationships decreased, and in men the characteristics of styles of romantic relationships with the focus on friendship, self-sacrifice and fascination increased; the weight of the rationality component increased significantly. Many participants from the experimental group came to the conclusion that it was necessary to build romantic relationships.

The developmental experiment had positive influence on the parameters of such psychological phenomena as ability to love, experience of intimate relationships and styles of romantic relationships. Psychology and pedagogics are capable of clearly and professionally presenting the idea of the value of love in contrast with the idea of sex and selfishness to the conscience of the youth. We are at least capable of introducing the knowledge about the capacity and power of love to the commonplace conscience, especially the one of adolescents and young people.

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